

**INVITATIONS TO LAUGHTER:  
A MICROANALYSIS OF TELEVISED  
STAND-UP COMEDY PERFORMANCES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis set out to identify the various techniques used by stand-up comedians to invite laughter and other affiliative responses from their audiences. A corpus of 13 televised stand-up comedy performances was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively, and comparative analyses of different audience responses (including laughter and applause) were presented. Coding schemes that had been designed for analysing audience applause during political speeches were found to account for many of the audience responses during stand-up comedy performances, but differences between both performer and audience behaviours in the two genres were also identified. A taxonomy of comedy invitation devices was proposed, containing 16 different verbal and non-verbal invitational techniques that were observed in the corpus. In a quantitative comparison of two of these, no statistical difference was found between the invitational use of gestures and standard rhetorical devices, although both techniques were used during all of the performances in the corpus. An analysis of potential forms of disaffiliation suggested that non-responses were more disaffiliative than either uninvited responses or invited responses of weak affiliation intensity. Finally, a number of ways of identifying skill as a stand-up comedian were proposed, including the use of subtle invitational cues, combining several comedy invitation devices at salient response invitation points, and moving on swiftly and fluently when laughter invitations are not taken up by the audience.

## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

The study presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis has been published in the *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* (2007, vol. 26, pp. 321-342).

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# CHAPTER 1

## Humour and laughter research:

### General background to the present study

#### INTRODUCTION

This thesis describes the application of detailed microanalytic techniques within the field of stand-up comedy. This novel combination of methodology and genre was initially based on the results of microanalytic studies of political speeches, and it is hoped that – in addition to providing an analysis of the interaction between audiences and stand-up comedians – the findings to be reported here will contribute towards the understanding of performer-audience interaction in general.

The main aim of the studies comprising this thesis was to understand the various ways in which stand-up comedians and their live audiences interact with each other. In order to achieve this aim, a series of studies was performed on a corpus of stand-up comedy performances that were recorded live in Edinburgh for later broadcast on national television. These studies essentially focused on three areas: the behaviour of audience members, the behaviour of stand-up comedians, and the strengths and weaknesses in the flow of interaction between them. Based on these analyses, a number of specific factors that contribute towards skill as a stand-up comedian will be proposed. Throughout this thesis, specific research questions will be addressed that refer to the various ways in which audiences respond (and fail to respond) during comedy performances, and the range of techniques used by performers in order to invite laughter and other responses from their audiences.

Much of the work within the field of humour research to date has been focused on the nature of jokes, as opposed to the communicative process itself. Likewise, many of the existing studies concerned with the analysis of laughter have been carried out in experimental or contrived situations. The aim of the present investigation was to apply the techniques of microanalysis to a corpus of live stand-up comedy performances in order to discover how performers and audiences communicate effectively with each other in a real-world situation, in real time. As a starting point, a series of microanalytic techniques from studies of audience



applause to political speeches were applied to a selection of stand-up comedy performances from the present corpus. The results of this pilot study were then used to inform a series of further analyses across the whole corpus that were more specifically focused on the processes that occur during stand-up comedy performances. This thesis will present an overview of the relevant political literature as a starting point, and ascertain the extent of any similarities between the affiliative behaviours of audiences to political speakers and audiences to stand-up comedians. It will then go on to account for the differences in performer-audience interaction between these two genres, and to propose a range of comedy-specific invitational techniques.

The nature of performer-audience interaction as a whole can be conceptualised as a continuum that ranges from more to less formal, depending on the genre in which the interaction is taking place. For example, the interaction between audiences and stand-up comedians can be said to occupy some mid-point on a scale which runs from audiences to political speakers at one end and audiences to orators at Speakers' Corner at the other. Research findings from performer-audience interaction within both of these genres will be presented in Chapter 2. A broader continuum can also be suggested, with formal lectures or serious theatrical performances occupying the most formal end of the spectrum (i.e., more formal than political speeches), and dyadic interpersonal conversations marking the most informal end (i.e., less formal than Speakers' Corner interactions). In other words, in terms of decreasing formality, this proposed hierarchy would run from formal lectures or serious theatrical performances (in which the audience might only respond once or twice during the entire performance), to political speeches, to stand-up comedy performances, to orators at Speakers' Corner, to dyadic interpersonal conversations – in which the terms “performer” and “audience” are effectively interchangeable, and indeed those terms would not normally be used within such a context. For each successive proposed grouping in this list, the “audience” can be expected to demonstrate increasing degrees of participation and interaction with the “speaker”, until no distinction between the two can be identified, as is the case with most dyadic interpersonal conversations. As stated above, the present thesis will begin by taking a series of methodological analyses that have been conducted in a more formal genre within this proposed spectrum (i.e., political speeches) and attempting to apply them within a less formal genre



(i.e., stand-up comedy performances), in order to ascertain the extent to which observations made in the former genre can be seen to hold within the latter. The literature relating to audience responses within the genres of political speeches and public oratory will be reviewed in the next chapter.

An introduction to selected empirical and theoretical perspectives on humour and laughter will be presented. Because of the range and extent of work that has been done within these broad domains, it is not possible to provide an exhaustive review of the literature in these areas; more attention will therefore be devoted to those areas of research that are directly relevant to the present study. This chapter will also present selected findings from interaction research, as the performance of stand-up comedy involves an interaction between the performer and his or her audience. A brief introduction to the genre of stand-up comedy will then be given. Before these issues are presented, the practice of microanalysis will be described. Microanalysis is the primary methodology to be used in the present thesis; it also incorporates a range of other analytical disciplines that will be briefly outlined here. This chapter will therefore provide a brief introduction to the various methodological, theoretical, and empirical issues that underpin the present thesis.

## **MICROANALYSIS**

Microanalysis is the main methodological approach that will be used in the studies comprising the present thesis. It is derived from a combination of a variety of traditions, and represents both a distinctive methodology and a distinctive way of thinking about communication (Bull, 2002). Microanalysis is the detailed analysis of film, audiotape, and videotape recordings. According to Bull (2002, p. 1), “the detailed analysis of film, audiotape and videotape recordings has facilitated discoveries that otherwise simply would not be possible”. The theory and practice of microanalysis has been informed by three major historical influences: psychiatry, structural linguistics, and information theory and cybernetics (Bull, 2002). The underlying theoretical and methodological disciplines that have contributed to microanalysis will now be outlined.

Microanalysis uses the structural approach (Bull, 2002), in contrast to the external variable approach (e.g., Duncan, 1969). This presumes that interactions are organised sequentially, hierarchically, or in terms of social rules, and cannot be assumed to be random. The discipline of conversation analysis (e.g., Sacks, 1992) has made a considerable contribution to microanalysis. Conversation analysis



assumes that conversation is not just a means to an end, and that talk can be studied in its own right. The study of conversation analysis involves detailed transcripts and coding conventions, which cover both what is said and the way in which it is said. These transcripts concentrate on verbal and non-verbal aspects of speech, including prosody. However, they do not include non-vocal aspects of interpersonal interaction, such as gesture, stance, and gaze. Speech act theory (Austin, 1962) states that language is a form of action. It proposes that utterances have both a meaning and a force; i.e., they say something and do something. In this sense, speech act theory conceives of language as a tool. For example, according to Bull (2002), the utterance “what are you laughing at” could either be a request to share the joke, or an instruction to be quiet. The discipline of discourse analysis (e.g., Potter & Wetherell, 1987) has also made a considerable contribution to microanalysis. Discourse analysis applies to formal and informal interaction, as well as to written texts. According to discourse analysis, the way in which language is used is dependent on both the context and the goal of the speaker. One example of this is eye-witness statements (e.g., Beattie & Doherty, 1995), in which the goal of the eye-witness is to appear credible, and this is reflected in their choice of language. The ethological approach (e.g., Darwin, 1872) has also contributed to the practice of microanalysis. Ethology involves the interpretation of behaviour in its natural environment, in terms of evolutionary consequences. The ethological aspects of microanalysis involve studying communication in an evolutionary context and as it occurs naturally. This refers especially to the non-verbal communication of emotion (Bull, 2002), which – in contrast to conversation analysis – includes gestural, non-vocal elements. Argyle and Kendon’s (1967) social skills model is another approach that has contributed to the assumptions underlying the practice of microanalysis. This model asserts that interactions are comparable to processes in motor skills, and six separate interactional processes were identified. These are: distinctive goals, selective perception of cues, central translation processes, motor responses, feedback and corrective action, and the timing of responses (Bull, 2002). The fundamental assumption underlying this model is that communication is a skill, and hence it can be taught.

The practice of microanalysis sometimes involves the use of coding systems. It can thus be criticised (e.g., Psathas, 1995) for misrepresenting the data by constricting them into a narrow range of categories. However, many examples of



effective coding systems exist. One of these is the Facial Action Coding System (FACS; Ekman & Friesen, 1978). This is a detailed description of the facial muscle movements used in human expressions, and it allows researchers to accurately identify expressions and assists in emotion perception. The effective practice of microanalysis involves the use of appropriately conceived coding systems – which are suggested by detailed observation of the material studied, as well as theoretically driven – and these coding systems need to be reliably applied by appropriately trained independent raters. In addition, the effective practice of microanalysis sometimes does not involve the use of coding systems. The present thesis includes some studies that use coding systems and some that do not. It is important to choose an appropriate microanalytic technique (or combination of techniques) to address the specific hypotheses or research questions being addressed.

Although the practice of microanalysis involves fine-detailed analytical examination of interpersonal interactions, the results of microanalysis can be applied to macro issues (such as politics, feminism, and racism; Bull, 2002). For example, the analysis of political speeches can, at a macro level, illuminate the effects of social systems. Combined with studies of communication in other performance genres, a general theory of performance activity can be developed with the assistance of microanalytic studies. The aim of the present thesis is to make a contribution towards such a theory.

Microanalysis is a methodological approach that can be seen to unite the often entirely separate practices of qualitative and quantitative research. Mead (1969, pp. 17-18) presented a colourful description of the “battle” between these two different approaches:

It was an old battle between those who could only arrive at a forest by counting separate trees and those who insisted that to understand even a single tree, its place in the forest must be known. It occurred at so many interfaces, between experimental psychology and clinical psychology, between the animal experimentalists and the ethologists, between the proponents of intensive interviewing and those who preferred questionnaires, that it often seemed as if we were dealing with a rift between two temperamental styles, two distinct types of research workers, both of



whom were drawn to the study of behaviour, invincibly opposed to and uncomprehending of each other.

Although this passage was written almost 40 years ago, in many respects it remains as true today as it was then. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques have their uses in the analysis and interpretation of real-world interactions, and it is preferable to argue for the appropriate use of relevant tools and methodologies from both of these disciplines. More comprehensive findings can be obtained by combining these various research tools, especially when dealing with complex source materials – including public performance and interpersonal interaction – from real-world events. By using the results of qualitative research studies to inform quantitative projects, and vice versa, the combined output of these analyses is likely to account for more of the underlying complexity in the source materials than could be obtained by pursuing either approach in isolation. The present thesis will propose a number of research questions with reference to the corpus of stand-up comedy performances under consideration, and these questions will be addressed with the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

A brief overview of the history and practice of humour research will now be presented.

## **HUMOUR RESEARCH**

Roeckelein (2002) provides a detailed historical account of the terminological aspects and domains of humour, from its origins as a medical term right through to the multiplicity of current-day usages. The term was originally associated with the four humours (blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile), which were thought to be needed to be kept in balance in order to maintain good health. Nowadays, the term encompasses the areas of satire, irony, sarcasm, farce, parody, riddles, puns, jokes, caricature, cartoons, comic strips, and slapstick (Roeckelein, 2002). In a study of the use of humour and demeanour in a public speaking club, Bjorklund (1985) found that humour was used as a strategic resource during speaking performances. The club literature advised members how to stage and manage humour within that context, emphasising a focus on delivery. Martin (2007) sees humour as being composed of three separate elements, involving cognition, affect, and behaviour, respectively. The cognitive experience of humour is non-serious incongruity, the emotional experience of humour is mirth, and the



expressive experience of humour is laughter. However, these three elements do not always co-occur. According to Provine (1993), there is only a partial correlation between the subjective category of humour and the behavioural fact of laughter. The present thesis is primarily concerned with the expressive experience of laughter, in that it will present a series of analyses of overt audience responses during stand-up comedy performances. Laughter will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

According to Foot and McCreddie (2006), there are probably more than a hundred different theories of humour, some of which are general theories and some of which are more specialised, and most of these theories deal with humour appreciation rather than humour encoding. Most general theories of humour use vaguely defined concepts and are not falsifiable; each theory accounts for some aspects of humour, but fails to give a complete picture. Thus, to gain a broad understanding of humour, insights from all of the different theories need to be combined (Martin, 2007). Four major influential humour theories will be outlined below.

### **Freudian theories**

Freud (1928, 1938) suggested that humour is similar to dreaming, in that both are vehicles for regulating sexuality and aggression. Like dreaming, humour was thought to be an outlet for aggressive and sexual desires that had been repressed into the unconscious because they were unacceptable in society. Freud (1905) regarded humour as a means of outwitting the internal inhibitions that prevent people from giving rein to many of their natural impulses. Freud (1905, 1928) coined three separate terms, all of which would now be considered to belong within the general domain of humour research (Martin, 2007). These original categories were wit or jokes, humour, and the comic. Wit or jokes (Freud, 1905) refers to the clever use of “jokework” (Martin, 2007, p. 33) combined with the expression of a repressed sexual or aggressive impulse. Jokework involves a combination of cognitive techniques, although these would not be perceived as genuinely funny without the concomitant release of sexual or aggressive drives. In other words, both the release of these drives and the preceding jokework are said to be necessary in order for a joke to be truly effective. Humour (Freud, 1928) refers to the perception of incongruous or amusing elements in an otherwise negative situation. This form of humour arises in stressful or aversive situations, and a



person's ability to "see the funny side of things" (Martin, 2007, p. 35) leads to a release of energy that would otherwise have been experienced as fear, sadness, or anger. Thus Freud's (1928) definition of humour is considerably narrower than the definition that is currently assumed within the field of humour research in general. The comic (Freud, 1905) refers to non-verbal sources of mirth, including slapstick comedy or people slipping on banana skins. It involves "delighted laughter at childish behaviour in oneself or others" (Martin, 2007, p. 36), and often contains a hint of aggression. For example, it is funnier if the person who slips on the banana skin is a pompous and ostentatious adult than if it is an innocent child. Freudian theories of humour focus on the dynamics that occur within an individual, and fail to consider either the interpersonal context or the social functions of humour. They are also difficult to test empirically.

### **Superiority and disparagement theories**

Superiority theories suggest that people laugh at others to whom they feel superior, and therefore they assert that humour is inherently a derisive phenomenon. A person who looks down on whatever he or she is laughing at necessarily judges it as being inferior. This point of view was proposed by philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes (Morreall, 1987). According to Plato, laughter originates in malice, and Aristotle saw people who carry humour to excess as "vulgar buffoons" (Morreall, 1987, p. 15). Hobbes referred to the "sudden glory" of passion that leads to laughter at the misfortune of others (Foot & McCreddie, 2006). According to this viewpoint, humour is thought to result from "a sense of superiority derived from the disparagement of another person or one's own past blunders or foolishness" (Martin, 2007, p. 44). Gruner (1997) suggested that humour is playful aggression as opposed to genuine aggression; thus, humour occurs in the context of a game or competition in which there are winners and losers. According to this frame of reference, the successful enjoyment of humour must include both winning and a sudden perception of winning (Gruner, 1997). Superiority and disparagement theories thus appear to portray humour in a negative light, and although some forms of humour can be aggressive, hostile, or cruel, it can be argued that many forms of humour are not. Those who promote humour for its beneficial qualities (e.g., Cousins, 1985; Kataria, 2002) draw a distinction between "laughing at" and "laughing with", and espouse views of "political correctness" (Martin, 2007, p. 47).



However, Davies (1990) argues that the kinds of jokes that may appear to make fun of ethnic stereotypes are actually affirmative of the cultures concerned.

### **Arousal theories**

Arousal theories are based on the assumption that the most important qualities of humour operate at a physiological level (Foot & McCreddie, 2006). Spencer (1860) hypothesised that the respiratory and muscular action of laughter was a way for the body to release excess nervous energy, although it is now known that the nervous system does not operate in this way (Martin, 2007). Other theorists have suggested that humour is a more general way of relieving built-up tension or strain (e.g., Gregory, 1924; Morreall, 1987). According to Berlyne (1972), humour is associated with a reduction of high arousal, and also with a moderate increase in arousal followed by a sudden drop. This “arousal boost-jag” (Berlyne, 1972) accounts for the pleasure derived from many jokes. Arousal is built up while a joke is being attended to, and the punchline of the joke leads to a rapid dissipation of this arousal, which is often associated with laughter. Berlyne (1972) stated that there is a curvilinear relationship between the level of arousal and the amount of pleasure experienced, with moderate levels of arousal being more enjoyable than either very high or very low levels. However, according to Martin (2007), the relationship between arousal and enjoyment appears to be linear: humour is perceived as funnier and more enjoyable with greater levels of physiological arousal (McGhee, 1983).

### **Incongruity theories**

Incongruity theories focus on the cognitive aspects of humour rather than the emotional or social aspects. Incongruity refers to the absurd, inappropriate, unexpected, and out-of-context elements of humour (Foot & McCreddie, 2006), and incongruity is a crucial determinant of whether or not something is humorous (Martin, 2007). However, while incongruity appears to be a necessary component of humour, it is not sufficient (McGhee, 1979). Koestler (1964) coined the term “bisociation” to refer to the mental processes involved in humour, which also apply to scientific discovery and artistic creativity. In bisociation, a single event “is made to vibrate simultaneously on two different wavelengths” (Koestler, 1964, p. 35). In other words, bisociation occurs when something is perceived from two different and normally incompatible frames of reference at the same time. In contrast to the logic of rational thought, in humour it is possible for something to be both X and not-X at



the same time (Mulkay, 1988). This simultaneous activation of two contradictory perceptions is claimed to represent the essence of humour (Martin, 2007).

Suls (1972) proposed a two-stage model of humour comprehension, which essentially characterises humour as an online problem-solving task. Attending to the set-up of a joke leads to a prediction about its likely outcome. If the punchline differs from this prediction, a cognitive rule is sought which will make the punchline follow from the set-up. If such a rule is found, the incongruity is resolved and the joke is found to be funny. However, if no such rule is found, the result is puzzlement instead of humour (Martin, 2007). Thus, for Suls (1972), humour comes from the resolution of the incongruity rather than from the incongruity itself. A similar theory was proposed by Shultz (1972), who suggested that the punchline of a joke creates an incongruity by introducing material that is incompatible with the set-up. The listener goes back to search for an ambiguity in the set-up which can be interpreted in a different way in order for the punchline to make sense. This ambiguity can take a number of different forms, including phonological, lexical, and non-linguistic (Martin, 2007). For Shultz (1972) it is the identification of the ambiguity that enables the incongruity to be resolved, and it is the resolution of the incongruity that results in humour.

According to Rutter (1997), one of the most widely studied theories in the field of humour research is Attardo and Raskin's (1991) General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), which was developed and expanded from Raskin's (1985) Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH). The SSTH is a formal model for recognising humorous texts, and states that jokes are texts in which two opposing mental scripts are activated. When the punchline of a joke introduces an opposing script to the one activated by the set-up, the text is viewed as humorous. According to Raskin (1985), both scripts are activated at the same time; in this way, it is similar to Koestler's (1964) concept of bisociation (Martin, 2007). This concept of Script Opposition (SO) is retained as one of six elements in the GTVH (Attardo & Raskin, 1991), with the other elements being: the Logical Mechanism (LM), which is the technique used to activate the alternative script; the Situation (SI), which refers to the characters and activities in the joke; the Target (TA), or "butt" of the joke (this is optional, because a joke does not necessarily have a target); the Narrative Strategy (NS), or format of the joke; and the Language (LA) which refers to the specific words used. The GTVH is thus a more comprehensive theory of



verbal humour, which incorporates Koestler's (1964) concept of bisociation as well as the concepts of incongruity and its resolution (e.g., Shultz, 1972; Suls, 1972). However, it was not designed to account for non-verbal humour.

Although much work has been done in the field of humour studies in connection with the development of incongruity and incongruity-resolution theories, it must be pointed out that the concept of incongruity still remains relatively vague (Ritchie, 2004). In addition, Rutter (1997) criticised incongruity theory for being a theory of joke structure rather than a theory of humour, laughter, or social use. A number of theorists have asserted that humour is based on incongruity (Martin, 2007), but none have provided clear, concrete and testable definitions of incongruity (Ritchie, 2004). It is consequently difficult to measure and evaluate these theories with any precision in empirical studies of real-world performances of humorous material, such as the corpus of stand-up comedy routines to be analysed in the present thesis.

## **LAUGHTER RESEARCH**

According to Foot and McCreddie (2006), humour is an essentially shared experience. Although people certainly laugh and smile in response to humorous materials on their own, Provine and Fischer (1989), for example, found 30 times more instances of laughter when participants were with other people than when they were alone. However, the use of humour does not always result in laughter, and there are also many instances of laughter that have little to do with humour (e.g., laughter in response to tickling, or nervous laughter; Ostrower, 2002). Before going on to describe a range of interactional studies, a brief description of laughter will be presented.

Human laughter is a series of short, stereotypical vocalisations. The sounds of laughter are similar in different cultures, and they are unmistakable and easily recognisable (Martin, 2007). Laughter is one of the first social vocalisations produced by babies, after crying (McGhee, 1979). Babies start to produce laughter in response to other people's actions from about the age of four months, and the fact that children who are born deaf and blind also produce laughter appropriately suggests that it is innate (Provine, 2000). The existence of gelastic epilepsy in some newborn babies suggests that the necessary brain mechanisms for laughter are present at birth, and there is emerging neuropsychological evidence of specialised



brain circuits for humour and laughter in humans, including the dopaminergic mesolimbic reward centres, although this research is still ongoing (Martin, 2007).

Darwin (1872) stated that laughter is an emotional expression. It is a way of communicating to others that someone is feeling an emotion akin to happiness or joy, which many humour researchers (including Martin, 2007) refer to as “mirth”. In humans, smiling and laughter occur on a continuum of emotional intensity. At a very low level of intensity, mirth may only be displayed as a faint smile. As the intensity of mirth increases, audible sounds of laughter are produced. At high levels of intensity, loud laughter can be accompanied by bodily movements and a reddening of the face. According to van Hooff & Preuschoft (2003), hearty laughter is contagious and difficult to fake. Laughter tends to begin as a smile, and then fades back into a smile again as its intensity subsides (Martin, 2007).

Humans are not the only animals who laugh. Darwin (1872) identified laughter in young chimpanzees, and van Hooff and Preuschoft (2003) have studied similar laughter in other apes including gorillas and orang utans. Ape laughter sounds different from human laughter, but it is still recognisable as laughter. It is a staccato, throaty, panting vocalisation that is produced with a “relaxed open mouth display” or “play face” (Martin, 2007, p. 165). Ape laughter is produced in similar situations to laughter in human infants, i.e., when the animals are involved in social play, and it acts as a signal to other apes that behaviours which might otherwise be construed as aggressive, such as chasing or wrestling, are intended to be playful and not serious. This shows that apes can distinguish between seriousness and playfulness, and may be indicative of a rudimentary sense of humour. Some apes who have been taught sign language even produce verbal jokes involving puns and incongruous word usage, which further supports this contention (Martin, 2007). There is also evidence that a form of laughter may exist in rats (Panskepp, 2000). Rats produce ultrasonic chirping sounds when they are tickled by human handlers and during rough-and-tumble play with other rats, although the frequency of these purported rat-laughter sounds is too high to be perceived by the human ear. This evidence suggests the possibility that all mammals may be capable of experiencing mirthful feelings.

## **HUMOUR, LAUGHTER, AND INTERACTION**

According to Keith-Spiegel (1972), laughter usually accompanies the humour experience. However, Provine (1993, p. 298) asserts that “laughter deserves



more attention than that accorded it as a behavioural curiosity related to humour”. The present thesis will nevertheless largely address laughter with reference to humour, comedy, and the interaction between speakers and their audiences.

Lindtberg (1984) proposed a series of general rules to describe the occurrence of laughter in comedy performances. The first rule is Personality, which refers to the personal appearance and presentation of the comedian, including voice, head shape, appearance in general, and any physical factors which make that particular comedian unique. The second rule is Interaction, or the correspondence and harmony between comedian and audience. This includes the location, the composition and sophistication of the audience, and the comedian needs to adapt to these changes in order for laughter to occur. The third rule is Timing, which includes the spontaneity and development of the comedian’s performance. Lindtberg (1984) contends that these conditions are important in creating audience laughter. He points to the differences between honest laughter and polite laughter, and asserts that the worst kind of laughter is silence, or the laughter that does not happen. One way for a comedian to avoid this “silent laughter” is by paying appropriate attention to the cultural background of the audience, which also includes the history and political situation. In some climates, comedians can hint at things and play with the senses by using cultural references, whereas at other times such references would be culturally inappropriate. Another way to avoid silent laughter is for comedians to laugh about themselves.

In a study of the relationship between laughter and speech that involved 1200 episodes of naturally occurring laughter from pairs or small groups in public places, Provine (1993, p. 296) described the social dynamics of laughter as “complex”. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he found that audience laughter almost exclusively followed complete statements or questions. However, and possibly counter-intuitively, he also found that most naturally occurring conversational laughter was highly context dependent, and did not occur in response to structured humour. “Few laugh episodes followed speaker comments that would be considered funny outside the context of the conversation” (Provine, 1993, p. 296). This led him to conclude that “the playful dynamic of the social setting that includes a multitude of non-verbal and postural cues was a more important condition for laughter than a particular verbal message” (Provine, 1993, p. 295). Provine’s (1993) study analysed instances of laughter by speaker as well as by audience. He found that speakers



laughed significantly more than their audiences, and that this was especially the case with female speakers, who produced 126.5% more laughter than their male audiences. The smallest amount of laughter by speakers occurred when males were speaking to female audiences, and both male and female audiences laughed significantly more to male speakers than female speakers.

Overall, Provine (1993) found that females laughed more often than males, which suggests that there is more female than male laughter in the general population. He also stated that “the large amount of laughter following comments made by male speakers suggests why there are more male than female comedians – males may be more successful at getting laughs” (Provine, 1993, p. 297). Indeed, the corpus of stand-up comedy performances to be analysed in the present thesis contains only two performances by women, as compared with 11 by men. These were the only two performances by British women within the series of *The Stand-Up Show* from which the corpus was selected (see Chapter 4, p. 98). Indeed, only four (12.1%) of the 33 performers in that series of *The Stand-Up Show* as a whole (not including male compère Tommy Tiernan) were women. The present corpus can therefore be said to reflect an ecologically valid composition of male and female stand-up comedians. Given that this corpus – like the stand-up comedy circuit as a whole – includes so few women, further comparisons will not be made with respect to female and male performers within the present thesis. However, a study that compared male and female audience responses to humorous material will now be described.

Martin and Gray (1996) carried out a study in which male and female participants were asked to listen to ten minutes of radio comedy containing short, fast-paced quickies and sketches, either with or without the accompanying laughter track. Their analysis of the effects of audience laughter on men’s and women’s responses to humorous material showed no significant differences between men and women on any of the four dependent variables in their study (laughter, smiles, enjoyment ratings, and funniness ratings). Noting that only one out of three other male v female studies in naturalistic settings had found a difference, they interpreted their own results as a caution that “some speculations about differences between men and women in their responses to humour may be premature” (Martin & Gray, 1996, p. 228). They found that “the effect of added laughter on mirth ... is general and robust” (Martin & Gray, 1996, p. 223). Both males and females laughed



significantly more when the comedy material included the accompanying laughter track than when it did not, although the results for smiling were not significant. The presence of the laughter track elevated participants' responses on measures of funniness and enjoyment, in that mean ratings on both variables were higher in the "with laughter" condition. Martin and Gray (1996) described the mean ratings for funniness and enjoyment as "fairly positive", and they found no interaction between Group and Laughter for any of the four dependent variables in their study. They concluded that "added laughter had a positive effect on both spontaneous and retrospective measures of humorous response" (Martin & Gray, 1996, p. 227). Interpreting their results, they suggested that laughter may be functioning as an "attentional marker", adding that "for laughter to function as an effective marker, the material must be apposite and sufficiently funny" (Martin & Gray, 1996, p. 227). They also called for greater emphasis to be placed on "the realism of the situations used to evoke and to measure mirth and the appreciation of humour" (Martin & Gray, 1996, p. 229). In their behavioural and phenomenological analysis of audience reactions to comic performance, to be described next, Pollio and Swanson (1995) also called for a field theory of audience reactions to comic materials, encompassing a range of factors. By presenting a series of analyses of audience laughter in response to stand-up comedy performances, the present thesis aims to respond to these requests.

Pollio and Swanson's (1995) study of audience responses to stand-up comedians Bill Cosby and Richard Pryor presented the audience with audiotaped material in order to facilitate their imagination. Cosby was described as a "non-situation-centred" comedian, in that his storytelling style involves the description of imaginary places and events, and tends to focus on some other context than the present. In contrast, Pryor's style was described as "situation-centred", in that his narrative style is more present-centred and tendentious. Audience members consequently tended to be more aware of the ideas or situations suggested by Cosby's routine than Pryor's. "It is as if Pryor-the-performer fascinates audience members to a greater degree than Cosby-the-performer" (Pollio & Swanson, 1995, p. 24). Their study involved 12 audiences, each consisting of between four and six participants. The audiences were male, female, or mixed sex, and each audience consisted of either friends or strangers. The audiences heard performances by both comedians, and the order of presentation was counterbalanced across conditions.



Thus the variables in the study were comedian, order, gender, and acquaintanceship, and Pollio and Swanson (1995) found strong effects for all four variables. Using both behavioural and self-report measures, they found that reactions to humorous materials depend at least as much on the social contexts in which they are encountered as on the specific nature of the comic material itself. Pollio and Swanson (1995) observed three major categories of audience behaviours: laughing and smiling; social responses (e.g., talking, looking around); and “various movements of the hand”. They also noted that there were large occurrences of “sitting still”. They found a lower concordance between self-report data for the audiences to Richard Pryor than those to Bill Cosby. Pollio and Swanson (1995, p. 25) claimed that “comedian and audience factors differentially affect how individual audience members behave in regard to narrative and tendentious comedians under both friends and stranger contexts”. Commenting on the differences in audience behaviour across conditions, Pollio and Swanson (1995) suggested that there are different constraints on public behaviour than personal reactions. They noted that “the field in which comic action takes place is delineated not only by its immediate interpersonal situation, but also by social institutions and traditions that define what is acceptable and what is taboo” (Pollio & Swanson, 1995, p. 26).

In studies of audience responses to speeches with and without recorded laughter, Gruner (1993) and Gruner, Pelletier and Williams (1994) found that audiences rated the dimensions of Authoritativeness, Character, Dynamism, Interestingness and Funniness more highly when the speeches contained laughter than when they did not. They concluded that “public speakers planning to use humour might profit from the presence of a sympathetic claque in the audience” (Gruner *et al.*, 1994).

Lawson, Downing and Cetola (1998) undertook two experiments to test the levels of perceived funniness in different laughter conditions. These provide evidence that audience laughter affects perceivers’ cognitive evaluations of humorous material. The first experiment involved evaluations of four jokes of “moderate funniness” in four conditions: no laughter, canned laughter, canned laughter which the participants were told was canned, and canned laughter which the participants were told was live. Lawson *et al.* (1998) found a significant effect of laughter condition on funniness ratings. In line with previous research, the non-



laughter condition was evaluated as less funny than the canned laughter condition. Additionally, the funniness ratings of canned laughter which the participants were told was canned were lower than those for both of the other laughter conditions (Lawson *et al.*, 1998). In a second experiment, which involved evaluations of five jokes of moderate funniness, Lawson *et al.* (1998) measured overt mirth on a 4-point scale (no response; attenuated smile; full smile; laugh) as well as funniness ratings. They found no significant effect of their independent variables on overt mirth. The most important conditions in their analysis were Laughter Strength (strong v weak) and Constraint (unconstrained, i.e., laughter that the audience was told was live, v constrained, i.e., laughter that the audience was told was canned). Lawson *et al.* (1998) found that strong laughter was perceived as both significantly stronger and significantly more genuine than weak laughter. They also found a significant main effect of laughter strength on the ratings of perceived funniness, qualified by the interaction between laughter strength and constraint. Participants in the unconstrained (“live laughter”) condition attributed a higher level of perceived funniness to actors in the strong laughter condition, but there was no effect in the constrained (“canned laughter”) condition. The laughter strength x constraint interaction was the only significant effect on funniness ratings; there was no significant effect of strength of audience laughter on funniness ratings in the constrained condition. In summary, where audiences thought the material was accompanied by genuine laughter (“higher attributed funniness”), they rated the material as funnier (“higher perceived funniness”). This effect of attributed funniness remained significant after a multiple regression analysis, leading to Lawson *et al.*’s (1998, p. 248) conclusion that their experiment has shown strong evidence for a single, dominant mediator (i.e., “attributed funniness”).

### **Timing or tempo**

One factor that is stereotypically thought to be very important in the effective live performance of humorous material is timing. Gulbranson (1972) defined tempo as the number of words spoken per minute, or the rate of delivery. A selection of studies referring to the timing or tempo of audience laughter will now be presented.

Morrison (1940) studied the timing of audience laughter. He measured the number of people in the audience, the number of laughter instances, and the total duration of laughter for each performance, and found that the number of laughs per



performance correlated +.90 with the number of people attending the performance. His finding that when more people are present, they laugh more often, and they laugh for longer, supports Allport's (1924) concept of social facilitation.

Butcher and Whissell (1984) studied the frequency, amplitude and duration of laughter for male and female audiences consisting of two, four or ten members in response to three short segments of a comedy film. Consistent with Martin and Gray's (1996) results reported above, there were no significant interactions in any analysis, and they found no significant main effect of sex. Consistent with Morrison's (1940) findings, Butcher and Whissell (1984) found a significant main effect of audience size, with 10-person audiences responding most and 2-person audiences responding least. They concluded that the size of an audience facilitates occasion, duration and amplitude of laughter. Butcher and Whissell (1984) also found a significant main effect of segment, with the greatest level of audience response in the last segment and the least in the central segment. Laughter was more typical of the ending section of the film and least typical of the middle. Consistent with these results, Gulbranson (1972) also found that audience responses during humorous performances were influenced by their responses during the first third of the performance.

Gulbranson (1972) analysed four performances of a single play, in which the first third of the play was delivered differently. The delivery variables were speed of performance, or tempo (fast or slow), and comic line delivery (step or wait). In the step condition, the actor "stepped on" any audience responses, thus not encouraging people to respond; in the wait condition, the actor waited for any audience responses to finish before continuing with the performance. The step or wait condition was applied to each segment of dialogue to which the audience was expected to respond with laughter. Gulbranson's (1972) analysis examined audience responses during the first third of the play, in each condition, and then compared these with the audience responses during the remainder of the play, and the total. He considered the number, duration, and loudness of responses, and the interval between responses, and found that the number of responses in the rest of performance increased when there was a higher response in the first third. However, the ratio of increase was not proportional across delivery styles, and he concluded that there was "little relationship between the length of audience responses during



the initial moments of performance compared with the length of their responses throughout the whole play” (Gulbranson, 1972, p. 98).

In terms of tempo, slow performance resulted in more laughs, in terms of number and loudness, but not duration. In terms of delivery, suppression or non-suppression of audience responses did not establish any patterns, but did increase the loudness of responses. Gulbranson (1972) interpreted the relationship between the number and loudness of responses at the beginning and during the remainder of the performance as being due to both qualities inherent in the actors’ performance, and qualities inherent in the audience. A decrease in tempo during the first third of the performance led to an increase in the number and loudness of audience responses throughout the play. Gulbranson (1972, p. 115) concluded that a greater degree of interaction by the audience at the beginning of a performance leads to the establishment of a “comic rhythm” that is sustained throughout the performance. He defined comic rhythm as “the pattern of recurrence between the delivery of comic lines in a live performance and the responses of laughter from the audience” (Gulbranson, 1972, p. 13), and contrasted comic rhythm to the term “rhythm”, which equates to “theatrical tempo”, and is more or less dramatic. Gulbranson (1972) suggested that the sustaining of a comic rhythm occurs through the additive effect of actors eliciting responses from their audience, and audiences initiating their own responses. These two independent processes work together to generate higher levels of response. Gulbranson (1972, p. 53) commented that “audience response becomes an ingredient of performed comedy, as well as its purpose”. This observation is particularly relevant with respect to the analyses of stand-up comedy to be performed within the present thesis.

Norrick (2001) undertook a qualitative analysis of three examples of narrative jokes performed in conversational contexts. His examples differed from each other in that one was successful, one became successful after a slow start (the initial listener became the eventual joker), and one was unsuccessful. From this analysis, some interesting observations about the internal structure of successful and unsuccessful comedy performance emerged. Further to Gulbranson (1972), Norrick (2001) distinguished between the concepts of timing and rhythm in more detail. He listed the components of timing as features of the basic joke text, teller strategies, standard joke prefaces, formulas and patterns, the teller’s style of delivery, and the audience response. He considers that “timing begins with the preface and exposition



of a joke, and runs through the whole performance” (Norrick, 2001, p. 265), and describes rhythm as including “hesitation, formulaicity and repetition” (Norrick, 2001, p. 255). He sees rhythm as both a guide to listeners, in terms of the flow of information, and also as a means to gain planning time for joke tellers. Joke tellers use rhythm as a way to organise their performance. Their use of rhythm makes the joke easier to remember, and enables faster production. For listeners, rhythm facilitates the ability to identify patterns and enables faster interpretation of a joke. The information is easier for the listener to process if the teller employs an effective use of rhythm. “The tension between repetition as mechanical reproduction versus repetition as clever variation underlies much joking behaviour, and it reflects opposed principles in verbal humour” (Norrick, 2001, p. 267). These opposed principles can be said to refer to the features of incongruity and resolution identified by, e.g., Suls (1972) and Shultz (1972).

In his analysis of an unsuccessful narrative joke, Norrick (2001, p. 268) pointed out that “a confused, repetitive joke performance ... illustrates some interesting points regarding timing”. His analysis of the failed joke shows that the telling strategy neglects to address timing or information flow, and he demonstrates that a joke is more than just a mass of information. “Joke elements in the wrong order without the customary delivery simply do not add up to a joke” (Norrick, 2001, p. 260). In his analysis of a joke narrative that became successful when the listener became the teller, Norrick (2001, p. 267) described a “classic” three-part joke structure. The first two episodes establish a pattern, which then becomes skewed in the third episode. Such a pattern employs formulas and parallelism to reinforce patterns. It establishes a rhythm, which serves to both carry the auditor along, and to render the punch-line more effective. The switch of perspective immediately before the punch-line “complicates the processing task facing the audience and postpones the resolution, so that the punch-line gains dynamism” (Norrick, 2001, p. 268). Norrick (2001) also listed the elements of successful jokes, the order in which they need to occur, and the methods of reinforcement at each stage. Jokes require prefaces, set-ups, build-ups, tension, and a punch-line, and those elements need to occur in that order. This structure is reinforced by hesitation at the start, rhythm in the middle, tempo slowdown and semantic shift in the transition, and a smoothly delivered punch-line.



In a complex and detailed predictive account of laughter in response to comedy, Svebak (1974) suggested that the comical situation is composed of three essential elements: the message (H), the audience (A), and the target or content treated by the message (T). In terms of the social quality of the humorous situation, the humorist must always be present, and either the target or the audience, but not both, is also required. Svebak (1974) presented a conceptual scheme for the prediction of laughter, based on three situational dimensions: the humorous message ( $M_s$ ), interpersonal likings ( $L_s$ ), and permissiveness towards actual laughter ( $E_s$ ), modified by three personal dispositions: habitual sensitivity to such messages ( $M_p$ ), habitual tendency to favour comical situations and persons ( $L_p$ ), and habitual need for emotional-impulse control ( $E_p$ ).  $M_p$ , or the “meta-message sensitivity”, is “the keystone of the sense of humour in an individual”, and  $M_s$ , or the “meta-message perceptibility” is the “most laughter-provoking” situational dimension (Svebak, 1974, p. 104). People with high  $E_p$  have a tendency towards laughter, and people with low  $E_p$  tend to be “poker-faced” (Svebak, 1974, pp. 105-106). An example of a situation with high  $E_s$  would be a Broadway show (or perhaps a stand-up comedy gig), and a situation with low  $E_s$  would be a church.  $L_p$  refers to “the habitual liking or disliking of the social role of H, or the comical situation in general” (Svebak, 1974, p. 104). In other words, people with high  $L_p$  like comedy, but people with low  $L_p$  do not.  $L_s$  refers to “the sentiment relation between the interacting parties at the rational level, particularly between H and A” (Svebak, 1974, p. 104). In other words, the level of  $L_s$  refers to the extent to which an audience likes a particular humorist.

After presenting these precise definitions, Svebak (1974) went on to predict suggested laughter outcomes with relation to respective values of the proposed variables of interpersonal likings ( $L_s$ ) and habitual tendency to favour comical situations and persons ( $L_p$ ). Low levels of both  $L_s$  and  $L_p$  indicate that the audience dislikes both this particular humorist and comedy in general, and thus laughter will be suppressed. High levels of both  $L_s$  and  $L_p$  indicate that the audience likes both this particular humorist and comedy in general, and this combination is predicted to result in medium frequencies of laughter. Low levels of  $L_s$  and high levels of  $L_p$  indicate that the audience dislikes this humorist but likes comedy in general. Svebak’s (1974) description of this combination is “indifferent”, but he does not make any specific prediction about the laughter production with respect to this



group. However, the reverse combination, i.e., high levels of  $L_s$  and low levels of  $L_p$ , indicating that the audience likes this particular humorist but dislikes comedy in general, is predicted to result in high frequencies of laughter. Thus, according to Svebak's (1974) theory, an audience's liking of a particular humorist will have a greater impact on their laughter than their liking of comedy in general, and audiences who like a particular humorist will produce more frequent laughter responses if they dislike comedy in general than if they like comedy in general.

Palmer (1988) suggested that there is an intimate link between semantic theories, discourse theories, and references to extra-textual variables, such as historical and social variables. He argued for a less text-centred approach to the study of humour, which would be sensitive to the structure of occasion and audience while still remaining sensitive to the structure of texts. According to Palmer (1988), applying a theory of discourse would dissolve the distinction between the joke as a self-contained unit of meaning and the narrative as a superordinate source of meaning. He described two prominent and dissimilar theories of comic narrative: the analysis of comedy as a genre, which lacks an intrinsic relationship between comedy and funniness, and the semantic structure of an individual joke, which assumes an intrinsic relationship between the nature of jokes in everyday life and the nature of comic narrative. The present thesis intends to follow the first of these paths more than the second, although Palmer (1988) associates the second theory with his assertions that the difference between humour and metaphor is the context in which they appear, and that the ludicrous context, presented in a series of cues, invites enjoyment and pleasure in non-serious connections. For Palmer (1988) the second theory is more appropriate for the comic products of the mass media, whereas the first is more appropriate for canonical literature. He does, however, admit that the second theory suffers from a difficulty of theorising the manner in which jokes and narrative are articulated together, other than "vague generalisations about the humorous content" (Palmer, 1988, p. 114). For Palmer (1988), any theory of comic narrative demands a theory of funniness, or a way of explaining the difference between what is funny and what is not. The present thesis does not intend to present a theory of funniness, but rather to assume funniness as an empirical artefact. This approach is consistent with Limon's (2001) observations. In other words, when audience members produce laughter, it is assumed that this is because they found something funny. This thesis is thus



primarily based on analyses of a set of empirical behavioural responses rather than a series of cognitive interpretations. Palmer's point that "the intention to joke is not enough for a joke to occur: it must also be understood and permitted, otherwise it may well fall flat or be regarded as childish or offensive" (Palmer, 1988, p. 113), is well taken.

Palmer (1988) points to the distinction between discourse and semantics, stating that semantic theories conventionally refer to incongruity, and incongruity is a feature of the social world rather than the natural world. The advantage of using pragmatics allows a direct relationship to be drawn between the semantic structure of meaning and the social occasion in which such meaning is construed. He states that jokes refer to discourses that have an existence independent of the joke, and jokes themselves are a form of discursive organisation. They are rhetorically constructed, and their meaning is context-dependent and "indissolubly linked to discursive contexts" (Palmer, 1988, p. 116). When jokes are arranged in running sequences, the comic impact of later moments "depends as much upon their articulation onto the earlier ones as upon any semantic structure" (Palmer, 1988, p. 116). This idea was adopted by Rutter (1997), who identified the "reincorporation" as an invitational technique that is specific to the performance of stand-up comedy, as will be described below. Greenbaum (1999) referred to this technique as a "call back".

Palmer (1988) also states that a theory of discourse can speak to the failure to arouse humour in an audience, and suggests a relationship between the form of comedy or humour (i.e., the semantic or discursive model) and its reception by the audience. In this sense, any "meaning" is assumed to be the product of negotiation between audience and text. Statements are made comprehensible by a combination of the situation in which they are made and the semiotic paradigms that assign meaning to the components of the statement. The pragmatic or performative dimension refers to "some aspect of the social situation in which a statement is made that is the basis of the meaning of the statement in question" (Palmer, 1988, p. 117). It can deal with jokes that are not found funny by the audience, because the structure of meaning is inseparable from social structure, and a different audience might enjoy the same joke. Pragmatics or performance also addresses the notion of occasions that are and are not suitable for humour. A joke must be permitted as well as intended, and there must be a sense of what kinds of statements are most



appropriate for what sorts of occasions. For Palmer (1988), pragmatics enables a direct relationship to be drawn between the semantic structure of meaning and the social occasion upon which such meaning is achievable. “The social occasion is inscribed in [the text] and ... the set of discursive meanings that constitute ... [the text] is responsible for some features ... of the social occasion in question” (Palmer, 1988, p. 124). This combination of text and social occasion would seem to be an appropriate description of stand-up comedy, the area to which this chapter will turn next.

## **STAND-UP COMEDY**

Historically, according to Roeckelein (2002), the term “comedy” occurs typically in the context of literature and the literary discipline. Nilsen and Nilsen (2000, p. 291) present an unreferenced quotation which colourfully reinforces this idea:

I’ve seen many articles examining the current state of comedy but almost none that use the word “humour”. Looking for humour in comedy clubs is like looking for true love in a strip joint. There is plenty of delightful wit being produced in this country, but it is in written form, in comic novels and essays.

In psychology, the term “comedy” is usually a “variant, derivative, subservient, or secondary term for the more popular terms ‘humour’ and ‘laughter’” (Roeckelein, 2002, p. 56). For the purposes of the present thesis, comedy is defined as the performance before a live audience of material that is intended to be humorous.

The genre of stand-up comedy, which provides the source material for this thesis, is described by Nilsen and Nilsen (2000) as a genre which developed in its own right during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, emerging from the spoken or comedy parts of burlesque and vaudeville. A typical comedy club format comprises three performers: the Opening Act, who serves as both “warm-up” performer and master of ceremonies; the Middle Act, often a newcomer or a less well-known performer; and the Headline Act, usually a well-known “name” to attract audience members (Nilsen & Nilsen, 2000). This format is also frequently adopted in televised stand-up comedy shows, although in the episodes comprising the present



corpus, the Opening Act is not also the master of ceremonies. That role is taken by the Irish comedian Tommy Tiernan in all of the performances in the present corpus, which will be itemised in Chapter 4 (see p. 98).

Especially in the 1980s and 1990s, a distinctive and less formal sub-genre of stand-up comedy developed, which was referred to as “alternative comedy”. Alternative comedy can be described as “the thinking person’s comedy”, because “it is so free-flowing that it can include anything” (Nilsen & Nilsen, 2000, p. 289). The material under analysis in the present study can be considered to have developed from the alternative branch of stand-up comedy, although this distinction appears to be less compelling nowadays than would have been the case twenty years ago.

Stand-up comedy could also be viewed as a specific example of a local, social, institutional, and cultural context which is constructed by language-as-interaction (Gee, 1999). Meaning and context are, according to Gee, “mutually constitutive”, in that “patterns of behaviour, as well as cultures and institutions, are produced and reproduced as by-products of ‘on the spot’, moment-by-moment, adaptive social interaction” (Gee, 1999, p. 61).

Goodwin (2000) presents a theory of action linking language, environment, text, and context. He refers to the juxtaposition of semiotic fields as “contextual configuration”, and the participation framework as a public field of mutual orientation. He exemplifies the notion of semiotic contexts in interaction, with reference to the examples of children using Hopscotch grids, and archaeologists using Munsell charts. In both cases, the semiotic contexts are understood by the users, and are used by them in interaction with each other. Similarly, locally understood semiotic contexts may exist between performers and audiences in stand-up comedy performances. Goodwin (2000) states that talk and gesture work together, mutually elaborating each other within larger sequences of actions and within an embodied participation framework. He presents an analysis of interaction as a multi-party interactive phenomenon, which relies on semiotic structure in the environment. The interaction in stand-up comedy can thus be contextualised as a multi-party interactive phenomenon that relies on semiotic structure in the environment.

In an investigation of comic culture, Greenbaum (1999) states that comic narratives are essentially rhetorical, and stand-up comedy is an inherently rhetorical



discourse. Differentiating between Ethos (Aristotle) and Kairos (Isocrates), she characterises Ethos as the creation of a persona, or comic authority, which invites audience laughter responses. This involves the establishment of a comic “voice”, and requires confidence and assurance. Ethos may involve the mixing of voices, questioning of authority, and embracing of class distinctions. It involves “alignment with lower classes, even while making fun of them”. Self-deprecating humour and sexually explicit material are both, according to Greenbaum (1999), associated with Ethos. The construction of Ethos bridges the distance between the orator or performer and the listeners or audience. With reference to Kairos, Greenbaum (1999) states that it is critical for stand-up comedians to realise that comic discourse must remain malleable in order to be rhetorically effective. To illustrate this point, she presents a quotation from performer Etta May:

Any question I ask the audience seems they can answer me a million different ways, but they can't. They can only answer in a certain way. After doing it awhile, there's no way they can answer to mess you up.

One feature of Kairos, according to Greenbaum (1999), is for the performer to make local references to the place of the performance. Greenbaum (1999) separates the Isocratean discourse paradigm into three separate elements: Natural talent, Praxis, and Theoreia. As regards natural talent, she states that most comedians see their talent as being innate. She describes Praxis as “the practice of one's craft to oratory perfection”, and encourages stand-up comedians to “get on stage as much as you can, as often as you can, wherever you can”, in order to polish their jokes, timing, and stage persona (Greenbaum, 1999, p. 42). Theoreia is described as an understanding of structure, incorporating a knowledge of “when a joke is missing a line, or if the rhythm or beat is off”. Stand-up comedians need a sound theoretical base on which to build their oratory skills. “While a theoretical understanding of how a joke is composed is essential to comedy writing, that alone will not make a comedian funny” (Greenbaum, 1999, p. 43).

Rutter's (1997) PhD thesis proposed a theoretical perspective and methodological approach within humour research that moves beyond traditional assumptions about joke telling and the organisation of laughter. Such an approach, he argued, needs to be primarily based on “the specific observation of the humorous



situation and a detailed analysis of the event and its place within the ongoing interaction” (Rutter, 1997, p. 287). He analysed a number of live stand-up comedy performances in the north west of England from a sociological perspective, using the methodology of conversation analysis. His underlying assumption, which is shared by the present thesis, proposed that audiences are not “made” to laugh at joke punchlines, but that stand-up comedians perform jokes in such a way as to inform their audiences that laughter is both expected and acceptable, and it then becomes the audience’s responsibility to produce a laughter response. Rutter (1997) stated that an effective system of analysis for stand-up comedy must incorporate the recognition that live stand-up comedy is organised and understandable. Such a system needs to understand the live performance of stand-up comedy, which includes the importance of an interactive audience, the recognition of the complexity of audience responses, and of studying real rather than idealised examples. The present thesis acknowledges these requirements.

Rutter (1997, pp. 99-102) described the difficulties that he needed to overcome with respect to obtaining tapes of live stand-up comedy material, and his thesis studied a combination of his own audiotaped recordings of live performances and commercially available recordings of well-established comedians. One benefit of this combination for his thesis was that the supplementation of his own recordings with professional material allowed him to demonstrate that his findings were “common to stand-up as a broader phenomenon” rather than restricted to the limited sample to which he had access. A benefit of his research for the present thesis is his finding that there were no appreciable differences between the performances that he recorded personally and the commercially available recordings, suggesting that the present corpus of televised stand-up comedy performances is likely to be equally representative of the genre.

As well as providing a comprehensive description of stand-up comedy openings and the importance of the role of the compère (see also Rutter, 2000), his key findings were that stand-up comedians use the same standard rhetorical devices as politicians (see Chapter 2, pp. 43-53), and he also proposed four additional comedy-specific invitational techniques. These were reincorporations, alliteration and assonance, intonation, and adoption of voices. He defines reincorporations as “the reappearance of one element of a joke (usually not a punchline) later on in a stand-up performer’s set” (Rutter, 1997, p. 226). Of alliteration and assonance, he



says that “surprisingly often, joke punchlines are structured by the performer to include alliteration, assonance or, more rarely, rhyme” (Rutter, 1997 p. 229). Noting that intonation is even more performance-specific than the other proposed techniques, he states that the changes of pitch in stand-up comedians’ delivery are used “not only to provide a varied and interesting tune to their script, but also ... to signpost the completion of jokes and create an invitation to laugh” (Rutter, 1997, p. 232). In discussing comedians’ adoption of voices, he distinguishes between two different ways in which this is done. The first of these is termed “voice as costume”, in which stand-up comedians adopt a voice that is “different from their own ordinary diction” throughout their entire performance. Voice as costume is thus a stand-up specific technique, as opposed to “voice as prop”, which is found in natural conversation as well as in stand-up comedy performances. Rutter (1997, p. 234) defines voice as prop as “the voice that is adopted by stand-up comedy performers for only a short period of time within a stand-up sequence”. All four of these proposed additional comedy-specific techniques will be addressed with respect to the present corpus (see Chapter 5).

Before going on to present the various microanalytic studies of the performances within the present corpus, Chapter 2 will provide an overview of the literature relating to performer-audience interaction within the genres of political speeches and public oratory. Chapter 3 will then present the results of a pilot study comparing four stand-up comedy performances from within the present corpus to 15 political speeches studied by Bull and Wells (2002), in order to ascertain the extent to which coding schemes developed for the analysis of audience applause in political speeches can account for laughter and other affiliative audience responses in stand-up comedy performances. Chapter 4 will develop and expand on the findings reported in Chapter 3: the complete corpus of 13 stand-up comedy performances will be analysed, and distinctions will be drawn between the different forms of audience responses that occur within the corpus. Chapter 5 will then go on to present a detailed analysis of the various invitational techniques used by stand-up comedians in order to invite affiliative audience responses. Based on these findings, Chapter 6 will describe and evaluate a range of proposed forms of audience disaffiliation within the corpus. Finally, Chapter 7 will summarise the main findings and propose a series of key features that contribute towards success as a stand-up comedian.



## CHAPTER 2

# Studies of audience responses to political speeches and public oratory

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss affiliative and disaffiliative responses in political speeches and public oratory. As stated in Chapter 1, studies of political speeches have provided a theoretical framework that can be applied to the analysis of forms of affiliative audience responses in addition to applause, such as cheering and laughter.

### AUDIENCE AFFILIATION

Affiliative audience responses to political speeches include both applause and laughter. However, the empirical literature (e.g., Bull, 2006) has addressed affiliative laughter only when it occurs as part of an applause response. Disaffiliative laughter in political speeches is considered later in the current chapter, and the literature on affiliative laughter in other contexts was reviewed in Chapter 1.

### Applause

In a study of displays of audience affiliation at public meetings, Atkinson (1984a) examined the ways in which speakers hold the attention of non-speaking recipients, and the features of their talk that lead audiences to interpret it as persuasive. He found that applause frequently occurs just after or in overlap with some other displays of affiliation; it recurrently reaches maximum intensity soon after onset, and bursts of applause within a speech tend to last for approximately eight seconds.

Affiliative audience responses do not just happen anywhere in a speech, they occur in particular sequential positions (Atkinson, 1984a). These relate to responses to sequences of talk that perform particular actions, and the timing of response onset and termination in relation to the preceding and subsequent talk. There is a high degree of precision about the timing of responses in relation to the prior talk, and speakers display an orientation to the occurrence of applause onset and completion. Public speakers construct their prior talk to let audience members know when a collective affiliative response will become a relevant activity for them



to perform. They do this by giving recognisable cues embedded in the prior talk: the use of a number of devices, all of which project the relevance of an affiliative response at the next possible transition point (Atkinson, 1984a).

Public speakers and audience members orient to the collective production of one activity at a time, either talk by the speaker or response by the audience. A process of turn-taking takes place, similar to that in conversation, in which both speaker and audience orient to an upcoming transition relevance place in advance of its occurrence (Atkinson, 1984a). In order to analyse an audience's response to a speaker's turn, both the content and delivery of the speaker's utterance need to be considered. Each of these areas will be discussed below, and then a distinction between various different forms of audience applause will be presented.

### *Speech content*

According to Atkinson (1984a, p. 377), applause tends to occur after a relatively narrow range of actions: "terminating declarations (e.g., of support or opposition to a motion ...), commendations, congratulations, announcements of winners, opponent-directed criticisms or insults, and self-directed praises or boasts". Atkinson (1984a) found that 44% of the actions hearably produced by speakers just prior to applause onset included criticism or insult, and 71% included praise, boasting, or commendation. "Applause may be a way of welcoming, thanking or congratulating some identified person, or it may be done as a display of agreement with some decision, proposal, or a particular point being made by a speaker" (Atkinson, 1984a, pp. 405-406).

Atkinson (1984b) identified three specific standard rhetorical devices that speakers use in order to generate audience applause. These are: projecting a name, lists of three, and contrastive pairs. Based on Atkinson's work, Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) studied a heterogeneous sample of political speeches to British political party conferences in 1981. They analysed the entire televised output that year, which comprised 476 speeches, 41.75 hours of material, and approximately 20,000 sentences. Although they noted some minor differences between rostrum and platform speakers, they found that audience response patterns were independent of the political party or political status of the speaker, and also independent of the popularity of the message preceding the applause (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986).

Unlike studies by Bull and his colleagues (e.g., Bull, 2003), Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) did not include all incidences of audience applause in their



analysis. They discarded 35% of their initial sample of 2,461 applause events: 19% (459) which occurred at the end of speeches, considered to be “obligatory”, and a further 414 incidences of isolated applause (17%). A comprehensive analysis of the remaining 1,588 applause events (65% of their original sample) revealed that seven basic rhetorical formats were associated with almost 70% of the total applause produced during those speeches. In addition to Atkinson’s (e.g., 1984b) original three (i.e., contrast, three-part list, and naming), Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) identified a further five rhetorical devices (puzzle-solution, headline-punchline, combination, position taking, and pursuit). The standard rhetorical formats identified by Atkinson, Heritage and Greatbatch are described in further detail below.

### *Contrast*

A contrast, or antithesis, involves the sequential juxtaposition of an item with its opposite. Contrasts may include boasts about one’s own side, insults about an opponent or opponents, or simultaneous boasts about “us” and insults about “them” (Atkinson, 1984a, p. 391).

McIlvenny (1996a) points out the danger for a speaker of setting up a contrastive pair with a negative first part. The negative may be cheered or applauded by an audience, or it may be seized upon by a heckler. In terms of achieving an affiliative audience response, the most successful contrasts tend to be composed of first and second parts that are rhythmically balanced and contain similarities of length, content, and grammatical structure. However, these properties are not essential, and “more mundane variants” can also generate audience applause (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986, p. 124). In other words, audience applause can also occur in response to contrasts in which the first and second parts are less elegantly matched.

Atkinson (1984a) notes that contrastive devices are massively recurrent across a range of environments, both interactional and textual, where persuading or convincing an audience is a central practical concern. He asserts that “making a point in the form of a contrast is the most commonly used prerespone verbal construction” (Atkinson, 1984a, p. 391); Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) consider the contrast to be one of the most basic resources of an orator. According to Atkinson (1984a), contrasts feature in about one third of collective applause during political speeches. Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) found that contrasts were the



most effective rhetorical devices, in that they were associated with 33.2% of applause events. They coded political messages as contrasts if they contained “an explicit contrast in words, or sense, or both” (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986, p. 125).

Some examples of contrasts in political speeches are given below. In these (and all subsequent examples), the orthographic notation of the excerpt has been simplified. That is to say, the notation used in the current thesis does not follow the conversation analysis transcription convention of the excerpts as reported in their original sources. However, the speech content of each excerpt herein is reproduced verbatim.

1. “Which example will be most likely to make it pause? The renunciation of the means of national self defence, which the banners of Faslane and Greenham call for, or the swift and sure response of our young men in the South Atlantic just a year ago?” (from Atkinson, 1984b, p. 75, spoken by Margaret Thatcher).
2. “And indeed it was rather appropriate that ITN was swinging from the stock market, where they’re gambling with the wealth of the nation, to Brighton, where we represent the people who create the wealth of the nation” (from Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986, p. 123, spoken by Tony Benn).
3. “Their policies may change every five minutes. Their prejudices never change” (from Tony Blair’s speech to the Labour party conference, September 2000).

In the first example, the contrast is between “the renunciation of the means of national self defence” and “the swift and sure response of our young men in the South Atlantic”. The applause begins during the utterance of the word “men”, by which time (according to Atkinson, 1984b) the audience has become aware of the speaker’s use of a contrastive device. The contrast in the second example is between “gambling with the wealth of the nation” and “creat[ing] the wealth of the nation”. The audience responds with “hear hear” and collective applause after the word “create”; again, as soon as the use of a contrastive device has become apparent. The third example contrasts changing policies with unchanging



prejudices; it follows an attack on the Conservative party's opposition to several specifically itemised Labour government policies. The audience applaud immediately after this utterance.

### *List*

A list, normally in three parts, is a linked array of juxtaposed items, the final item often being preceded by the conjunction "and". Atkinson (e.g., 1984a, 1984b) noted that the list format combines the resources by which a political message is emphasised and through which its completion point can be anticipated. The repetition of an item can strengthen, underlie, or amplify any message (Atkinson, 1984b). Heritage and Greatbatch (1986, p. 127) included applauded lists in their coding system "if the list was complete at, or very close to, the third item".

Atkinson (1984a, p. 389) describes lists as "procedures with competing and opposite sequential implications being simultaneously mobilised". He claims that speakers and recipients in conversational interaction orient to three-partedness in list construction, and that the forthcoming completion is predictable from the point at which a list is recognisably under way. "As is fairly common in the production of lists, the early (nonterminal) items are completed with rising intonation, whereas the last one is completed with a downward shift" (Atkinson, 1984a, p. 401). Atkinson (1984a, p. 387) further suggests that "in cases where a third list item and an action are completed simultaneously, the immediate sequential relevance of a collective response is so strongly established that one will be produced there and then, irrespective of whether the speaker has more to say." Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) found that lists were the second most effective rhetorical devices, after contrasts, in that they were associated with 12.6% of applause events.

Some examples of lists in political speeches are given below.

1. "This week has demonstrated that we are a party united in purpose, strategy, and resolve" (from Atkinson, 1984b, p. 61, spoken by Margaret Thatcher).
2. "I thought it was disgusting this week that a Member of Parliament came here, cast his vote in the election, and then resigned" (from Heritage & Greatbatch, 1996, p. 126, spoken by Alex Kitson).



3. “We’re going to have no more of Labour’s early release schemes for rapists and burglars and muggers” (from William Hague’s speech to the Conservative party conference, October 2000).

These examples are all of lists in three parts, which is the most common form, although longer lists are also sometimes found. In the first list, the three items are “purpose”, “strategy” and “and resolve”. In the second, they are “came here”, “cast his vote in the election”, and “and then resigned”. In the third, they are “rapists”, “and burglars”, and “and muggers”. In each of these examples, the applause commences either during or immediately after the production of the third element in the list.

#### *Puzzle-solution*

A puzzle-solution is a two-part message in which a speaker first establishes some kind of puzzle or problem and then offers a subsequent statement in resolution. The puzzle part indicates the issue under consideration, and also directs the audience’s attention to the speaker’s proposed solution. The audience can thus anticipate the point at which to applaud, and the delivery of the solution naturally coincides with the completion of the political message (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986). Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) state that puzzle-solutions are most commonly found in simple form, but that the puzzle-solution format is also capable of considerable elaboration.

Two examples of puzzle-solutions from Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) are presented below.

1. “Unemployment, Mister Chairman, immediately brings to mind young people. What they want are real jobs. Many a business would like an apprentice. So why do they do without? Because the minimum wage laid down by wages councils and joint negotiating agreements are more than they can afford” (from Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986, pp. 127-128, spoken by Joan Hall).

The puzzle takes the form of a rhetorical question: “So why do they do without?”, and the solution (the remainder of the utterance) elicits an early



affiliative response of “hear hear” after the words “minimum wage”; collective applause starts before completion of the word “afford”.

2. “Margaret Thatcher has portrayed herself as the nation’s nurse administering nasty but necessary medicine to us in the belief that whatever short term pain we may suffer in the long run it’s going to do us good. And I’m surprised that as a qualified chemist she seems to have forgotten the warning on every bottle – caution, it is dangerous to exceed the stated dose” (from Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986, p. 128, spoken by David Steel).

In this example, the puzzle is “she seems to have forgotten the warning on every bottle”, and the remainder of the utterance constitutes the solution. The audience respond with collective laughter and applause towards the end of the utterance (after the word “exceed”).

#### *Headline-punchline*

The headline-punchline format is structurally similar to the puzzle-solution, although somewhat simpler and with less potential for elaboration. In a headline-punchline, the speaker firstly proposes to make a statement, and then makes it. The message, or punchline, is emphasised by the pre-announcement, or headline. As with the puzzle-solution device, the audience can anticipate the point at which to applaud a headline-punchline, since the completion of the punchline message is normally short and simple (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986).

Two examples of the headline-punchline device, one from Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) and one from the material analysed by Bull and Wells (2002), are presented below.

1. “The other point about that as well, and this is very very important I think, is that passing this motion can help the alliance with the Social Democrats. And I’ll tell you why. It removes the last excuse for your idealistic radicals to join the Labour party” (from Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986, p. 129, spoken by Michael Meadowcroft).

In this example the headline is “I’ll tell you why”; the rest of the utterance constitutes the punchline.



2. “My ambition: I want to be the first Prime Minister in forty years to stand up and say, Britain is back at full employment again” (from Tony Blair’s speech to the Labour party conference, September 2000).

In this example the headline is “My ambition”; the punchline is the remainder of the utterance. In both cases, the punchline is followed by audience applause.

### *Combination*

The term “combination” as used by Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) refers specifically to utterances that include at least two of the four previously mentioned rhetorical devices. Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) state that combining these devices is likely to further emphasise the political message and project a completion point even more clearly than the use of a single device alone.

Atkinson (1984a, p. 379) claims that “the use of a single procedure on its own may not be adequate for getting a simultaneously and collectively done activity under way”. The use of two or more devices in combination, each of which projects the same action as relevant next, makes it more likely that most of those present will recognise at least one, and hence that a collectively produced response may be initiated fairly immediately (Atkinson, 1984a).

Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) found that contrasts and lists were the most common devices to occur in combination with others. More than half of all the combination devices in their sample included a list, and almost all (more than 91%) included a contrast.

### *Position taking*

On occasions when rhetorical devices are not used in conjunction with each other, Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) identified position taking as the most effective single rhetorical format in their sample.

Position taking is an unequivocal praising or condemnation of a previous descriptive statement or series of statements that contained little or no overt evaluation. The audience responds by affiliating with the speaker’s position, which is simultaneously both expected and deferred (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986). Position taking can be either complex, following a section of speech content including other rhetorical devices, or simple, where the description before the device is not rhetorically formatted (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986). Heritage and



Greatbatch (1986, p. 133) comment that position taking is “uniquely fitted for the packaging of criticisms”, noting that positive positions tend to be formatted as pursuits (see below).

Two examples of position taking, one from Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) and one from the material analysed by Bull and Wells (2002), are presented below.

1. “There is a widespread practice in this country whereby companies which use closed shops pass that obligation on to small business sub-contractors. To use only s- sh- er- union labour in meeting contracts in those places. That practice must stop” (from Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986, pp. 132-133, spoken by Spencer Batiste).
2. “Look, you can’t change human nature. You can’t change human nature. But poverty. Unemployment. Drugs. These are major causes of crime, too. Now, someone needs to be saying that, and that’s why Britain needs the Liberal Democrats” (from Charles Kennedy’s speech to the Liberal Democrat party conference, September 2000).

In both these examples, the final sentence constitutes the position taking device.

### *Pursuit*

In cases when an audience initially fails to respond to a particular message, the speaker may pursue their applause by using a pursuit device. A pursuit may be a recompletion (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) or summary of the previous point. It may also involve a shift of footing (Goffman, 1979) whereby speakers tend to shift from speaking on their own behalf to speaking on the behalf of a group or collective (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986). Atkinson (1984a) states that recompletion appears to be an extremely effective way of eliciting a response that had previously been withheld. In the same way as position taking, pursuits may be simple or complex.

Unlike the previously discussed rhetorical devices, pursuits lack a preliminary element that prepares the audience to respond. Audiences may therefore be less able to recognise the point at which their applause becomes sequentially relevant. Commenting on the relative effectiveness of each of these devices,



Heritage and Greatbatch (1986, p. 135) state that “pursuits are less effective ... than most of the other devices”.

However, Atkinson (1984a) extols the virtues of post-response pursuits. Early response by the audience is hearable as a display of greater than usual enthusiasm. Post-response pursuits by the speaker provide a way of transforming a slightly early response into a very early one, and possibly even one that drowns out the recompletion. This form of recompletion has a “can’t lose” character. Either it will elicit a response that has not yet happened, or it will make a response that is already under way seem more enthusiastic. But the former can also seem “lame”, in that it draws attention to the former lack of response (Atkinson, 1984a, p. 398).

Below are two examples of pursuits, the first from Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) and the second from the material analysed by Bull and Wells (2002).

1. “I am not willing to throw away the prospects of lasting recovery in an orgy of self indulgence, false sentimentality and self justification. And no one in this government is” (from Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986, pp. 134-135, spoken by Norman Tebbit).

In this example, the pursuit is the final sentence. The audience, who remain quiet during the three-part list, begin to applaud during the utterance of the pursuit.

2. “We’ve always said that voting Liberal is a wasted vote. But, as anyone who lives under a Liberal council will tell you, a vote for the Liberals is never so wasted as when the Liberals actually win. True” (from William Hague’s speech to the Conservative party conference, October 1998).

In this example the audience had already begun to laugh and applaud after his delivery of the initial puzzle-solution device, but Hague added the pursuit – the single word “true” – presumably with the aim of intensifying the applause. This was the only example of a pursuit identified in the material analysed by Bull and Wells (2002), which included a total of 967 incidences of audience applause. It is therefore considered that pursuits are rarely used in political speeches at the highest levels.



## *Naming*

Although not specifically used as a coding category by Heritage and Greatbatch (1986), Atkinson (1984a) identified the importance of projecting a name as a rhetorical device. This involves saying something about the person as a preliminary to naming him or her, so that the name itself provides a readily recognisable completion point. Naming may also be accompanied by a statement of gratitude towards the person named.

Naming often provides a “monitor space” (Davidson, 1984) just prior to completion initiation (Atkinson, 1984a, p. 381). For instance, in award ceremony nominations, the audience need to wait for the pause before responding, since any of the names may ensue. Pause is an effective way of building suspense. “The use of name forms that take several beats to deliver after the name has become identifiable enables the audience to produce an early response”. The audience need to recognise the completion point in advance of its occurrence (Atkinson, 1984a).

Below are three examples: two from the material studied by Bull and Wells (2002), followed by one from Atkinson (1984b).

1. “Didn’t Michael Portillo make a fantastic speech and show what a great Chancellor he would be?” (from William Hague’s speech to the Conservative party conference, October 2000).
2. “And on a personal level, although we thanked him to the rafters – and appropriately so – earlier this week, and what a magnificent speech it was for us, can I just say personally, on behalf of us all, a full, and a complete, thank you, to Paddy Ashdown” (from Charles Kennedy’s speech to the Liberal Democrat party conference, September 1999).

In the first example, the audience applause interrupts the speaker, possibly because he continued his utterance after mentioning the name. In the second example, the audience applaud at the end of the speaker’s utterance. The first example is of naming, the second of naming and gratitude in combination.

3. “Now it’s my pleasure to invite Mister Michael Heseltine, the Member of Parliament for Henley, Shadow Minister of the Environment, to reply to the



debate. Mister Heseltine” (from Atkinson, 1984b, p. 49; the speaker is not named).

The audience begin to applaud during the utterance of the final “mister”.

### *Delivery*

Delivery refers to the way in which a speaker’s verbal material is presented to an audience. In other words, it encompasses everything that the speaker does during his or her performance, other than the meanings of the words uttered. Delivery includes vocal features, such as intonation, pitch, and other prosodic cues, as well as non-vocal features, such as stance, gaze, and gesture.

Atkinson (e.g., 1984b) was aware of the importance of delivery in encouraging audiences to applaud rhetorically formatted utterances. He noted that prosodic and non-vocal activities may be recurrently implicated in the way audiences are informed when an affiliative response will become relevant. Speakers can be perceived to “change gear”, and to launch into a sequence that is marked as being noticeably different from the immediately preceding talk. Prosodic shifts may be involved in marking various stages in the production of a response-elicitation sequence. For example, a downward intonational shift that coincides with an assertion that is approaching termination may be hearable as projecting an imminent completion point (Atkinson, 1984a).

However, Atkinson (1984a) explicitly does not propose that prosodic shifts are so powerful that they will work independently of other procedures to assure the actual production of a response by co-present audience members. He states that, for a prompt response to occur, prosodic shifts may have to be mobilised in conjunction with other response-relevant features in the talk’s construction and delivery. “Nonvocal activities may be closely involved with prosodic and other features in the production of response-elicitation sequences” (Atkinson, 1984a, p. 402), and “hand and arm movements may be closely coordinated with the rhythm of the talk and with specific features of its sequential construction” (Atkinson, 1984a, p. 403).

A range of identifiable techniques or procedures that are regularly used by speakers in the production of sequences preceding collective displays of affiliation include particular verbal constructions, as well as prosodic and non-vocal activities, and these may be mobilised in a variety of combinations (Atkinson, 1984a). They provide the audience with the upcoming relevance of an affiliative response and a



clearly recognisable completion point, and give an invitation to the audience to respond affiliatively and immediately when (or before) completion is reached.

Bull and Wells (2002) identified a clear distinction between the use of rhetorical devices and applause invitations, and suggested that delivery may be more important than Atkinson (e.g., 1984a) originally recognised. In claiming that delivery is important with regard to whether or not a rhetorical device is an applause invitation, Bull and Wells (2002) stated that their analysis only showed synchrony (see below) when rhetorical devices were accompanied by appropriate delivery, and called for a further examination of the interrelationship between delivery and rhetorical devices. This thesis intends to consider such an interrelationship within the genre of stand-up comedy.

### *Different forms of audience applause*

Building on the work of Atkinson (e.g., 1984a) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986), Bull and his colleagues (e.g., Bull, 2006) have undertaken a series of further analyses of political applause. In asserting that audiences do not only applaud “claptrap” in political speeches, Bull (2000) qualitatively analysed instances of applause that occurred in the absence of standard rhetorical devices.

Bull (2000) performed a detailed content analysis of 15 non-rhetorically formatted statements evoking collective applause, from the three major British political party leaders’ keynote speeches to their annual conferences in 1996. He found that the audience were responding to substantive policy issues, and concluded that “neither rhetorical formatting nor synchronisation between speaker and audience are necessary for collective applause” (Bull, 2000, p. 39). Bull (2000) proposed that two separate processes occur in audience applause. The first, “invited applause”, occurs in response to standard rhetorical devices. The second, “uninvited applause”, does not relate to rhetorical devices, and is initiated by the audience.

Bull (2000) suggested that a high proportion of uninvited applause may reflect a speaker’s popularity, since uninvited applause appears to be more spontaneous than applause invited by the speaker, and may reflect greater audience enthusiasm. “An affiliative response that is already under way by the time the speaker reaches a completion point is likely to be noticeable and reportable as more enthusiastic/spontaneous than ones that start after even a slight delay” (Atkinson, 1984a, p. 377). Bull (2000) further suggested that a comparable distinction between invited and uninvited audience responses might exist in other social situations, and



indicated the potential influence of local contextual factors such as different social conventions about appropriate audience behaviour.

Bull (2000) found that only a third of the applause to non-rhetorically formatted statements was synchronous with the end point of the speaker's utterance. He also found that "mutual monitoring", a term which Clayman (1993) associates with booing, was associated with the staggered onset of applause. The applause events analysed by Bull (2000), and especially the asynchronous instances, were typically associated with a staggered onset.

Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) undertook a more comprehensive analysis of asynchronous applause. Further to Bull's (2000) finding that two-thirds of all audience applause in response to non-rhetorically formatted utterances was asynchronous with the end point of the speaker's utterance, they found that almost 40% of all the applause events in the six keynote speeches by the leaders of the major British political party leaders to their annual conferences in 1996 and 1997 were asynchronous (or "mismatched"). Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) discussed ways in which rhetorical devices can "go wrong", and how mismatched applause can occur in the absence of rhetorical devices. Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) proposed four different types of mismatch, three of which they describe as audience-driven, and one as speaker-driven. The audience-driven mismatches are: (a) isolated applause, (b) delayed applause, and (c) interruptive applause; the speaker-driven mismatch is: (d) audience applause interrupted by speaker. As Atkinson (1985) noted, the refusal of invited applause is a relatively rare occurrence and may be indicative of a highly charismatic orator.

Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) coded each type of mismatch independently; they did not include a "combination" category. Given that some incidences of mismatched applause contained more than one type of mismatch, the figures they report include some double counting, which they acknowledge. The overall figures for applause in the sample they analysed were: 61% synchronous, 4.7% isolated, 7.5% delayed, 17.8% interruptive, and 12.9% speaker interruptions. They noted variability between the speakers in both types of interruptive applause, as well as the extent to which mismatches occur, and pointed out that each type of mismatch may occur in the presence or absence of rhetorical devices (Bull & Noordhuizen, 2000). In an earlier study (of audience applause to speeches made by Arthur Scargill, the former leader of the National Union of Mineworkers), Bull (1986)



found that collective audience applause was associated more frequently with standard rhetorical devices, and that isolated applause occurred more frequently in the absence of standard rhetorical devices.

Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) suggested a number of potential reasons for the occurrence of mismatched applause: the audience could applaud in response to a speaker's utterance that did not contain rhetorical devices; the audience could misread the speaker's cues to applaud; the speaker's rhetoric could fail or be poorly constructed; and/or the speaker could continue speaking after a his or her utterance has reached a logical completion point. Some mismatches could be accounted for by more than one of these reasons, although not all of these reasons can apply to every form of mismatched applause.

Table 2.1 summarises Bull and Noordhuizen's (2000) suggested potential causes of mismatched applause in relation to each category of audience mismatch.

Table 2.1  
*Potential causes of mismatched applause in audience mismatches*

Potential cause of mismatched applause	Type of mismatch		
	Isolated	Delayed	Interruptive
Absence of rhetorical devices	Yes	Yes	Yes
Misreading of cues	Yes	-	Yes
Failure of rhetoric	Yes	-	Yes
Poorly constructed rhetoric	-	Yes	Yes
Speaker overshoots completion point	Yes	-	Yes

Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) divide speaker mismatches (which are always interruptive) into two categories: successful interruptions, where the speaker regains the turn, and unsuccessful interruptions, where the speaker allows the audience response to continue before regaining the turn. Speakers may interrupt unsuccessfully by not using rhetorical devices to full effect. They may interrupt successfully to stop half-hearted applause, or to force the continuation of their speech after long and enthusiastic applause. Speakers may also interrupt audience applause strategically, to emphasise their perception as charismatic orators. If an audience is bursting to applaud, their applause when eventually permitted can seem



highly enthusiastic, thus giving the impression of the speaker's overwhelming popularity (Atkinson, 1984b; Bull & Noordhuizen, 2000). In contrast, Clayman (1993) notes that withholding speech accommodates applause, and is therefore advantageous for the speaker.

Although they did not include isolated applause events in their analysis, Heritage and Greatbatch (1986, pp. 140-141) discussed the comparison between full and isolated applause. They noted that "... rhetorical formats are more likely to engender collective responses and less likely to be associated with the responses of single individuals". According to Atkinson (1984a, p. 371), "one person can clap his hands, but it only becomes applause when several do so simultaneously". Commenting on applause in general, Heritage and Greatbatch (1986, p. 146) stated that "audience agreement may be a necessary condition for the generation of applause, but it is not generally a sufficient one". *Contra* Heritage and Greatbatch (1986), Bull (2000) and Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) assert that audience agreement alone is a sufficient condition for collective applause.

Bull and Wells (2002) undertook a more detailed analysis of audience applause, considering the dimension of synchrony with relation to the distinction between invited and uninvited applause. In a similar way to Heritage and Greatbatch (1986), Bull and Wells (2002) analysed each incidence of audience applause that occurred during the speeches they studied. However, unlike Heritage and Greatbatch (1986), they did not discard any tokens of audience applause from their sample. As stated previously, Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) discounted 19% of their original tokens because they occurred at the end of speeches and were considered obligatory (N=459), and a further 17% because they were incidences of isolated applause (N=414).

In a microanalysis of 15 speeches by political party leaders to their respective party conferences between 1996 and 2000, Bull and Wells (2002) coded each incidence of audience applause according to whether or not it was invited by the speaker, whether it occurred in the presence or absence of one or more rhetorical devices, and whether it was synchronous or asynchronous with speech. Following Bull and Noordhuizen (2000), they additionally coded each audience mismatch according to whether it was isolated, delayed, or interruptive. They found that 94.8% of the total applause was associated with rhetorical devices, 86.2% was



invited by the speaker, and 66.1% was synchronous with the end point of the speaker's utterance.

They also found that 19.5% of the total applause was asynchronous applause invited through the use of rhetorical devices. Of this, 87.5% was interruptive, indicating audience enthusiasm, and 12.5% was delayed, indicating that the audience were less enthusiastic about what the speaker had just said, or that the speaker's signals to applaud were less clear. None of the invited applause in Bull and Wells' (2002) sample was isolated. Accordingly, Bull and Wells (2002) suggested that audiences comply with a speaker's overall wishes by producing collective applause when invited. However, audiences may send subtly modulated signals of approval or disapproval to the speaker by varying their timing. They may anticipate the completion point of a speaker's utterance by applauding early. Bull and Wells (2002) found that most asynchronous applause was interruptive, and suggested that what appears to be uninvited applause may be a stratagem on the part of the speaker to make himself appear more popular.

Bull and Wells (2002) tested two hypotheses. Firstly, that the most commonly occurring form of applause should be invited through rhetorical devices and synchronous. Their data supported this hypothesis, with 64.7% of the applause being invited, synchronous and rhetorically formatted. They further found that this combination occurred significantly more frequently than any other combination.

The second hypothesis tested by Bull and Wells (2002) was that uninvited applause should typically occur in the absence of rhetorical devices and be asynchronous with speech. Their data failed to confirm this hypothesis. Bull and Wells (2002) noted that 13.8% of the total applause in their sample was uninvited. Although they found that uninvited applause was typically asynchronous (97.7%), it occurred most frequently in direct response to speech content that had been formatted with rhetorical devices (75.2%). Their analysis was based on delivery being important in indicating invitationality. If a speaker used a rhetorical device, but his delivery indicated that he intended to continue, the applause was coded as uninvited. A speaker's delivery may be insufficiently clear or visible for the audience to perceive his intention to continue, whereas *a posteriori* microanalysis can reveal the speaker's intention. "In deciding whether applause was invited, the presence of rhetorical devices was not in itself sufficient, the delivery also had to be consistent with an applause invitation" (Bull & Wells, 2002, p. 237). Heritage and



Greatbatch (1986, p. 110) also suggested that “performance factors are found to influence the likelihood of audience response strongly”.

## **AUDIENCE DISAFFILIATION**

Disaffiliative audience responses include heckling and booing. Clayman (1992) stated that audience disaffiliation can take two forms: direct, such as booing and disaffiliative laughter; and indirect, such as endorsing a third party’s negative assessment. Applauding a heckle that criticised the speaker would be an example of indirect disaffiliation, whereas booing the speaker would be an example of direct disaffiliation. Clayman (1992) noted that indirect disaffiliation is more common than direct disaffiliation. In an analysis of three 90 minute general election debates for the 1988 US Presidency, Clayman (1992) also found that disaffiliation was much rarer than affiliation, with 24 of the 169 responses in his sample (14%) including some form of disaffiliation.

Clayman (1993) defined audience response as an elementary form of social action and a form of collective behaviour. He analysed audience response from the perspective of rational choice and game theory, as well as conversation analysis, especially preference organisation. From this perspective, he noted that a response was a balance between the cost and the benefit of responding or refraining. Making a response enables an audience member to convey his or her views, encourage other people to join in, and drown out any dissenters. However, it can lead to social isolation if no one else joins in. “The sequential structure of interaction embodies a robust framework within which particular activities, including collective activities like applause and booing, are managed” (Clayman, 1993, p. 110).

Clayman (1993, p. 125) noted that “the positional asymmetry between affiliative and disaffiliative actions is a robust and strongly conventionalized feature of conversational interactions.” When a response is relevant, any delay may be taken as foreshadowing an as-yet-unspoken disaffiliation. The explanation lies in the intrinsic nature of these activities rather than their sequential or institutional environment. “Preference organisation is not merely the aggregate result of an array of calculated decisions by individual interactants; its asymmetries are deeply institutionalised conventions that are recognised, appreciated, and oriented-to by interactants themselves” (Clayman, 1993, p. 126). This approach challenges the traditional assumption that collective behaviour, particularly in crowds and other public gatherings, is organisationally distinct from the rest of social behaviour.



Citing, *inter alia*, Sacks *et al.* (1974), Clayman (1993) asserts that the interaction order is a species of social institution in its own right; it predates and is constitutive of most other social institutions, and has its own indigenous organisational properties and conventional practices.

Clayman (1993) further points out that the features of audience affiliation and disaffiliation are similar to the differentiation between statements of agreement and disagreement in ordinary conversation. Agreements are prompt, unqualified, and require no special explanation or account, whereas disagreements are delayed, qualified, and accountable (Clayman, 1993). On the basis of this observation, delayed audience applause (described above) might be considered a disaffiliative response. This distinction has not been explicitly made in the political studies reported by Bull *et al.* (e.g., Bull, 2006).

The current section will briefly discuss disaffiliative laughter, before going on to consider booing and heckling.

### **Disaffiliative laughter**

Clayman (1992) distinguished between affiliative and disaffiliative laughter. He described affiliative laughter as “laughing with”, noting that this type of laughter was often followed by applause, was critical of opposition, and was marked as laughable. Conversely, disaffiliative laughter was described as “laughing at”. This type of laughter is stand-alone, and displays disbelief or derision; it is not critical of self, and not marked as laughable. Clayman (1992) identified a further category of equivocal laughter, which contained both affiliative and disaffiliative laughter. This equivocal laughter followed speech disfluencies or humorous self-deprecations.

### **Booing**

#### ***Targets of booing***

According to Clayman (1993), the most common target for booing is an unfavourable remark about an adversary. Boos also occur in response to “boasts”, whereby speakers comment favourably on themselves or something with which they are associated, and combinations of unfavourable references to “them” and favourable references to “us”. Boos can also occur in response to straightforward factual statements, personal opinions, or policy proposals, although Clayman (1993) states that this is the rarest target.



### *Features of booing*

Clayman (1992) found that booing always followed hostile remarks in which a candidate was criticising the opposition. Two types of booing were identified. Firstly, counter-affiliative, accounting for five out of eight tokens (62.5%), which he describes as competitive, triggered by others, and relatively weak. Secondly, direct booing, which is a negative sanction, and occurs in response to excessive, uncalled-for, below the belt or improper remarks (Clayman, 1992).

Clayman (1993) found that, as the frequency of booing increases, a wider range of remarks appears to be “boo-able”. There is usually a substantial time lag between the completion of the objectionable item and the onset of booing. Whether booing is delayed or not, there is usually some other audience response before the booing occurs, and the audience responses before booing can be disaffiliative or affiliative, with equal frequency.

Boos that have been preceded by affiliative audience responses can be interpreted as going “on record” with an overt response of disagreement; the relevance of the response has already been established (Clayman, 1993). If disaffiliative audience responses occur first, the booing can be taken as an escalation of disapproval. Examples of prior disaffiliative responses include audience members whispering or talking to one another, the response cry “AW:::” (Goffman, 1981), or heckling. These responses are all described by Clayman (1993) as “accountably private or solitary actions”.

Clayman (1993) proposed that applause, booing, and other collective audience responses are coordinated by two different mechanics of collective behaviour: independent decision making and mutual monitoring. These processes are described below.

#### *Independent decision making*

According to Clayman (1993, pp. 111-112), individual audience members may anticipate the completion of “a particularly compelling or objectionable assertion” in an ongoing speech. They may also assume that other audience members will find this assertion response-worthy. The speaker’s completion of such an assertion – assuming that “all parties can project its completion early enough to gear up for a response” – may thus serve as a common reference point around which each individual’s response decision is coordinated. Hence individual audience members decide independently to respond, their responses occur at the



same time as each other, and a collective response is produced. Independent decision making is characterised by a rapid burst of sound at the beginning, as many audience members begin their response at the same moment in time. This procedure explains how individual audience members can coordinate their actions while at the same time acting independently of each other.

### *Mutual monitoring*

In contrast, Clayman (1993, p. 112) proposes a separate process whereby the responses of individual audience members are guided “at least in part” by reference to the behaviour of other members of the same audience. This form of response has a staggered onset, with the volume of the collective response increasing gradually as more individuals join in. Once a collective response is under way, continued silence by other members of the audience becomes noticeable and “can be taken as an expressive act in its own right”. In other words, by refusing to join in with a collective response, an abstaining audience member is – in effect – refusing to show their support. In support of this thesis, Clayman (1993, p. 112, citing Atkinson, 1984a, p. 371; 1984b, pp. 19-20) states that “most audience responses have an aural form that accommodates the contributions of late starters, consisting of a singular extended sound that others can easily join in at any point and still be in unison”. Thus, although responses generated by a process of mutual monitoring take longer to reach maximum intensity than those generated by independent decision making, they are still collective audience responses.

### *Speakers’ responses to booing*

Clayman (1993) noted that in five out of 33 cases (15.2%), speakers oppose booing. They do this either explicitly or implicitly. Explicit oppositions are only used to deal with more forceful boos. They include arguing or disputing, and objecting to the boo itself. Implicit oppositions involve talking through the boos, although the speaker will generally remain silent through any part of the response which also includes clapping.

### **Heckling**

McIlvenny (1996b, p. 21) defines a heckle as “a public utterance usually directed at a ratified current speaker – often in response to a particular assertion, utterance, statement or speech.” McIlvenny (1996a) notes that a heckle is both a public utterance and an independent individual response. “Although a heckle may be an isolated and individual attack that does not involve collective behaviour, it is



often built to elicit support from one section of the audience in order to engage collective disaffiliation with the speaker and thus to oppose or subvert the speaker's point" (McIlvenny, 1996b, p. 25). "There can be no more than one heckler responding to a speaker, and a heckle can become the target of another heckle" (McIlvenny, 1996a, p. 57).

McIlvenny (1996a, b) studied heckles in audience responses to public oratory taking place at Speakers' Corner in London's Hyde Park. McIlvenny (1996a) analysed the timing, format and sequential organisation of heckling. For this analysis, he used transcribed examples of video data recorded at Speakers' Corner, excerpts from published articles, and a corpus of televised broadcasts of public discourse.

McIlvenny (1996b) describes Speakers' Corner as "a fundamentally non-consensual domain of popular public discourse", in which participation is centric, territorial, enclosed, recurrent, serial, and sequentially organised (McIlvenny, 1996b, pp. 10-11). Speakers' Corner audiences are fluid and changeable, and audience responses are common (McIlvenny, 1996a). "Cultural identity is not only invoked in the speech of orators, but supported, resisted or subverted by the responses of their audiences" (McIlvenny, 1996b, p. 8).

According to Clayman (1993), heckles during political speeches are sometimes a precursor to boos. McIlvenny (1996a) notes that, in contrast to political speakers, some speakers at Speakers' Corner elicit disaffiliative heckling. "With a verbal heckle an audience member hearably challenges his or her participation status from a member of a collective audience to an individual in direct interaction with the speaker" (McIlvenny, 1996a, p. 33).

### *Targets of heckles*

The targets of heckles can include accusations, contentious statements, or claims and steps in an argument. Some heckles can be topic-developing, and others can be general attacks on an implied position by the speaker (McIlvenny, 1996a).

A speaker is vulnerable to heckling because the necessity for clear and punctual oration affords opportunities for the launch of a heckle. Also, because speech is linear, hecklers need to launch their heckle before time has passed and the target is no longer topical (McIlvenny, 1996a). While a speech is in progress, an interpretative tension exists between the speaker and the audience of active listeners or "latent hecklers" (McIlvenny, 1996a, p. 47).



### *Features of heckles*

Heckles are launched independently, in most cases. They are intended to be heard publicly, in relation to prior talk, and are usually placed in relation to a possible speaker completion point (McIlvenny, 1996a). A heckler may preface the heckle itself, but prefacing is neither necessary nor sufficient. The precursor to a heckle is often a response cry (Goffman, 1981), which is a spontaneous utterance, usually immediately after the target (e.g., “Oh, for Christ’s sake”). A response cry is a conventionalised, private display that is often publicly audible (McIlvenny, 1996a).

According to McIlvenny (1996a), heckles are unlike conventionalised collective audience responses – which can easily be followed and joined – but they can take a variety of forms. Common forms of heckles include accusation, correction, and topic development. An example of each of these types of heckle is presented below.

#### *Accusation*

An accusation heckle accuses the speaker of something, and often includes an insult. McIlvenny (1996a, pp. 37-38) presents the following example:

Speaker        Jesus has encouraged people to come over to be sexually enlightened and for women to have an orgasm. Jesus wants you to have an orgasm.

Heckler        You lying bastard.

#### *Correction*

In a correction heckle, the heckler proposes a correction of the speaker’s prior turn. McIlvenny (1996a, p. 39) presents an example of a correction (which he terms a “friendly heckle”):

Speaker        You’ll find that the Egyptians had the cross because they put the people on the cross.

Heckler        My friends it was the Romans who invented the cross.



### *Topic development*

A topic development heckle can either shift the topic or generate a new one (for example, if the heckler asks a question). In the following example, the heckler first responds with a direct counter-claim to the speaker's utterance, and then attempts in a series of interactions to re-orient both the speaker and the audience to another perspective on the issue in question (McIlvenny, 1996a, pp. 39-40):

Speaker        We have race relations acts and, er, race committees, and commissions, and all this sort of thing.

Heckler        But they don't actually work, 'cause they don't actually cover half the groups they should do. I mean, what about me? I'm subject to discrimination, not because of the colour of my skin or anything I do or wear.

Speaker        Why are you subject to racial prejudice?

Heckler        I'm subject to racial prejudice because I play a guitar.

This example shows that heckles can be idiosyncratic and very different from conventional collective audience responses. At this point, the transcribed discourse between speaker and heckler appears to resemble a conversation much more than an example of public oratory. "Heckles may precipitate more collective audience activity, or may prefigure shifts in talk activity and participation" (McIlvenny, 1996a, p. 36).

McIlvenny (1996a) describes the sequential organisation of a heckle in two different ways: either pre-speaker-completion (e.g., pre-emptive heckles), or post-speaker-completion (e.g., re-completion heckles). The examples presented in this section have all been post-speaker-completion heckles. A pre-speaker-completion heckle can occur when the heckler completes a rhetorical device that the speaker has begun. Hecklers can thus use the form and trajectory of prior turns to build their response, either by syntactic completion or by conjunction or disjunction (McIlvenny, 1996a).



### *Speakers' responses to heckles*

According to McIlvenny (1996b), one way in which speakers can respond to heckling is by re-inscription. This occurs when “the ‘identities’ and affiliations of participants are re-aligned interactionally” (McIlvenny, 1996b, p. 26). If a speaker decides that a heckler should not be treated as one of “us”, then “the characteristic put-down and demarcation” of the heckler may ensue (McIlvenny, 1996b, p. 26). One way to achieve this is for the speaker to reframe the heckler’s contribution in a negative light, in order to gain a disaffiliative audience response towards the heckler’s intervention (McIlvenny, 1996b).

McIlvenny (1996a) differentiates between responses and non-responses to heckles. Non-responses include a speaker’s disregard of a heckler, and a disinterested reaction. A heckle that is ignored or remains unaddressed by the speaker is known as a “floating heckle” (McIlvenny, 1996a, p. 36). Active responses to heckles include denial, accusation, reassertion, and ridicule (McIlvenny, 1996a).

#### *Denial*

A denial response occurs when a speaker denies the assertion or claim made by a heckler immediately at the close of the heckler’s utterance. An example of a denial response occurred in the speaker’s reply to the accusation heckle presented above (McIlvenny, 1996a, p. 38):

Speaker            Jesus has encouraged people to come over to be sexually enlightened and for women to have an orgasm. Jesus wants you to have an orgasm.

Heckler            You lying bastard.

Speaker            No, I’m not a lying bastard.

#### *Accusation*

A speaker may not only flatly deny the heckle, but he or she may also attempt to dismiss the competence or knowledge of the heckler.



### *Reassertion*

If a heckle challenges the validity of the speaker's argument in a prior turn, the speaker can reassert his or her argument with little or no modification. The reassertion challenges the relevance of the heckler's turn to the substance of the speaker's point. Below is an example of a reassertion response from McIlvenny (1996a, p. 34):

Speaker            We did not follow the Americans into Grenada. We did not  
                             condemn the Americans when they went in Grenada. That  
                             was an invasion of a sovereign country.

Heckler            Welcomed by the Grenadan people.

Speaker            It was an invasion of a sovereign country.

### *Ridicule*

According to McIlvenny (1996a, p. 49), seasoned speakers have a range of "set-pieces" available, which can be directed at a particular heckler, and which usually evoke laughter and audience approval. This makes it difficult for the heckler to re-engage with the audience's support. In stand-up comedy performances it is likely that this type of response to hecklers is the one that is used most often. In commenting that speakers often deal with heckles in a humorous fashion, McIlvenny (1996a, pp. 53-54) suggests that "dealing seriously with a heckler's response could condone the participation status of the heckler as a serious adversary".

### ***Tactics used by speakers and hecklers in speaker-heckler-audience interactions***

In the context of ethnic, religious, and topical soapbox orientation, speakers and active audience participants invoke cultural membership categories to gain group affiliation, elicit audience response, and win arguments (McIlvenny, 1996b).

McIlvenny (1996b) compares newspaper reports of parliamentary debate in the nineteenth century with analyses of audience responses to speeches at Speakers' Corner. Citing Sacks (1992), McIlvenny (1996b) posits the use of a membership categorisation device (MCD), which conveys "... expectations, rights and obligations concerning activities or actions which are expectable for a member of



that category” (McIlvenny, 1996b, p. 18). Speakers use the MCD in order to build a platform to which audiences can either affiliate or disaffiliate, and some portion of the crowd may support, or at least respond to, the MCD. Speakers may use an MCD to gauge audience receptivity; for example, as regards favourable and unfavourable references. A normative constraint in interaction is that any member of the interacting group is a representative of the MCD category (McIlvenny, 1996b).

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has discussed the literature on affiliative and disaffiliative audience responses in political speeches and public oratory. The affiliative response that has received the most empirical attention in these genres is audience applause. Two major methods used by speakers to elicit audience applause are: the use of a limited range of standard rhetorical devices, along with appropriate invitational delivery. Audience applause can occur in synchrony with the end point of a speaker’s utterance, or it can be asynchronous in three major ways: isolated, delayed, or interruptive. Interruptive applause can be an indicator of speaker popularity, whereas isolated or delayed applause can be interpreted as a “lukewarm” response.

In political speeches, disaffiliative audience responses are considerably rarer than affiliative responses. Disaffiliative responses include disaffiliative laughter and, more traditionally, booing and heckling. This chapter has discussed the targets and features of boos and heckles, as well as speakers’ responses to them. Applause and booing tend to be collective audience responses, whereas heckling is a more idiosyncratic form of audience response. In the most complex cases, a section of dialogue between a speaker and a heckler can appear to be more like a conversation than an oratorical performance. A speaker may need to position a heckler as tangential or non-serious in order to successfully reclaim his or her authority with the rest of the audience.

Although this chapter has presented booing and heckling as disaffiliative responses and applause as an affiliative response, the distinction between affiliative and disaffiliative responses may not be so clear-cut. The example of a correction heckle presented earlier was described by McIlvenny (1996a) as “friendly”; this might lead it to be viewed as a non-disaffiliative response. Booing could be thought of as an affiliative response in situations where an audience collectively boos after the intervention of a heckler. This chapter has already suggested that laughter,



normally considered to be affiliative, can sometimes be a disaffiliative audience response; this may also be true of some forms of applause. For example, isolated and delayed applause may be disaffiliative (or at least neutral) responses. In contrast, some cases of interruptive applause could be seen as extra-affiliative responses. It may therefore be more realistic to consider audience responses on a continuum from very disaffiliative to very affiliative, rather than on a simple bipolar scale.

The next chapter will report the results of a pilot study which attempted to apply coding schemes developed for the analysis of audience applause in political speeches to laughter and other affiliative audience responses during stand-up comedy performances. This study is intended to ascertain whether audiences produce similar proportions of affiliative responses in the very different genres of political speeches and stand-up comedy performances, and to uncover the key similarities and differences between the affiliative behaviours of audiences to political speakers and audiences to stand-up comedians. It is further hoped that any similarities between patterns of audience interaction in such different contexts can suggest broader theoretical hypotheses for speaker-audience interaction in general.



## CHAPTER 3

# From politics to comedy: A comparative analysis of affiliative audience responses<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

Although studies of political speeches (e.g., Atkinson, 1984a, b; Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986) have largely concentrated on the analysis of applause, they provide a strong theoretical framework that can be applied to the analysis of other forms of affiliative audience responses, such as cheering and laughter. It is recognised that applause and laughter are not necessarily affiliative; however, the focus of this chapter is on affiliative instances. Audience members do not always produce disaffiliative responses – as found by, for example, Greatbatch and Clark (2005) in their studies of audience responses to management gurus, and Tsang and Wong (2004) in their interpretation of comic discourses as an identity-construction tool. Furthermore, in an analysis of audience participation in local public meetings, Llewellyn (2005, p. 714) found that speakers and audiences displayed “remarkable cooperation”. The present study is intended to identify key similarities and differences between the affiliative behaviours of audiences to political speakers and stand-up comedians. A further aim is to ascertain whether similarities between speaker-audience interaction in such different contexts can suggest broader theoretical hypotheses for speaker-audience interaction in general.

Atkinson (1984a) noted that “invited laughter” is a phenomenon that appears to have been known to classical writers on oratory, and as such has been subjected to detailed empirical study by conversation analysts. That research, following the traditions of conversation analysis, was necessarily qualitative in nature. The present study intends to investigate whether findings from political speeches, as described in the previous chapter, can be applied to the genre of stand-up comedy.

### Background to the present study

Limon (2001) asserts that the audience’s response is paramount in any evaluation of the funniness of any given performance. If the audience do not laugh

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<sup>1</sup> An article based on this chapter has been published in the *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* (2007, vol. 26, pp. 321-342).



at a joke, they do not attribute a humorous intention to that part of the performance. Rutter (2000) notes the importance of differentiating between the telling of jokes and the performance of stand-up comedy. He states that jokes performed by stand-up comedians cannot be seen as “hermetically separated” from the ongoing performance; they are “located within, and part of, the developing interaction of stand-up” (Rutter, 2000, p. 481).

In a qualitative sociological study of live stand-up comedy performances to audiences in the north west of England, Rutter (1997) observed that stand-up comedians use the same rhetorical devices identified by Atkinson (e.g., 1984b) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986). Rutter’s (1997) analysis was primarily qualitative; he did not attempt to quantify the use of rhetorical devices by the stand-up comedians in his sample. The present quantitative study is intended to clarify and elaborate on Rutter’s (1997) observations. It is also intended to assess the extent to which the codings used in microanalytic studies of applause in political speeches (e.g., Bull, 2006) can be applied to affiliative audience responses in stand-up comedy routines (i.e., responses containing laughter and/or applause). Thus, the aim is to ascertain the extent to which laughter in televised stand-up comedy is associated with the rhetorical devices described in Chapter 2, and to identify additional devices which appear to be specific to the genre of stand-up comedy. Despite the manifest differences in the nature of affiliative responses between the two different settings, one aim of the study is to investigate whether comedians invite the same proportion of affiliative responses as politicians. In particular, three issues will be addressed.

Firstly, the extent to which stand-up comedians invite affiliative responses from their audiences will be considered. Do comedians invite the same proportions of affiliative responses as politicians? Because of the more informal, conversational nature of stand-up comedy, it is possible that a higher proportion of responses to stand-up comedians than politicians are not invited. The extent to which stand-up comedians use the same standard rhetorical devices as politicians will also be considered.

Following Bull and Wells (2002), invitationality and rhetoricality will be coded separately. Invitationality refers to whether or not the audience response is invited. It includes the speaker’s delivery, i.e., the way in which the speech content is presented to the audience immediately prior to their response. This comprises



both vocal features (e.g., intonation, pitch, and other prosodic cues) and non-vocal features (e.g., stance, gaze, and gesture). In contrast, rhetoricality refers to the actual speech content immediately before the audience's response, and whether or not this contains any of the standard rhetorical devices identified by Atkinson (e.g., 1984a) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986). In the political material studied by Bull and Wells (2002), invitationality and rhetoricality frequently tended to occur together. This combination may not apply as consistently in stand-up comedy.

Secondly, if standard rhetorical devices work in the way suggested by Atkinson (e.g., 1984b), synchronous audience responses should be expected to occur in most cases. Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) and Bull and Wells (2002) found that synchrony in political speeches occurred less frequently than Atkinson (e.g., 1984b) implied. In order to shed further light on the notion of rhetorical devices, it is intended to compare the genres of politics and stand-up comedy in terms of the relative proportions of synchronous audience responses received. Any asynchronous audience responses to the stand-up comedians in this sample will also be checked, in terms of the types and frequencies of mismatches that occur, and compared with the proportions and types of mismatches found in political speeches (Bull & Noordhuizen, 2000; Bull & Wells, 2002).

Based on the above analysis, audience responses can be distinguished along three dimensions: invitationality, rhetoricality, and synchrony. From the perspective of Atkinson (e.g., 1984b), most affiliative audience responses should be a combination of invited, rhetorical, and synchronous. The final question to be addressed in the present study is therefore to what extent a similar combination of responses occurs in stand-up comedy.

Atkinson's (e.g., 1984a) approach was qualitative, rooted firmly in the traditions of conversation analysis (e.g., Sacks, 1992). Conversation analysts tend to be opposed to quantification because of the need for coding systems and aggregation of data for statistical analysis (Bull, 2002). Researchers in conversation analysis prefer to make use of the ways in which people categorise themselves, using their own discourse, as opposed to imposing preconceived categories on the data (van Dijk, 1997). Such a critique of categorisation, however, ignores the additional benefits that can be gained by using coding systems that have been devised by outside observers. A good coding system can enable researchers to identify phenomena that may not be immediately obvious to the untrained observer



(Bull, 2002). According to Schegloff (1993, p. 102), studying large amounts of data is just like studying “multiples or aggregates of single instances”; quantitative analysis is thus an extension of, rather than an alternative to, qualitative analysis. As stated in Chapter 1, it is suggested that both quantitative and qualitative techniques have their merits, and they can complement each other in tackling different research issues.

### **Research questions**

The issues discussed above were addressed in the form of five specific research questions:

- 3.1 To what extent do stand-up comedians invite similar proportions of affiliative audience responses as politicians (Bull & Wells, 2002)?
- 3.2 Do stand-up comedians use the same standard rhetorical devices as politicians (Rutter, 1997)? If so, how similar are the proportions of rhetorical devices used by comedians to invite affiliative audience responses, compared with those used by political speakers to invite audience applause (Bull & Wells, 2002)?
- 3.3 Can affiliative audience responses during stand-up comedy performances be categorised as either synchronous or asynchronous with the end point of the performer’s utterance? If so, is the proportion of synchronous responses similar to that found in political speeches (Bull & Noordhuizen, 2000)?
- 3.4 Do the same audience mismatch types occur in affiliative responses to stand-up comedy routines as to applause in political speeches? If so, to what extent are the proportions of the various different mismatch categories similar to those found in political speeches (Bull & Noordhuizen, 2000)?
- 3.5 If all of the above codings are possible, will the highest proportion of affiliative audience responses during stand-up comedy performances be a combination of invited, rhetorical, and synchronous, as has been found in political speeches (Bull & Wells, 2002)?



## **METHOD**

### **The comedy routines**

The study was based on four stand-up comedy routines performed by British comedians, televised as part of The Stand-Up Show on BBC1. The comedians performed live in front of an audience in Edinburgh, Scotland. The broadcasts were not transmitted live and some editing may have occurred, although there were no perceptible cuts. In each case, the analyses were performed on the comedy routines as broadcast. The routines selected were the shortest, the longest, and two median length performances by single-act British performers on the 2001-2 series of The Stand-Up Show. The routines were as follows:

- 23 November 2001, Steve Jameson (3 minutes 25 seconds)
- 30 November 2001, Will Smith (6 minutes 41 seconds)
- 7 December 2001, Matt King (10 minutes 7 seconds)
- 14 December 2001, Andy Zaltzman (6 minutes 27 seconds)

### **Apparatus**

The routines were recorded off-air onto VHS videotape and digitised using Adobe Premier software. Each routine was transcribed into a word-processing package and checked against the video recording for accuracy.

The routines were analysed using Adobe Premier software. This allows accuracy to one frame (one twenty-fifth of a second). It also allows the display of a visual representation of the sound accompanying the broadcast alongside the pictorial and auditory output. Taken together, these features permit analysis at a very fine-grained level of detail.

### **Procedure**

Each transcript was marked with every incidence of affiliative response from the audience. Affiliative responses in this sample included laughter, applause, cheers, whistles, whoops, and brief verbal responses (“Hello”, “Yeah”, and “Yes”). These responses were all counted as affiliative; no attempt was made to distinguish between the different forms of affiliative responses.

Following Atkinson (1984a), the intensity and duration of collective applause was represented by a string of small and large crosses (xxxXXXXxxx), with isolated or non-collective applause also including hyphens (-x- for a single



clap, or -x-x-x- for hesitant or spasmodic clapping). Large crosses indicate louder applause, and small crosses indicate quieter applause. Laughter was transcribed similarly, using the character “h” in place of “x” (following McIlvenny, 1996a). Any audience responses other than laughter or applause were noted in words.

Following Bull and Wells’ (2002) codings for applause, each affiliative audience response (regardless of response type) was coded according to the criteria presented below: invited/uninvited, rhetorical/non-rhetorical, and synchronous/asynchronous.

### ***Invitationality***

A response was coded as invited if the delivery of the performer indicated that he wished the audience to respond at that point. Delivery includes “both vocal features (change in pitch, speed, or intonation) and non-vocal features (stance, gaze, or gesture)” (Bull & Wells, 2002, p. 236). Responses occurring when the performer was not inviting a response through the use of delivery were coded as uninvited. Any responses that could not be coded as invited or uninvited were coded as ambiguous.

In the present study, invitationality was coded separately from rhetoricality. If the comedian’s delivery included rhetorical formatting and was delivered invitationally, it was coded as invited (and also rhetorical; see below). However, if the delivery included rhetorical formatting but was not delivered invitationally, it was not coded as invited. A separate coding category was applied for rhetoricality (see below). The position taken in this thesis is that a performer’s use of a rhetorical device cannot in itself be considered as an invitation to respond. This is a different position from Atkinson (e.g., 1984a). It is contended that the accompanying non-verbal cues tell the audience whether or not a rhetorical device is to be taken as an invitation to respond. Given that these non-verbal cues may also be present without rhetorical formatting, a separate coding category for invitationality was considered to be necessary.

### ***Rhetoricality***

Atkinson (1984a) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) identified a limited range of standard rhetorical devices used by politicians to invite audience applause (i.e., Contrast, List, Puzzle-solution, Headline-punchline, Combinations, Position taking, and Pursuit). In addition to these, Atkinson (1984a) also identified Naming.



Responses to utterances that included one or more of these devices at the response point were coded as rhetorical (Atkinsonian).

Some examples of Atkinsonian rhetorical devices in the present sample are as follows<sup>2</sup>:

#### *Contrast*

“If you put a cow in formaldehyde, that’s considered art. But if you put formaldehyde in a cow, that’s considered a criminal act” (Andy Zaltzman).

#### *List*

“But I- I’m not complaining, it is fantastic to be here, in Edinburgh, in the north of England” (Will Smith).

#### *Puzzle-solution*

“To cut a long story short, took her home, got to her door, she said, I’m afraid I can’t invite you in. I said, that’s OK, are your folks still up? She said, no, I just don’t want you in my house” (Steve Jameson).

#### *Headline-punchline*

“I’ll tell you who else I hate. People that can do those cryptic crosswords” (Matt King).

#### *Position taking*

“What? Omar- how d’you get Omar Sharif, from that? I don’t understand” (Matt King).

#### *Pursuit*

“We all benefit from scientific innovation. Which is a good thing, I think. I- w- w- what do you think of genetic modification in general? [Pause] That’s quite an apathetic response to quite an important topic” (Andy Zaltzman).

During the analysis, it became apparent that stand-up comedians were also using other forms of rhetorical devices to elicit affiliative audience responses, in addition to those specified by Atkinson (1984a) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986). Some examples of these additional rhetorical devices are presented below.

#### *Simple questions*

These often occur at the start of stand-up comedy routines. Will Smith’s opening utterance is “Hello, good evening everyone.” The audience responds, after a delay, with a collective “Hello”. Matt King’s opening utterance is “Ho ho. Good

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<sup>2</sup> It is acknowledged that most of these devices were first reported by Heritage and Greatbatch (1986).



evening. Are you well?" The audience responds to this with a collective "Yes". King continues with "Fantastic. Have you had a good day?" The audience responds with another collective "Yes". Andy Zaltzman's opening utterance is "Hello. Er, you glad to be alive?" A small section of the audience responds, after a delay, with a collective "Yes". This is regarded as an affiliative response because failure to respond at this point would be seen as highly disaffiliative.

### *Complex questions*

About four minutes into his routine, after commenting on the way the government handled the foot and mouth crisis, Andy Zaltzman asks the audience "Were any of you, er, disappointed by the low turnout at the general election?" After a delay, one person in the audience answers, "Yes".

### *Asides, or "stepping out of character"*

About two minutes into his routine, Matt King talks about drugs and being stoned while performing. His utterance immediately prior to the aside is "Don't, er, please don't get too excited. I would- I wouldn't turn up to a- a telly gig like this off me tits, would I? That'd be stupid." The audience responds with collective laughter. King then turns slightly aside and, with a hint of a stage whisper, says "Get it together. Um-" The audience laugh collectively again.

Any responses to utterances containing both Atkinsonian and additional rhetorical devices were coded as rhetorical (Atkinsonian). Responses to all other forms of rhetorical invitation were coded as rhetorical (additional). Responses to utterances without rhetorical formatting at the point of response were coded as non-rhetorical.

### *Synchrony*

Following Bull and Noordhuizen (2000), responses were coded as synchronous if they (a) occurred at or immediately before the completion point of the performer's utterance, and (b) were produced by several or more audience members. Responses occurring well before or well after the completion point of the performer's utterance and isolated responses (produced by only one or two audience members) were coded as asynchronous.

Asynchronous responses were further sub-categorised into isolated, delayed, or interruptive mismatches (Bull & Noordhuizen, 2000). These sub-categories are not mutually exclusive; it is possible for asynchronous responses to fall into one or more mismatch types.



## **Reliability**

The level of inter-observer agreement with the second coder for the various dimensions was as follows: invitationality 86.0% (N=107); rhetoricality 87.9% (N=107); synchrony 82.2% (N=107); coding of subcategories in the mismatch typology 89.1% (N=64). Percentage agreement of 85% or more is generally considered acceptable (Stiff & Mongeau, 2002). Whereas the reliability for synchrony coding in this study fell below 85%, a subsequent study (which will be reported in Chapter 4) has shown that synchrony in stand-up comedy routines can be coded reliably. In that study, the level of inter-observer agreement with the second coder for synchrony was 91.9% (N=136).

## **RESULTS**

Following Bull and Wells (2002), the data were analysed along the dimensions of invitationality, rhetoricality, and synchrony. Asynchronous responses were further analysed according to mismatch type (Bull & Noordhuizen, 2000).

The results for each dimension are presented below. Summary figures are also presented for the four performances in combination, to enable a direct comparison with the political material as reported by Bull and Wells (2002). Some further calculations were conducted on these data, which were undertaken for the purpose of comparison with the current study; these will be referred to when appropriate.

### **Invitationality**

It was found that stand-up comedy material was more difficult to code for invitationality than political material. There were some instances where, even with highly sensitive microanalytic techniques, it was not possible to discern whether or not the comedian was inviting an audience response. These instances were coded as ambiguous (9.7%, N=17).

In order to enable direct comparisons with political speeches (Bull & Wells, 2002), the ambiguous items can be dealt with in various different ways, two of which are described here. It should be noted that in Table 3.1 (and subsequent tables in this chapter), percentages for the means and standard deviations of the political data analysed by Bull and Wells (2002) are also presented, along with 95% confidence intervals. These figures were not reported by Bull and Wells (2002), but are included here for the purpose of comparison between the political data and the comedy data.



Table 3.1

*Proportions of invited and uninvited responses, by comedian (N=175)*

	Invited	Uninvited/Ambiguous “Non-Invited”
Steve Jameson (N=22)	20 (90.9%)	2 ( 9.1%)
Will Smith (N=45)	40 (88.9%)	5 (11.1%)
Matt King (N=68)	54 (79.4%)	14 (20.6%)
Andy Zaltzman (N=40)	34 (85.0%)	6 (15.0%)
Total	148 (84.6%)	27 (15.4%)
M (SD)	86.1% (5.1%)	14.0% (5.1%)
M (SD) for political speeches 95% confidence intervals	85.9% (6.6%) 82.3% - 89.5%	14.1% (6.6%) 10.5% - 17.7%

Table 3.1 presents the uninvited and ambiguous items collapsed together into a single “non-invited” category. After doing this, the responses were 84.6% invited (N=148) and 15.4% non-invited (N=27). Before collapsing these categories together, 5.7% of the responses had been uninvited (N=10) and 9.7% ambiguous (N=17). An alternative way of dealing with the ambiguous items would be to discard them from this part of the study (N=158). Reanalysing the data in this way would indicate that 93.7% of the responses were invited (N=148) and 6.3% uninvited (N=10). Although the combined category enables comparison with the political studies more readily, there is no obvious rationale for choosing between discarding or collapsing; the data are thus presented in both ways.

With reference to research question 3.1, stand-up comedians appear to invite a similar proportion of affiliative audience responses as politicians; Bull and Wells (2002) found that 86.2% of audience applause instances were invited by the speaker.

Table 3.1 shows that the means for the stand-up comedy performances in the present sample fall within the 95% confidence intervals for the means of the 15 political speeches reported by Bull and Wells (2002). It therefore appears as though invitationality may be functioning in a similar way in two very different genres of



public performance. However, when the ambiguous responses are discarded, the means for stand-up comedy performances fall outside the 95% confidence intervals for the means of the 15 political speeches reported by Bull and Wells (2002), which may suggest that a higher proportion of audience responses are invited in stand-up comedy performances than in political speeches.

Table 3.1 shows that the proportions of invited and uninvited responses were broadly similar between different comedians. The standard deviations for invited and uninvited responses suggest that, based on the present sample, the percentages reported for invitationality are reasonably robust across four comedians with different styles of delivery.

### Rhetoricality

For the purposes of this study, responses to one or more rhetorical devices were grouped together. In cases where both Atkinsonian and additional rhetorical devices were used in combination, the incidence was counted as Atkinsonian (i.e., rhetorical). Table 3.2 shows the results of the codings for rhetoricality by comedian.

Table 3.2

*Proportions of responses to rhetorically formatted and non-rhetorically formatted utterances, by comedian (N=175)*

	Rhetorical		Non-rhetorical
	Atkinsonian	Additional	
Steve Jameson (N=22)	18 (81.8%)	0	4 (18.2%)
Will Smith (N=45)	34 (75.6%)	3 ( 6.7%)	8 (17.8%)
Matt King (N=68)	43 (63.2%)	7 (10.3%)	18 (26.5%)
Andy Zaltzman (N=40)	33 (82.5%)	2 ( 5.0%)	5 (12.5%)
Total	128 (73.1%)	12 ( 6.9%)	35 (20.0%)
M (SD)	81.3% (5.8%)		18.8% (5.8%)
M (SD) for political speeches	95.0% (4.7%)		5.0% (4.7%)
95% confidence intervals	92.4% - 97.6%		2.4% - 7.6%

The figures in the rhetorical (Atkinsonian) column confirm the first part of research question 3.2, that stand-up comedians use the same standard rhetorical



devices as politicians. For each comedian in this sample, between two-thirds and four-fifths of their utterances immediately prior to audience responses include one or more of the standard rhetorical formats identified by Atkinson (1984a) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986). The figures in the rhetorical (additional) column show that three of the four comedians in this sample also invited audience responses through rhetorical formats other than those found in political speeches.

The second part of research question 3.2 is concerned with the extent to which the proportions of rhetorical devices used by comedians to elicit affiliative audience responses are similar to those used by political speakers to elicit applause. Even when additional rhetorical devices are counted together with standard Atkinsonian rhetorical devices, Table 3.2 shows that an average of only 81.3% of the audience responses in this sample are associated with standard rhetorical devices. This is in comparison with Bull and Wells' (2002) finding that 94.8% of all audience applause in political speeches was associated with the speaker's use of a limited range of standard rhetorical devices. Heritage and Greatbatch's (1986) study of larger and more diverse range of politicians' speeches found that 67.6% of the applause incidents included in their sample were associated with rhetorical formatting. However, their coding scheme and sampling methods differed from Bull and Wells' (2002) and the current study. It is thus not appropriate to make a direct comparison between the current study and Heritage and Greatbatch's (1986) findings.

Table 3.2 shows that the means for the stand-up comedy performances in the present sample do not fall within the 95% confidence intervals for the means of the 15 political speeches reported by Bull and Wells (2002). This appears to support the assertion that political speakers and stand-up comedians are using rhetoricality in different ways.

### **Synchrony**

Table 3.3 shows the proportions of synchronous and asynchronous (mismatched) affiliative audience responses in this sample.



Table 3.3

*Proportions of synchronous and asynchronous responses, by comedian (N=175)*

	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Steve Jameson (N=22)	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.2%)
Will Smith (N=45)	37 (82.2%)	8 (17.8%)
Matt King (N=68)	45 (66.2%)	23 (33.8%)
Andy Zaltzman (N=40)	11 (27.5%)	29 (72.5%)
Total	111 (63.4%)	64 (36.6%)
M (SD)	64.4% (25.7%)	35.6% (25.7%)
M (SD) for political speeches	65.8% (7.7%)	34.2% (7.7%)
95% confidence intervals	61.5% - 70.0%	30.0% - 38.5%

With reference to research question 3.3, Table 3.3 shows that affiliative audience responses during stand-up comedy routines were categorisable as synchronous or asynchronous in the same way as applause during political speeches.

The second part of research question 3.3 addresses whether there are similar proportions of synchronous responses in stand-up comedy to those found in political speeches (Bull & Noordhuizen, 2000). When considering the figures for the comedy data in combination, it appears that this may be the case. Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) found that 61% of all audience applause to political speeches was synchronous, and Bull and Wells (2002) found a figure of 66.1%. The data in the present study show a combined mean of 64.4% for synchronous responses, which is therefore in line with the figures for applause during political speeches.

Table 3.3 also shows that the means for the stand-up comedy performances fall within the 95% confidence intervals for the means of the 15 political speeches reported by Bull and Wells (2002). It therefore appears as though, individual differences aside, synchrony between the two genres is directly comparable.



## Mismatches

Table 3.4 presents an analysis of asynchronous responses by mismatch type. The percentages are reported with respect to the total number of audience responses, i.e., including synchronous responses.

Table 3.4  
*Analysis of mismatch types, by comedian (N=175)*

	Isolated	Delayed	Interruptive	Total
Steve Jameson (N=22)	2 ( 9.1%)	1 ( 4.5%)	1 ( 4.5%)	4 (18.2%)
Will Smith (N=45)	6 (13.3%)	1 ( 2.2%)	4 ( 8.9%)	11 (24.4%)
Matt King (N=68)	7 (10.3%)	0	19 (27.9%)	26 (38.2%)
Andy Zaltzman (N=40)	3 ( 7.5%)	1 ( 2.5%)	26 (65.0%)	30 (75.0%)
Total	18 (10.3%)	3 ( 1.7%)	50 (28.6%)	71 (40.6%)
M (SD)	10.1% (2.5%)	2.3 (1.8%)	26.6% (27.6%)	

*Note.* Given that some asynchronous responses comprise more than one type of mismatch, it should be noted that the totals do not necessarily add up across each row.

Table 3.4 confirms the first part of research question 3.4. Asynchronous audience responses can be categorised into the same mismatch types as the audience mismatches in applause to political speeches identified by Bull and Noordhuizen (2000). However, with reference to the second part of research question 3.4, the data from this sample show that the proportions of affiliative audience mismatches in stand-up comedy routines are quite different from those in political speeches. Each form of audience mismatch is discussed separately below.

### *Isolated*

Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) found that a mean 4.7% of all audience applause to political speeches was isolated. This compares with a mean of 10.1% in the present sample (SD 2.5%). At the lowest end of the range in the present sample, Steve Jameson received just under twice as many isolated audience responses as the mean percentage for political speakers; at the highest end, Will Smith received almost three times as many isolated responses as politicians, on average.



### *Delayed*

In contrast, the results from the present analysis suggest that delayed responses to stand-up comedians appear to differ from those to political speakers in the opposite direction. Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) identified a mean 7.5% of delayed applause in political speeches, which compares to a mean of just 2.3% of delayed responses in the present sample (SD 1.8%)

The concept of delayed responses presumes the projection of an appropriate sequential position for an audience response at that point. This suggests that it would be interesting to correlate delayed responses with incidences of invitation/non-invitation, and all of the delayed responses in the present sample were found to be invited. It should, however, be noted that there were only three delayed responses in the present sample.

### *Interruptive*

Coded as “audience applause interrupts speaker”, Bull and Noordhuizen (2000, p. 285) found a mean 17.8% of interruptive applause. This compares to a mean 26.6% in the present sample (SD 27.6%). The mean suggests that – on average – there are more interruptive audience responses in stand-up comedy than in political speeches. However, the relatively high standard deviation may mean that there is little similarity in the rates of interruptive applause between different stand-up comedians.

The comedy data from this sample show a very high range in interruptive applause, from less than 5% for Steve Jameson, to just under one-third for Matt King, to more than two-thirds for Andy Zaltzman. Given this wide range of individual differences, it may not be possible to make any robust generalisations based on this sample.

### **Comparison with political studies**

Table 3.5 presents summary figures for the dimensions of invitationality, rhetoricality, and synchrony, for the four comedy routines combined.



Table 3.5

*Incidents of audience response for each of the three dimensions, for all four routines combined (N=175)*

	Invited				Uninvited/Ambiguous “Non-Invited”			
	Rhetorical		Non-rhetorical		Rhetorical		Non-rhetorical	
	S	AS	S	AS	S	AS	S	AS
N	91	35	12	10	2	12	6	7
M	53.4%	21.6%	6.7%	4.4%	0.7%	5.6%	3.6%	4.0%
SD	(20.6%)	(22.4%)	(4.5%)	(4.4%)	(1.5%)	(4.4%)	(1.0%)	(1.2%)

*Note.* Rhetoricality includes both Atkinsonian and additional rhetorical devices.

With reference to research question 3.5, Table 3.5 shows that it is broadly possible to code stand-up comedy along the same dimensions as political speeches (although the previous sections have commented on the various coding issues encountered).

Research question 3.5 was also concerned with the relative proportions of invited, rhetorical, and synchronous affiliative audience responses between political speeches and stand-up comedy. In both cases, this combination is the most common. However, based on the combined data in this sample, the proportion is higher in political speeches than in stand-up comedy. Around half of all affiliative audience responses in this sample were invited, rhetorical, and synchronous (53.4%, N=91, although this figure increases to 58.5% if the ambiguous responses are excluded). This compares to a figure of almost two-thirds (64.7%) in response to political speeches (Bull & Wells, 2002).

Bull and Wells' (2002) data were further analysed, in order to test for 95% confidence intervals in each category. These additional calculations enable a direct comparison of the results in the present study with each of the categories reported by Bull and Wells (2002). The recalculations of Bull and Wells' (2002) data are presented in Table 3.6.



Table 3.6

*Further analysis of Bull and Wells' (2002) political speech data (N=967)*

	Invited				Uninvited			
	Rhetorical		Non-rhetorical		Rhetorical		Non-rhetorical	
	S	AS	S	AS	S	AS	S	AS
M (SD)	64.5% (8.4%)	19.6% (8.7%)	1.0% (1.7%)	1.0% (1.3%)	0.2% (0/6%)	10.8% (5.9%)	0.1% (0.5%)	3.0% (3.5%)
95% CI								
Lower	59.9%	14.7%	0.3%	0.1%	0	7.5%	0	1.1%
Upper	69.1%	24.4%	2.0%	2.0%	0.5%	14.1%	0.4%	5.0%

*Note.* SPSS suggested values of less than zero have been reported as 0.

Tables 3.5 and 3.6 are split into eight cells according to the dimensions, i.e., a 2 x 2 x 2 matrix. With reference to Tables 3.5 and 3.6, it can be seen that the only cell in which the means of the stand-up comedy data in the present sample fall within the 95% confidence intervals for the means of the Bull and Wells (2002) political data is that for invited/rhetorical/asynchronous. There is thus no compelling evidence that the combined categories of comedy data are comparable to those found in studies of political speeches.

Based on the present sample of four stand-up comedians, the results suggest that there may be similarities between stand-up comedy performances and political speeches with regard to the broad categories of invitationality and synchrony, and differences between the two genres on rhetoricality and mismatch types. These similarities between the two genres in the broader categories break down under a more fine-grained analysis.

## **DISCUSSION**

As has been shown above, affiliative audience responses during stand-up comedy performances are similar in some ways to audience applause during political speeches. However, although the responses could clearly be coded along



the same dimensions, some of the political codings were considerably more straightforward to apply than others in such a different genre of performance. There are several limitations of using the political codings alone for stand-up comedy performances, some of which are discussed below. There may be a number of ways in which the stand-up comedy material is not adequately accounted for by using just the political codings. Further studies will attempt to shed more light on these issues, and a number of these are highlighted below. Furthermore, just as Atkinson (1985) found differences between charismatic and uncharismatic orators, the current sample demonstrates that in some cases there are considerable individual differences between different stand-up comedians. In subsequent studies, it will be important to sample a wider range of comedians. Even though the present study analysed only four routines from a substantially different genre, there is a remarkable degree of similarity between these results and those from the political studies reported by Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) and Bull and Wells (2002).

The findings of the current study that relate to each specific coding category will be discussed in turn below. A couple of additional, broader issues will be mentioned thereafter.

The figures for invitationality appear to be robust and stable across comedians, and in comparable proportions to those for politicians. However, in this sample, invitationality was found to be very difficult to code. Apart from the ambiguous instances mentioned above, it was noted that there seem to be varying degrees of invitationality. It is possible that ambiguity in invitationality is genre-specific. It is not in the interest of politicians to make their applause invitations ambiguous, whereas ambiguous delivery could be a positive advantage for stand-up comedians. Some responses could be clearly coded as invited or uninvited, whereas other instances were considerably less clear. To take account of these variations, both 7-point and 5-point Likert scales (ranging from “definitely invited” to “definitely uninvited”) were tested, but satisfactory reliability was not achieved on either of these scales. A 3-point scale did, however, achieve satisfactory reliability. This was considered to be an acceptable compromise between reflecting the variability within the present sample and allowing a direct comparison with the political data.

This issue raises awareness of a key difference between the positions of qualitative and quantitative researchers, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Good



qualitative research requires that any analysis represents the source material in as accurate a way as possible, yet good quantitative research requires that the source material can be reliably coded by another trained practitioner. Coding systems have been criticised by conversation analysts as being arbitrary and reductionist, distorting the data to fit into predetermined categories (Psathas, 1995), yet quantification necessitates categorisation (Bull, 2002). The present study has reached a compromise between these positions by presenting a 3-point scale – invited/ambiguous/ uninvited – which is the most diverse scale that has been shown to be reliably codable by an independent rater.

Contrary to initial speculation, comedians appear to invite similar proportions of audience responses to politicians. Based on the evidence from this sample, stand-up comedians seem much more subtle in their style of delivery than politicians, and thus less prone to telegraph their response invitations. There is also considerably more variation between the delivery styles of different comedians than different politicians. It could be that the more skilled comedians are the ones who are more successful at masking their invitations to respond, or that they do not need to work so hard to elicit affiliative audience responses.

As shown above, this study confirms Rutter's (1997) finding that stand-up comedians use the same set of standard rhetorical formats used by politicians in political speeches. However, those devices were only a subset of the verbal techniques used by stand-up comedians to elicit laughter from their audiences. Although many of the response instances in this sample can be accounted for by the use of such rhetorical devices, there is still a proportion of responses that remain unaccounted for by rhetoricality alone, even after identifying additional rhetorical strategies used by comedians. In addition to proposing a higher-order category for rhetoricality, to include both Atkinsonian and additional rhetorical devices, it also seems clear that there are other verbal processes taking place in stand-up comedy. A study identifying several of these will be reported in Chapter 5.

Affiliative audience responses in stand-up comedy were, like applause in political speeches, either synchronous or asynchronous with the end point of the performer's utterance. These codings were relatively straightforward to apply in the present sample. Overall, the mean percentages of synchronous and asynchronous responses were broadly similar to those found in previous studies of audience applause in political speeches (Bull & Noordhuizen, 2000; Bull & Wells, 2002).



However, there were considerable individual differences between the percentages of synchronous responses to the different stand-up performances in this sample, and it is proposed to undertake a further analysis involving a larger number of performances from a wider range of performers. This study will be presented in Chapter 4.

It was possible to apply the same mismatch coding categories to asynchronous affiliative responses in stand-up comedy performances as to audience applause in political speeches. It was also considered that the existing mismatch categories were sufficient to describe all the forms of asynchronous audience responses in the present sample. However, the mean proportions of each of the mismatch types were very different in stand-up comedy than political speeches, as mentioned above. There were a number of individual differences between performers; these differences were particularly marked in the case of interruptive audience responses. Each mismatch type is discussed separately below.

It is possible that isolated audience responses are a natural feature of stand-up comedy in a way that does not appear to be the case in political speeches. Atkinson (1984b), Heritage and Greatbatch (1986), Clayman (1993), and Bull (2000) – among others – all refer to the stigma of being a lone applauder during a political speech. This stigma associated with being a sole responder may simply not translate into the less formal ambience of a stand-up comedy performance.

Delays may be somewhat more common in the more formal atmosphere of a political rally than in the more relaxed atmosphere of a stand-up comedy performance. It is possible that stand-up comedy is a much “faster-paced” genre than political speechmaking, and so delays lasting a second or longer will appear highly salient in such an environment. Split-second delays certainly occur in stand-up comedy performances, but these data show that delays of a second or more are relatively rare. It may be a feature of skilled comedy performers that they swiftly identify any possible delays and “talk into the silence” well before such delays become noticeable.

The fact that there are, on average, more interruptive audience responses in stand-up comedy performances than political speeches may support the previous observation that stand-up comedy performances are less formal than political speeches, and thus interruptive responses are generally considered to be more acceptable in such an environment.



Bull and Wells (2001) note that interruptive applause can be an indicator of speaker popularity. It is possible that higher proportions of interruptive affiliative audience responses may indicate the greater popularity of those comedians who obtain them. It is also possible that audience interruptions are more acceptable, and perhaps even expected, in the less formal atmosphere of a stand-up comedy performance.

Given the variability in rates of interruptive responses to the performances in the present sample, it is recommended that further studies are undertaken, covering a wider spread of comedians. It is therefore proposed to perform a similar analysis on more performances from a wider range of stand-up comedy performers, to ascertain the extent of this variability.

The present study used a gross measure of audience responses, and made no attempt to differentiate between them. As has already been mentioned, affiliative audience responses in this sample included laughter, applause, cheers, whistles, whoops, and brief verbal responses. A detailed analysis of the different forms of affiliative audience responses, in both the current sample and a number of additional stand-up comedy performances, will be reported in the next chapter.

The aim of this study was to investigate whether key similarities and differences can be identified in the affiliative responses of audiences to political speakers and stand-up comedians. Not only was the proportion of affiliative audience responses invited by stand-up comedians shown to be comparable to that of politicians, so too was the degree of speaker-audience synchrony. Thus, invitationality and synchrony would seem to be comparable in form across these two different genres of public performance.

However, it was found that stand-up comedians and politicians were less similar with regard to the use of rhetorical devices and the proportions of audience mismatches that occurred. Thus, although techniques derived from the analysis of political speeches were successfully applied to stand-up comedy performances in this study, the two genres were also shown to differ in certain key respects. The studies to be reported in Chapters 4 and 5 will focus on these differences. In Chapter 5, particular attention will be given to the relative importance of delivery, and to rhetorical (and other) techniques that are more specific to stand-up comedy. Through the detailed microanalysis of such features, it is intended to deepen our understanding of both speaker-audience interaction and the interactional dynamics



of public performance. Before presenting those findings, Chapter 4 will report on the extension of the analyses in the present chapter across a corpus of 13 stand-up comedy performances. The different forms of audience responses that occur within this larger corpus will also be analysed separately.



## CHAPTER 4

### Now that's what I call funny:

### How audiences respond to stand-up comedy

#### INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 presented an analysis of affiliative audience responses for a pilot study of four stand-up comedy routines. However, it is possible that the results of that analysis may have been idiosyncratic, due to the small number of performances studied. It is therefore necessary to analyse a larger sample of stand-up comedy performances, in order to ascertain whether a similar pattern of findings occurs. The present chapter thus seeks to discover the extent to which the results reported in Chapter 3 will be borne out in a more comprehensive study.

The 13 stand-up comedy performances to be analysed in the present chapter (and the remainder of this thesis) were selected from a single series of *The Stand-Up Show* (BBC1, 2001-2). A corpus of stand-up comedy performances by British comedians to British audiences was selected, in order to maximise homogeneity as far as possible within such a relatively heterogeneous genre of public performance. It was considered important for the performer and members of the audience to be of the same nationality in order to maximise the extent of shared cultural context. While it is recognised that not all members of a British audience will necessarily be British themselves, the fact that they are audience members at a British stand-up comedy venue suggests that at least they are familiar with British culture to some extent, and there is likely to be more of a shared culture between a British performer and a British audience than, say, an American performer and a British audience, or vice versa.

It was decided to select a corpus of televised stand-up comedy performances, because broadcast quality videotape is of very high quality, and this maximises the potential for successful detailed microanalysis of the performances concerned. While it is accepted that some editing could have taken place before these performances were broadcast, detailed microanalysis of the performances within this corpus was not able to identify any obvious cuts. Indeed, a section of one of the performances in the corpus contained direct references by the performer



(Sean Lock) to the possibility of having material cut out of his performance prior to broadcast, yet that section of his performance was broadcast along with the rest of his routine. This suggests that, while stand-up comedians are well aware of the possibility that their performances could be cut before being broadcast on television, the people who made this particular series might have chosen not to do this. Furthermore – as stated in Chapter 1 – in a section of his thesis which largely studied live stand-up comedy performances, Rutter (1997) made a direct comparison between the audience responses to a live stand-up comedy performance and audience responses to a commercially available videotaped stand-up comedy performance, and no appreciable differences were found.

To ascertain whether any editing had in fact taken place, an e-mail was sent to the BBC; however, the requested information was not received. It is possible that these shows were produced by an external production company, and that this company would have been in a better position to provide this information. However, the broadcasts were branded as “BBC Comedy” and no external production companies were mentioned in the credits. An Internet search identified a record for The Stand-Up Show on the Internet Movie Database (n.d.); this contained limited general information about these broadcasts, but no external production company details were found.

Although detailed microanalysis did not identify any edits during the performances selected for the present corpus, it is nevertheless possible that some editing could have occurred. If this had happened, the quantitative analyses reported in this thesis would not be comparing like with like, in that the unit of analysis is intended to be an entire live performance. This potential discrepancy would call into question the comparisons with political speeches, which were all broadcast live and are thus known to be unedited, and this should be borne in mind with respect to the quantitative studies reported in the present chapter.

The 2001-2 series of The Stand-Up Show (BBC1) contained a total of 16 performances by British performers, all of which were considered for inclusion within the present corpus. However, three of those performances were excluded from the corpus because they included either segments with two performers on stage at the same time, or segments in which the performer selected individual audience members at certain points. During those sections there was a three-way interaction between the performer, the selected audience member, and the rest of



the audience, instead of a single interaction between the performer and the audience. The corpus thus contains all of the performances by single-act British comedians from that series, in which the performers did not single out individual audience members during their routines. This selection was made in order to maximise the homogeneity between the different performances being analysed. Different performer-audience dynamics occur when individual audience members are selected for sequences of dyadic conversation within the context of a larger speaker-audience performance, and also when there are two performers on the stage instead of one. Given that the series of *The Stand-Up Show* under consideration only included one British double-act and two British comedians who selected individual audience members during their performances, it was considered that their inclusion would not provide sufficient data for meaningful examination of these different dynamics, and that their exclusion would not unduly restrict the size of the data set under examination in this study. It was not considered meaningful to analyse the results from the sections of those three additional performances to which these limitations did not pertain, as greater homogeneity of data is achieved when complete performances are analysed in every instance. The sample being analysed in the present study is thus the most comprehensive homogeneous corpus which could be reasonably derived. It contains the performances of 13 British stand-up comedians with different performance styles, it includes a wider range of individual differences than were analysed in the pilot study, and it is not confounded by differences in performer-audience dynamics.

Chapter 3 found that the affiliative audience responses during a sample of four stand-up comedy performances were similar in some ways to audience applause during political speeches. In particular, invitationality within that sample occurred in similar proportions to the studies of political speeches reported by Bull and Wells (2002); invitationality also occurred to a similar extent during the performances of each of the four individual comedians studied. If the analysis of a more comprehensive sample of stand-up comedy performances were to support the findings reported in Chapter 3, this might suggest that invitationality functions similarly in performer-audience interactions in a much wider range of genres, given that the genres of stand-up comedy and political speeches are so different from each other in both form and character.



Rhetoricity, however, was found to be less prevalent in the stand-up comedy performances analysed in Chapter 3 than in the political speeches studied by Bull and his colleagues (e.g., Bull, 2003). An analysis of a larger sample of stand-up comedy performances will be able to provide evidence as to whether this finding applies to stand-up comedy more generally, or whether the four performances selected for the pilot study were idiosyncratic in that regard. It is possible that studying a wider range of stand-up comedians will show a greater use of rhetoricity overall, and/or that considerable individual differences between performers will be found, with some comedians using rhetoricity a good deal more than others. (Chapter 5 will address the issue of additional invitational techniques used by stand-up comedians, in addition to rhetoricity. The studies to be reported in the present chapter merely intend to substantiate the extent to which rhetoricity is used in a larger sample of stand-up comedy performances.)

Another apparent similarity between the stand-up comedy performances analysed in Chapter 3 and the political speeches analysed by Bull and Wells (2002) was the proportion of synchronous audience responses which occurred. However, although the mean results suggested that synchrony might occur in similar proportions in stand-up comedy performances and political speeches, there were substantial individual differences in audience synchrony between the four performances analysed in Chapter 3. It is therefore necessary to analyse a larger sample of stand-up comedy performances in order to address this issue of variability, and to ascertain whether those findings will be replicated in a larger sample.

Chapter 3 found that asynchronous audience responses could be coded according to the same mismatch categories used by Bull and Noordhuizen (2000), and that those categories were sufficient to account for all the mismatch types found within that sample. However, the subsequent analysis of asynchronous responses undertaken in Chapter 3 suggested that the proportions of mismatch types were considerably different between the genres of political speeches and stand-up comedy performances. Specifically, the mean proportions of each mismatch type differed from those found in audience applause to the political speeches studied by Bull and his colleagues (e.g., Bull, 2006). An analysis of the mismatch types within a larger sample will be able to confirm whether (a) delayed responses are equally rare within a larger corpus of stand-up comedy performances, and remain less



common in that genre than in political speeches, (b) isolated responses are more common in stand-up comedy than political speeches, and (c) interruptive responses are the most common type of audience mismatch in stand-up comedy performances, and, as with isolated responses, more common in that genre than in political speeches. It is hoped that the analysis of a broader range of stand-up comedy performances will be able to address the issue of variability reported in Chapter 3, and to substantiate which of these coding categories have greater variability across a wider spread of performers than have been analysed previously.

One of the differences between stand-up comedy performances and political speeches is that a wider range of audience responses occurs in stand-up comedy than in politics. Audiences in political speeches produce mainly applause, and while audiences in stand-up comedy performances produce laughter responses for the most part, they also produce other response tokens, including applause, whistles, cheers, and short verbal responses. Chapter 3 used a gross measure of audience responses, and made no attempt to differentiate between the different forms of response that occurred in the audience turns within that sample. The present chapter intends to distinguish between different audience response tokens, and to investigate whether some forms of response tend to arise under different circumstances than others. The present study thus intends to examine the various audience responses within the corpus as a whole, and to investigate whether different forms of audience response have similar patterns in terms of invitationality, rhetoricality, synchrony, and mismatch types. Given that this analysis of audience response forms is an essential precursor to the replication and extension of the analyses presented in Chapter 3, it will be presented before that analysis is described.

The present chapter is therefore divided into two main sections: firstly, a detailed analysis of the various forms of response produced by the audiences within the present corpus; and secondly, an extension and replication of the study reported in Chapter 3. The former section will present an analysis of how frequently audiences respond within stand-up comedy performances, and detail the different forms of responses they produce. It will also present an analysis of audience affiliation. The latter section will present a replication of the findings reported in Chapter 3, and a comparison between the different forms of audience response and levels of audience affiliation with respect to those findings. This distinction will



facilitate an assessment of whether certain forms of non-laughter responses appear to be more salient to audience members on some occasions than others. The latter section will apply the coding system described in Chapter 3 to all 13 stand-up comedy routines within the present sample, as well as an additional coding scheme for audience affiliation. The present study will therefore not only replicate the analyses presented in Chapter 3, but will also investigate whether the different forms of audience response have similar or different patterns in terms of invitationality, rhetoricality, synchrony, and mismatch types, as well as the extent to which the degree of audience affiliation is reflected in those coding schemes.

The specific areas to be addressed in the present chapter can be summarised as follows:

### **Research questions**

#### ***Features of audience responses***

- 4.1 How frequently do audiences respond during stand-up comedy performances?
- 4.2 What different forms of audience response occur during stand-up comedy performances? How many audience turns contain laughter, and how many contain other response tokens?
- 4.3 In what ways, if any, do audience responses containing tokens other than laughter differ from audience responses containing laughter?
- 4.4 Can audience responses during stand-up comedy performances be reliably categorised as being affiliative or disaffiliative?

#### ***Replication and extension of pilot study***

- 4.5 Will the findings for invitationality, rhetoricality, synchrony, and mismatch types from the four comedy routines reported in Chapter 3 be replicated in a larger corpus of stand-up comedy performances?



- 4.6 Will the findings for invitationality, rhetoricality, synchrony, and mismatch types for laughter responses differ from those for other forms of audience response?
- 4.7 In what ways does the degree of audience affiliation relate to the findings for invitationality, rhetoricality, synchrony, and mismatch types?

## METHOD

### The comedy routines

Table 4.1 lists the stand-up comedy performances that were selected for the corpus to be analysed in the present chapter and the remainder of this thesis.

Table 4.1  
*Corpus of stand-up comedy performances (N=13)*

Date of broadcast	Comedian	Duration of routine
19 October 2001	Marian Pashley	3 minutes 28 seconds
26 October 2001	Andy Parsons	7 minutes 16 seconds
26 October 2001	Richard Ayoade	4 minutes 17 seconds
23 November 2001	Steve Jameson	3 minutes 25 seconds
30 November 2001	Will Smith	6 minutes 41 seconds
7 December 2001	Matt King	10 minutes 7 seconds
14 December 2001	Andy Zaltzman	6 minutes 27 seconds
14 December 2001	Gordon Southern	7 minutes 13 seconds
21 December 2001	Sally Holloway	5 minutes 4 seconds
29 December 2001	Greg Burns	6 minutes 9 seconds
29 December 2001	Jack Russell	8 minutes 5 seconds
4 January 2002	Gavin Webster	5 minutes 12 seconds
4 January 2002	Sean Lock	9 minutes 51 seconds
Total		83 minutes 25 seconds

Table 4.1 presents a list of all of the performances in the present corpus. The same corpus will also be used for the analyses to be reported in the remaining chapters within this thesis.



## Procedure

A coding scheme for audience affiliation was devised, whereby every audience response within the present corpus was judged to be affiliative (containing only positive response tokens), disaffiliative (containing only negative response tokens), or mixed (containing a combination of positive and negative response tokens). To test the reliability of this coding system, two raters independently coded all of the audience response incidences during four complete performances within the corpus. An overwhelming majority of the responses were found to be affiliative, with only ten audience response turns (1.7%) being mixed; no instances of entirely disaffiliative responses were found. Given that the vast majority of audience responses within this corpus were affiliative, an additional coding scheme was then devised to assess the degree of audience affiliation, with the values “weak”, “normal”, and “strong”. This additional coding scheme was informed by Lawson *et al.*'s (1998) finding that laughter strength (strong v weak) was an important condition in their experimental analysis of overt mirth and funniness ratings. Instances where an audience response was perceived to be unusually enthusiastic and long lasting were coded as having strong affiliation intensity, and instances where an audience response was judged to be unusually brief or unenthusiastic were coded as having weak affiliation intensity. The intention was to code the majority of audience responses as being of normal intensity, and in cases of doubt the raters were instructed to code the response as normal. To test the reliability of this coding system, all of the affiliative audience responses in four complete performances were coded independently by two raters. The ten mixed responses in the corpus were not coded for affiliation intensity, because this sample was too small for inter-observer reliability data to be obtained.

Since every audience response was found to contain at least some degree of overt affiliation with the performer, all of the responses within the corpus of 13 stand-up comedy routines were categorised according to the form(s) of response produced. Codings for invitationality, rhetoricality, and synchrony (Bull & Wells, 2002) were then applied to each of these audience responses. All of the asynchronous responses in the corpus were additionally analysed according to their mismatch type(s) (Bull & Noordhuizen, 2000). These codings were all undertaken as described in Chapter 3 (pp. 74-77). All of the audience turns containing response



tokens other than laughter were then additionally subjected to a detailed qualitative analysis.

### **Reliability**

Reliability studies were carried out with the assistance of two third year undergraduate psychology project students, one of whom was the second coder in the studies for invitationality, rhetoricality, synchrony, and mismatch types, and the other for affiliation, affiliation intensity, and use of gestures (see Chapter 5, p. 189). In all cases, the author was the first coder. The second coders were trained in the use of each coding scheme separately. All of the audience responses from at least three complete performances were included in each reliability sample. This method was chosen in order to minimise the impact of inter- and intra-performance idiosyncrasies, and no concessions were made with regard to the relative ease or difficulty of coding different sections of different performances. None of the performances used for the training of any given dimension was used in the reliability sample for that dimension. Different performances were chosen for each of the studies, depending on how many and which performances had been used for training in each case.

The samples used for each reliability study were as follows: affiliation and affiliation intensity: Matt King, Sean Lock, Jack Russell, Gordon Southern; rhetoricality: Steve Jameson, Will Smith, Andy Zaltzman; invitationality and synchrony: Richard Ayoade, Gordon Southern, Gavin Webster; mismatch types: Richard Ayoade, Andy Parsons, Marian Pashley, Gordon Southern, Gavin Webster; use of gestures (see Chapter 5): Richard Ayoade, Sally Holloway, Steve Jameson, Sean Lock, Marian Pashley, Gordon Southern.

The level of inter-observer agreement with the second coder for the various dimensions was as follows: affiliation 99.3% (N=270); affiliation intensity 87.3% (N=268); invitationality 94.1% (N=136); rhetoricality 87.9% (N=107); synchrony 91.9% (N=136); mismatch types 94.1% (N=51). Percentage agreement of 85% or more is generally considered acceptable (Stiff & Mongeau, 2002).

### **RESULTS**

A series of analyses of the various forms and features of audience responses will be presented in the first part of this section, followed by a report of the replication and extension of the pilot study reported in Chapter 3. This section will thus be divided into two separate sub-sections, the first of which will report the



results of research questions 4.1 - 4.4, and the second of which will report the results of research questions 4.5 - 4.7.

## Features of audience responses

### *Response frequency*

In response to research question 4.1, an analysis was undertaken of how frequently audience responses occur in stand-up comedy performances. This is presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2  
*Audience response rate, by comedian (N=13)*

Comedian	Duration of performance (in seconds)	Number of responses	Proportion of responses
Richard Ayoade	257	47	5.47
Marian Pashley	208	35	5.94
Sean Lock	591	86	6.87
Gordon Southern	433	56	7.73
Jack Russell	485	60	8.08
Will Smith	401	45	8.91
Matt King	607	68	8.93
Greg Burns	369	40	9.23
Steve Jameson	205	22	9.32
Gavin Webster	312	33	9.45
Andy Zaltzman	387	40	9.68
Andy Parsons	436	44	9.91
Sally Holloway	304	29	10.48
Total	4995	605	8.26
Mean (SD)	384.2 (128.8)	46.5 (17.3)	8.46 (1.55)

*Note.* The proportion of responses was calculated as the mean response rate for the duration of each performance.

As can be seen in Table 4.2, the audiences responded frequently during all of the stand-up comedy performances in the present sample. For the corpus as a whole, there was an audience response, on average, approximately every eight and a



half seconds. The comedian with the most frequent response rate was Richard Ayode, who received a response on average every 5.47 seconds, and the comedian with the least frequent response rate was Sally Holloway, with a response on average every 10.48 seconds. The mean duration of comedy performance (in seconds) was 384.2 (SD 128.8), and the mean number of audience responses was 46.5 (SD 17.3). There was thus considerable variability in both duration of performance and number of responses received per performance. However, the variation in response rate between the different performances was low, with a standard deviation of just 1.55. This shows a striking degree of homogeneity between the different stand-up comedians within the present sample, which suggests that these results can be generalised to other samples of stand-up comedy performances with a reasonably high level of confidence.

### *Forms of response*

In response to research question 4.2, Table 4.3 presents a summary description of the different response tokens present in all of the audience response turns within the present corpus.



Table 4.3  
*Descriptive statistics for the corpus as a whole (N=605)*

Form of audience response	N (% of total)
Solely or primarily laughter	557 (92.1%)
Laughter (517; 85.4%)	
Laughter and isolated applause (35; 5.8%)	
Laughter, isolated applause and a vocal response (1; 0.2%)	
Laughter and a vocal response (1; 0.2%)	
Laughter and cheers (1; 0.2%)	
Laughter and whistle (1; 0.2%)	
Laughter, whoops and cheers (1; 0.2%)	
Primarily applause	13 ( 2.1%)
Applause and cheers (11; 1.8%)	
Applause, cheers and whistles (2; 0.3%)	
Laughter and applause	13 ( 2.1%)
Laughter and collective applause (9; 1.5%)	
Laughter, cheers and applause (3; 0.5%)	
Laughter, whoops, cheers and applause (1; 0.2%)	
Verbal and vocal responses	12 ( 2.0%)
Verbal responses (11; 1.8%)	
Vocal responses (1; 0.2%)	
Responses containing both affiliative and disaffiliative tokens	10 ( 1.7%)
Laughter and groans (5; 0.8%)	
Laughter, isolated applause and groans (4; 0.7%)	
Laughter and boos (1; 0.2%)	

*Note.* Verbal and vocal responses are audience response tokens which consist exclusively of words or non-verbal utterances (e.g., “aaaaah”).

Table 4.3 itemises all of the audience responses within the present corpus. A summary of these figures (including double counting) indicates that 580 of the responses contained laughter (95.9%), 26 contained collective applause (4.3%), 14 contained verbal or vocal responses (2.3%), and ten contained groans or boos (1.7%). Seventy-six of the audience turns (12.6%) contained a combination of response tokens. Most of the 605 audience turns in the corpus contained only laughter (85.4%), and the vast majority of responses included at least some laughter



(95.9%). None of the responses consisted of applause alone, either collective or isolated; however, 66 responses (10.9%) contained either collective or isolated applause. The internal subheadings within Table 4.3 indicate how these audience responses will be grouped for subsequent analyses in the latter part of this chapter.

### *Non-laughter responses*

To address research question 4.3, a detailed qualitative analysis was undertaken of every audience turn in the corpus that did not consist solely or primarily of laughter. The key findings of this analysis will be described below.

### *Primarily applause*

Eleven of the 13 audience responses containing primarily applause occurred as the final audience turns within their respective performances. The final audience responses in the remaining two performances contained a combination of laughter and applause. Thus the final audience response turn in every performance in the present corpus contained collective applause. This is consistent with the observations of Rutter (1997). The other two audience responses in this sample which contained primarily applause were produced during Jack Russell's performance; both occurred after a specific, overt request from him for a response. They were in response to successive utterances which he delivered just over five minutes into his performance:

OK, so who here prefers dogs to cats? If you do, make noise. [1] Dog people. Now if you feel the other way, and you prefer cats to dogs, make noise. [2]

The audience responded with a combination of cheers and applause at both points [1] and [2]. Laughter responses would not have been salient at either of those points. In both instances, Russell simply requested "noise". On the one hand, applause and cheers tend to be much noisier than laughter, and on the other hand, invitations for laughter are usually considerably more subtle than this straightforward direct request.

### *Laughter and applause*

The 13 responses in the present sample which contained both laughter and collective applause took place during six of the 13 performances in the corpus. Two of these responses were mentioned in the previous section; they were the final



audience turns during Andy Parsons' and Jack Russell's performances. Of the remaining 11 responses that contained both laughter and collective applause, four occurred towards the end, two towards the beginning, and five at other points during their respective performances. This suggests that, although applause without laughter occurs primarily at the end of stand-up comedy performances, laughter and applause can co-occur in an audience turn at any point during the performance. Each of these 11 responses will be described below, along with suggestions as to why collective applause formed part of the audience's response on those occasions.

1. Just over two minutes into Steve Jameson's performance, he delivered the utterance: "She said to me, d'you suffer from premature ejaculation? I said no, I enjoy it." The audience responded to this with enthusiastic collective laughter. Sporadic applause commenced when the laughter started to become less intense, at which point Jameson commented: "Solidarity, brothers, I know you're here", which successfully invited a burst of sustained collective applause. Jameson's utterance overlapping the audience's response with the result of prolonging it was reminiscent of Atkinson's (1984b) observations about charismatic political orators who appear more popular by "speaking into" the applause of their audiences.

2. Just under nine minutes into his performance, during a sequence of turns about haunted houses, Matt King delivered the following utterance:

Oh, I'll bet there's nothing in the forest. And I don't know why this is, whenever Americans are running- in horror films, they're running into the forest, there is always one idiot, up the back, isn't there, who's just running, going, "Oh god, you're going to- oh!

During this utterance, King mimed the action of running; he then adopted a higher-pitched voice and an American accent for the reported speech, and at the point where he uttered "oh", he pretended to trip up and threw himself forwards onto the floor. The audience responded with collective laughter. From his sprawled position on the floor, King then uttered: "Oh, I've broken my legs. I tripped on a leaf", in response to which the audience again produced a response of enthusiastic collective laughter. Still on the floor, he added: "Get St John's, I'm in trouble, I-",



at which point the audience responded with a combination of enthusiastic collective laughter and applause. By this point, King had employed a complex series of invitational techniques in rapid succession, building upon one enthusiastic audience response after another, including adoption of voices (Rutter, 1997), reincorporations (Rutter, 1997), and a surprising “pratfall” or full body gesture, the only one of its type in the whole corpus. The audience “had nowhere else to go” in terms of conveying their enthusiasm; they were already responding with enthusiastic collective laughter, so applauding collectively along with the laughter may have been the only effective way for them to indicate their enhanced appreciation of King’s performance at that point.

3. The second audience turn during Andy Parsons’ performance contained a combination of collective laughter, cheers, and applause. This was in response to his utterance: “And Jeffrey Archer is still in prison”, which was at that time a highly topical and popular observation. The applause in response to this utterance was reminiscent of Bull’s (2000) finding that spontaneous collective applause in political speeches can be produced in response to popular statements of party policy in the absence of standard rhetorical formatting. In his subsequent utterance, Parsons appeared to acknowledge the similarity of the enthusiasm of this response to that which is more usually found at the end of stand-up comedy performances, by saying “That’s all from me, thank you very much, goodnight.” This formulaic utterance would more normally be delivered immediately before a comedian leaves the stage, in response to which an audience would produce collective applause, but this particular utterance received collective laughter, presumably in acknowledgement of its incongruous position so early on in Parsons’ performance.

4. Two and a half minutes into his performance, Parsons delivered the following utterance:

People always want to know, don’t they, whether they’ve got a shit job or not. Give you a little rule of thumb where you can work out whether you’ve got a shit job. If your job has got an employee of the month- [1] You’ve got a shit job. [2]



The audience produced collective laughter at point [1], after which Parsons paused briefly and acknowledged this response with a nod of his head as he continued speaking. The audience responded again at point [2] with collective laughter followed by collective applause. The quality of the audience's response to this utterance was similar to that produced by the audience during Matt King's performance (described in example 2 above). It seemed as though the audience wanted to give "something extra" in response to the completion of Parsons' utterance; something over and above the collective laughter which they had already produced at point [1].

5. Later on, just under five and a half minutes into his performance, Parsons made the following utterance:

Also it looks like we're gonna ban fox hunting. Now I think that's a good idea, meself, yeah. Because, like, it's not fair is it? One hundred hunters, fifty hounds, against one poor little fox. Now of course if it was one hundred hunters, fifty hounds, against one hundred skinheads, fifty rottweilers – [1] we'd think that was a cracking bank holiday Monday. [2]

The audience responded with collective laughter at point [1], and they responded again at point [2] with collective laughter accompanied by a small amount of collective applause. The quality of this audience response was similar to that described in the previous example. It could have been a response to the complex referentiality contained in this utterance: a combination of the connotations associated with foxhunters, skinheads, rottweiler dogs, and the battles between Mods and Rockers that used to take place in seaside towns such as Brighton on bank holiday Mondays in the 1960s, and an acknowledgement of the "cleverness" of its construction.

6. Towards the beginning of Jack Russell's performance, he mentioned the Tory MP Boris Johnson and performed an impersonation of him, to which the audience responded with collective laughter. His subsequent utterance was: "It's amazing. Every time I see him on television, I'm just waiting for Patrick Moore to appear behind him, going 'He's not my son'!", to which the audience responded



with laughter and collective applause. This occurred approximately one minute into the performance, and was the fifth audience turn. Again, the audience appeared to be responding to a skilled combination of invitational devices from Russell, including adoption of voices (Rutter, 1997) and external referentiality (which will be described in Chapter 5 as a highly salient invitational device which is used in stand-up comedy performances; see pp. 164-170).

7. Just over four minutes into his performance, Russell discussed smuggling drugs into the country “up a dog’s arse”. After the audience had responded to that section of his routine, he commented: “You see, I love that joke. But it’s actually quite a flawed joke, because the problem with that joke is, that it’s also a really good idea.” The audience responded to this utterance with collective laughter. Russell then added: “Isn’t it? It gets that stunted laugh. It gets that ‘that’s a fucking good idea’...”, to which the audience responded with a combination of laughter and collective applause. This was another complex utterance. It is possible that reincorporation (Rutter, 1997) contributed to the enthusiasm of the audience’s response; it is also possible that it relied on “cleverness” on the part of the audience, in being able to “fill in the blanks”. In other words, they were able to feel superiority (Morreall, 1987) when they understood the relevant implicature (Grice, 1957).

8. In a later section of his routine discussing the differences between dogs and cats, after having described the enthusiasm of dogs when their owner returns to them, Russell delivered the following utterance describing the behaviour of cats:

It’s strange, see. You leave a cat alone for a day, when you return home, the cat will go “And this – is my arse”.

He then demonstrated the appropriate action (i.e., he bent over, turned away from the audience, extended his backside, and walked away slowly while swaying his buttocks), to which the audience responded with collective laughter and applause. This occurred about six and a half minutes into his performance. The audience appeared to be applauding Russell’s unusual and very skilled impersonation of a cat walking away from them with its tail in the air. This could be



considered as a narrative gesture (which will be described as an invitational technique in Chapter 5; see pp. 181-182); it could also be considered as another opportunity for the audience to “fill in the blanks”; they could feel superior for being able to link Russell’s charade with the movement of a cat that he was satirising.

9. The only combined collective applause and laughter response during Gordon Southern’s performance was in response to a somewhat unusual occurrence, which was unique within the present corpus. Southern had been describing the loneliness of his personal life, with appropriate music in the background. It became apparent that the music should have stopped when Southern made the utterance: “But then- the music faded away”, at which point the music stopped abruptly and the audience responded with enthusiastic collective laughter, whoops, cheers, and applause. This occurred just under a minute and a half into his performance. The audience may have been responding enthusiastically to the fact that something went wrong with the technical support, which could again link to the “superiority” concept (in the sense that “the technicians got it wrong and we saw them do it”) or to the aplomb with which Southern dealt with the problem. During the utterance prior to this, Southern had been using a hand gesture to indicate the “cut” signal, which the technicians had failed to notice. Southern had also been dancing along to the music and smiling while continuing with his utterances during that section of his performance, even while he was subtly conveying that he wished the music to be switched off. The audience may have been empathising with Southern’s problem, and/or congratulating him for handling it so well.

10. The two examples of collective laughter and applause that occurred in Gavin Webster’s routine took place towards the end of his performance. The first of these occurred just under four and a half minutes into his routine, and was in response to an exaggerated v-sign gesture with the mimed but clearly lip-readable words “fuck off”. This gesture followed a sequence of utterances about women with tattoos which involved adoption of voices (Rutter, 1997) and deprecation of the women he was describing (deprecation will be described as an invitational device in Chapter 5; see pp. 173-174).



11. Another combination of laughter and applause occurred just over half a minute later in Webster's performance, after he had described the kinds of tattoos that such women prefer as being nothing more than Chinese symbols copied by a tattoo artist from a Chinese take-away menu. After this description, he delivered the utterance:

There's Chinese people laughing themselves stupid. Well, you would laugh at a Chinese person, wouldn't you, if they rolled up the sleeves of their t-shirt and it said, "soup of the day with croutons", you know what I mean?

The audience's response of collective laughter and applause was again in response to a complex build-up of invitational techniques, involving adoption of voices (Rutter, 1997), external referentiality (see Chapter 5, pp. 164-170) and superiority (e.g., Morreall, 1987).

This analysis suggests that applause responses during stand-up comedy performances tend to take place (a) at the end of the performance, (b) in response to specific requests for audience participation, and (c) in response to utterances that are seen as especially popular, topical, or "clever". Based on evidence from the present sample, audience turns consisting of both collective laughter and collective applause appear to be qualitatively different from audience turns containing collective applause without accompanying laughter. As suggested above, applause invitations in stand-up comedy performances tend to be less subtle than laughter invitations, and applause without laughter appears to be considerably more formulaic than applause which co-occurs with laughter. When collective applause is produced during the same audience turn as collective laughter, the applause can be interpreted as serving to intensify the laughter; to give the performer "something more", such as a reward for "extra funniness", an identification with an especially popular opinion, or an acknowledgement of a more than usually "clever" turn of phrase. This is in contrast to collective applause without laughter, which is either produced in response to a direct and specific request, or to a performer's final (and highly formulaic) utterance, which is delivered immediately before leaving the stage.



### *Verbal and vocal responses*

Six performances contained one verbal or vocal response, and a further three performances contained two verbal responses, giving a total of 12 verbal or vocal responses occurring in nine of the 13 performances in the present corpus. Eleven of these responses were verbal and only one was vocal; this single vocal response appeared to take a distinctly different form than the verbal responses, and it will therefore be described separately at the end of this section. In contrast to the responses containing collective applause, the verbal responses within the present sample tended to occur towards the beginning of stand-up comedy performances. The first audience turn in seven of these performances, i.e., just over half of the performances in the corpus as a whole, was a verbal response. There was also considerably less variability between the utterances which received verbal responses than between the utterances which received a combination of laughter and applause. Nine verbal responses were replies to specific questions asked by the comedian, and two were second pair parts of a traditional greeting sequence (e.g., Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). The verbal responses will be presented as either greetings or questions, and the single vocal response will then be discussed separately.

#### 1. Greetings

The first utterance during Sally Holloway's performance was "Thank you very much, good evening", to which the audience responded with a collective verbal response of "Evening". Will Smith's opening utterance was very similar. He said: "Hello, good evening everyone", to which the audience responded with a collective "Hello". These two initial turns and their responses were similar in form to standard conversational greeting-greeting sequences: sequentially ordered adjacency pairs in which the first pair greeting part makes a second pair greeting response conditionally relevant (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). In each of these cases, the audience responded with the same initial greeting word that the comedian used.

#### 2. Questions

The first utterance during Richard Ayoade's performance was: "Hello. All right? How- are you all right?", to which the audience responded with a collective "Yeah". Later in his performance, Ayoade delivered the following utterance:



And- outside London it becomes so much nicer, so much more wussy. Like, I was in Ipswich the other day. Um- do any of you know Ipswich?

The audience again responded with the vocal token “Yeah”, although this time their response was isolated rather than collective. This may be because Ipswich is a small county town and not necessarily a salient location for members of an audience in Edinburgh to identify with. Approximately two minutes into Andy Parsons’ performance, in a section about winding up teachers for having long holidays, and after referring to them as “not much more than part time”, Parsons delivered the following utterance: “They hate that, don’t they?”, to which the audience responded with an isolated verbal response of “Yeah”.

Greg Burns’ opening utterance, acknowledging the applause that the audience were delivering in response to the compère’s introduction while he was walking onto the stage, was: “Oh, thank you very much. ... Ah. Are you good? Are you happy? Are you well?”, to which the audience responded with a collective “Yeah”. Marian Pashley’s opening utterance, which also acknowledged the audience’s applause as she came onto the stage, was: “Hello, Edinburgh, that’s fantastic. How are you?”. The audience responded to this utterance with the collective verbal tokens “good” and/or “great”. Andy Zaltzman’s opening utterance, previously reported on p. 77, was somewhat less conventional. He greeted the audience with the utterance: “Hello. Er, you glad to be alive?” to which they responded with a collective but delayed verbal token of “Yes”. Later in his routine, Zaltzman delivered the following utterance (which was also reported on p. 77):

And it makes you wonder why so people- er, so few people bothered voting at the election. Were any of you, er, disappointed by the low turnout at the general election?

The audience responded to this with an isolated verbal response of “Yes”. This response may have been isolated because Zaltzman’s question was more complex than usual and required thought on the part of audience members before they could produce a response; in this respect, this question is different from all of the other examples described in the present section. In Matt King’s performance,



the audience delivered collective verbal responses of “yes” to both of his first two utterances (which were described on pp. 76-77).

It should be noted that the verbal audience responses to performers’ first turns (or in the case of Matt King, first and second turns) within the present sample were all collective, whereas the verbal audience responses which occurred later during the performances in this sample were all isolated. It is possible that the point at which verbal audience responses are most salient is at the start of a stand-up comedy performance, and in that sense the questions asked by comedians in performance-initial turns may be interpreted by audience members as forming part of a greeting sequence. There was a delay in the collective verbal response to Andy Zaltzman’s performance-initial question, and this may have been because its content was somewhat incongruous to that of a more traditional greeting sequence, and so the audience may not have realised immediately that a verbal response was being invited.

Apart from differences in the speech content of the different question-response sequences within this corpus, their formatting was very similar in all nine examples described. In each case, the verbal audience response token was brief and monosyllabic: “good” or “great”, “yeah”, and “yes”. It is suggested that performers need to ask questions which unambiguously invite a single word in response, do not require a great deal of thought on the part of audience members, and evoke a positive (preferably affirmative) response. It may be a risky strategy for performers to invite responses from their audience by asking direct questions beyond their opening turns. Audiences may generally interpret rhetorical questions as non-invitational devices, and so might not understand them to be inviting a response unless they are used at the beginning of a performance, as part of the performer’s introduction sequence.

### 3. Vocal responses

The only vocal (non-verbal) audience response within the present corpus occurred during Gordon Southern’s routine. Approximately a minute into his performance, Southern delivered the following pair of utterances:

I spent a lot of my life on my own, [1] Feeling- lonely. [music starts] [2]



The audience responded at point [1] with a collective vocal response of “Aaaaah”, and at point [2] they responded with collective laughter. The response at point [1] was qualitatively different from the verbal responses described above, in that in this case the audience responded with a collective sympathetic vocal sound which was invited by the performer, as opposed to a specifically invited verbal response. It is possible that the audience’s collective vocal response became salient at this point due to Southern’s mournful tone of voice, as well as the speech content of that utterance. A laughter response at point [1] would not have been salient (and may, indeed, have been disaffiliative). However, the laughter at point [2] was both salient and affiliative. By this point, Southern was going “over the top” in exaggerating his loneliness, even using a musical “prop” (an extract from the well-known Coldplay single, “Trouble”) to intensify the mournfulness of his utterance. This turn will be mentioned again in Chapter 5, in a section describing the use of props as invitational devices (see pp. 186-187).

On the basis of this single example from the present corpus, it appears as though vocal responses may be qualitatively different from verbal responses. It would be useful to identify further examples of vocal responses from other stand-up comedy performances, in order to ascertain more about the nature of such responses; however, based on the present sample, such responses appear to occur relatively rarely.

#### *Responses containing disaffiliative tokens*

No audience responses within the present corpus consisted entirely of disaffiliative tokens. However, ten audience responses in the sample did contain a combination of affiliative and disaffiliative tokens, as described in Table 4.3. One of these occurred during Steve Jameson’s performance, two during each of Sally Holloway’s and Gordon Southern’s performances, and five during Will Smith’s performance. All of these responses contained collective laughter, and the accompanying disaffiliative tokens were either groans or boos. Each of these responses and the utterances that preceded them will be described below.

1. Approximately a minute into his performance, Steve Jameson delivered the following utterance:



I like to do a bit of home decorating, I recently painted my bedroom blood red. Gives it a kind of period feel.

The audience responded with a combination of collective laughter, collective groans, and an isolated clap. The groans may have been in response to the double meaning of the word “period”, and/or the audience’s disgust at that term being mentioned.

2. Just over half a minute into her performance, Sally Holloway delivered the following utterance:

And, um, I have been obsessed with the weather, and I was wondering, when it’s a really hot day, like an oven, d’you think women with yeast infections start to rise, h’m.

The audience responded with a combination of collective groans and collective laughter, possibly due to disgust at the thought of women with yeast infections, and/or the comparison between women with yeast infections and loaves of bread baking in an oven. This example appears similar in form and structure to the previous example, from Steve Jameson’s performance.

3. Approximately three minutes later, Holloway delivered the following utterance:

But I did have a little relationship, er, with a guy who worked for Railtrack, or, well I think I did, er, he kept giving me all the wrong signals, and um-

The audience responded with a combination of collective laughter and collective groans. In this case, it is likely that the groans were in response to the corniness of the pun on “wrong signals”. Both of the previous examples also incorporated corny puns, and the disaffiliative portion of the responses in those cases were more marked than in this example. In other words, a corny pun that conveys an image evoking disgust may tend to receive more tokens of audience disaffiliation than one that does not.



4. Gordon Southern began his performance with the following series of utterances:

So I'm in the bar with my mate, Fat Pete, right, er- which isn't uncommon, and he says to me, "Gordon", cos he's got a- squeaky voice. "Gordon, when you masturbate-" [1] Ooh, tricky question might be on the way, right? He said, "Does your- ejaculation" [2] I'm nervous now, because he's using medical terms, "Ever come out- lumpy?" [3] I said, "Pete, don't ask me, because by that point it's all mixed up with mashed bits of melon". [4]

The audience responded at points [1], [2], and [3] with laughter, and their response at point [4] contained a combination of laughter and groans. The groans may have occurred due to the unpleasant mental image conjured up by the combination of these four utterances.

5. Some six minutes later, towards the end of his performance, Southern delivered the following series of utterances:

But all the time I was inside I'm thinking, right, so apparently I am being detained at Her Majesty's pleasure. Does it actually give her any pleasure. While I'm sat in my cell, is she sat in Buckingham Palace going, "Mmm" [gesture] [1] "All them lads are banged up in the nick just because of one". [2] Possibly, mental picture for you- her bejewelled hand slowly snaking its way down her velvet dress, hn. [pause] OK, too far. [3] Last throw of the dice, possibly [laugh]. Bit of dog food on the gusset, "Corgis", hah. [4]

The audience responded with collective laughter at points [1], [2], and [3], and with a combination of groans, laughter, and isolated applause at point [4]. The audience had failed to respond at the point at which Southern paused, between audience responses [2] and [3], and both his immediate response to that pause and his comment at the beginning of his final utterance in this sequence suggest that he may well have been expecting a disaffiliative response at point [4]. His subsequent and performance-final utterance was: "Not an image you want to leave people with, but, er- I'm out of time. I've been Gordon Southern, thanks very much, goodnight."



The audience responded to this with collective applause, whoops, and cheers; a traditional combination of response tokens to a performer's final utterance.

6. Approximately half a minute into his performance, Will Smith delivered the following utterance (previously reported on p. 76): "But I- I'm not complaining, it is fantastic to be here, in Edinburgh, in the north of England." The audience responded with a combination of collective laughter, collective cheers, collective groans, and isolated applause. The groans may have been an acknowledgement of the insult to Scottish people contained in this deprecatory utterance. (The use of deprecation as an invitational tactic is discussed in Chapter 5.)

7&8. About two minutes later, Smith delivered the following sequence of utterances:

I've just been ripped off so many times now. They- they just see me coming an absolute mile off, which I- it- it- it's probably the way I dress as well as the way I talk, yes? I mean, you- you knew what I was like as soon as you saw me, didn't you? You know, I mean, you know, look at that. Just waiting for a leather elbow patch, isn't it? Yes. [1] I've, er- I've got corduroy underpants on as well, tonight. [2] And one day I want the first pair of wicker trousers. [3] Although, obviously, wicker would be a bit itchy on the old chap. Er, huh, huh- [4] Or the- or the colonel, as we call him in our family. [5] We, er, we call him the colonel, because he's killed five million chickens. [6]

The audience responded with laughter at points [1], [2], [3], and [5], and with a combination of laughter and groans at points [4] and [6], with the groans occurring at point [6] perceptibly more prominent than those at point [4]. The groans at point [4] may have been in response to Smith's colloquial usage of the phrase "chap" to refer to his genitals. The groans at point [6] were presumably in response to complex referentiality (see Chapter 5); a combination of "the colonel" referring to the well-known Colonel Sanders' Kentucky Fried Chicken brand and the vast numbers of chickens that it cooks and sells, and an over-the-top image of bestiality.



9. Just under four minutes into his performance, Smith delivered the following pair of utterances:

Now, I- I- I- I'm quite confused about gender, you know, in general, actually, because I- I wasn't really around women for the first twenty years of my life. Er, apart from, obviously, m-m-m-m-mother. [1] Steady, colonel. Um- [2]

The audience responded with collective laughter at point [1], and collective laughter and groans at point [2]. The groans at point [2] were presumably in response to the reincorporation (see Chapter 5, pp. 162-164) which referred back to the previously reported utterance.

10. Approximately five minutes into his performance, Smith made the following utterance: "But ladies, you've gotta think maybe men have periods too. We just don't go on about it." The audience responded to this with collective laughter and boos, although it should be noted that the booing was relatively brief and occurred towards the end of that response turn. It is possible that the boos were in response to Smith's reference to periods, or to his implicit deprecation of women in that utterance.

In the examples from Steve Jameson's and Sally Holloway's performances, the audience's disaffiliative response tokens occurred in response to, essentially, one-liners. In Gordon Southern's performance, although the disaffiliative response tokens were produced with respect to two distinct utterances, in each case the series of utterances which occurred before the utterance in question were also involved in the set-up. The five examples from Will Smith's performance reflected both of these different performance styles, with the first and last examples reflecting the styles reported for Steve Jameson and Sally Holloway, and the three intermediate examples reflecting the style reported for Gordon Southern.

### *Summary*

Based on this analysis of the non-laughter audience responses in the present corpus, verbal responses tend to occur towards the beginning of stand-up comedy performances, and responses containing primarily applause tend to occur in the final audience turn. Responses containing both collective applause and collective



laughter, and responses containing a combination of affiliative and disaffiliative response tokens, can occur at any point during a stand-up comedy performance.

### *Affiliation intensity*

In response to research question 4.4, it was found that audience responses during stand-up comedy performances can be reliably categorised as being affiliative or disaffiliative. Five hundred and ninety five (98.3%) of the audience turns within the present corpus were found to be solely affiliative. Since this accounted for such a large proportion of responses, it was decided to perform an additional analysis in order to ascertain the relative intensity of audience affiliation within each of these response turns. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4  
*Intensity of affiliative audience responses (N = 595)*

	Weak	Normal	Strong
Sally Holloway (N=27)	3 (11.1%)	24 (88.9%)	0
Marian Pashley (N=35)	4 (11.4%)	30 (85.7%)	1 (2.9%)
Andy Zaltzman (N=40)	5 (12.5%)	34 (85.0%)	1 (2.5%)
Andy Parsons (N=44)	6 (13.6%)	36 (81.8%)	2 (4.5%)
Steve Jameson (N=21)	3 (14.3%)	17 (81.0%)	1 (4.8%)
Richard Ayoade (N=47)	8 (17.0%)	38 (80.9%)	1 (2.1%)
Sean Lock (N=86)	17 (19.8%)	68 (79.1%)	1 (1.2%)
Gordon Southern (N=54)	10 (18.5%)	42 (77.8%)	2 (3.7%)
Will Smith (N=40)	8 (20.0%)	31 (77.5%)	1 (2.5%)
Gavin Webster (N=33)	6 (18.2%)	25 (75.8%)	2 (6.1%)
Jack Russell (N=60)	10 (16.7%)	45 (75.0%)	5 (8.3%)
Matt King (N=68)	14 (20.6%)	51 (75.0%)	3 (4.4%)
Greg Burns (N=40)	9 (22.5%)	30 (75.0%)	1 (2.5%)
Total	103 (17.3%)	471 (79.2%)	21 (3.5%)
M (SD)	16.6% (3.7%)	79.9% (4.5%)	3.5% (2.2%)

Table 4.4 shows that almost 80% of all audience responses within the present corpus were judged to be of normal affiliation intensity. A much larger proportion of affiliative audience responses were judged to be of weak than strong



intensity, with more than 80% of the remaining responses being judged as having weak affiliation intensity. It should be noted that 12 of the 21 responses with strong affiliation intensity occurred as the final audience turn; the only performer to have been coded for normal affiliation intensity on the final audience turn during her performance was Sally Holloway. These ratings for affiliation strength will be analysed further in the following section of this chapter, with respect to invitationality, rhetoricality, synchrony, and mismatch types. Having presented the results in respect of the research questions relating to features of audience responses, this section will now go on to present the results of the replication of the pilot study reported in Chapter 3.

### **Replication and extension of pilot study**

Following Bull and Wells (2002) and Bull and Noordhuizen (2000), the data were analysed along the dimensions of invitationality, rhetoricality, synchrony, and mismatch types. The various forms of response comprising each audience response turn were also categorised with respect to these four dimensions. Finally, the data were analysed along these dimensions for both affiliation and affiliation intensity. These categories will each be discussed in turn, with reference to research questions 4.5 - 4.7. This section of the chapter will present three different forms of analysis for each of the coding schemes piloted in Chapter 3, i.e., invitationality, rhetoricality, synchrony, and mismatch types. The first analysis in each case will be a straightforward replication of the coding schemes used in Chapter 3, extended to apply to all 13 stand-up comedy performances within the present corpus. These results will address research question 4.5 and will show whether the findings in Chapter 3 remain robust over a wider sample of stand-up comedy routines. The second analysis under each of these subheadings will present the results for each of the different forms of audience response outlined in Table 4.3. These analyses will show the differences, if any, between laughter and the various non-laughter responses within the corpus, in response to research question 4.6. Because of the relative rarity of non-laughter responses in the corpus, these results will not be broken down individually by comedian, but will be presented for the corpus as a whole. The final analysis under each of these subheadings will report the extent to which the intensity of audience affiliation is related to each of these areas, and will thus address research question 4.7. This section of the chapter will thus be divided into separate subsections for invitationality, rhetoricality, synchrony, and mismatch



types, and research questions 4.5 - 4.7 will be addressed separately within each of those subsections.

### *Invitationality*

The pilot study reported in Chapter 3 found that the proportions of invited and uninvited responses were broadly similar between the four different comedians studied, and that stand-up comedians appeared to invite a similar proportion of affiliative audience responses as politicians. To investigate whether this finding would hold true for a larger corpus of stand-up comedy performances, Table 4.5 presents an analysis of invitationality for all 13 performances in the present corpus.

Table 4.5

*Proportions of invited, uninvited, and ambiguous responses, by comedian (N=605)*

	Invited	Uninvited	Ambiguous
Gavin Webster (N=33)	32 (97.0%)	0	1 ( 3.0%)
Gordon Southern (N=56)	53 (94.6%)	2 ( 3.6%)	1 ( 1.8%)
Sean Lock (N=86)	81 (94.2%)	3 ( 3.5%)	2 ( 2.3%)
Richard Ayoade (N=47)	44 (93.6%)	1 ( 2.1%)	2 ( 4.3%)
Steve Jameson (N=22)	20 (90.9%)	0	2 ( 9.1%)
Greg Burns (N=40)	36 (90.0%)	1 ( 2.5%)	3 ( 7.5%)
Will Smith (N=45)	40 (88.9%)	3 ( 6.7%)	2 ( 4.4%)
Andy Parsons (N=44)	39 (88.6%)	1 ( 2.3%)	4 ( 9.1%)
Marian Pashley (N=35)	31 (88.6%)	2 ( 5.7%)	2 ( 5.7%)
Sally Holloway (N=29)	25 (86.2%)	1 ( 3.4%)	3 (10.3%)
Andy Zaltzman (N=40)	34 (85.0%)	1 ( 2.5%)	5 (12.5%)
Jack Russell (N=60)	50 (83.3%)	2 ( 3.3%)	8 (13.3%)
Matt King (N=68)	54 (79.4%)	6 ( 8.8%)	8 (11.8%)
Total	539 (89.1%)	23 ( 3.8%)	43 ( 7.1%)
M (SD)	89.3% (5.0%)	3.4% (2.5%)	7.3% (4.0%)
M (SD) for political speeches	85.9% (6.6%)	14.1% (6.6%)	
95% confidence intervals	82.3% - 89.5%	10.5% - 17.7%	

Table 4.5 is presented in rank order by performer, from the highest proportion of invited responses to the lowest. The mean percentage of invited responses within the present corpus was 89.3%; this is higher than the 86.1%



reported for the four stand-up comedy performances analysed in Chapter 3, but still falls within the 95% confidence intervals for audience applause responses during the corpus of political speeches studied by Bull and Wells (2002). This analysis therefore supports the findings reported in Chapter 3, and suggests that stand-up comedians invite a similar proportion of affiliative audience responses as politicians. However, as stated in Chapter 3, if the ambiguous responses were to be discarded and the percentages to be recalculated for only the unambiguously invited and unambiguously uninvited tokens, the means for stand-up comedy performance would fall outside the 95% confidence intervals for political speeches, with more audience responses being invited in stand-up comedy than in political speeches. The relatively small standard deviations for invitationality (5.0% in the present analysis; 5.1% in the analysis reported in Chapter 3) suggest that the findings for stand-up comedy performances are reasonably robust and can be generalised to other comedians with different styles of delivery.

Table 4.6 presents a summary of response totals for invitationality, separated out by the audience response headings described in Table 4.3.

Table 4.6

*Proportions of invited, uninvited, and ambiguous responses, by form of audience response (N=605)*

	Invited	Uninvited	Ambiguous
Primarily laughter (N=557)	491 (88.2%)	23 ( 4.1%)	43 ( 7.7%)
Primarily applause (N=13)	13 (100%)	0	0
Laughter and applause (N=13)	13 (100%)	0	0
Verbal/vocal responses (N=12)	12 (100%)	0	0
Containing disaffiliation (N=10)	10 (100%)	0	0
Total	539 (89.1%)	23 ( 3.8%)	43 ( 7.1%)

Table 4.6 shows that, in the present corpus, only responses consisting solely or primarily of laughter were both invited and uninvited or ambiguous. All other forms of audience response in the stand-up comedy performances comprising this study were invited.



Table 4.7 presents the results of an analysis of affiliation intensity as it relates to invitationality for all of the performances within the present corpus.

Table 4.7

*Proportions of invited, uninvited, and ambiguous responses, by degree of affiliation intensity (N=605)*

	Weak	Affiliative Normal	Strong	Mixed
Invited (N=539)	67 (12.4%)	441 (81.8%)	21 (3.9%)	10 (1.9%)
Uninvited (N=23)	14 (60.9%)	9 (31.9%)	0	0
Ambiguous (N=43)	22 (51.2%)	21 (48.8%)	0	0

Table 4.7 shows that most of the invited responses (81.8%) received a normal degree of audience affiliation. In contrast, most of the uninvited responses (60.9%) received weak affiliation intensity. Approximately half of the ambiguously invited-or-uninvited responses received weak affiliation (51.2%) and approximately half received normal affiliation (48.8%). Both the responses containing a combination of affiliative and disaffiliative tokens (which were also reported in Table 4.6), and the strongly affiliative responses within this corpus only occurred when those responses had been unambiguously invited by the performer.

### ***Rhetoricality***

The pilot study reported in Chapter 3 found that stand-up comedians use the same standard rhetorical devices as politicians. Three of the four comedians in that study also invited audience responses through rhetorical formats other than those found in political speeches. In Chapter 3, it was also proposed that political speakers and stand-up comedians use rhetoricality in different ways. To determine whether those findings would hold true for a larger corpus of stand-up comedy performances, Table 4.8 presents an analysis of rhetoricality for all 13 performances within the present corpus.



Table 4.8

*Proportions of responses to rhetorically formatted utterances (Atkinsonian and additional), and non-rhetorically formatted utterances, by comedian (N=605)*

	Rhetorical		Non-rhetorical
	Atkinsonian	Additional	
Andy Zaltzman (N=40)	33 (82.5%)	2 ( 5.0%)	5 (12.5%)
Andy Parsons (N=44)	35 (79.5%)	2 ( 4.5%)	7 (15.9%)
Marian Pashley (N=35)	27 (77.1%)	2 ( 5.7%)	6 (17.1%)
Greg Burns (N=40)	29 (72.5%)	4 (10.0%)	7 (17.5%)
Will Smith (N=45)	34 (75.6%)	3 ( 6.7%)	8 (17.8%)
Steve Jameson (N=22)	18 (81.8%)	0	4 (18.2%)
Sally Holloway (N=29)	22 (75.9%)	1 ( 3.4%)	6 (20.7%)
Gavin Webster (N=33)	24 (72.7%)	1 ( 3.0%)	8 (24.2%)
Matt King (N=68)	43 (63.2%)	7 (10.3%)	18 (26.5%)
Jack Russell (N=60)	39 (65.0%)	2 ( 3.3%)	19 (31.7%)
Gordon Southern (N=56)	38 (67.9%)	0	18 (32.1%)
Richard Ayoade (N=47)	25 (53.2%)	2 ( 4.3%)	20 (42.6%)
Sean Lock (N=86)	40 (46.5%)	0	46 (53.5%)
Total	407 (67.3%)	26 ( 4.3%)	172 (28.4%)
M (SD)	70.3% (10.9%)	4.3% (3.4%)	25.4% (11.9%)
M (SD) for political speeches	95.0% (4.7%)		5.0% (4.7%)
95% confidence intervals	92.4% - 97.6%		2.4% - 7.6%

Ten of the 13 stand-up comedy performers in the present corpus invited audience responses through rhetorical formats other than those found in political speeches. However, even when these additional rhetorical devices were counted along with the standard Atkinsonian rhetorical devices used by political speakers, Table 4.8 shows that an average of only 74.6% of the audience responses in the present corpus were associated with rhetorical devices. This figure falls well below the 95% confidence intervals for the audience applause responses to the corpus of political speeches studied by Bull and Wells (2002). Indeed, even Andy Zaltzman, the performer in the present sample who used the most standard rhetorical devices (87.5%), used them to a lesser extent than the 95% confidence intervals for politicians (92.4% - 97.6%). This confirms the findings of the pilot study reported



in Chapter 3, and suggests that stand-up comedians and political speakers do indeed use standard rhetorical devices differently.

On average, approximately a quarter of the responses in the present corpus (25.4%) were to utterances that did not contain rhetorical devices. However, the standard deviation of 11.9% suggests a high degree of variability between performers. Table 4.8, which is presented in rank order of performer by non-rhetoricality, shows the individual differences between the performers as to their use of rhetorical devices. Only an eighth of the audience responses during Andy Zaltzman's performance occurred after non-rhetorically formatted utterances, whereas more than half of the audience turns during Sean Lock's performance were in response to non-rhetorically formatted utterances.

Table 4.9 presents a summary of response totals for rhetoricality, separated out by the audience response headings described in Table 4.3.

Table 4.9

*Proportions of responses to rhetorically formatted utterances (Atkinsonian and additional), and non-rhetorically formatted utterances, by form of audience response (N=605)*

	Rhetorical		
	Atkinsonian	Additional	Non-rhetorical
Primarily laughter (N=557)	373 (67.0%)	16 ( 2.9%)	168 (30.2%)
Primarily applause (N=13)	10 (76.9%)	2 (15.4%)	1 ( 7.7%)
Laughter and applause (N=13)	11 (84.6%)	0	2 (15.4%)
Verbal/vocal responses (N=12)	2 (16.7%)	10 (83.3%)	0
Containing disaffiliation (N=10)	9 (90.0%)	0	1 (10.0%)
Total	405 (66.9%)	28 ( 4.6%)	172 (28.4%)

Table 4.9 suggests that there is a difference between the forms of rhetorical devices that elicit verbal or vocal responses from the audience and other forms of audience response in the present corpus. More than 80% of the verbal or vocal responses in the present sample were in response to rhetorical devices that were not found by Atkinson (e.g., 1984a) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) in political speeches. This suggests that political speakers do not use this rhetorical format, although according to Bull (personal communication) an example occurred in a



political speech by David Cameron, the leader of the British Conservative party. In Cameron's speech to the Conservative Party Conference on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2005 he delivered the utterance: "I don't want to sit around and wait and lose again in four years. Do you?", to which the audience responded with a collective "No".

Table 4.9 suggests that the form of delivery preceding verbal or vocal responses is different from that for other forms of audience response. As described earlier in this chapter, most of these responses were invited by either direct questions or first pair greeting parts. These devices were coded as additional (i.e. non-Atkinsonian) forms of rhetorical devices. As can be seen in Table 4.9, a disproportionately high number of these additional devices occurred in the utterances that preceded verbal or vocal responses from the audience.

Table 4.10 presents the results of an analysis of affiliation intensity as it relates to rhetoricality for all of the performances within the present corpus.

Table 4.10

*Proportions of responses to rhetorically formatted utterances (Atkinsonian and additional), and non-rhetorically formatted utterances, by degree of affiliation intensity (N=605)*

	Weak	Affiliative Normal	Strong	Mixed
Atkinsonian (N=405)	44 (10.8%)	337 (82.8%)	17 (4.2%)	9 (2.2%)
Additional (N=28)	5 (19.2%)	19 (73.1%)	2 (7.7%)	0
Non-rhetorical (N=172)	54 (31.4%)	115 (66.9%)	2 (1.2%)	1 (0.6%)

Table 4.10 shows that most rhetorically formatted utterances (both Atkinsonian and additional) received a normal degree of audience affiliation, as did most non-rhetorically formatted utterances. A higher proportion of weakly affiliative responses was associated with non-rhetorically formatted utterances than with either Atkinsonian or additional rhetorically formatted utterances. However, this distinction is not as marked as was the case with invitationality. Based on these results, there appears to be a slight tendency for rhetorically formatted utterances to be more salient audience response invitations than non-rhetorically formatted utterances.



## *Synchrony*

The pilot study reported in Chapter 3 found that similar proportions of synchronous audience responses occurred in stand-up comedy as in political speeches, but noted considerable individual differences and called for an analysis of a wider range of stand-up comedy performances. Table 4.11 shows the proportions of synchronous and asynchronous (mismatched) audience responses for all 13 performances in the present corpus. Table 4.11 is presented in rank order of performer by percentage of synchronous responses, from highest to lowest.

Table 4.11

*Proportions of synchronous and asynchronous responses, by comedian (N=605)*

	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Sally Holloway (N=29)	24 (82.8%)	5 (17.2%)
Will Smith (N=45)	37 (82.2%)	8 (17.8%)
Gordon Southern (N=56)	46 (82.1%)	10 (17.9%)
Steve Jameson (N=22)	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.2%)
Jack Russell (N=60)	49 (81.7%)	11 (18.3%)
Richard Ayoade (N=47)	38 (80.9%)	9 (19.1%)
Greg Burns (N=40)	31 (77.5%)	9 (22.5%)
Marian Pashley (N=35)	27 (77.1%)	8 (22.9%)
Sean Lock (N=86)	63 (73.3%)	23 (26.7%)
Andy Parsons (N=44)	32 (72.7%)	12 (27.3%)
Matt King (N=68)	45 (66.2%)	23 (33.8%)
Gavin Webster (N=33)	21 (63.6%)	12 (36.4%)
Andy Zaltzman (N=40)	11 (27.5%)	29 (72.5%)
Total	442 (58.3%)	163 (41.7%)
M (SD) whole corpus	73.0% (15.1%)	27.0% (15.1%)
M (SD) except Zaltzman	76.8% (6.6%)	23.2% (6.6%)
M (SD) for political speeches	65.8% (7.7%)	34.2% (7.7%)
95% confidence intervals	61.5% - 70.0%	30.0% - 38.5%

As can be seen in Table 4.11, at least two thirds of the audience responses to most of the performers in the present corpus were synchronous. However, over two thirds of the responses during Andy Zaltzman's performance were mismatched.



Because it seems likely that this proportion of responses during Zaltzman's performance was anomalous, by comparison with the other performances in the present corpus, the means and standard deviations have been presented in two ways: both for the corpus as a whole, and for all the performances except for Zaltzman's. The mean synchronous and asynchronous responses within the present corpus, both including and excluding Zaltzman's performance, fall outside the 95% confidence intervals for the corpus of political speeches analysed by Bull and Wells (2002). The difference between the two genres becomes more marked when the results from Zaltzman's performance are excluded. There is more asynchrony, on average, in the political speeches analysed by Bull and Wells (2002) than in the sample of stand-up comedy performances comprising the present study. Including Zaltzman's data in this study increases the reported amount of asynchrony, bringing the mean for the stand-up comedy data closer to that for political speeches. However, based on this analysis of a larger sample of stand-up comedy performances, it appears that the figures for synchrony that were reported in Chapter 3 were unduly influenced by the inclusion of data from Zaltzman's performance, which the present study suggests were anomalous. That chapter's reported finding that synchrony appeared to be similar in political speeches and stand-up comedy performances is not supported by the present study.

Table 4.12 presents a summary of response totals for synchrony, separated out by the audience response headings described in Table 4.3.

Table 4.12

*Proportions of synchronous and asynchronous responses, by form of audience response (N=605)*

	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Primarily laughter (N=557)	401 (72.0%)	156 (28.0%)
Primarily applause (N=13)	12 (92.3%)	1 ( 7.7%)
Laughter and applause (N=13)	11 (84.6%)	2 (15.4%)
Verbal/vocal responses (N=12)	8 (66.7%)	4 (33.3%)
Containing disaffiliation (N=10)	10 (100%)	0
Total	442 (73.1%)	163 (26.9%)



In the present corpus, synchronous audience responses were more strongly associated with responses containing applause, and all of the responses containing tokens of overt disaffiliation within the corpus were synchronous. Verbal and vocal responses were associated with the highest degree of asynchrony in the present corpus. Table 4.12 suggests that responses containing applause are more often synchronous than responses containing laughter, and vocal responses are more often asynchronous than other forms of audience responses. In order to further understand these differences, it is important to analyse the different mismatch types for these different response tokens. This analysis is presented in Table 4.15.

Table 4.13 presents the results of an analysis of affiliation intensity as it relates to synchrony for all of the performances within the present corpus.

Table 4.13

*Proportions of synchronous and asynchronous responses, by degree of affiliation intensity (N=605)*

	Weak	Affiliative Normal	Strong	Mixed
Synchronous (N=442)	46 (10.4%)	368 (83.3%)	18 (4.1%)	10 (2.3%)
Asynchronous (N=163)	57 (35.0%)	103 (63.2%)	3 (1.8%)	0

Table 4.13 shows that most synchronous responses and most asynchronous responses received a normal degree of audience affiliation. A higher proportion of asynchronous than synchronous responses received weak affiliation, and a higher proportion of synchronous than asynchronous responses received strong affiliation. As mentioned above, all of the responses containing overt disaffiliation were synchronous. In order to discover whether clearer patterns of affiliation intensity for the asynchronous responses can be identified, it was necessary to analyse the affiliation intensity for the different mismatch types. This analysis is presented in Table 4.16.

### ***Mismatches***

In order to gain a more detailed understanding of the individual differences between comedians, it is important to analyse the different mismatch types. Table



4.14 presents an analysis of asynchronous responses for each performer by mismatch type. The percentages are reported with respect to the total number of audience responses, i.e., including synchronous responses. Table 4.14 is presented in rank order of performer by percentage of asynchronous responses, from highest to lowest (i.e., in the reverse order from Table 4.11).

Table 4.14  
*Analysis of mismatch types, by comedian (N=605)*

	Isolated	Delayed	Interruptive	Total
Andy Zaltzman (N=40)	3 ( 7.5%)	1 ( 2.5%)	26 (65.0%)	29 (72.5%)
Gavin Webster (N=33)	2 ( 6.1%)	1 ( 3.0%)	9 (27.3%)	12 (36.4%)
Matt King (N=68)	7 (10.3%)	0	19 (27.9%)	23 (33.8%)
Andy Parsons (N=44)	3 ( 6.8%)	0	9 (20.5%)	12 (27.3%)
Sean Lock (N=86)	4 ( 4.7%)	1 ( 1.2%)	19 (22.1%)	23 (26.7%)
Marian Pashley (N=35)	2 ( 5.7%)	0	8 (22.9%)	8 (22.9%)
Greg Burns (N=40)	8 (20.0%)	1 ( 2.5%)	1 ( 2.5%)	9 (22.5%)
Richard Ayoade (N=47)	2 ( 4.3%)	0	7 (14.9%)	9 (19.1%)
Jack Russell (N=60)	5 ( 8.3%)	0	7 (11.7%)	11 (18.3%)
Steve Jameson (N=22)	2 ( 9.1%)	1 ( 4.5%)	1 ( 4.5%)	4 (18.2%)
Gordon Southern (N=56)	3 ( 5.4%)	2 ( 3.6%)	6 (10.7%)	10 (17.9%)
Will Smith (N=45)	6 (13.3%)	1 ( 2.2%)	4 ( 8.9%)	8 (17.8%)
Sally Holloway (N=29)	0	0	5 (17.2%)	5 (17.2%)
Total	47 ( 7.8%)	8 ( 1.3%)	121 (20.0%)	163 (41.7%)
M (SD) whole corpus	7.8% (4.9%)	1.5% (1.6%)	19.7% (15.8%)	
M (SD) except Zaltzman	7.8% (5.1%)	1.4% (1.7%)	15.9% ( 8.5%)	

*Note.* Given that some asynchronous responses comprise more than one type of mismatch, it should be noted that the totals do not necessarily add up across each row. Of the 13 tokens that were double counted, two were both isolated and delayed, and 11 were both isolated and interruptive.

Table 4.14 confirms that asynchronous audience responses from a larger corpus of stand-up comedy performances can be categorised into the same mismatch types as the audience mismatches in applause to political speeches identified by Bull and Noordhuizen (2000). It also supports the suggestion made in Chapter 3 that the proportions of affiliative audience mismatches in stand-up



comedy routines are different from those in political speeches. Each form of audience mismatch is described separately below.

### *Isolated*

Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) found that a mean 4.7% of all audience applause during political speeches was isolated. The sample of stand-up comedy performances analysed in Chapter 3 found a mean of 10.1% (SD 2.5%). A mean of 7.8% (SD 4.9%) was found in the present corpus, with a median of 6.8%. There were considerable individual differences between the performances comprising the present corpus. Sally Holloway received no isolated responses, whereas 20% of the responses during Greg Burns' performance were isolated. Although the mean percentage of isolated responses in the present sample is lower than that found in the pilot study reported in Chapter 3 – where a mean 10.1% of isolated responses was found – this study still confirms that more isolated audience responses occur during stand-up comedy performances than political speeches.

### *Delayed*

Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) found that a mean 7.5% of delayed applause occurred in political speeches. The sample of stand-up comedy performances analysed in Chapter 3 found a mean of 2.3% (SD 1.8%). A mean of just 1.5% (SD 1.6%) was found in the present corpus. Six of the 13 performances received no delayed responses, six received one delayed response, and one received two delayed responses. The highest proportion of delayed responses was received by Steve Jameson (4.5%), although it should be noted that this percentage accounts for only one delayed response during his routine (the shortest performance in the corpus). The mean percentage of delayed responses in the present sample is lower than that found in the pilot study reported in Chapter 3, suggesting that delayed responses in stand-up comedy performances are much rarer than in political speeches.

### *Interruptive*

Coded as “audience applause interrupts speaker”, Bull and Noordhuizen (2000, p. 285) found a mean 17.8% of interruptive applause in political speeches. A mean of 19.7% (SD 15.8%) was found in the present corpus, with a median of 17.2%. All of the performances comprising the present corpus received at least one interruptive response; however, there was considerable variability between the different performances. Much of this is accounted for by Andy Zaltzman's performance; if this is excluded from the analysis, the mean rate of interruptive



responses decreases to 15.9% and the standard deviation is reduced to 8.5%. In the present study, the proportion of interruptive responses in stand-up comedy is considerably closer to that found in the political speeches analysed by Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) than was found in the pilot study in Chapter 3, which reported a mean 26.6% of interruptive responses (SD 27.6%). However, the range of individual differences in the present sample suggests that it would be important to analyse a larger sample of stand-up comedy performances in order for these findings to be supported with confidence.

In order to gain a clearer understanding of asynchrony with respect to the different forms of audience responses, it is important to analyse the different mismatch types. Table 4.15 presents a summary of response totals for mismatch types, separated out by the audience response headings described in Table 4.3.

Table 4.15  
*Analysis of mismatch types, by form of audience response (N=605)*

	Isolated	Delayed	Interruptive	Total
Primarily laughter (N=557)	44 ( 7.9%)	7 (1.3%)	118 (21.2%)	156 (28.0%)
Primarily applause (N=13)	0	0	1 (7.7%)	1 ( 7.7%)
Laughter and applause (N=13)	0	0	2 (15.4%)	2 (15.4%)
Verbal/vocal responses (N=12)	3 (25.0%)	1 (8.3%)	0	4 (33.3%)
Containing disaffiliation (N=10)	0	0	0	0
Total	47 ( 7.8%)	8 (1.3%)	121 (20.0%)	163 (41.7%)

*Note.* All of the double counted items in this table are for primarily laughter. Of the 13 tokens that were double counted, two were isolated and delayed, and 11 were isolated and interruptive.

While it must be noted that the sample size at this level of analysis is very small, especially for the non-laughter responses, all of the mismatched audience responses in the present corpus that contained collective applause were interruptive, whereas all of the mismatched vocal responses in the sample were either isolated or delayed. Asynchronous responses containing primarily laughter featured all three mismatch types, with 21.2% being interruptive, 7.9% isolated, and 1.3% delayed.



Given the aforementioned sample size, these figures must be considered as indicative rather than conclusive.

Table 4.16 presents the results of an analysis of affiliation intensity as it relates to mismatch types for all of the performances within the present corpus.

Table 4.16  
*Analysis of mismatch types, by degree of affiliation intensity (N=176)*

	Weak	Affiliative Normal	Strong
Isolated (N=47)	45 (96.0%)	2 ( 4.0%)	0
Delayed (N=8)	4 (50.0%)	4 (50.0%)	0
Interruptive (N=121)	21 (17.4%)	97 (80.2%)	3 (2.5%)

*Note.* This total includes double counting. All of the incidences of double counting included isolated mismatch types (2 isolated and delayed; 11 isolated and interruptive). All of the double counted responses were weakly affiliative.

Table 4.16 shows that the vast majority of isolated responses (96%) were associated with weak affiliation intensity. Perhaps it is more surprising to notice that two of the isolated response incidences within the corpus (4%) were of normal affiliation intensity; this appears to be unusually enthusiastic for isolated responses. Half of the delayed responses within the corpus were associated with weak and half with normal affiliation intensity. As previously stated, however, there was a very small number of delayed responses within the corpus, and a much larger sample would need to be analysed in order to substantiate this finding with any degree of confidence. Most of the interruptive responses (80.2%) were associated with normal affiliation intensity. This percentage appears to be comparable to the 83.3% normal affiliation intensity reported for synchronous responses, and suggests that the quality of interruptive responses is different from that of either isolated or delayed responses. All of the mismatch types receiving strong affiliation intensity were interruptive responses.



## DISCUSSION

The present analysis has confirmed that the forms of audience responses within stand-up comedy performances are more varied than those of audience responses to political speakers. In political speeches, the salient form of audience response is applause; this is by far the most common form of response within that genre (e.g., Bull, 2003). As might be expected, the most typical form of audience response during stand-up comedy performances is laughter; however, as the present analysis has shown, stand-up comedy audiences respond with a diverse range of response tokens. In addition to laughter, the present corpus also contained audience responses such as applause, cheers, whistles, and verbal utterances. Some audience turns contained a single form of response, and some contained multiple forms.

Several response incidences in the present corpus contained combinations of audience response tokens. Even using sophisticated microanalytic techniques, it was not always easy to distinguish the different forms of audience responses that occurred during such combinations. Listening to the audio track on headphones with eyes closed appeared to be the most effective way of detecting the more subtle tokens, such as isolated applause within collective laughter; however, it is not certain that every single instance of the more subtle forms of response was detected. As described above, the input for the present study was a series of televised broadcasts of live stand-up comedy performances which were imported digitally using Adobe Premier software. Adobe Premier is able to present the auditory and visual elements of the performance separately, showing a visual display of the sound track in a different part of the computer screen alongside the accompanying performance. However, it is not able to split the sound display into separate channels for performer and audience, if the sound track has been captured from a single device. The present analysis would have been much easier if it had been possible to obtain separate video footage for the performer and the audience. Adobe Premier has the capacity to manage multiple auditory streams and display them simultaneously; however, in order to do this, the streams would need to be captured from different devices. Separate visual information about the behaviours of the audience throughout the performances would also have been beneficial. Such information would be able to support the observations made in this thesis, all of which were based on auditory information alone. For example, video footage of the audience would have made it possible to see a person clapping if the sound track



had not been sufficiently acute to detect it. It would also have been possible to observe the extent to which audience members were focused on the performance, how often their attention moved to fellow audience members, their facial expressions, hand gestures, and so forth. Again, Adobe Premier is capable of managing multiple visual streams simultaneously. However, despite the desire for even richer source material, it must be stated that the functionality of Adobe Premier, even with input from only a single video channel, was extremely useful for the level of fine-grained analysis needed for the present study.

Results showed that audiences respond approximately every eight and a half seconds during stand-up comedy performances. Due to the low standard deviation reported in Table 4.2, it is probable that this rate of response can be generalised to other samples of stand-up comedy performances of similar durations for similar audiences. However, as the present sample consisted of relatively short routines, with each performance lasting between just under three and a half minutes and just over ten minutes, it is not known whether these findings would also hold for stand-up comedy performances lasting for an hour or more, or for performances not recorded for broadcast on television. It is recommended that more heterogeneous samples of stand-up comedy performances are analysed in order to substantiate this finding across different durations and qualities of stand-up comedy performances, and also with audiences of different sizes and within different cultures. Based on the variation within the present sample, it could be hypothesised for such future studies that audiences to stand-up comedy performances will respond at a rate of between five and twelve times per minute, on average.

The present sample was relatively limited as to the number of non-laughter responses it contained. Analysis of these incidences suggested that verbal audience responses tend to occur at the start of stand-up comedy performances and applause responses are more salient in the final audience turn. In contrast, responses that contain a combination of laughter and other response tokens (either affiliative or disaffiliative) tend to occur at any point during the performance. It would be important to analyse a much wider sample of stand-up comedy performances in order to ascertain whether these findings can be supported within the genre as a whole.

From a qualitative analysis of audience responses containing applause within the present corpus, it is possible to hypothesise that the function of applause



in stand-up comedy is to show a more enthusiastic reception than laughter alone. The audience appear to want to give something “extra”, or to need to give “something more” than a laughter response will convey. One place in which this occurs invariably is at the end of a performance, as noted by Rutter (1997); all of the performances in the present corpus received collective applause in response to the performer’s final turn. The present analysis has also shown that applause in stand-up comedy can occur in response to a particularly popular public opinion, as in the first example presented from Andy Parsons’ performance. It can occur in response to direct requests, as in the examples presented from Jack Russell’s performance, and malfunctions in technical support, as in the example presented from Gordon Southern’s performance. Applause can also occur at a point when an audience is already responding with strong collective laughter and wish to indicate an increased appreciation of the comedian’s performance at that point. In these cases, it appears as though applause is produced in addition to affiliative laughter when the audience wish to continue conveying their appreciation and “simply can’t laugh any louder”.

There appears to be a qualitative difference between audience responses containing applause without laughter and those containing both laughter and applause, in that the responses without laughter appear to be more formulaic and in response to less subtle cues. This lack of subtlety also holds for verbal (but not vocal) audience responses, many of which were performance-initial responses and could be construed as part of a formal greeting sequence. Indeed, the verbal responses which were invited at later points in the performances within the present corpus were isolated rather than collective, suggesting that the most salient place for verbal responses is at the start of stand-up comedy performances. Based on the present sample, audience responses containing a combination of laughter and collective applause appear to be salient at any point during a stand-up comedy performance.

So far it has been suggested that the techniques used by performers to invite laughter responses are considerably more varied and subtle than the techniques they use to invite either applause responses or verbal responses. The single vocal response within the present corpus appeared to be similar in character to the laughter responses, in that it was invited more subtly than both the invitations for verbal responses and those for applause without laughter. It also occurred part way



through a performance rather than as part of a beginning or ending sequence. It would obviously be necessary to analyse a much larger sample of vocal, non-verbal responses to verify this speculative interpretation from a single instance, however.

All of the responses in the present corpus which contained overt tokens of both affiliation and disaffiliation included collective laughter. Thus they appeared to be more similar in form to the responses containing a combination of laughter and applause and the vocal response just described than to the verbal responses or the responses containing applause without laughter. During these mixed responses, the audience members who produced tokens of overt disaffiliation may have been disaffiliating with the audience members who were already producing affiliative laughter. Chapter 6 will suggest that another form of audience disaffiliation is a failure to respond at a response invitation point. However, this is no longer an option after a large section of the audience has already begun responding affiliatively, so the only way for other audience members to indicate their disaffiliation overtly is to begin producing disaffiliative response tokens at that point.

Another possible interpretation is that the same audience members begin their turn by producing collective laughter in response to the invitational formatting or delivery of the performer's utterance, and then realise part way through their response that in fact there was something objectionable in the speech content of that utterance (or its implicature) to which they now wish to show their disaffiliation. This interpretation would suggest that audiences are automatically "primed" to produce a response to certain invitational tokens, but that their analysis of the performer's speech content which does not form part of an invitational token may take slightly longer to process.

The present analysis does not give any indication as to which of these two interpretations is the more likely. A more detailed analysis of a considerably larger number of combined affiliative and disaffiliative responses would be necessary, ideally with the assistance of video footage of the audience, so that it could be identified whether it is the same people who produce both affiliative and disaffiliative response tokens or whether those tokens are produced by different audience members.

To simplify the analyses of invitationality, rhetoricality, synchrony, and mismatch types, the forms of audience response in the present study were grouped



into broad categories of solely or primarily laughter, primarily applause, laughter and applause, verbal and vocal responses, and responses containing both affiliative and disaffiliative tokens, as described in Table 4.3. It is possible that these superordinate groupings might have masked some potentially interesting findings about the less frequent forms of response tokens in the present corpus – such as, say, cheers or whistles – but the relative rarity of such tokens in the present corpus did not merit a more finely grained analysis, especially given that those tokens did not occur in isolation at any point within the corpus. In order for such tokens to be understood more fully, it is likely that a considerably larger corpus of stand-up comedy performances would need to be analysed.

Chapter 3 suggested that the findings for invitationality and synchrony were similar in stand-up comedy performances and political speeches, but that rhetoricality and mismatch types were dissimilar. The present study confirmed that invitationality appears to be similar, but found that synchrony differs, along with rhetoricality and mismatch types. However, if the ambiguously invited or uninvited responses were not included in the analysis for invitationality, the rate of invited responses would be higher in stand-up comedy than in political speeches. Invitationality is, however, the only category of those which have been analysed in both genres where a reasonable degree of similarity between the two genres was found. It would be useful to perform similar analyses of these four coding dimensions across samples from a range of different genres of performer-audience interaction, in order to ascertain whether there are any other cross-genre similarities. Based on the results of the present analysis, the initial hypothesis for such further studies would be that invitationality is the most likely of the coding categories used in the present study to display cross-genre similarity.

The analysis of rhetoricality in the present chapter showed that stand-up comedians tend to use fewer standard rhetorical formats to invite audience responses than was suggested in the pilot study reported in Chapter 3. The present study found that, even after accounting for additional rhetorical formats over and above those identified by Atkinson (e.g., 1984a) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986), more than a quarter of the audience responses in the present corpus (25.4%) were not in response to rhetorically formatted utterances, compared with less than a fifth (18.8%) reported in Chapter 3. The difference in use of standard rhetorical devices between the two genres holds for all of the performances in the present



corpus: none of the stand-up comedians in the present sample used standard rhetorical formats to the extent of the 95% confidence intervals of the politicians studied by Bull and Wells (2002). The fact that even fewer responses in the present sample were found to be invited by the use of standard rhetorical devices than was suggested in Chapter 3 underlines the call for a detailed analysis of other forms of response invitations that are used by stand-up comedians, and such an analysis will be presented in Chapter 5.

As regards synchrony, although Chapter 3 found that 64.4% of audience responses were synchronous, this figure increased to 73.0% in the present analysis (76.8% if the responses to Andy Zaltzman's performance are excluded). It appears that the finding reported in Chapter 3, that similar proportions of synchrony occur in stand-up comedy performances and political speeches, was premature. As described in the Results section, Andy Zaltzman's performance (one of the four comprising the pilot study reported in Chapter 3) appeared to be anomalous when compared with the other 12 performances in the present corpus. The proportion of asynchronous responses during Zaltzman's performance was more similar to the proportions of synchronous responses in all of the other performances, with more than twice as many asynchronous responses than any of the other performances received. Thus the figures reported in Chapter 3 were apparently skewed by the inclusion of Zaltzman's performance, and the present study shows that there is no reason to suggest that the proportion of synchronous responses in stand-up comedy is similar to that in political speeches.

The present analysis of mismatch types largely supports the findings reported in Chapter 3. Isolated responses are more common in stand-up comedy than political speeches, and delayed responses are considerably rarer. Interruptive responses in the present sample were found to be more common in stand-up comedy than political speeches, but by less of a margin than was reported in Chapter 3. The findings for each of these three mismatch types will be discussed in more detail below.

Although the proportion of isolated responses identified in the present corpus was smaller than that reported in Chapter 3, there were still found to be almost twice as many isolated responses in stand-up comedy performances as in the political speeches reported by Bull and Noordhuizen (2000). As noted in Chapter 3, it appears as though the response of a lone audience member during a stand-up



comedy performance may carry less of a stigma than being a lone audience responder during a political speech.

As stated in Chapter 3, delayed responses presuppose the projection of an appropriate sequential position for an audience response. Even with the larger sample size analysed in the present study, there were still very few instances of delayed responses; however, all of them were found to be invited. A qualitative analysis of all of the delayed responses in the present corpus will be presented in Chapter 6, in which delays will be considered as one possible form of audience disaffiliation. It is likewise possible that delayed responses only occur when a performer is insufficiently skilled to “talk into” the audience’s silence after a projected response invitation; this issue will be further considered in a discussion of the features constituting skill as a stand-up comedian, which will be presented in Chapter 7.

While delays of a second or more are rare in stand-up comedy performances, shorter delays do sometimes occur. Given the capability of Adobe Premier software to examine digitised footage to an accuracy level of one twenty-fifth of a second, it would be empirically possible to identify delays of shorter duration. However, in performing such an analysis, it would be important not to confound delays with natural pauses, and thus a range of potential delay times would need to be tested in order to identify an optimum number of frames (between 1 and 24) to be considered as a genuine delay from the perspective of a stand-up comedy performance.

Chapter 3 suggested that there are more interruptive responses, on average, in stand-up comedy performances than in political speeches. The present study supports this assertion, but to a much lesser extent. There is still a high degree of variability in the rate of interruptive responses between different performers, which suggests that an even larger sample would need to be analysed before a reliable claim can be made as to whether the rate of interruptive responses in stand-up comedy is similar or dissimilar to that found in political speeches.

In the present sample, the rate of interruptive responses during Andy Zaltzman’s performance was considerably higher than that during any of the other performances. This appears to be a qualitatively different feature of Zaltzman’s performance style. On several occasions during his performance, Zaltzman completed an invitational utterance to which the audience did not immediately



respond. Rather than waiting for their potential response (which would have caused a delay and, as suggested above, could have been seen as a lack of performance skill), Zaltzman frequently continued with his next utterance. However, towards the beginning of this subsequent utterance, the audience often produced a delayed response to the previous utterance (indicating that they “got the joke”). To distinguish this phenomenon from a delayed response, which has already been given a very precise definition, this particular form of response will be termed a “deferred response”. Deferred responses seem to be more likely to occur when the content of a performer’s utterance is complex and “clever”, potentially requiring greater cognitive ability to decode. Under the coding system as presently defined, deferred responses are necessarily coded as interruptive. It is possible that, for future analyses of mismatches, the concept of deferred responses would need to be accounted for by using a separate form of coding category. However, if deferred responses are not frequently found in other performers’ styles of delivery, they can be considered an idiosyncrasy of the performance style of Andy Zaltzman. More instances of stand-up comedy performances by a wider range of performers would need to be analysed in order to discover how widespread a phenomenon the deferred response is in stand-up comedy.

The analyses comparing the different forms of audience responses with the coding categories of invitationality, rhetoricality, synchrony, and mismatch types found that all forms of audience responses which did not consist of primarily laughter were invited. The majority of verbal and vocal responses were in response to additional rhetorical devices (i.e., rhetorical devices that were not identified by Atkinson, 1984a, or Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986, and which tend not to be used in political speeches). One reason why these devices are rarely used in political speeches may be that politicians usually seek to invite audience applause rather than verbal responses. Verbal and vocal responses were also associated with the highest proportion of asynchrony within the present corpus, which again might make them appear less popular for political speakers, given that synchronous responses in the present corpus were more strongly associated with responses containing applause. Asynchronous verbal responses in the present sample appear to be very different from asynchronous applause responses, in that the mismatched applause responses were all interruptive whereas the mismatched verbal responses were all isolated or delayed. However, it must be acknowledged that the present study only included a



small sample size of non-laughter responses, and therefore the findings for these responses must be considered highly speculative. If the analysis of a larger sample were to confirm the findings reported here, it is possible that they would support politicians' tendencies not to use invitational rhetorical devices that typically invite verbal responses rather than applause.

The analyses for audience affiliation intensity found that weakly affiliative responses tended to be associated with uninvited responses and normally affiliative responses tended to be associated with invited responses. This apparent double-dissociation between invited and uninvited audience responses in relation to the intensity of the audience's affiliation at that response point may prove to be a useful indicator for relative skill as a stand-up comedian. In Chapter 7, these figures will be analysed for each individual performer within the corpus, for both the unambiguously invited and unambiguously uninvited responses within their respective performances (see Table 7.4, p. 247). The hypothesis is that more skilled performers will have a higher proportion of weak responses when those responses were uninvited, and a lower percentage of weak responses when those responses were invited.

Both strong audience affiliation intensity and responses containing a combination of affiliative and disaffiliative response tokens were exclusively associated with invited responses within the present corpus; however, because these responses were relatively rare within this sample, any further interpretations are highly speculative. Based on the analysis in response to research question 4.3, it is possible that strongly affiliative responses might be an indication of skill as a performer only if those responses contain laughter. Given that all of the mixed responses within the present corpus contained laughter, this suggestion might also hold true for responses containing a combination of affiliative and disaffiliative tokens. However, analysis of a much larger sample would be needed in order for these suggestions to be substantiated.

The analysis of affiliation intensity for audience mismatches suggests a potential dissociation between "positive mismatches" and "negative mismatches". All of the mismatches that received strong affiliation intensity within the present corpus were interruptive, and more than 80% of the interruptive responses in the corpus received normal affiliation intensity, with only 17.4% receiving weak affiliation intensity. This suggests that interruptive responses have a similar profile



to synchronous responses, and thus proposes that interruptive mismatches are positive. Indeed, Bull (2006) suggested that applause interruptions during political speeches may indicate audience enthusiasm. Conversely, 96% of the mismatches that received weak affiliation intensity in the present corpus were isolated, suggesting that isolated responses are negative. There were only eight delayed responses within the present corpus, half of which received weakly affiliative responses and half of which received normally affiliative responses. Although fewer delayed responses than isolated responses were of weak affiliation intensity, given that delays are rare and highly salient in stand-up comedy performances, it is suggested that they are also considered to be negative mismatches. Further discussion of negative mismatch types will be presented in Chapter 6, which will analyse potential forms of audience disaffiliation, and of positive mismatch types in Chapter 7, which will address skill factors in the performance of stand-up comedy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The present chapter has extended the findings reported in Chapter 3 by substantiating the assertion that invitationality appears to be used to a similar extent in stand-up comedy and political speeches and confirming that rhetoricality and mismatch types appear to be different in the two genres. It has also demonstrated that, despite initial indications of potential cross-genre similarity, synchrony appears to be different in the two genres. It would be beneficial to perform similar analyses on samples from other genres of performer-audience interaction, in order to ascertain whether invitationality appears to be similar within a broader range of contexts. Based on the present analysis, it is hypothesised that invitationality will show similar proportions across all genres of performer-audience interaction. This is a strong hypothesis, and thus should be relatively easy to disprove. Further analyses from different genres are necessary, however, because without obtaining supporting evidence from such further analyses, the similarity between political speeches and stand-up comedy could be merely coincidental.

The present study found that standard rhetorical devices were used less frequently by stand-up comedians than had been suggested in Chapter 3. It is therefore important to undertake a detailed analysis of the invited responses in the present corpus in order to ascertain which additional (non-rhetorical) techniques are used by stand-up comedians in order to invite audience laughter. The results of this analysis will be reported in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 5

### What constitutes a laughter invitation?

### An analysis of delivery in stand-up comedy

#### INTRODUCTION

Chapters 3 and 4 showed that it was broadly possible to apply a series of codings that had been developed by Bull and his colleagues for analysing political speeches (e.g., Bull, 2006) to the analysis of stand-up comedy performances, but that in some respects the codings were less easy to apply to stand-up comedy material. In addition, it became apparent that the stand-up comedians in the present corpus used a wider range of invitational techniques than could be accounted for by the political coding schemes alone. Since those codings were shown to be insufficient to account for all of the invitational techniques that take place in stand-up comedy performances, the present chapter aims to investigate the various additional ways in which stand-up comedians invite affiliative responses from their audiences.

One way of accounting for the invitational techniques that occur in stand-up comedy performances is to propose a taxonomy of the invitational techniques that occurred during the present corpus of 13 stand-up comedy performances, and a substantial section of this chapter will be devoted to presenting such a taxonomy. This will include and expand on the category of rhetoricality in political speeches, as identified by Atkinson (e.g., 1984a) and further developed by Heritage and Greatbatch (1986). It will also incorporate a number of additional invitational techniques, including the four that were identified by Rutter (1997) as being specific to stand-up comedy (i.e., alliteration and assonance, intonation, reincorporations, and adoption of voices), along with further techniques that were observed empirically within the corpus. The techniques to be included in the proposed taxonomy will be referred to as “comedy invitation devices”, because they are considered to be the devices that are used by stand-up comedy performers to invite affiliative responses from their audiences.

The studies to be reported in this and the remaining chapters are of a more exploratory nature than those that have been presented so far. For example, the



quantitative analysis comparing the use of rhetorical devices and gestures reported in this chapter may have been conducted at too gross a level to be fully informative. Audience responses were simply coded as to whether or not a gesture had been used by the performer immediately prior to that response, and no account was taken of the type of gesture involved. Although detailed systems for gesture coding do exist (e.g., Bull, 1987), it was considered more relevant at this stage to begin with an overall measure. It is suggested that more detailed analyses can be carried out in future work. This study is presented as a first step in quantitatively exploring the different invitational techniques used by stand-up comedians, rather than a well-controlled attempt to conduct such work. None of the other aspects of the proposed taxonomy have yet been tested empirically, and it is presented here as a guideline for future research.

The standard rhetorical devices that have been identified as invitational devices in both political speeches and stand-up comedy tend to elicit very different audience responses in those different genres: primarily applause in political speeches, and primarily laughter in stand-up comedy. The most likely reason for this is considered to be the contextual difference between the two genres, in terms of situation and setting (e.g., Rutter, 1997). To take an example from a different genre, Tony Blair famously gave a talk to the Women's Institute during which he received heckles and boos (e.g., BBC News, 2000). It can be argued that his performance was poorly received because his audience considered that he was using it as an opportunity to make a political speech. Had he delivered the same talk in the context of a political rally, it would arguably have been likely to receive predominantly audience applause. If a senior politician were to deliver a political speech in a stand-up comedy venue, the audience would be equally likely to produce disaffiliative responses, because they have chosen to go there in order to see comedy performances.

It is also possible that the production of laughter instead of applause in response to the delivery of standard rhetorical devices in stand-up comedy performances is directly related to the speech content of the performers' turns. This is an empirical question that can be resolved by making reliable quantitative comparisons between different invitational techniques. One purpose of the qualitative taxonomy to be proposed in the present chapter is to provide a



framework within which such further empirical work can be conducted. For this reason, both form-based and content-based invitational devices will be included.

The invitational techniques used by the stand-up comedians in the present corpus were identified qualitatively, by repeated detailed observation of the performances within the corpus. Categories for these comedy invitation devices were then generated inductively. As mentioned above, the techniques identified by Atkinson (e.g., 1984a), Heritage and Greatbatch (1986), and Rutter (1997) were among the invitational techniques identified. Because of an emphasis in the field of humour research on the importance of incongruity (e.g., Martin, 2007), it was decided to seek ways in which this could be identified as an invitational device, or series of devices, within the present corpus. However, it was found to be difficult to identify incongruity *per se*, for reasons that will be explained below (see pp. 158-159). It was generally considered more appropriate, based on the principles of microanalysis, to use detailed observation of the material itself to identify the most salient categories for the proposed taxonomy. The literature was referred to when relevant, e.g., Rutter's (1997) study of stand-up comedy performances, and the rhetorical techniques already identified in Chapters 3 and 4.

While Chapters 3 and 4 suggested that comedians and politicians appear to invite similar proportions of affiliative audience responses (invitatoriness), those chapters also showed that the use of a limited range of standard rhetorical devices (rhetoricity) is less prevalent in stand-up comedy than in the political speeches studied by Bull and Wells (2002). In an attempt to compare the use of rhetoricity with another form of invitational device that was widely used in the present corpus, this chapter will compare the use of standard rhetorical formats with an entirely different form of invitational device: the performers' use of gesture.

The aims of the present study can be summarised in the following research questions:

### **Research questions**

- 5.1 What specific techniques do stand-up comedians use to invite affiliative responses from their audiences?
- 5.2 Can these different proposed techniques be grouped together into logical superordinate categories to form a suggested taxonomy of invitatoriness?



- 5.3 Can audience responses during stand-up comedy performances be reliably categorised as being in response to utterances containing one or more gestures towards the end point of the performer's utterance?
- 5.4 If so, to what extent do utterances containing gestures contribute to invitationality, and to what extent do utterances containing standard rhetorical devices contribute to invitationality?
- 5.5 How frequently do these two qualitatively distinct invitational techniques co-occur, and which of them correlates more highly with invitationality?

Research questions 5.1 and 5.2 will be addressed in the next section of this chapter, and research questions 5.3 - 5.5 will be addressed in the following section. The remainder of this chapter will therefore be divided into two parts: firstly, a proposed taxonomy of comedy invitation devices, and secondly, a quantitative analysis of two of the specific invitational techniques that were identified within the corpus. The first of these sections will propose a range of invitational techniques, based on issues identified in the literature as being relevant to stand-up comedy (e.g., Rutter, 1997), as well as on inductive observations of the behaviour of performers in the present corpus. The second section will then present a comparative analysis of two very different invitational devices used within the corpus, i.e., the use of standard rhetorical devices and the use of gestures.

### **COMEDY INVITATION DEVICES: TOWARDS A PROPOSED TAXONOMY**

In response to research questions 5.1 and 5.2, this section of the chapter will report the results of a conceptual analysis of all the performers' turns within the present corpus that immediately preceded affiliative audience responses. Most of these turns took the form of utterances, but in some cases they did not contain any spoken material; these instances will be discussed in the section about narrative gestures below (see pp. 181-182). A qualitative analysis of the whole corpus of 13 stand-up comedy performances was conducted, in order to identify a diverse range of invitational techniques that were used by different performers in the corpus. These observed invitational techniques were then grouped together conceptually into superordinate category headings, in order to achieve a theoretically logical



taxonomy of invitational devices used in stand-up comedy. No account was taken of the frequency with which each individual technique, or each superordinate group of techniques, occurred within the corpus. The key aims in creating this taxonomy were clarity, transparency, and logical consistency.

The present study was based on the full corpus of 13 stand-up comedy routines performed by British comedians on *The Stand-Up Show*, as described in Chapter 4. Each transcript was marked with every incidence of affiliative response from the audience, as described in Chapter 3. Each affiliative audience response (regardless of response type) was coded for the dimension of invitationality (see Chapter 3), with the possible values of invited, ambiguous, or uninvited. Every response that was coded as invited was then qualitatively analysed for potential inclusion in the present chapter. Invited responses were those where it was considered that the delivery of the performer indicated that he or she desired an affiliative audience response at that point. As stated in Chapter 4, the level of inter-observer agreement with a second coder for invitationality was 94.1% (N=136).

This taxonomy of comedy invitation devices is presented, with examples, as a potential outline of the various processes that may be taking place when audiences respond affiliatively to stand-up comedians. Whereas every suggested comedy invitation device is described separately in the following taxonomy, it is usual for more than one method to be used in combination (similar to the “combination” category of standard rhetorical devices reported by Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986). By listing and describing each method of invitation separately in this thesis, it is hoped that future categorisation and quantification will be facilitated – not only within stand-up comedy, but also within other genres of public performance. Before describing the comedy invitation devices themselves, a suggested hierarchical taxonomy for these devices will be presented, including explanations for the rationale of grouping the various individual devices into their chosen superordinate categories. Each of the proposed comedy invitation devices will then be described in turn, including illustrative examples from within the present corpus. However, first of all, it is necessary to explain the concept of comedy invitation devices and the benefits of identifying them.

A comedy invitation device is a comedian’s use of a specific verbal or non-verbal technique in order to invite an affiliative response from the audience. As stated above, comedy invitation devices may either be used individually or in



combination. Examination of the present corpus suggests that it is much more usual to use these devices in combination than individually, and it is possible that combinations of devices are more successful at inviting affiliative audience responses than single devices.

Comedy invitation devices may or may not be successful at eliciting affiliative responses from the audience. Having identified these invitation devices empirically, based on the audience's overt responses within the present corpus, it then becomes possible to identify such devices in the absence of any responses from the audience. Examples of such failed invitations will be examined in Chapter 6. All of the examples to be described in the current chapter successfully elicited affiliative responses from the audience.

Comedy invitation devices in stand-up comedy performances are not synonymous with applause invitations in political speeches. However, the two concepts are related, and comedy invitation devices can be seen as an extension and development of the theory of applause invitations (e.g., Bull, 2006). It has been found – by Rutter (1997) and in Chapters 3 and 4 herein – that stand-up comedians also use the same techniques to invite laughter and other affiliative responses from their audiences as politicians use to invite audience applause. For this reason, the standard rhetorical devices that have been identified by Atkinson (e.g., 1984a) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) in political studies are included in the taxonomy presented in this chapter, and they can be regarded as an important subcategory within it.

As previously stated, the comedy invitation devices observed within the present corpus were grouped together into superordinate categories. A conceptual structure for this proposed taxonomy is presented in Table 5.1.



Table 5.1  
*Proposed hierarchical taxonomy of comedy invitation devices*

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4		
Verbal	Rhetoricality	Atkinsonian	Contrast List Puzzle-solution Headline-punchline Position taking Pursuit Question Direct request Greeting Aside		
		Additional			
		Incongruity	Absurdist Real world knowledge Preceding discourse Challenged expectation		
		Referentiality	Internal	Setting Reincorporation	
			External	People Brands Organisations Titles Locations Slogans/catchphrases Meta-humour	
	Non-verbal	Rudeness Deprecation	Self Others		
		Vocal	Intonation Pauses Alliteration/assonance Adoption of voices Non-linguistic noises		
			Non-vocal	Gesture	Illustrative Narrative Accompanying
				Gaze Stance Use of props	

As can be seen from Table 5.1, a hierarchical structure for the proposed taxonomy has been suggested. The taxonomy is presented as a hierarchy, in part, to facilitate the conceptual understanding of a multiplicity of proposed invitational



devices, and also to more readily enable comparisons to be made with other genres of public performance. It is hoped that further studies will identify invitational devices used by performers in different genres, and that this taxonomy will be updated and expanded upon in the future. It is considered that a clearly defined and delineated conceptual starting point is useful at the present time, and this taxonomy is presented with these considerations in mind.

The highest order of separation in the taxonomy is between verbal and non-verbal devices, which is a widely recognised logical division (e.g., Bull, 2002). Verbal devices include rhetoricality (both Atkinsonian and additional), incongruity, referentiality (both internal and external), rudeness, and deprecation. Non-verbal devices have been further separated into vocal and non-vocal devices. This is another well-accepted logical division (e.g., Vrij, 2000). Each of the sub-headings in the proposed taxonomy will be explained in detail below, and empirical examples of each of the lower-level invitational devices from the performances in the present corpus will be presented.

### **Verbal**

Verbal devices are specifically associated with the content or format of uttered speech; in other words, how the comedian uses words. This category includes the standard rhetorical devices identified by Atkinson (e.g., 1984a) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986); these were also found to be used in stand-up comedy by Rutter (1997). However, the studies reported in Chapters 3 and 4 indicated that these rhetorical devices did not account for as high a proportion of the audience response as those in the political studies reported by Bull (2006). Even after identifying three additional rhetorical devices that are used in stand-up comedy (see Chapter 3), it became clear that other verbal techniques were also being used by the comedians in this sample to invite affiliative audience responses.

In addition to rhetoricality, it is proposed that incongruity, referentiality, rudeness, and deprecation are different verbal techniques that contribute towards invitationality in stand-up comedy performances. Examples of each of these verbal devices will be presented below, before going on to describe the non-verbal invitational techniques that were found in the corpus.

#### ***Atkinsonian rhetorical devices***

Atkinsonian rhetorical devices are the standard rhetorical devices identified in political speeches by Atkinson (e.g., 1984b) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986).



It is important to note that, in the current corpus, Atkinsonian rhetorical devices are typically used in conjunction with other verbal and non-verbal techniques. Although stand-up comedians appear to make extensive use of rhetorical devices as laughter invitations, these devices are not necessarily sufficient in themselves to invite affiliative audience responses within stand-up comedy performances. The examples presented here are thus not “pure” rhetorical devices, although they do all demonstrate the use of the rhetorical formats originally identified by Atkinson (e.g., 1984b) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986).

### *Contrast*

Rutter (1997) found that the contrast device is used in stand-up comedy performances. An example of a contrast device from Andy Zaltzman’s performance was presented on p. 76, and two further examples from different comedians in the current corpus are described below.

Approximately one and a half minutes into his performance, Greg Burns used a contrast to good effect.

Most stand-ups are single, actually. I worked this out, quite recently, I think it’s a lifestyle thing, I think it’s sleeping patterns. My last girlfriend works in the city. So she had to get up about- six fifteen, six thirty. I do stand up so I get up about- Thursday.

This utterance contrasted a time with a day of the week, thus challenging expectations (see below, p. 161), and received enthusiastic collective laughter from the audience. It is possible that the laughter invitation is carried by the contrast, the incongruity, or the combination of the two.

The following example of a contrast occurred approximately three minutes into Sean Lock’s performance:

I went out, I went out, I went to the supermarket, I bought this massive orange. I got it home, and it turned out to be a grapefruit. Huh, oh dear-

This contrast between two different items of fruit, while being well formatted rhetorically, resulted in a “polite” rather than enthusiastic laughter response from the audience. This may suggest that, in contrast to political speeches,



contrast devices are considerably more effective in stand-up comedy when used in conjunction with other invitational techniques.

### *List*

Three-part lists (and lists containing more than three parts) are used in stand-up comedy performances, as noted by Rutter (1997). An example of a three-part list from Will Smith's performance was presented on p. 76, and two further examples of lists from different comedians are described below.

About three quarters of a minute into his performance, Steve Jameson delivered the following utterances, culminating in a three-part list:

Fifty four's a great age to look back at your life, see what you've achieved, what you've got to show. I've got be honest with you, I got two suits, about half an hours' worth of jokes, [1] and a rectal problem. [2]

The audience responded with collective laughter at point [1], after the second list item, and they respond again and even more enthusiastically at point [2], after the final item. It is noticeable that the second item in the list was self-deprecatory, and the final list item was both self-deprecatory and "rude" (see below, pp. 171-173). The laughter invitation was achieved by the combination of these elements and the three-part list format.

The following utterance delivered by Andy Parsons, just under a minute into his performance, contained a list in four parts. The final list element also contains a contrast, both in terms of the lexical items themselves and in terms of the external referentiality (see below, pp. 164-170) of the list items.

You can always tell, can't you, the difference between American politicians and British politicians. Right? Kennedy: shot; Lincoln: shot; Reagan: shot; John Prescott: hit by an egg.

The audience responded with appreciative laughter. Parsons' hand gestures and intonation made it clear that the list was not complete after the third item, and no audience response was forthcoming until the end of the fourth and final list item.



### *Puzzle-solution*

A puzzle-solution is a rhetorical device in two parts, the second of which constitutes the laughter invitation. In the first part, the performer establishes some kind of puzzle or problem, and in the second part, a resolution is provided. A puzzle-solution device from Steve Jameson's performance was presented on p. 76, and further examples from two different performers are described below.

This utterance, which occurred approximately three and a half minutes into Will Smith's performance, and to which the audience responded with collective laughter and isolated applause, ended with a well-crafted puzzle-solution device:

Don't worry, I'm used to being the odd one out in the room. That's no surprise. You're- you're actually looking at a man who once went on a club eighteen-thirty holiday. I thought it was a club for people who liked Victorian fancy dress.

The success of this utterance was enhanced by the audience's familiarity with the connotations of Club 18-30 holidays, the incongruous juxtaposition between that environment and the likely connotations of a club for people interested in Victorian fancy dress, the unlikelihood of this performer choosing such a holiday, and the self-deprecatory tone of voice in which the final sentence was uttered.

A minute and three quarters into his performance, Andy Parsons delivered the following utterance containing a puzzle-solution device, which resulted in collective audience laughter: "All you've got to do to wind up a teacher is go: 'Oooh, you've got long holidays.'" This entire puzzle-solution can also be seen as the solution to a puzzle presented by Parsons in his previous utterance, which also resulted in collective audience laughter: "Maybe he's just trying to wind up the teachers. Cos it's quite easy to wind up a teacher, isn't it?" It can therefore be seen that puzzle-solutions in stand-up comedy can be nested within other devices, and can span more than one of the performer's turns.

### *Headline-punchline*

According to Heritage and Greatbatch (1986, p. 128), a headline-punchline device is where: "the speaker proposes to make a declaration, pledge, or announcement and then proceeds to make it". The only occurrence of this device



that was found in the current corpus was the example reported on p. 76, which occurred approximately five minutes into Matt King's performance. The relative rarity of this device in stand-up comedy (which was also noted by Rutter, 1997) suggests that it may be primarily politics-specific. Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) stated that the headline-punchline is structurally similar to the puzzle-solution, but simpler and with less potential for elaboration. A headline-punchline may be, in general, too straightforward a rhetorical device for invitational use in stand-up comedy. According to Rutter (1997, p. 216) "[w]hen this format is used in stand-up it tends not to be used directly for comic effect".

### *Position taking*

Position taking also appears to occur less frequently in stand-up comedy performances than in political speeches, on the basis of the present sample; however, Rutter (1997) did not note a similar finding in his data. Its relative frequency of use in stand-up comedy may be due to stylistic differences between different stand-up comedians. There tends to be a greater similarity between the performance styles of different politicians than of different stand-up comedians. It is therefore possible that position taking is a salient device for all political speakers in a way that does not appear to be the case for all stand-up comedians. An example of position taking from Matt King's performance was described on p. 76, and two further examples from different performers are presented below.

The following example was performed by Sean Lock, approximately two minutes into his routine, during a series of utterances about his time at school. This utterance referred to learning animal noises: "'Cow goes moo, pig goes oink.' OK, we've got some knowledge, let's get out there into the real world and use it." The final position taking statement, delivered in an emphatic tone of voice, was rewarded by collective audience laughter.

Jack Russell used position taking to good effect in the second utterance of his performance. His first utterance, which ended with a comparison between his appearance on *The Stand-Up Show* and Jeffrey Archer being in prison, elicited enthusiastic laughter and isolated applause. Russell then delivered the position taking statement: "What a result!" to which the audience responded with collective laughter and cheers.



### *Pursuit*

In contrast to the headline-punchline and position taking rhetorical devices, examination of the present corpus suggests that pursuits occur more often in stand-up comedy performances than in political speeches. Only one example of a pursuit was found in the entire corpus of 15 political speeches studied by Bull and Wells (2002); however, several examples of pursuits were found in the present corpus of stand-up comedy performances. An example from Andy Zaltzman's performance was described on p. 76, and two further examples are presented below.

Just under five minutes into his routine, Will Smith successfully delivered an utterance comparing women with men, which resulted in collective audience laughter. He continued with the following utterance:

Women, women you are flowers. Do not compete with the trees. [1] Good, so- [2]

When the audience did not respond to this weakly formatted contrast device which was performed with invitational delivery at point [1], Smith started to deliver his pursuit – after a one-second pause – simultaneously with isolated laughter from the audience. The audience responded with collective laughter to Smith's pursuit at point [2].

In the last of a series of utterances about wanting to be a careers officer when he left school, just under two minutes into his routine, Sean Lock presented the careers officer's response:

He said "Forget it, you haven't got the maths", you know. [1] He was good. [2]

When the audience failed to respond at point [1], Lock added the successful pursuit "He was good", and was rewarded with collective laughter at point [2].

### *Naming*

Use of names (in the Atkinsonian sense) was not found in any of the stand-up comedy performances in the present corpus. When performers in this corpus mentioned names, these were not delivered rhetorically, in the way described by Atkinson (1984b); nor were these names used in combination with gratitude, as is



often the case in political speeches (e.g., Bull, 2003). Therefore, in the present conceptual taxonomy, the use of names in stand-up comedy performances has been classed as a form of external referentiality. This is because the names are not delivered rhetorically, and their salience as an invitational device is considered to be due to the audience's familiarity, or presumed familiarity, with any person named. In this way, the names are used as referential markers. They provide a way for the performer to demonstrate his or her assumption that the associated referential information is shared. To avoid confusion with Atkinsonian terminology, the term "people" has been used for the referential form of naming that is being proposed in the present taxonomy (see pp. 165-166).

#### *Additional rhetorical devices*

As mentioned in Chapter 3, a number of additional rhetorical devices have also been identified during the performance of stand-up comedy material. Some examples of these were described previously (see pp. 76-77), and some further examples are presented below.

#### *Question*

Chapter 3 proposed a distinction between simple and complex questions. However, since no further examples of complex questions were found within the present corpus, these have now been conflated into a single category. Examples of question devices receiving affiliative audience responses within the present corpus were presented in Chapter 3 (pp. 76-77) and Chapter 4 (pp. 111-113). It can be seen that these devices invited predominantly verbal responses as opposed to laughter responses. However, an example of a question which resulted in a laughter response will be presented on pp. 185-186.

#### *Direct request*

Chapter 4 (p. 104) presented two examples of direct requests used by Jack Russell just after five minutes into his performance. These requests resulted in collective applause, and were the only two examples of direct requests found within the present corpus. Direct requests in stand-up comedy can therefore be successful in inviting audience applause, but may not be useful devices for inviting audience laughter.

#### *Greeting*

Chapter 4 (p. 111) presented two examples of first turn greeting pair parts, one from Sally Holloway and one from Will Smith. These examples resulted in



affiliative verbal responses from the audience and, as with direct requests, may not be useful devices for inviting audience laughter. These were the only two specific greeting sequences in the corpus, although some forms of questions used in opening turns may have the same functional impact as a greeting, despite being delivered in a different rhetorical form, as noted in Chapter 4 (see p. 113).

### *Aside*

Chapter 3 (p. 77) presented an example of an aside delivered by Matt King that resulted in collective audience laughter. Two further examples from the present corpus are presented below.

Just over two and a quarter minutes into her performance, after the audience responded to her previous utterance with collective laughter which included an isolated clap, Sally Holloway said: “Don’t clap on your own, the social services’ll be round”, and the audience responded with another turn of collective laughter.

The first five utterances in Sean Lock’s performance were:

Thank you. Um, my wife- is so fat- [1] that she hates herself and sits in her room crying all day long. [2] But enough of my troubles, let’s get on with the show. Come on. [3] You don’t want to hear about all my problems, do you, you know. Trying to have a laugh here. Come on. [4] Only joking, sisters. Now, um- [5]

The first four of Lock’s utterances could have been considered offensive to women, which may account for the aside “Only joking, sisters” in his fifth turn. All of the numbers in square brackets refer to collective audience laughter. (The first of these utterances ends with the beginning of a “stock” joke; see p. 170.)

Unlike the three previously described additional rhetorical devices, which largely succeeded in inviting different affiliative audience responses, asides do seem to be useful for inviting audience laughter.

### *Incongruity*

Humour research generally accepts incongruity as a necessary ingredient of humour (e.g., Martin, 2007). It could thus be said that incongruity pervades comic discourse in a similar way as rhetoric pervades public discourse. Even so, Atkinson (e.g., 1984a) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) found it possible to identify a limited number of specific rhetorical devices from within that broadly rhetorical



discourse which are used by politicians to invite applause from their audiences. The present thesis proposes that a limited range of specific incongruity-related invitational devices can be identified within stand-up comedy in a similar way, and suggests the devices mentioned here as a first step along this path. Because of the general prevalence of incongruity in humorous discourse, it would be uninformative to code for the occurrence of incongruity in stand-up comedy, just as it would be uninformative to code for the occurrence of rhetoric in political speeches. However, it may be informative to code for the occurrence of standard incongruity devices in stand-up comedy, in the same way as it has been found to be informative to code for the occurrence of standard rhetorical devices in political speeches (e.g., Bull, 2006).

As stated in Chapter 1, much of the humour literature refers to incongruity. For example, a currently respected theory of the mechanisms operating in humour is the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH; Attardo & Raskin, 1991) which is an incongruity-resolution theory (Martin, 2007). However, this author has been unable to find a clear definition of incongruity that is generally accepted in the field of humour studies. Ritchie (2004) also lamented this lack, and criticised a number of definitions put forward by different authors in the field. He pointed out that none of them improved on standard dictionary definitions, and also noted that it is unclear whether they all had precisely the same concept in mind. This thesis therefore proposes a limited number of pragmatic, working examples, and it is hoped that the identification of the specific forms of incongruity reported here may add some empirical evidence to the ongoing debate about the contribution of incongruity to humour. However, it is recognised that there is a great deal more work to be done in order to identify the entire contribution of incongruity within the genre of stand-up comedy.

Incongruous utterances may or may not be delivered using standard rhetorical devices, or in combination with any of the other invitational devices proposed within this chapter.

### *Absurdist*

Although it is debatable whether absurdist humour is really the same thing as incongruous humour, this author wishes to propose that absurdist utterances represent an extreme form of incongruity. Their extreme nature may render them easier to identify than some other more subtle forms of incongruous devices. When a more workable definition of incongruity has been accepted within the field of



humour studies, it may become necessary to consider absurdist tokens as being different from incongruous ones. However, for the purpose of this initial analysis, it was considered that including absurdist items within the overall category of incongruity would be a worthwhile starting point. An example of an absurdist invitational device from within the present corpus is presented below.

Less than half a minute into his performance, Andy Zaltzman's third utterance began in an entirely congruous manner, but developed into absurdity towards the end:

Isn't comedy fun. Um. I- I do think it's a very exciting time to be alive, ladies and gentlemen. Er, scientists recently genetically modified a monkey with genes from a jellyfish, so that it glows in the dark. Which is great news, isn't it, because it makes monkeys much, much easier to find-

The audience responded to this utterance with collective laughter that built up gradually from a slow start (mutual monitoring; Clayman, 1993 – see Chapter 2, p. 62).

*Incongruous to real-world knowledge*

Just under two minutes into her performance, Sally Holloway delivered an utterance containing material that is incongruous to real-world knowledge. She delivered it in the format of a four-part list, with the incongruity occurring in the final list item.

And I have- the reason I have so much time is that I, er, I am single and, um, I'm over thirty, and I live on my own, and, um- I recently got sent a free cat by the local council, um-

The audience responded to this utterance with collective laughter.

*Incongruous to immediately preceding discourse*

Just under seven minutes into his performance, Matt King immediately followed a discussion about cryptic crosswords with the following utterance:



What just happened then? Did I- did I just get abducted by aliens and miss out on a week? What? I don't- very rarely see that. But why do people move in to haunted houses?

The start of this utterance overlapped with the dying away of the audience laughter in response to King's previous utterance, and the very sudden change of subject (by which time the audience had become silent again) resulted in another instance of collective audience laughter.

### *Challenged expectation*

Challenged expectations appear to occur relatively frequently in stand-up comedy, and are often presented using puzzle-solution rhetorical devices. However, they can also be delivered without such devices, either on their own or combined with other forms of invitational delivery.

Two examples of challenged expectations occurred in the following pair of utterances from Richard Ayoade, which began just over two and a half minutes into his performance:

I live in a very depressing area of London. I live by the A40, which is the busiest road in London, it's very polluted. Em, er, I took up smoking recently, and my cough got better. [1] Because at least I had a filter in my mouth. [2]

The audience responded with collective laughter at both points [1] and [2]. The first challenged expectation occurred immediately prior to response [1], in that smoking is normally assumed to exacerbate coughing rather than to improve it. The utterance immediately prior to response point [2] completed the puzzle-solution device by resolving the puzzle presented in the previous utterance, and also contained a second challenged expectation. The concept of having a filter in one's mouth would normally refer to a protection device of some sort, not to the filter tip of a cigarette.

### *Internal referentiality*

Internal referentiality is defined as the performer's overt reference to something specific about that particular performance in that particular venue. This includes uttering the name of the town or venue in which the performance is taking



place. It also includes the performer's reference to material uttered previously during that performance, a device which Rutter (1997) termed "reincorporations". Internal referentiality refers to performance-specific (both discourse-specific and situation-specific) elements. No external knowledge is required to "get" these references. They are internal to the performance in question, and can be decoded by audience members with little or no contextual knowledge beyond the event itself. The concept of internal referentiality is consistent with Provine's (1993) finding that naturally occurring conversational laughter is highly dependent on the context in which it occurs.

### *Setting*

In an identification of seven potential moves which may be present at the start of a stand-up comedy performance, the fourth item in Rutter's (1997, p. 145) proposed list is "Comment on the setting", which is described as a performer's comment about "one of four locally specific areas: the audience, the venue, their own act or a meta-comment on the act". However, while these moves may serve to build affiliation with the audience, they are not necessarily intended to be direct invitations for affiliative audience responses. In contrast to Rutter's (1997) sample, all of the performances in the present corpus were performed in the same venue, for both a live audience and a television audience. The opening sequences identified by Rutter (1997) may be less prevalent when a performance is intended for broadcast on national television. That said, the present corpus did contain some references to the performance location that contributed to the formation of an audience response invitation. An example that occurred during Will Smith's seventh turn, just over half a minute into his performance, was presented on p. 76.

### *Reincorporation*

Rutter (1997) identified four "stand-up specific techniques", the first of which he termed "reincorporations". A reincorporation is defined as "the reappearance of one element of a joke (usually not a punchline) later on in a stand-up performer's set" (Rutter, 1997, p. 226). Rutter's identification of the reincorporation as "a signposted point for laughter" is borne out in the present corpus, with several examples of collective audience laughter, sometimes also including collective applause, occurring in response to reincorporations. Examples of reincorporations from three performances within the present corpus are presented below.



Towards the conclusion of his performance, Andy Parsons delivered the following utterance:

Well that's pretty much it from me ladies and gentlemen. I am hoping, with maybe a little bit of work, I might become this month's comedy circuit employee of the month.

The audience responded to this utterance with collective laughter and isolated applause. The reincorporation phrase "employee of the month" referred back to a previous sequence of utterances in which that precise phrase was mentioned three times. The previous sequence was delivered some three and a half minutes before the reincorporation phrase was uttered.

Towards the end of his performance, Matt King delivered two reincorporations. The first of these occurred just over nine minutes into his performance, when he uttered the line "Get St John's, I'm in trouble, I-" from his position on the floor after having thrown himself there using a full body gesture, which resulted in a combination of enthusiastic audience laughter and applause. This reincorporation referred back to an earlier section in his performance where he spent several turns talking about St John's Ambulance Brigade. That series of utterances began approximately four minutes into King's performance and lasted for just over three quarters of a minute; thus, there was an interval of more than four minutes between the original utterance and the reincorporation. The penultimate utterance in King's performance ended with another reincorporation: "That's showing yourself up, isn't it. All you've got to do is go, 'Mate, I'm quite stoned. I er-'" This reincorporation referred back to an earlier section which began approximately two minutes into King's performance, when he spent approximately half a minute discussing the use of "being stoned" as an excuse to "get you out of things", and the reincorporation occurred more than seven minutes after the utterance that contained its antecedent.

Marian Pashley delivered a reincorporation just three turns after the original utterance to which it referred. The following extract began a minute and a quarter into her performance.



You're looking round some fantastic house going "Oh, mortgage, you say, not rented." [1] "I'm so pleased for you" [2] And then they show you round the décor, and it's fantastic. It's Nicaraguan wood that's really expensive, no Ikea shit. [3] And you're going, "Oh, this is lovely. This is the kind of house that I'd be living in if my boyfriend didn't drink." [4] "I'm so pleased for you." [5]

In this example, the audience response at point [2] was perceptibly more enthusiastic than their response to the reincorporation at point [5]. This may suggest that a reincorporation is a more effective invitational device when there is a longer gap between the reincorporation and the initial utterance to which it refers, and/or if there is at least one change of discourse topic between the reincorporation phrase and its antecedent.

Reincorporations are considered in this thesis to be referential rather than rhetorical devices. They appear to be more successful when there is a gap of many turns, whereas the previously described standard rhetorical formats typically occur in the turn immediately prior to the audience response. As illustrated by the example from Marian Pashley's performance, a reincorporation occurring close to its antecedent appears to be less successful than the reincorporations used by other performers in the present sample which occurred at a greater distance from the original utterances to which they referred.

### *External referentiality*

External referentiality is defined as the performer's overt reference to something specific that the audience can be expected to know given the culture in which the performance is taking place. This includes, but is not limited to, brand names, names of famous people, external locations, catchphrases, and well-known jokes. References to well-known "stock" jokes are a form of meta-humour (Nilsen & Nilsen, 2000) in that the audience is presumed to know how the joke normally ends, even when the current performer does not finish the joke. Indeed, if the performer changes the ending of the joke, an element of incongruity in the form of a challenged expectation (see p. 161) is introduced.

In contrast to internal referentiality, external referentiality refers to culturally-specific elements which are external to the situation and discourse of the current performance. External, real-world knowledge is necessary in order for



audience members to “get” these references. While the underlying assumption is that in an appropriately shared culture most of these references will be understandable to most members of the audience, they are “missable” for any given audience member who is not familiar with that particular cultural reference. External referentiality thus requires outside knowledge in order to be correctly decoded, and relies heavily on the cultural stereotyping associated with that particular reference.

External referentiality may either be a direct reference, or a “play on words” which relies on an inherent understanding of the reference that is being manipulated. Examples of both of these forms of referentiality will be presented below.

### *People*

As stated on pp. 156-157, although Atkinson (1984b) considered naming to be a standard rhetorical device, this thesis suggests that the use of names in stand-up comedy is not done in the same way as Atkinson (1984b) describes. The name is not projected as an audience response point; rather, it is mentioned during the performance to underline the performer’s sense of connection with the audience. It is the assumed shared referentiality of the name which invites the audience’s affiliation, not the projectability of that name. The content of the referential utterance is thus more salient than the format in which it is uttered. To avoid confusion with the Atkinsonian rhetorical concept of naming, this taxonomy refers to “people” rather than “naming”. Two examples of referentiality to people from within the present corpus are described below.

During his opening remarks, Will Smith’s fourth turn referred to a more famous American comedian who has the same name: “And apologies to anyone, er, expecting the, er, other Will Smith”. The audience respond to this utterance with collective laughter.

About a minute into his performance, Gavin Webster delivered the following utterance:

I was of course in that very famous tribute band the, er, the Geordie Rolling Stones. Er, I- I played the bass, I was- I was Bill. Er, Bill Wye-aye-man. And, er, the-



The audience responded to this utterance with collective laughter. The majority of the audience may not have known that Bill Wyman was the Rolling Stones' bass player without having been given that background information in Webster's set-up, although a substantial section of the audience would have been likely to share this referentiality once that background context was presented. This example differs from the previous two in that Webster used Wyman's name to make a reference to a stereotypical Geordie catch-phrase (turning Wyman into "wye-aye-man"); the shared referentiality of knowing that Wyman was the Stones' bass player may have been secondary to the ethnic referentiality of the stock Geordie catchphrase.

### *Brands*

In addition to the names of famous people, well-known brand names are also referred to in stand-up comedy as invitational devices. Two examples of this from within the present corpus are presented below.

Steve Jameson began his performance with the following utterance:

Thank you very much. Thank you very much, good evening, you're probably all looking at me thinking middle-aged guy, I bet he uses Viagra.

The audience responded to this utterance with collective laughter, indicating their recognition of the Viagra brand name and its associated functionality. In other words, a man of Jameson's age and appearance could well be assumed to require the assistance of medication in order to successfully achieve and sustain an erection.

The second and third utterances in Marian Pashley's performance were:

I'm up here for a couple of days. Erm, I am like you, I may be from the north, but I too go to Ikea on a Sunday- [1] -to watch the couples split up.  
[2]

The audience's response at point [1] was presumably influenced by their familiarity with Ikea furniture stores; however, their response at point [2] did not require any knowledge of connotations associated with Ikea, but with stereotypical views of supermarket shopping in general. Arguments between couples in supermarkets can readily be observed by the other shoppers around them, and can



be interpreted by observers as bad signs for the healthy continuation of the relationships in question.

### *Organisations*

A reincorporation from Matt King's performance which referred to St John's Ambulance Brigade, an organisation with which the audience could be assumed to be familiar, was reported on p. 163. Two further examples of organisational referentiality from within the present corpus are presented below.

Following on from the utterance reported on p. 165, Will Smith segued from a naming reference into an organisational reference. The three utterances forming that particular section of his performance were as follows:

And apologies to anyone, er, expecting the, er, other Will Smith. [1] Um, the rapping chappie. [2] Er, been a bit of a mix up in the bookings, there. Tonight I'm here, and he's actually giving a talk to Eton College Chess Club. [3]

The audience response at point [3] was audibly more enthusiastic than either of the previous two responses within this section of his performance. It is possible that the bigger laugh at point [3] was in response to a combination of the more famous Will Smith's name, the organisational connotations of both Eton College and chess clubs, the incongruity of the other Will Smith appearing at Eton College Chess Club, and the contrast of the physical appearance of this Will Smith with that of his more famous American namesake.

About three quarters of a minute into his performance, Greg Burns delivered the following utterance:

Actually, as Tommy said, I am going to Australia quite soon, which I'm quite looking forward to. They've got a big festival over there, as well, lot of, er, lot of comics head over there. It's also one of those places where a lot of British go to sort of, you know, find yourself, do a bit of travelling, see a bit of culture. Frankly I'm not that deep. I'm going to Australia cos I'm a grown up session with the mile high club.



The audience responded to this referential invitational device with isolated laughter, suggesting that they may have been less familiar with the referential connotations of the “mile high club” than Burns assumed them to be.

### *Titles*

Direct and indirect references can also be made to the titles of films, songs, television programmes, and so forth. Two examples from the present corpus are presented here, the first of which uses a play on words to refer to a title, and the second of which refers to a title verbatim.

Approximately two minutes into his performance, Greg Burns delivered a series of utterances about relationship breakdowns, and described the way that songs on the radio remind you of your own situation in a break-up. His utterance: “It’s like, Now That’s What I Call Dumped” was a direct reference to a series of popular music compilation albums entitled “Now That’s What I Call Music”. The altered final word in the title also challenged the audience’s expectation of what they were about to hear.

Just under three minutes into his performance, during a sequence of utterances about cannabis and following an assertion that it is a bad idea to smoke it every day, Jack Russell delivered the following utterance:

The reason why I stopped doing that was because I caught myself for the thousandth time, lying on a settee, going “[inhale] Countdown – brilliant”.

The audience’s collective laughter in response to this utterance was likely to have been due in part to their recognition of the title of that popular television quiz show, although Russell’s adopted voice (see pp. 178-179) for that part of the utterance may have also contributed to this laughter invitation.

### *Locations*

Performers may also make references to the names of places with which the audience are assumed to be familiar. An example of location referentiality from Richard Ayoade’s performance was described on pp. 111-112, and a further example from the current corpus is presented below.

Approximately four minutes into his performance, Andy Parsons delivered the following utterance:



So, Lambeth has decriminalised cannabis. Yeah. Three months after Belgium and Switzerland. What does it come to in this country when we're less forward thinking than Belgium and Switzerland.

The audience laughter response at this point may have been in recognition of the social or political connotations of Belgium and Switzerland. Both countries are stereotypically thought to be socially conservative and unlikely to be at the forefront of innovation.

The audience responses to these two examples were less enthusiastic than to many of the examples that illustrated the other proposed subcategories of external referentiality. It may be that referentiality towards locations is a less effective form of invitational device than the other suggested forms of external referentiality.

#### *Slogans or catchphrases*

Two examples of direct references to well-known slogans or catchphrases from within the present corpus are presented below.

Just under a minute into his performance, after describing buying a second hand straitjacket from a local asylum (itself an incongruity which resulted in collective audience laughter), Matt King delivered the following utterance:

You might need one, you never know. I thought I'd be safe with that, a second hand straitjacket. No. No. Got it home, a little sticker on it.  
"Warning: may contain traces of nut." I thought-

This utterance cleverly linked King's previous discussion of food allergy warning labels with the double meaning of "nut" by using a direct and precise reference to a common and specific warning labelling term that can be found on several common food items. The audience responded to this utterance with enthusiastic collective laughter and isolated applause.

Just under five minutes into his performance, Andy Parsons delivered the following sequence of utterances:

The government, and they're campaigning against Ecstasy at the moment, aren't they? Now, last year in Britain, only five people died from taking Ecstasy. Fifty people died from swallowing a wasp. [1] And seventy people



died attempting DIY in their own home. [2] So how come we haven't also got campaigns: wasps, don't swallow them. [3] And shelves, just say no. [4]

The collective audience laughter response at point [4] was presumably in recognition of the famous anti-drug campaign catchphrase "drugs: just say no".

#### *Meta-humour*

Meta-humour (Nilsen & Nilsen, 2000), or ur-humour, refers to culturally recognisable humour tropes outside the current discourse, such as well-known "stock" jokes. An example of this from Sean Lock's performance was presented on p. 158, and a further example is presented below.

Just over a minute and a half into his performance, Andy Zaltzman delivered the following utterance:

Or we could just genetically modify dogs, so that they have no nose. Then you could say to your friend, "My dog has no nose". Your friend could reply, "How does it smell?" And you'd be two thirds of the way to a very, very entertaining joke. And-

The audience's collective laughter at this point may have indicated their familiarity with the punchline of this very familiar joke (i.e., "terrible"), which Zaltzman did not deliver.

#### *Differences between internal and external referentiality*

Internal referentiality is specific to the discourse and situation of the performance, whereas external referentiality is a broader category. External referentiality refers to culturally specific references that the majority of members of the culture within which the performance is taking place can be assumed to understand. Thus external referentiality assumes real-world knowledge, whereas internal referentiality requires only that the audience members are aware of the setting of that particular performance and can remember salient aspects of the performer's discourse that they have just experienced. Internal referentiality can be a successful invitational device cross-culturally, whereas external referentiality relies on shared cultural references within a given culture.

It is suggested that the external category of meta-humour can be thought of as being somewhat analogous to the internal category of reincorporations.



Reincorporations contain the assumption that the audience will remember a salient section of the humorous material from earlier within the same performance, whereas meta-humour contains the assumption that the audience will be familiar with some standard, well-known joke trope from within the culture in which the performance is taking place.

All of the stand-up comedians in the present corpus used referentiality during their performances, and it generally appears to be an effective invitational device. It is suggested that its use has the effect of emphasising that the performer and audience members are all in the same in-group, and thus maximises audience favourability towards the performer (e.g., Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Reicher and Hopkins (1996) made a similar observation about in-group maximisation in political speeches.

Referentiality is seen as a separate verbal form from a rhetorical device, in that it is the speech content which leads to the response invitation, as opposed to the format in which it is presented. Referential items may or may not be delivered using standard rhetorical devices, they may or may not form part of incongruous utterances, and they may be delivered on their own or in combination with other invitational devices.

### ***Rudeness***

The category of rudeness also refers to speech content as opposed to rhetorical formatting; again, rudeness may either be delivered on its own or in combination with other invitational devices. In the present taxonomy, rudeness is defined as any part of an utterance that challenges the norms of polite conversation and would be considered shocking in most discourse situations. It includes swear words, blasphemy, drug references, sexual references, scatological and lavatorial humour, etc. Rudeness as a category refers to specific words, rather than the formats within which they are (or are not) presented. In the examples presented below, the audience response is invited through the performer's use of the rude word or short phrase itself. Three examples of the invitational use of rudeness from the present corpus are presented below.

Approximately half a minute into his performance, Gavin Webster delivered the following utterance, which is also rhetorically formatted as a list in multiple parts:



I tell a few jokes, I sometimes- play the ukulele, I've got a cousin, I- t- I t- I have a bit of banter, and a bit of a crack, I've got- I've got a colour television- And, er- I can also balance thirteen Jammy Dodgers on me cock- But, er, the thing is-

The final list element of the penultimate sentence in this utterance invited laughter because it ended in a rude word: "cock". Brand referentiality contributes to the set-up of the rude punchline, in that the audience would be presumed to share the knowledge that "Jammy Dodgers" is the brand name for a certain type of sweet biscuit. An element of surprise was also involved.

Less than half a minute into his performance, Richard Ayoade delivered the following series of utterances:

Because I'm a comedian I spend a lot of time in toilets. Um- [1] Shitting. [2]  
I- I- I get nervous before gigs, I shit a lot. [3]

The audience responded with collective laughter at points [1] and [3], and isolated laughter at point [2]. Based on this example, it is possible that the use of a rude word as a laughter invitation is more effective when it is presented as part of an utterance that includes other lexical items as well.

Approximately four minutes into his performance, Andy Zaltzman delivered the following utterance:

But there- there has been a history of political apathy. There's been a history of political apathy in Britain. In the Welsh devolution referendum a couple of years ago, only fifty per cent of Welsh people bothered voting. And clearly Wales woke up that morning and thought, wow, this is a historic day, this is the most important democratic decision in the history of my proud people, I personally have a chance to help dictate the future of my nation. "Oh no, hang on, I've got to scratch my arse this afternoon."

The audience responded with collective laughter, in response to both the rude word "arse" and to the incongruous juxtaposition between the final sentence and the earlier part of the utterance.



In future studies, it would be useful to make a more detailed analysis of “rude” lexical items, and to compare rudeness with other forms of invitational delivery, to attempt to identify the extent to which such words or phrases contribute to invitationality. It is possible that the use of such rude words is secondary to other forms of invitationality, or that there are considerable individual differences between performers and the quality and quantity of rude words used within their performances. The composition of the audience may also affect the use of rude words (for example, more rude words are likely to be used in stand-up comedy performances which are not intended to be broadcast on television).

### *Deprecation*

Two forms of deprecation were found to occur within the present corpus: self-deprecation, and insults to others. Examples of both of these forms of deprecation will be presented below.

#### *Self*

Self-deprecation is a form of humour in which a performer refers disparagingly to his or her personal shortcomings, in terms of appearance, abilities, and so forth. Two examples of self-deprecation from the present corpus have been presented previously. On p. 154, Will Smith referred self-deprecatingly to his failure to understand what a Club 18-30 holiday would be like, and on p. 76, a self-deprecatory puzzle-solution device from Steve Jameson’s performance was presented, to which the audience responded with collective laughter.

Self-deprecation tends to be used more by some comedians than others, and based on the present sample it is not thought to be a necessary ingredient for the successful performance of stand-up comedy material.

#### *Others*

While self-deprecation is generally considered to be an effective tool in humour (e.g., Martin, 2007), deprecation towards others can also be an effective invitational device. Some of the stand-up comedians in the present sample also used “put-downs” or insults to others as laughter invitations. This use of deprecation may be connected to the superiority theory of humour (Morreall, 1987), in which the audience join the performer in feeling superior to the person or people who constitute the “butt of the joke”.

An example of deprecation of others from Will Smith’s performance was presented on p. 117, where he deprecated Edinburgh – the capital of Scotland – by



referring to it as being in the north of England, which was also an insult to Scots in general. This utterance invited disaffiliative as well as affiliative response tokens from the audience. Smith's next utterance was "Settle down, peasants", a direct insult to the audience, to which they responded with collective laughter.

It is possible that deprecation of others is more acceptable in stand-up comedy when the performer presents it within a general context of self-deprecation; however, a more detailed and systematic analysis of deprecatory invitations would be necessary in order to support this assertion. The issue of political correctness may also need to be considered; some deprecatory utterances might be acceptable in certain contexts, whereas those same utterances would not be appropriate in other situations.

### **Non-verbal**

In contrast to verbal devices, non-verbal devices refer solely to the performer's delivery of his or her comedy routine. Non-verbal devices can basically be summarised as everything that a performer does during a stand-up comedy performance beyond the speech content of his or her utterances. In other words, non-verbal devices refer to the ways in which the comedian presents his or her material, over and above the language used.

Non-verbal devices can be further sub-divided into vocal and non-vocal devices. Vrij (2000) supports the distinction between vocal and non-vocal non-verbal behaviours, stating that vocal behaviours are those related to voice and speech. Vocal devices in this proposed taxonomy refer to the ways in which the performer uses his or her voice, whereas non-vocal devices refer to the ways in which the performer uses his or her body, including the use of physical props. Non-physical props (such as the musical interlude described on pp. 113-114) are another form of non-vocal invitational device. Vocal devices include intonation, pauses, alliteration and assonance, adoption of voices, and non-linguistic noises, and non-vocal devices include gestures, gaze, stance, and use of props. Subordinate categories and examples of each of these proposed devices will be described below.

#### ***Intonation***

Rutter (1997) identified intonation as an invitational technique that is specific to the performance of stand-up comedy. While intonation is both "striking" and "omnipresent" in stand-up comedians' performances, changes of pitch in their delivery are additionally used "to signpost the completion of jokes and create an



invitation to laugh” (Rutter, 1997, p. 232). Three examples of the invitational use of intonation within the present corpus are presented below.

The second utterance in Sally Holloway’s performance was:

Well, I- I am actually from East London and, er, before you mock, East London is the mecca for everything for a pound shops, so if you’ve got a pound, do go, and um- The other week a load of kinda middle class people got together, burnt one of these shops down to the ground, caused fifteen pounds worth of damage, yeah?

Towards the end of this utterance, Holloway’s delivery slowed down considerably and her tone of voice became gradually more emphatic. After the audience failed to respond to an earlier laughter invitation point in this utterance (see Chapter 6), they responded with collective laughter at the end. Holloway’s use of intonation, combined with nodding gestures, made it very clear that a laughter response was being invited at that point.

In a section of his performance talking about his childhood, just over a minute into his routine, Sean Lock delivered the following utterance:

Running, scratching, and also talking. Never stopped talking. You know? I was like an eleven year old chat show host. You know? Is that your bike? How many gears? Three? Five? Seven? What is it, Chopper? Racer? Is it your birthday? Christmas? Can I have a go on it? Why not?

As this utterance went on, Lock gradually speeded up his delivery, until by the end he was speaking very quickly indeed, and in a higher pitched tone of voice than he used at the beginning of the utterance. The audience responded to these invitational intonation techniques with collective laughter.

About a minute into his performance, following on from his utterance described on pp. 167-168, Greg Burns delivered the following pair of utterances:

See, my theory is, longer the flight, more chance of pulling. [1] Twenty seven hours, you’re bound to grind someone down. [2]



During the second of these utterances, Burns' voice gradually rose in pitch, and he ended the utterance with a rising tone. The audience's response at point [2] contained laughter and isolated applause, and was perceptibly more enthusiastic than their collective laughter response at point [1].

Although intonation is, as Rutter (1997) pointed out, used throughout stand-up comedy performances, and it may thus not be an easy task to identify the precise instances in which it is being used as a specific laughter invitation technique, the above examples from the present corpus support his assertion that intonation can be used to invite audience laughter in stand-up comedy performances.

### *Pauses*

Another prosodic cue that was observed to invite affiliative audience responses within the present corpus was the strategic use of pauses. Performers sometimes paused before delivering a key section of a particular utterance (an important word or phrase, or a joke punchline); this pause served as a cue to the audience that a salient response point was imminent. Two examples from the present corpus are presented below.

Just over four minutes into his performance, Greg Burns delivered the following utterance:

Because you know what they say, it's a man's hunting instinct, it's his biological make-up, he'll hunt a member of his own tribe, right. And what they mean by that is, if you've got your sort of average looking bloke, apparently he'll go for what he thinks is a slightly average looking lady. Or if a bloke thinks he's a slightly plainer looking bloke, he'll go for what he thinks is a slightly more achievable lady. Or if he's a great looking guy, a real hunk, he'll go for an absolute beauty, a babe. Peter Stringfellow.

Burns left a slight pause before uttering Peter Stringfellow's name, which served to highlight the incongruity of that particular name in that particular context, and the audience responded with collective laughter.

Approximately two minutes into his performance, Steve Jameson delivered the following pair of utterances:



And women: I love women, absolutely adore women, but it's always questions, questions, questions. First question she said to me, er, what birth sign are you? I said, I'm a Sagittarius. She said, you're half man half horse. [1] I said, that's right. [pause] [neighing noise] [2]

The audience responded with collective laughter at both points [1] and [2]. Jameson's pause before making the neighing noise indicated to the audience that his next utterance (in this case, a non-linguistic noise; see pp. 179-180) was a salient laughter invitation point.

### *Alliteration/assonance*

Rutter (1997) identified the use of alliteration and assonance as an invitational technique that is specific to the performance of stand-up comedy. His thesis suggested that "surprisingly often, joke punchlines are structured by the performer to include alliteration, assonance or, more rarely, rhyme ... [which] ... acts as a signpost to the audience" (Rutter, 1997, p. 229). While alliteration and assonance are present in many of the utterances within the present corpus, not just at laughter invitation points, three examples of the invitational use of alliteration and assonance are presented below.

Less than half a minute into her performance, Marian Pashley delivered the following utterance: "But, erm – there is a kind of shopping I hate. I do go to hippie shit shops." This puzzle-solution device ended with the assonance of "hippie" and "shit" and the alliteration of "shit" and "shops", and the audience responded with collective laughter.

Just over four minutes into his performance, Gordon Southern delivered the following utterance:

But you're not gonna go for the big trolley, there is no need. But do you go for the basket. No, because that just screams out that you're alone. That to me says spinster basket. Specially if it contains, dead give-away, the half loaf.

This utterance ended with the alliteration of "f" in the phrase "half loaf", and the audience responded with collective laughter.



A minute and a quarter into his performance, Andy Zaltzman delivered the utterance: “Or, we could genetically modify horses, so that they have twin air bags, ABS, and an in-horse stereo-” This incongruous utterance ended in a three-part list which also contained alliteration of “r” and “s”, and the audience responded with collective laughter.

As with intonation, alliteration and assonance are used throughout stand-up comedy performances. Therefore, again, it may be a difficult task to identify the precise instances in which it is being used as a direct laughter invitation. That said, the examples presented here do support Rutter’s (1997) suggestion that alliteration and assonance can contribute towards laughter invitations in the performance of stand-up comedy material.

### *Adoption of voices*

The last of the four stand-up specific invitational devices proposed by Rutter (1997) was the adoption (or use) of voices. Adoption of voices – i.e., characterisation – was used by several of the performers within the present sample. Rutter (1997, p. 234) pointed out that performed jokes feature “the adoption of accents, mimicry of vocal attributes, and the creation of characters through vocal qualities”. As stated in Chapter 1, he suggested that stand-up comedians use these voices in two different ways: “voice as costume”, where the comedian adopts a voice different from their own for the duration of their performance, and “voice as prop”, where he or she adopts a voice for a short period of time within the stand-up sequence. Performers can use adoption of voices to illustrate both realistic and incongruous characters within the narrative of a stand-up comedy performance. There were no examples of “voice as character” within the present corpus, but several examples of “voice as prop” were found. Two examples of this invitational technique from Gordon Southern’s routine were presented on p. 116, and two examples from different performances in the corpus are presented below.

Approximately two and a half minutes into Marian Pashley’s performance, she delivered the following pair of utterances:

There was also a vegetarian there. Now, I don’t eat meat, but this was a “vegetarian”. You know the sort, she wouldn’t even wear wool. She was sitting in her hessian, scratching. [1] Going, “We have to defend the



animals, the animals don't have a voice, we have to speak for them, ah-ah-ah-ah." [2]

The second utterance in this pair was delivered in an adopted voice, ending with a possible imitation of a non-specific animal noise, and the audience responded to this utterance with collective laughter.

Approximately two and a half minutes into his performance, during a section of his routine in which he talks about the unlikelihood of getting his car repaired cheaply, Will Smith delivered the utterance: "I may as well just go in and go, 'fix my car for a shiny sixpence, you rough hewn man of granite'". Smith adopted a higher pitched tone of voice for the quoted speech, imitating a stereotypical nobleman from history, and he accompanied that part of his utterance with illustrative gestures (see below, pp. 180-181). The audience responded to this utterance with collective laughter.

As with other invitational techniques found within the present corpus, adoption of voices is often used in conjunction with other invitational devices for maximum effectiveness.

### *Non-linguistic noises*

Non-linguistic noises were sometimes used as laughter invitations within the present corpus. Examples of non-linguistic noises from Steve Jameson's and Marian Pashley's performances were presented above (see pp. 176-177 & 178-179), and a further example is presented below.

Less than a minute into his performance, just before the extract presented on p. 175, Sean Lock delivered the following set of utterances:

Running running running, scratching, running, chewing a big lump of lego, arrarrarrarghh. [1] I used to get up in the morning, wake up the hamster, "Get up!" Vrroom, I was gone. Lunatic, you know. Because in the seventies they didn't know about the dangers of squash, did they? They thought it was safe. You know? They thought, it's orange, must be good for you. I was on about five pints a day. [2] [gulping and glugging noises] [3]



The collective audience laughter responses at points [1] and [3] were in response to non-linguistic noises; both of these responses were audibly more enthusiastic than their collective laughter response at point [2].

### *Gestures*

All of the performers within the present corpus used gestures as invitational devices during their performances. These included hand gestures, arm gestures, facial gestures, and whole body gestures. For the purposes of this taxonomy, it was decided to subcategorise invitational gestures according to their relationship with the discourse as a whole, as opposed to the part(s) of the body involved in making the gestures (following, e.g., Beattie & Shovelton, 2000; Kendon, 2004; McNeill, 1992), although such further subcategorisations might prove useful in future analyses. These subcategories are described below, along with examples from the present corpus.

### *Illustrative*

An illustrative gesture occurs when the performer illustrates or mimics the topic of a given utterance while delivering that utterance. This is similar to the concept of “illustrators” that was coined by Ekman and Friesen (1969), i.e., “movements which are directly tied to speech, serving to illustrate what is said verbally” (Ekman & Friesen, 1969, p. 68). However, illustrative gestures are only a subset of illustrators, including Ekman and Friesen’s (1969) concepts of deictic movements, spatial movements, kinetographs, and pictographs, but not those of batons or ideographs. The latter concepts would be included here as accompanying gestures (see below). In other words, illustrative gestures necessarily involve the illustration of a tangible subject of discourse in some way, and do not include gestures of emphasis (batons) or movements related to thought processes (ideographs). Illustrative gestures may be analogous to the vocal device of Adoption of Voices presented above (see pp. 178-179). One example from Will Smith’s performance was referred to on p. 179, where the illustrative gestures accompanied an utterance delivered in an adopted voice. Two further examples of illustrative gestures from within the present corpus are described below.

Approximately a minute and a quarter into his performance, after a series of utterances referring to the town of Ipswich, Richard Ayoade delivered the following utterance:



And I was there, and this is what it genuinely said, the graffiti on the door, this was their hard graffiti. It said, this is completely true, it said: “Joseph-can’t play- cricket”.

While delivering this utterance, Ayoade made a series of gestures with his right arm extended in front of him, as if he were holding a pen and writing on a wall. The audience responded with enthusiastic collective laughter.

Approximately three and a half minutes into his performance, Gordon Southern delivered the following utterance:

And sometimes, and I hope to God none of the couples here do this.  
Couples, in a supermarket, walking around hand in hand.

Southern interlinked his hands while delivering the final clause of this utterance, and the audience responded with collective laughter.

#### *Narrative*

A narrative gesture is defined as a gesture that is delivered in the absence of an accompanying utterance. At that point in the performance, the performer’s turn consists of just a gesture; at that moment, the gesture *is* the discourse (c.f., the idea that a gesture can be seen as an utterance just as much as a word can; Kendon, 2004). Two examples of narrative gestures occurring at the end of utterances within the present corpus are presented, followed by a further example in which a gesture comprises the performer’s entire turn.

About a minute and a half into his performance, Gordon Southern delivered the following utterance:

I met this woman, woman police officer, on traffic duty. She’s chatting to me. She’s gorgeous. But she knows she’s attractive, so she’s a bit flirtatious, bit of a tease. Like this: [a series of traffic direction gestures interspersed with flirtatious gestures]

The audience responded to these gestures with collective laughter. At that stage in his turn, there was no utterance accompanying the gestures, although the gestural part of Southern’s turn had been set up as the non-verbal solution to his



previously presented puzzle. In other words, the puzzle-solution device was completed non-vocally.

Approximately half a minute into her performance, Sally Holloway delivered the following utterance:

Oh yeah. And I'm not saying East London's rough, but I was in the market the other day, and they had one of those street performers, you know, that stand really still, like statues, and only move if you throw money. And we worked out, if you really wanna get 'em to move, you just throw bricks, ha ha.

After uttering the word "bricks", Holloway made two gestures in quick succession, the first with her left hand and the second with her right, to illustrate the throwing of bricks. The audience responded to these gestures with collective laughter.

Narrative gestures can also be used as invitational devices for amplifying pre-existing responses from the audience that are not as enthusiastic as they might be. Approximately two minutes into his performance, Gordon Southern delivered the following series of utterances:

She agrees to go out with me. It was wonderful. We were together for about six months. Right. One afternoon, I just came out with it, I said, "Hey, Fido." [1] Because I'd misunderstood the whole concept of the pet name. [2] [cheesy grin] [3]

The audience responded with collective laughter at points [1] and [2], and when the laughter at point [2] subsided Southern delivered a cheesy grin, to which the audience responded with another turn of collective laughter at point [3]. The laughter at point [3] was audibly more enthusiastic than the laughter at point [2].

#### *Accompanying*

Based on examination of the present corpus, accompanying gestures appear to be more common than either illustrative or narrative gestures. Accompanying gestures are used alongside the performer's verbal discourse to emphasise or enhance a particular part of the speaker's utterance. They include, but are not



restricted to, the concepts of batons and ideographs in Ekman and Friesen's (1969) proposed category of illustrators. Thus, while accompanying gestures may be directly tied to speech, they do not directly illustrate the discourse topic itself. Three examples of accompanying gestures being used as invitational devices within the present corpus are presented below.

Immediately after delivering the first of his utterances reported on p. 181, Gordon Southern continued with the utterance: "Not only is that an obstruction within the aisle scenario." While delivering this utterance, he unclasped his hands and raised his arms slightly; he then he extended both index fingers and moved both hands up and down. The audience responded with collective laughter.

Approximately a minute into his performance, Andy Zaltzman delivered the following utterance:

I don't know if y- I don't know if any of you are worried about over-fishing of cod, er, but just- let's look at it from the point of view of the ones that are left. They now have less competition for food and sex. And with melting polar ice caps, they've now got a bigger house. They've never had it so good.

When Zaltzman uttered the final sentence in this utterance, he raised his left hand from waist level to shoulder level. The audience began to respond with collective laughter while he was raising his hand.

Approximately seven minutes into his performance, Jack Russell delivered the following utterance:

Yeah, cat people know this for a fact. You try and smuggle drugs inside a cat, you are wasting your time.

Russell accompanied this sentence with gestures made with his right hand, index finger extended; the audience responded with collective laughter.

Within the present corpus, accompanying gestures were observed during the normal course of a performer's delivery, as well as when they were being used as invitational devices. In that regard, they are thought to be similar to the proposed



stand-up specific invitational techniques of intonation and alliteration and assonance identified by Rutter (1997).

### *Gaze*

Gaze can be used in stand-up comedy to invite audience responses, although based on the present sample it appears to be used as an invitational device less frequently than gestures. Two examples of the invitational use of gaze from the present sample are described below.

Greg Burns' opening utterance, as reported on p. 112, ended with the three-part list "Are you good? Are you happy? Are you well?" Burns emphasised the use of gaze while he uttered these words, looking around the audience and appearing to make eye contact as he did so. He used gaze in this way increasingly as the utterance went on, and even more so after its completion; the audience responded to this utterance with a collective "yeah", after a brief initial delay.

Just under three and a half minutes into his performance, Sean Lock delivered the following utterance:

But I- I love special brew. I- what I like about special brew, I re- I like the fact that, er, it represents the fact that if you wanna get pissed in this country you can. If you wanna get smashed, ripped to the tits, mullered, whatever you want to call it, we cater for that. But I was in New York recently I went to a bar in New York and I went up to the bar, and I'd had a couple of drinks beforehand, fair enough, I went up to the bar and said, "I'd like a drink". And the bloke says, er, ... he says, "Sorry, I can't serve you, you're drunk". And I said "Yeah, I know."

At the end of this utterance, Lock gazed at the audience with a puzzled expression. The audience responded with collective laughter in response to this facial expression.

The way in which the stand-up comedians in the present sample tended to use gaze most frequently was as a general accompaniment to their discourse, rather than as specific laughter invitations. It is possible that the length of time that it takes in order to deliver gaze as a specific response invitation is not fast-paced enough to invite a timely response within a stand-up comedy performance. Indeed, in the second and third examples presented above, the audience's collective responses



were delayed. Thus, while it has been shown that gaze can be used as an invitational device in stand-up comedy performances, it is thought to be less effective than many of the other invitational techniques that were observed within the present corpus.

### *Stance*

As with gaze, the stand-up comedians in this sample did not necessarily use stance in order to invite affiliative responses from the audience. However, examples from two performances in the corpus that illustrate the contribution of stance towards laughter invitations are presented below.

Almost two and a half minutes into his performance, Matt King delivered the following sequence of utterances:

The other thing is, I don't understand when people ring up drug dealers, in films and stuff, you see people ringing up drug dealers. Have you noticed, whenever people ring up drug dealers, they never ever talk like this. "Hello? Hello, is that the drug dealer?" [1] Hello mate, yeah. Listen, I want to buy some drugs from you. [2] Yeah, a lot of drugs. Hey, quite a lot of drugs, actually. [3] And- and when you- could you deliver those drugs to my house? I'll read out the address. It's-" [4]

The audience responded to the response invitations at points [2] and [4] with collective laughter. (Although the audience also responded at points [1] and [3], the former was collective laughter in response to an ambiguous invitation and the latter was uninvited isolated and interruptive laughter.) Towards the end of King's first turn in this extract, he made an illustrative hand gesture to imitate a telephone. He maintained this hand gesture throughout the rest of the turns reported here. He also made various changes in stance, turning his body towards the left and then towards the right, and bending forward slightly from the waist. The combinations of changes in stance and intonation at points [2] and [4] indicated to the audience that these were salient laughter invitation points.

Just over a minute and a half into his performance, Andy Parsons delivered the following utterance: "Maybe he's just trying to wind up the teachers. Cos it's quite easy to wind up a teacher isn't it?" Towards the end of this utterance, Parsons gradually turned his body to the right and made a slight dip (presumably by bending



his knees, although the camera angle did not show the lower part of his body at that point). The audience responded with collective laughter. (This is an example of the use of a rhetorical question device which elicited collective audience laughter as opposed to a vocal response; see p. 157.)

As with gaze, stance tends to be used throughout stand-up comedy performances more often than as a specific invitational device; however, the examples described above show that stance can also be used as a specific invitational technique.

### *Use of props*

The use of props was relatively rare within the present corpus: the only physical props being used by any of the performers in this sample were the microphone and its stand. Despite their rarity within the present sample, props can be additional devices through which stand-up comedians invite affiliative responses from their audiences. Adoption of voices was described on pp. 178-179 as a form of vocal prop, and the use of a musical prop in Gordon Southern's performance was described on pp. 113-114. Two examples of the use of a physical prop (the microphone stand) will now be presented.

Approximately two and a half minutes into his performance, Gavin Webster delivered the following utterance:

The- er- [laughs] So I'll just- I'll just put the mike stand, er, over- over there, right, so as to- kill a bit of time. Now, er-

He delivered this utterance while moving the microphone stand from the centre of the stage at the front, to further back towards the left hand side of the stage (from the audience's perspective), and the audience responded to this utterance with collective laughter.

In the following pair of utterances, which began approximately seven and a half minutes into Sean Lock's performance, the microphone stand was not being used as an invitational device at first; however, as the utterance continued, Lock made use of it as an invitational device.

Actually I did notice, though, I did notice there that, er, there was a little-slight bit of frostiness in the room, when I mentioned the- er- the cat thing,



pissing on the cat thing. And I must just point out, you know, I didn't- didn't do that, it was a joke, having a laugh, you know, made it up off the top of my head, you know. And, er, so don't worry about it, you know. Cos a lot- lot of people think, you know, that I get, cos you get complaints like that, and I- I'd just like to point out I love animals, you know. Nothing gives me a greater thrill than helping an animal, an injured animal, or- something like that. Or being able to operate a mike stand properly, you know, smoothly- [1] And not turn it the wrong way. Er- and- there we go, there, like that- I don't think they'll edit that out, cos that was really good that bit, wasn't it. Um- [2]

During his delivery of the first of these utterances, Lock was having difficulty returning the microphone stand to its appropriate height after he had brought it back to the front of the stage. Before the final sentence in that utterance the microphone stand had just been an incidental item; however, by referring to it directly and commenting self-deprecatingly on his ineptitude in handling it, Lock turned it into an invitational prop. He continued to do this with the second utterance reported here, and this incident led to a subsequent section of his routine about the editing of televised stand-up comedy performances. The audience responded at both points [1] and [2] with collective laughter.

While there were relatively few incidences of the use of props within the present sample, it is suggested that props can be used effectively during stand-up comedy performances as invitations for affiliative audience responses.

### **Summary**

The above section of the present chapter has presented illustrative examples of 16 different forms of invitational devices that were used by the stand-up comedians within the present corpus of 13 stand-up comedy performances. (This number increases to 37 if all of the subcategories of the proposed devices are counted separately.) As previously stated, in most of these cases the performers used a combination of invitational devices; this tendency to combine response invitations makes it difficult to identify which of the invitational devices in the combination was the most salient for inviting any given audience response. A far more detailed analysis of every response invitation would be necessary in order to attempt to ascertain this, and such an analysis is beyond the scope of the present



thesis. However, a first step towards such an analysis would be to compare two different specific invitational techniques and attempt to measure their relative contributions towards invitationality throughout the corpus as a whole. Such an analysis will be presented in the next section of this chapter, which will present a quantitative comparison between the use of standard rhetorical devices and the use of gestures as invitational devices throughout the present corpus. This analysis is presented as an illustrative example towards ascertaining the relative contributions of different invitational devices towards invitationality as a whole. It is recognised that many additional quantitative studies will be required, comparing each of the proposed invitational devices with each other, before this question can be exhaustively addressed.

### **THE CONTRIBUTION OF TWO DIFFERENT COMEDY INVITATION DEVICES TO INVITATIONALITY**

The previous section of this chapter presented a suggested taxonomy of comedy invitation devices used by the stand-up comedians within the present corpus. The present section intends to report the analyses of quantitative codings for both rhetoricality and use of gestures throughout the corpus. The taxonomy presented above proposes that both rhetoricality and use of gestures contribute to a performer's use of invitationality. In order to investigate the relative contributions of these areas, quantitative analyses of both of these invitational devices were undertaken.

An analysis of standard rhetorical devices was previously presented in Chapter 4, and the results were reported in Table 4.8. However, that table reported the results for all of the audience responses within the corpus. The present chapter intends to report an analysis of the rhetorically formatted utterances for invited responses only, and a comparison will be drawn between this analysis and the one undertaken for Chapter 4.

In order to make a detailed quantitative comparison with another proposed comedy invitation device, it was decided to select an invitational technique that was qualitatively different from standard rhetorical devices. It was also important to select another device that occurred within all the performances in the corpus, and one which could be reliably coded by independent raters. For these reasons, the non-verbal, non-vocal device of the performer's use of gestures was chosen.



## **Method**

### ***Procedure***

Codings for invitationality and rhetoricality (as described in Chapter 3) were applied to every affiliative audience response within the corpus of 13 stand-up comedy routines (as described in Chapter 4). Every affiliative audience response was also coded for gesture, according to whether or not the performer used one or more gestures towards the end point of the utterance immediately prior to the audience response. Responses to utterances including (or consisting solely of) one or more gestures were coded as gesture, and responses to utterances without the use of gestures towards the end point were coded as non-gesture. In some cases it could not be definitely determined whether a gesture was used, due to the broadcast camera angle not showing the whole of the performer's body. Instances where the performer was shown in close-up and no gesture could be detected were coded as ambiguous; however, if a gesture could be detected when the performer was shown in close-up, the coding of gesture was applied.

### ***Reliability***

The level of inter-observer agreement with the second coder for the various dimensions was as follows: invitationality 94.1% (N=136); rhetoricality 87.9% (N=107); use of gestures 85.5% (N=275). Percentage agreement of 85% or more is generally considered acceptable (Stiff & Mongeau, 2002).

## **Results**

In response to research question 5.3, it was found that audience responses during stand-up comedy performances can be reliably categorised as being in response to one or more gestures towards the end point of the performer's utterance. As reported above, at 85.5%, the percentage of inter-observer agreement just exceeded the 85% which is generally considered acceptable. In response to research questions 5.4 and 5.5, the results for the analyses of rhetoricality and use of gestures will be reported separately below, followed by a comparison of the relative contributions of rhetoricality and use of gestures to invitationality.

### ***Rhetoricality***

Chapter 4 reported the results for rhetoricality within the present corpus (see pp. 123-126). However, no attempt was made in that chapter to distinguish between invited and uninvited responses. This section therefore presents the results of an analysis of all of the invited audience response tokens within the corpus to which



the audience audibly responded. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

*Proportions of invited responses to rhetorically formatted and non-rhetorically formatted utterances, by comedian (N=539)*

	Rhetorical		Non-rhetorical
	Atkinsonian	Additional	
Andy Zaltzman (N=34)	30 (88.2%)	2 ( 5.9%)	2 ( 5.9%)
Andy Parsons (N=39)	34 (87.2%)	2 ( 5.1%)	3 ( 7.7%)
Steve Jameson (N=20)	18 (90.0%)	0	2 (10.0%)
Sally Holloway (N= 25)	21 (84.0%)	1 ( 4.0%)	3 (12.0%)
Will Smith (N=40)	32 (80.0%)	3 ( 7.5%)	5 (12.5%)
Marian Pashley (N=31)	25 (80.6%)	2 ( 6.5%)	4 (12.9%)
Greg Burns (N=36)	27 (75.0%)	4 (11.1%)	5 (13.9%)
Matt King (N=54)	35 (64.8%)	6 (11.1%)	13 (24.1%)
Gavin Webster (N=32)	23 (71.9%)	1 (3.1%)	8 (25.0%)
Jack Russell (N=50)	33 (66.0%)	2 ( 4.0%)	15 (30.0%)
Gordon Southern (N=53)	36 (67.9%)	0	17 (32.1%)
Richard Ayoade (N=44)	25 (56.8%)	2 ( 4.5%)	17 (38.6%)
Sean Lock (N=81)	38 (46.9%)	0	43 (53.1%)
Total	377 (69.9%)	25 (4.6%)	137 (25.4%)
M (SD)	73.8% (13.0%)	4.8% (3.7%)	21.4% (14.0%)
M (SD) for all responses (reported in Table 4.8, p. 124)	70.3% (10.9%)	4.3% (3.4%)	25.4% (11.9%)

When considering just invited responses, as opposed to all audience responses in the corpus, the proportion of responses which were invited using the standard rhetorical devices identified by Atkinson (e.g., 1984a) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) increased from 70.3% to 73.8%, and the proportion invited by additional rhetorically formatted utterances which may be specific to stand-up comedy increased from 4.3% to 4.8%. Even so, more than a fifth (21.4%) of the invited responses within the present corpus were invited using techniques other than Atkinsonian and additional rhetorical devices.



This chapter will now present similar results for a different comedy invitation device, the performers' use of gestures, and will go on to discuss the relative contributions of rhetoricality and gestures towards invitationality within the present corpus.

### *Gestures*

A comedian's use of gestures was one of the specific invitational techniques proposed in the taxonomy of comedy invitation devices presented earlier in this chapter. In response to research question 5.3, it was decided to code the comedy performances in the present corpus for use of gestures in a similar way to rhetoricality, as described above, and the findings of this analysis are presented in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3

*Proportions of invited responses to utterances accompanied by one or more gestures, by comedian (N=539)*

	Gesture	No gesture	Ambiguous
Jack Russell (N=50)	45 (90.0%)	2 ( 4.0%)	3 ( 6.0%)
Andy Zaltzman (N=34)	30 (88.2%)	4 (11.8%)	0
Sean Lock (N=81)	69 (85.2%)	8 ( 9.9%)	4 ( 4.9%)
Gordon Southern (N=53)	44 (83.0%)	5 ( 9.4%)	4 ( 7.5%)
Will Smith (N=40)	33 (82.5%)	5 (12.5%)	2 ( 5.0%)
Gavin Webster (N=32)	25 (78.1%)	7 (21.9%)	0
Richard Ayoade (N=44)	32 (72.7%)	8 (18.2%)	4 ( 9.1%)
Sally Holloway (N=25)	18 (72.0%)	5 (20.0%)	2 ( 8.0%)
Greg Burns (N=36)	18 (50.0%)	11 (30.6%)	7 (19.4%)
Marian Pashley (N=31)	15 (48.4%)	14 (45.1%)	2 ( 6.5%)
Matt King (N=54)	25 (46.3%)	20 (37.0%)	9 (16.7%)
Andy Parsons (N=39)	16 (41.0%)	19 (48.7%)	4 (10.3%)
Steve Jameson (N=20)	6 (30.0%)	10 (50.0%)	4 (20.0%)
Total	376 (69.8%)	118 (21.9%)	45 ( 8.3%)
M (SD)	66.7% (20.6%)	24.5% (16.0%)	8.7% (6.5%)
M (SD) for all responses (see table 5.4 below)	65.3% (19.9%)	25.3% (15.0%)	9.4% (6.2%)



In order to make a similar comparison to that presented for rhetoricality above, all of the remaining (i.e., uninvited and ambiguous) responses within the present corpus were additionally coded for the comedian's use of gestures, as previously described. Table 5.4 presents the results for all of the audience responses within the corpus.

Table 5.4

*Proportions of responses to utterances accompanied by one or more gestures, by comedian (N=605)*

	Gesture	No gesture	Ambiguous
Jack Russell (N=60)	55 (91.7%)	2 ( 3.3%)	3 ( 5.0%)
Gordon Southern (N=56)	47 (83.9%)	5 ( 8.9%)	4 ( 7.1%)
Sean Lock (N=86)	72 (83.7%)	10 (11.6%)	4 ( 4.7%)
Andy Zaltzman (N=40)	32 (80.0%)	6 (15.0%)	2 ( 5.0%)
Gavin Webster (N=33)	26 (78.8%)	7 (21.2%)	0
Will Smith (N=45)	35 (77.8%)	7 (15.6%)	3 ( 6.7%)
Richard Ayoade (N=47)	33 (70.2%)	9 (19.1%)	5 (10.6%)
Sally Holloway (N=29)	19 (65.5%)	8 (27.6%)	2 ( 6.9%)
Marian Pashley (N=35)	18 (51.4%)	14 (40.0%)	3 ( 8.6%)
Greg Burns (N=40)	20 (50.0%)	13 (32.5%)	7 (17.5%)
Matt King (N=68)	32 (47.1%)	25 (36.8%)	11 (16.2%)
Andy Parsons (N=44)	18 (40.9%)	21 (47.7%)	5 (11.4%)
Steve Jameson (N=22)	6 (27.3%)	11 (50.0%)	5 (22.7%)
Total	413 (68.3%)	138 (22.8%)	54 ( 8.9%)
M (SD)	65.3% (19.9%)	25.3% (15.0%)	9.4% (6.2%)

Table 5.3 shows that more than two thirds of the invited audience responses within the present corpus (66.7%) were in response to utterances accompanied by the performer's use of gestures, and approximately a quarter (24.5%) were not. A comparison between invited-only responses and all responses within the corpus shows that these figures are higher for invited responses than all responses (65.3% and 25.3%, respectively). This is similar to the finding for rhetoricality reported above. The opposite finding would have suggested that a performer's use of gestures is not necessarily an invitational tactic and that gestures are simply accompanying the performance discourse as a whole.



Tables 5.2 and 5.3 show that both rhetoricality and use of gestures make a substantial contribution to invitationality within the present corpus. 73.8% of all invited responses were in response to utterances formatted using standard rhetorical devices, and 66.7% of all invited responses were in response to utterances accompanied by the comedian's use of gestures. On the face of it, it appears as though rhetoricality makes a greater contribution to invitationality than use of gestures. It also appears as though there is a considerable amount of double counting, with many of the invited responses within the corpus being in response to both rhetoricality and use of gestures. In order to further investigate this, and in response to research question 5.4, it was decided to compare invitationality with both rhetoricality and use of gestures within the present corpus. These findings are presented in Table 5.5.



Table 5.5

*Respective contributions of rhetoricality and use of gestures to invitationality within the present corpus, by performer (N=494)*

	Rhetoric only	Gesture Only	Rhetoric and Gesture	Neither
Andy Zaltzman (N=34)	4 (11.8%)	2 ( 5.9%)	28 (82.4%)	0
Jack Russell (N=47)	1 ( 2.1%)	12 (25.5%)	33 (70.2%)	1 (2.1%)
Richard Ayoade (N=40)	6 (15.0%)	13 (32.5%)	20 (50.0%)	1 (2.5%)
Will Smith (N=38)	4 (10.5%)	3 ( 7.9%)	30 (78.9%)	1 (2.6%)
Andy Parsons (N=35)	18 (51.4%)	2 ( 5.7%)	14 (40.0%)	1 (2.9%)
Marian Pashley (N=29)	11 (37.9%)	3 (10.3%)	14 (48.3%)	1 (3.4%)
Gordon Southern (N=49)	3 ( 6.1%)	13 (26.5%)	31 (63.3%)	2 (4.1%)
Sean Lock (N=77)	5 ( 6.5%)	36 (46.8%)	32 (41.6%)	4 (5.2%)
Steve Jameson (N=16)	9 (56.3%)	1 ( 6.3%)	5 (31.3%)	1 (6.3%)
Gavin Webster (N=32)	5 (15.6%)	6 (18.8%)	19 (59.4%)	2 (6.3%)
Greg Burns (N=29)	9 (31.0%)	2 ( 6.9%)	16 (55.2%)	2 (6.9%)
Sally Holloway (N=23)	3 (13.0%)	1 ( 4.3%)	17 (73.9%)	2 (8.7%)
Matt King (N=45)	15 (33.3%)	6 (13.3%)	20 (44.4%)	4 (8.9%)
Total	93 (18.8%)	100 (20.2%)	279 (56.5%)	22 (4.5%)
M	22.3%	16.2%	56.8%	4.6%
(SD)	(17.8%)	(13.1%)	(16.1%)	(2.7%)

*Note.* Only unambiguously invited responses were analysed. Instances with ambiguous use of gestures (N=45) have been omitted from this analysis.

Table 5.5 shows that, on average, more than half of the invited responses in the present corpus (56.8%) were in response to utterances delivered using a combination of one or more standard rhetorical devices and one or more gestures. The majority of the remaining invited responses were either in response to utterances containing standard rhetorical devices but not accompanied by gestures (22.3%) or to utterances accompanied by the performer's use of gestures but not containing standard rhetorical devices (16.2%). However, Table 5.5 also shows that an average of 4.6% of the invited responses within the present corpus were neither in response to utterances formatted using standard rhetorical devices nor to utterances accompanied by the performer's use of gestures. No statistical difference was found between the relative contributions to invitationality of utterances



containing rhetorical devices without gestures and utterances containing gestures without rhetorical devices (Wilcoxon  $T = 33$ , n.s.). Thus, in response to research question 5.5, it appears as though rhetoricality and use of gestures contribute equally towards invitationality within the present sample.

## **DISCUSSION**

The proposed groupings within this taxonomy reflected logical connections between the different devices proposed, and took no account of the frequency with which they were employed within the corpus. Therefore this is at present a theoretical rather than an empirical suggestion. Further research will be necessary in order to determine whether this proposed hierarchy is the most effective way of representing the invitation techniques used by stand-up comedians to invite affiliative audience responses. This could perhaps be achieved by quantitative analysis of a much larger corpus of stand-up comedy material and factor analysis.

It should be noted that this proposed taxonomy is not intended to be an exhaustive and comprehensive account of all of the invitation techniques used throughout the present corpus. It is presented as a logical starting point, based on the conceptual analysis as described, and is open to additions and amendments based on further studies. As it stands, it suggests that delivery in the genre of stand-up comedy is considerably more complex than in the genre of political speeches.

Of the verbal responses in the present corpus, Atkinsonian rhetoricality and external referentiality appeared to be among the most frequently used devices within the present sample. Of the non-verbal responses, gestures appeared to be more consistently used as invitation devices than any of the other invitation techniques proposed. However, these findings are subjective, based on qualitative rather than quantitative observation of the present corpus, and will remain speculative until more detailed quantitative research on this corpus can be performed.

In the present sample, a total of 22 instances (4.6%) of invited audience responses were neither in response to the performer's use of standard rhetorical formats nor the performer's use of gestures. It is suggested that these instances would all be accounted for by one or more of the other invitation techniques proposed in the previously described taxonomy. In order to ascertain whether this taxonomy presents a comprehensive account of the invitation devices used by the performers within the present corpus, it would be beneficial to perform similar



analyses for each of the proposed invitational categories for every invited audience response in the corpus. In order to perform these analyses, it would first be necessary to obtain reliable codings for each of the proposed invitational techniques. This may require more stringent definitions in some cases, and in practice it is possible that some of the categories proposed here are not sufficiently rigorously defined to facilitate reliable coding. Again, the taxonomy presented here is intended as a “first pass” – a coherent initial suggestion for the processes comprising invitationality in stand-up comedy. It is expected that considerable future fine-tuning of these proposed categories will be necessary before it will be possible to arrive at a point at which all of the contributions towards invitationality have been successfully identified. Of the currently proposed invitational techniques, it is suggested that the easiest verbal devices to identify systematically will be internal and external referentiality, and the easiest non-verbal devices to identify systematically will be adoption of voices and use of props. As previously stated, it is anticipated that incongruity devices will be particularly difficult to identify. Empirical observation of live stand-up comedy performances appears to be a more effective way of identifying the specific invitational devices used by comedians than attempting to identify these categories based on imprecisely defined terms, however frequently they might be mentioned in the literature on humour and laughter research.

Assuming that reliable coding schemes could be developed for all of the proposed invitational techniques, it would be valuable to obtain categorical codings for the remainder of the comedy invitation devices that were outlined earlier in this chapter. It would thus be possible to investigate whether, between them, all of the proposed categories account for all of the invited responses within the present corpus, and also to ascertain which of the proposed devices accounted for the greatest proportions of the variability. After performing such an analysis, it would be beneficial to analyse larger and more heterogeneous samples of stand-up comedy performances, in order to avoid the chance that the observations presented here are merely the result of idiosyncratic, non-representative sampling within the genre of stand-up comedy as a whole. Such larger samples would include longer performances, performances by both more and less well-known comedians, performances by non-British comedians for non-British audiences (where performer



and audience are from the same culture, as well as where they are from different cultures), and so forth.

In particular, it would be beneficial to have a clearer definition of incongruity; ideally one that can be agreed upon by a sizable section of the humour research community. As stated previously, much of the current humour literature considers incongruity to be an essential ingredient of humour; however, without a clear definition (or series of sub-definitions) to indicate how incongruity can be identified in practice, it is not possible to measure its contribution to stand-up comedy as performed in real-life situations. If it were possible to make such measurements, the results of these empirical analyses of stand-up-comedy-as-performed could make a valuable contribution to the theoretical constructs of “how humour works” which appear to be more of a focus within the current field of humour research (e.g., Attardo & Raskin, 1991).

In the analysis of gestures presented in the present chapter, it was found that – even more so than with rhetoricality – there were considerable individual differences between the performers in the present sample. Some comedians appeared to be inviting more audience responses through the use of gestures than others. Although it was shown that codings for a performer’s use of gestures could be made reliably, it is possible that certain forms of gesture could be more salient in stand-up comedy than others. It is suggested that a comprehensive taxonomy of invitational devices is necessary in order to identify all of the invitational techniques used by stand-up comedy performers, with the addendum that each of these techniques will be used more widely by some comedians than others. After a comprehensive taxonomy has been defined, and once each of the suggested categories can be reliably identified within a range of stand-up comedy performances, it will then become possible to discover which of these techniques are in widespread use across the genre as a whole and which are used idiosyncratically by a relatively limited range of performers.

The value of performing such an exercise within a genre such as stand-up comedy – in which considerably more individual differences are found than those between different politicians, for example – is that the techniques which appear to be most widely used in this genre may also be the techniques which are used within performer-audience interaction across all genres of public performance. It is suggested that the identification and quantification of such invitational techniques



within stand-up comedy might be a useful starting point for an analysis of speaker-audience interaction as a whole, irrespective of performance genre. However, it is likely that converging evidence could usefully be brought to bear from similar analyses in other genres; for example, Greatbatch and Clark's (2005) studies of performer-audience interaction in the genre of "management guru" speeches. It would be beneficial for future cross-genre research to combine these findings, and also to seek additional examples from within individual genres of performance.

Chapter 4 presented a comparison between the results for rhetoricality in stand-up comedy performances and in political speeches. It might be informative to apply the gesture codings reported in the present chapter to the sample of political speeches analysed by Bull and Wells (2002) in order to ascertain the differences between the use of gestures as an invitational device in stand-up comedy performances and in political speeches. It was found that use of gestures and rhetoricality made statistically equivalent combinations to invitationality in the present corpus of stand-up comedy performances. Given that rhetoricality accounts for a higher percentage of invited responses in the political speeches studied by Bull and Wells (2002) than in the stand-up comedy performances reported within the present thesis, it is possible that the use of gestures will be found to account for a lower proportion of invitationality within the genre of political speeches. Alternatively, if the use of gestures in that genre were found to make a statistically similar contribution as rhetoricality to invitationality, this would challenge the findings of Atkinson (e.g., 1984a) that applause in political speeches is primarily invited by the use of standard rhetorical devices. Only a detailed empirical analysis of a corpus of speeches within that genre would be able to address this particular research question.

The identification of a range of techniques used by stand-up comedians to invite affiliative responses from their audiences also implies the relevance of considering "the other side of the coin". The following chapter will therefore go on to examine audience disaffiliation within the present corpus.



## CHAPTER 6

# To laugh, or not to laugh? An analysis of disaffiliative audience responses

### INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 presented a series of qualitative and quantitative analyses of all of the audience responses within the present corpus, each of which contained affiliative response tokens, and Chapter 5 presented a suggested taxonomy of comedy invitation devices based on a qualitative analysis of all of the invited audience responses in the corpus, along with a comparative analysis of two specific invitational techniques (standard rhetorical devices and use of gestures). A range of issues relating to affiliative audience responses within stand-up comedy have thus been addressed with reference to the present sample. Of course, not all audience responses are affiliative; audience members may fail to laugh, or even respond with jeers and boos. Hence, it is now necessary to address the issue of audience disaffiliation. The aim of the present chapter, therefore, is to propose and evaluate a number of ways in which audience disaffiliation in stand-up comedy performances can be identified.

Chapter 4 reported that all of the audience turns within the present corpus contained overtly affiliative response tokens. Ten of these responses (1.7% of the total number of audience responses in the sample) also contained overtly disaffiliative tokens (i.e., groans or boos). Chapter 4 also reported the results of an analysis of affiliation intensity, in which all of the audience response turns that did not contain overtly disaffiliative response tokens were reliably coded as to whether they displayed weak, normal, or strong affiliation intensity. The present chapter will consider the responses identified in Chapter 4 as being weakly affiliative as well as the responses which contained groans and boos. Both weakly affiliative responses and responses containing a combination of affiliative and disaffiliative tokens might be seen as either potentially or partially disaffiliative, given that overtly affiliative response tokens were present in all of these response turns.

Another suggestion made in Chapter 4 was that audience disaffiliation could be indicated by “negative mismatches”. The detailed analysis of audience



asynchrony in that chapter suggested that interruptive mismatches could be seen as a positive form of asynchrony, but that isolated and delayed mismatches tended to be forms of negative asynchrony. Since 47 of the 53 negatively asynchronous responses within the corpus (88.7%) were also judged to be of weak affiliation intensity, there is a considerable overlap between the categories of weak affiliation intensity and negative asynchrony. Since it is possible that both negative mismatches and weakly affiliative responses could be salient indicators of audience disaffiliation, it is proposed that the additional six negative mismatch incidences, which were all judged to be of normal affiliation intensity, will also be considered in this chapter. This further analysis may provide some indication as to whether the category of “negative mismatches” is likely to be more or less indicative of audience disaffiliation than that of “weak affiliation intensity”.

Given that none of the audience turns in the present corpus contained disaffiliative response tokens in the absence of accompanying affiliative response tokens, it is not possible to study “pure” audience disaffiliation within this sample. However, if weakly affiliative responses and/or negative mismatches can be seen as potentially or partially disaffiliative, non-responses could – by extension – be seen as fully disaffiliative. It should be pointed out that this hypothesis is not amenable to reliable quantitative analysis, in that the lack of an overt response from the audience at any point might be considered to indicate either affiliation (paying attention to the performance) or disaffiliation (failing to respond). In other words, it is more valid to analyse empirical occurrences of response tokens than their absence. However, given that Chapter 5 presented a suggested taxonomy of comedy invitation devices that were derived from a detailed qualitative analysis of every invited audience response within the present corpus, it is possible to present a qualitative analysis of empirically posited non-responses in this chapter, based on those devices. Having identified a range of invitational techniques, it becomes possible to identify additional occasions when performers used them to invite affiliative responses from their audiences, even when such responses were not audibly produced. A selection of audience non-responses at salient response invitation points will therefore be presented, along with an explanation as to why a response was considered to be invited at that point. In each case, suggestions will also be made as to why no response was produced.



If it is accepted that audience members can disaffiliate with a performer by failing to produce a response at a salient invitation point, it is also possible that a further and complementary form of audience disaffiliation is the production of an overt response at a point when it was not invited by the performer. Consequently, this chapter will also present the results of a detailed qualitative analysis of all of the unambiguously uninvited audience responses within the present corpus, in order to assess the extent to which uninvited audience responses reflect audience disaffiliation.

The present chapter therefore intends to consider the nature and extent of audience disaffiliation in the stand-up comedy performances in the present corpus with respect to each of the following research questions:

### **Research questions**

- 6.1 To what extent do audiences disaffiliate when they produce responses containing overt tokens of disaffiliation during otherwise affiliative audience responses?
- 6.2 To what extent do audiences disaffiliate when they produce affiliative responses of weak affiliation intensity?
- 6.3 To what extent do audiences disaffiliate when they produce “negative mismatches” (i.e., isolated or delayed responses)?
- 6.4 To what extent do audiences disaffiliate when they fail to respond at salient response invitation points?
- 6.5 To what extent do audiences disaffiliate when they produce uninvited responses?

Each of these research questions will be addressed in turn, following which an overall summary analysis of comparative degrees of audience disaffiliation will be discussed.



## **METHOD**

### **Procedure**

All of the responses within the corpus of 13 stand-up comedy routines described in Chapter 4 were coded for affiliation and affiliation intensity (as described in Chapter 4) and for invitationality, rhetoricality, and synchrony (Bull & Wells, 2002, as described in Chapter 3). All of the asynchronous responses in the corpus were additionally analysed according to their mismatch type(s) (Bull & Noordhuizen, 2000, as described in Chapter 3). Reliability data for these coding schemes were reported in Chapter 4 (see p. 100).

All of the audience responses that could be considered to be potentially disaffiliative were then subjected to a detailed qualitative analysis. These included responses containing tokens of overt disaffiliation, affiliative responses with weak affiliation intensity, asynchronous responses that were isolated and/or delayed, and uninvited responses. Additionally, all of the performers' turns within the corpus were examined, in order to identify potential response invitations to which no perceptible audience responses were produced.

## **RESULTS**

This section will be subdivided into four separate sub-sections, which will report the findings related to research questions 6.1, 6.2 - 6.3, 6.4, and 6.5, respectively.

### **Mixed responses**

In response to research question 6.1, Chapter 4 defined mixed responses as those which contained tokens of both overt affiliation (laughter in all cases, along with isolated applause in some cases) and overt disaffiliation (groans in nine cases, and boos in one case). A detailed qualitative analysis of all of the mixed audience responses in the present corpus was presented in Chapter 4 (see pp. 114-118), and some similarities were found in the performers' speech content immediately prior to those responses. Three of the examples involved puns with a double meaning, two involved deprecation, and five conjured up unpleasant or uncomfortable mental images. As stated in Chapter 4, five of the audience's disaffiliative response tokens were produced in response to one-liners, whereas the other five were produced in response to utterances which also related to the speech content of the immediately preceding utterances. The single response during Steve Jameson's performance, the two responses during Sally Holloway's performance, and two of the five responses



during Will Smith's performance were of the former type; the remaining three responses during Will Smith's performance and the two responses during Gordon Southern's performance were of the latter type. The former type accounted for the puns with double meanings and the incidences of deprecation, and the latter type accounted for the utterances that conjured up unpleasant or uncomfortable mental images. Thus, two distinct forms of utterances within the present corpus received responses containing overt tokens of disaffiliation: one-liners that contained deprecation and/or puns with double meanings, and continuation utterances that conjured up unpleasant or uncomfortable mental images. In three cases, these distinct forms occurred in combination: two of the one-liner puns also conjured up unpleasant mental images, and one of the responses that depended on context also included a pun (which relied on external referentiality in order to be understood by the audience). It should be stressed, however, that there were only ten mixed response tokens in the corpus as a whole, and that these occurred during only four of the 13 performances in the sample, so these findings are just preliminary observations based on the limited set of response tokens within the present corpus that contained overt tokens of audience disaffiliation.

Chapter 4 reported that all of the responses containing overt tokens of audience disaffiliation were both invited and synchronous. However, it must be noted that it was the audience response as a whole that was coded for these analyses; no distinction was made between the affiliative and disaffiliative portions of those responses. A further analysis of these ten audience turns indicates that in all cases the laughter response was produced first, followed by the overtly disaffiliative response tokens. In nine of the ten mixed responses, the laughter started either at the same time as or within a quarter of a second of the end of the performer's utterance, and the groans started between half a second and one second after the onset of laughter. In the single response that involved boos, these started three seconds after the onset of laughter, i.e., later than the groan responses. This suggests a potential difference in character between groans and boos, although with only one example of boos in the present corpus, this can only be a speculative suggestion.

One of the ten mixed responses started almost three quarters of a second after the end of the performer's utterance; in this instance, the groans started being produced almost simultaneously with the laughter. This may indicate that the production of disaffiliative response tokens automatically takes longer to initiate



than laughter, which may suggest that tokens of overt disaffiliation are dispreferred responses during stand-up comedy performances, in contrast to the preferred response of laughter. Clayman (1993) suggested that this was the case with respect to booing responses during political speeches.

In the four responses that contained isolated applause as well as groans, the first clap always occurred after the groans had begun (between one and three seconds after the onset of groans, and between two and five seconds after the onset of laughter, in all cases). In the audience responses that included multiple response tokens, it is possible to speculate that there may be a “mini-conversation” going on between different sections of the audience within a single audience response turn. If some audience members are producing affiliative response tokens and others are producing disaffiliative response tokens, one or two of the members who begin by producing laughter could later decide to produce isolated applause in refutation of the groans that are then being produced by other audience members. In three of the five responses containing laughter and groans but not isolated applause, the performer’s subsequent turn interrupted the audience’s response and may have curtailed it before either further tokens of disaffiliation or isolated applause responses would have been produced. The response that contained boos did not also contain isolated applause. Given that the boos in this response were produced later than the groans in the other nine responses, it is questionable whether there would have been sufficient time within the same audience response turn for isolated applause tokens to be produced as well.

On the basis of the present analysis, it appears as though mixed responses that include groans during stand-up comedy performances consist of laughter, groans, and (optionally) isolated applause, in that order. It would be useful to analyse further examples of responses containing both overtly affiliative and overtly disaffiliative tokens in order to determine whether this order is always the same, and whether isolated applause can sometimes be produced along with a response containing boos – and if so, which of these responses is typically produced first. Given that the typical timing of isolated applause as part of a response containing laughter and groans occurred at approximately the same duration through a given audience turn as the single example of boos relative to collective laughter within the present sample, it is not currently possible to speculate whether boos or isolated



applause would be produced first. Indeed, they could even be produced simultaneously within such a turn.

One suggestion made in Chapter 4 was that audience members who produce tokens of overt disaffiliation when a collective affiliative audience response is already under way might be overtly disaffiliating with the audience members who are producing that response, rather than with the performer. Once audience members are already producing collective laughter, it is self-evident that disaffiliation can no longer be indicated by a non-response. Given that in nine out of the ten cases of mixed responses within the present corpus the disaffiliative tokens were produced at least half a second after the affiliative laughter was under way, this is a plausible interpretation. However, if the delay in the production of these disaffiliative tokens occurred simply because such responses are dispreferred, this suggestion would not be supported. In the single case in the present sample where boos were produced, these began three seconds after the onset of collective laughter, which is a stronger argument in support of the suggestion that different sections of the audience were disaffiliating with each other in that instance. In the single example when groans were produced almost immediately after the onset of laughter, this appears to have been because the production of laughter was delayed; on this occasion, it is almost certain that the audience were expressing their disaffiliation with the performer rather than with other audience members.

The present analysis of so-called disaffiliative responses might be confounded if a performer intended to invite overtly disaffiliative response tokens from his or her audience at the point at which they were produced. According to McIlvenny (1996a), some orators at Speakers' Corner invite disaffiliative heckling from their audiences. If that were the case, some or all of the overt tokens of disaffiliation in this corpus would more properly be considered as special forms of affiliative response tokens. For example, groans could be as salient as laughter in response to corny one-liner puns. Utterances that conjure up dubious mental representations of women's bodily functions or men's absurd sexual pursuits might be intended to invite responses of disgust, which could be conveyed by overt tokens of disaffiliation. A performer's deprecation of others might invite either the audience's deprecation of the performer or their objection to the performer's use of deprecation. In either case, it can be argued that overtly disaffiliative response tokens are appropriate forms of affiliative response. If the audience's production of



overtly disaffiliative response tokens were just as conditionally relevant as their production of laughter, it would be wrong to interpret these empirical tokens of overt disaffiliation as indicating the audience's *actual* disaffiliation with the performer. For audiences to convey genuine disaffiliation, they might need to produce overtly disaffiliative responses in several successive turns, and the disaffiliative content in those responses might need to escalate from one turn to the next. No such tokens were observed within the present corpus; indeed, it would be rare to find such examples during the quality of stand-up comedy material selected for broadcast on national television.

Given that the above arguments can be made for interpreting overtly disaffiliative audience response tokens as *non-disaffiliative*, it may be more accurate to interpret them as being qualitatively similar to the vocal response token described in Chapter 4 (see pp. 113-114), which was interpreted in that chapter as an affiliative response token. Also, since tokens of empirical audience disaffiliation can be argued to be just as conditionally relevant as tokens of overt affiliation (or perhaps even more so, in some cases), it is possible that the groans or boos in these mixed responses may be similar, albeit in a different form, to the incidences of collective audience applause that occurred alongside collective laughter in the laughter-plus-applause category reported in Chapter 4 (see pp. 104-110). It is therefore suggested that the amount of actual disaffiliation conveyed by the audience's production of overtly disaffiliative response tokens in stand-up comedy performances, at least when these tokens are produced in combination with laughter responses, can at best be considered as marginally disaffiliative.

### **Weak affiliation intensity and negative mismatches**

In response to research question 6.2, Table 4.4 reported that the present corpus contained a total of 103 audience responses that were judged to be of weak affiliation intensity. This accounts for 17.0% of all of the audience response turns within the corpus. Tables 4.7, 4.13, and 4.16 provided further breakdowns of these responses in terms of invitationality (67 invited, 14 uninvited, and 22 ambiguous), synchrony (46 synchronous and 57 asynchronous), and mismatch types (45 isolated, four delayed, and 21 interruptive, including double counting).

In response to research question 6.3, 53 negatively asynchronous responses were found within the present corpus. Since 47 of these tokens were judged to be of weak affiliation intensity, and are thus already accounted for by research question



6.2, the six negative mismatches that were judged to be of normal affiliation intensity (and which therefore constitute the remainder of the items identified for research question 6.3) will be considered along with the response tokens identified for research question 6.2. Thus the analyses for both research questions 6.2 and 6.3 (N=109) will be reported in the present section. Before going on to present the qualitative analyses of these audience response turns, quantitative findings will be reported for the negative mismatches with reference to invitationality and affiliation intensity, and for the weakly affiliative responses with reference to invitationality and synchrony. Since a relatively large proportion of the weakly affiliative asynchronous responses included double counting of mismatch types, a further breakdown of mismatch types will be presented, showing separate line items for single and multiple mismatches.

Table 6.1 presents an analysis of invitationality and affiliation intensity for all of the negative mismatches within the present corpus.

Table 6.1

*Analysis of invitationality and affiliation intensity for audience responses with negative asynchrony, by comedian (N=53)*

	Invited		Uninvited		Ambiguous	
	Weak	Norm	Weak	Norm	Weak	Norm
Sally Holloway (N=0)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marian Pashley (N=2)	0	0	1	0	1	0
Richard Ayoade (N=2)	2	0	0	0	0	0
Andy Parsons (N=3)	1	1	0	0	1	0
Gavin Webster (N=3)	1	1	0	0	1	0
Steve Jameson (N=3)	1	1	0	0	1	0
Andy Zaltzman (N=4)	2	1	1	0	0	0
Jack Russell (N=5)	1	0	2	0	2	0
Sean Lock (N=5)	4	0	1	0	0	0
Gordon Southern (N=5)	4	1	0	0	0	0
Will Smith (N=6)	3	0	2	0	1	0
Matt King (N=7)	3	0	3	0	1	0
Greg Burns (N=8)	4	0	1	0	2	1
Total	26 (49.1%)	5 (9.4%)	11 (20.8%)	0	10 (18.9%)	1 (1.9%)



Table 6.1 shows that almost half (49.1%) of the negative mismatches within the corpus were both invited and of weak affiliation intensity. Five of the six negative mismatches with normal affiliation intensity (83.3%) were invited. All of the uninvited negative mismatches within the present corpus were of weak affiliation intensity. Although many of the cells for the individual comedians within the corpus contain zeros, and the highest number in any individual cell is 4, separate line items are presented for each performance so that the spread of negative mismatches throughout the corpus can be observed. However, due to the large number of empty cells for individual comedians, proportions of negative mismatches have only been calculated for the corpus as a whole.

Table 6.2 presents an analysis of all of the weakly affiliative responses in the corpus, in terms of both invitationality and synchrony.

Table 6.2

*Analysis of invitationality and synchrony for audience responses of weak affiliation intensity, by comedian (N=103)*

	Invited		Uninvited		Ambiguous	
	S	AS	S	AS	S	AS
Sally Holloway (N=3)	0	1	0	0	1	1
Steve Jameson (N=3)	0	1	0	0	1	1
Marian Pashley (N=4)	2	0	0	1	0	1
Andy Zaltzman (N=5)	0	3	0	1	0	1
Andy Parsons (N=6)	2	1	1	0	1	1
Gavin Webster (N=6)	4	1	0	0	0	1
Will Smith (N=8)	1	3	0	2	1	1
Richard Ayoade (N=8)	4	3	0	0	1	0
Greg Burns (N=9)	2	4	0	1	0	2
Jack Russell (N=10)	5	1	0	2	0	2
Gordon Southern (N=10)	5	5	0	0	0	0
Matt King (N=14)	2	3	0	4	3	2
Sean Lock (N=17)	9	5	0	2	1	0
Total	36 (35.0%)	31 (30.1%)	1 (1.0%)	13 (12.6%)	9 ( 8.7%)	13 (12.6%)

Several of the cells within Table 6.2 contain zeros and many contain low numbers; the highest number in any individual cell is 9. As with Table 6.1, the data



have been presented in this way in order to show the range of weakly affiliative responses in terms of both synchrony and invitationality within each of the performances comprising the present corpus. For the corpus as a whole, 36 of the 67 invited responses of weak affiliation intensity (53.7%) were synchronous and 31 (46.3%) were asynchronous. In contrast, 13 of the 14 uninvited responses of weak affiliation intensity were asynchronous (92.9%).

Table 6.3 presents an analysis of the mismatch types for the asynchronous responses reported in Table 6.2. Due to the relatively small number of weakly affiliative asynchronous responses in total, this breakdown is presented for the sample as a whole rather than by individual performances.

Table 6.3

*Analysis of invitationality and mismatch types for asynchronous audience responses of weak affiliation intensity (N=57)*

	Invited	Uninvited	Ambiguous
Isolated	21 (36.8%)	3 ( 5.3%)	8 (14.0%)
Delayed	2 ( 3.5%)	0	0
Interruptive	5 ( 8.8%)	2 ( 3.5%)	3 ( 5.3%)
Isolated and delayed	2 ( 3.5%)	0	0
Isolated and interruptive	1 ( 1.8%)	8 (14.0%)	2 ( 3.5%)
Total	31 (54.4%)	13 (22.8%)	13 (22.8%)

Table 6.3 disambiguates the findings reported in Table 4.16, where the totals reported for weakly affiliative mismatch types included double counting. It also shows that more than half of the asynchronous responses of weak affiliation intensity within the corpus (54.4%) were invited, with the remainder being equally divided between uninvited and ambiguous responses. To summarise the combined results of Tables 6.2 and 6.3, 36 of the 67 invited and weakly affiliative response tokens were synchronous and five were positively asynchronous (N=41; 61.2%) and 26 were negatively asynchronous (38.8%, including one token that was both isolated and interruptive).

This section will now go on to present the findings of the qualitative analyses relating to research questions 6.2 and 6.3. All of the examples to be



described in the remainder of this section were invited responses. This is because negative mismatches and/or weak affiliation intensity can be considered to be more potentially disaffiliative when audience members have been unambiguously invited to produce an affiliative response at that point. Ambiguous responses will not be reported in the present chapter, since it was not possible to identify whether a response was invited on those occasions. Uninvited responses will be reported with reference to research question 6.5 below. Suggested reasons for weak affiliation intensity and/or negative mismatches for invited response tokens will be presented and illustrated with examples from within the corpus.

### *Position taking*

The studies reported in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 found that stand-up comedians invite laughter and other affiliative responses from their audiences by using the standard rhetorical devices identified by Atkinson (e.g., 1984a) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) in political speeches. One of these standard rhetorical devices is position taking, which has been found to be an effective device for inviting applause in political speeches (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986). However, the use of position taking as a laughter invitation in stand-up comedy performances may be less appropriate in this genre than the other forms of rhetorical delivery that have been identified as applause invitations in studies of political speeches (e.g., Bull, 2006). Position taking may not be sufficiently subtle to serve as an effective laughter invitation device in stand-up comedy performances. To illustrate this hypothesis, two examples are presented of invitational delivery using position taking which received weakly affiliative audience responses.

About three and a half minutes into his performance, in a section of his routine about people who order drugs over the telephone by using codes, Matt King delivered the following pair of utterances:

People ring up and go, “Hello, Steve? Yeah, hello mate. Look, listen, can I, er, can I come round and vacuum your walrus?” [1] That’s not a code. [2]

The audience responded with collective synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity at point [1], but their synchronous laughter response to his subsequent emphatically delivered position taking statement at point [2] was of weak affiliation intensity.



About four and a half minutes into his performance, in a section about how people behave in supermarkets, Gordon Southern delivered the following pair of utterances:

But the supermarkets have researched this. There's now a third way. Not a trolley, not a basket, it's about this high- the demi trolley basket hybrid. [1]  
And if you're feeling a bit lonely, it's only a quid. Go on, treat yourself, oof!  
[2]

The audience responded with collective laughter of normal affiliation intensity at point [1], but their response to Southern's position taking statement at point [2] was synchronous laughter of weak affiliation intensity. Southern delivered the final sentence of this utterance in an aggressive tone of voice, and accompanied it with a punch-like gesture, emphasising the position taking device and potentially creating a menacing atmosphere that might not have been conducive to the production of enthusiastic laughter.

In the political speeches studied by Bull and his colleagues (e.g., Bull, 2003), position taking may have been a successful invitational device because the politicians in those studies were speaking to members of their party faithful, whereas in stand-up comedy performances the views and opinions of audience members are less transparent. For position taking to be successful, the performer's assumptions about the views of his or her audience need to be as accurate as possible. This is likely to be much more difficult in stand-up comedy performances than in political speeches. A comedy audience might reasonably contain a wide range of different viewpoints on many subjects. In responses of weak affiliation intensity, the opinions expressed in position taking statements are likely to be shared by a smaller section of the audience than the performer was anticipating.

### ***Failure of referentiality***

Chapter 5 (pp. 164-170) suggested that one way in which stand-up comedians invite affiliative responses from their audiences is by the use of external referentiality. The successful use of external referentiality creates a shared connection between the performer and the audience which results in an affiliative audience response. It is possible that some of the weakly affiliative responses and negative mismatches within the present corpus arose in response to utterances that



were delivered using tokens of external referentiality that failed to connect fully with the audience, either in terms of recognisability of or interest in the referential token that was uttered by the comedian. One example of this (described on p. 167-168) was an utterance from Greg Burns' performance that referred to the "mile high club". That utterance received a weakly affiliative laughter response that was both isolated and delayed, suggesting that audience members either failed to recognise the connotations of that phrase (i.e., people who have had sex in an aeroplane), or they did not connect with it as an interesting or appropriate reference at that point in Burns' performance. Two further examples are presented below.

Approximately three minutes into his performance, Sean Lock delivered the following combination of utterances:

And I- recently I bought a can of special brew, because I thought special meant "mmmmmm-mmm". [1] Mmmmm. Extra special, yum yum, mmmmm. I had one can of it, started threatening the whole shopping centre, you know. [2] For some reason I was particularly angry with the roof. [3] [incomprehensible speech sounds; looking upwards and making threatening gestures towards the roof] [4]

The audience responded with collective laughter of normal affiliation intensity at points [1], [2] and [4], but with isolated laughter of weak affiliation intensity at point [3]. At this point it appeared as though only a few audience members appreciated the "clever" use of referentiality that Lock used to describe the behaviour of some drunks, although when he physically demonstrated this behaviour the bulk of the audience produced collective laughter of normal affiliation intensity. This suggests that it was the audience's failure to "get" Lock's reference that resulted in their negatively asynchronous response of weak affiliation intensity at point [3], rather than a lack of interest in the topic of his utterance. Most audience members appeared to need the noises and gestures in order to understand Lock's reference just before response point [3], although one or two audience members did understand and respond to that reference immediately.

The following pair of utterances occurred within the first minute of Will Smith's performance:



And apologies to anyone, er, expecting the, er, other Will Smith. [1] Um, the rapping chappie. [2]

The audience responded with synchronous laughter of weak affiliation intensity at point [1], and with isolated laughter of weak affiliation intensity at point [2], suggesting either a failure to recognise Smith's reference to the more famous American actor and comedian of the same name, or a lack of interest in the comparison. Although these two weakly affiliative audience responses occurred in successive audience turns, these utterances combined to create a set-up for Smith's subsequent utterance, described in Chapter 5 (see p. 167), which received collective synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity.

The above examples suggest that, although the use of referentiality can be a highly salient invitation technique in stand-up comedy performances, in order to invite an enthusiastic audience response the majority of audience members should find it very recognisable and identify with it instantly. When audiences produce weakly affiliative responses to referential utterances, a performer may need to re-establish a strong connection with the audience during his or her immediately subsequent turns. Even in the example from Lock's performance in which he received three audience responses of weak affiliation intensity in succession, it did not appear to be difficult for him to re-establish a stronger connection with his audience, as demonstrated by the final utterance within that section of his routine.

### *Insufficient initial rapport*

Weak audience affiliation or negative mismatches produced during the opening utterances in a stand-up comedy performance may be indicative of a performer's failure to establish a strong sense of initial rapport with his or her audience. According to Rutter (1997), the opening turns in a stand-up comedy performance develop and shape the context of that performance. Moves on the part of the comedian that contribute towards this development include greeting the audience, commenting on the setting of the performance, and requesting a specific form of action from the audience as a group, and one or more of these moves may occur before the "first canned joke", i.e., the first turn in a series of pre-scripted humorous utterances that contributes towards the "routine proper" (Rutter, 1997, p. 146). The example presented from Will Smith's performance in the previous section may illustrate this proposed failure of adequate rapport development. Two



further examples of a potential failure on the part of performers in the present corpus to establish good initial rapport with their audiences are presented below.

The two initial utterances in Gavin Webster's performance were:

Hurrah, yay. Hurrah, yeah, hey, eh, whoar, so, anyway, thing is, right- dum, dum, dum, er, whoar. Now, er- [1] It gets better. Now, er, ah- [2]

The audience responded at point [1] with synchronous laughter of weak affiliation intensity, and with interruptive laughter of normal affiliation intensity at point [2]. There was no speech content in Webster's first utterance to establish any rapport with his audience, but the self-deprecation inherent in his second utterance may have been sufficient to establish the necessary audience rapport.

The first four utterances in Gordon Southern's performance, previously reported on p. 116, were:

So I'm in the bar with my mate, Fat Pete, right, er- which isn't uncommon, and he says to me, "Gordon", cos he's got a- squeaky voice. "Gordon, when you masturbate-" [1] Ooh, tricky question might be on the way, right? He said, "Does your- ejaculation" [2] I'm nervous now, because he's using medical terms, "Ever come out- lumpy?" [3] I said, "Pete, don't ask me, because by that point it's all mixed up with mashed bits of melon". [4]

The audience responded at point [1] with synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity, but their responses at both points [2] and [3] were of weak affiliation intensity. At point [2] they responded with interruptive laughter and at point [3] with synchronous laughter. Their response at point [4] was synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity, which may suggest that the necessary initial rapport had been established by this point. The opening utterance in this series will be referred to again later in this chapter (see pp. 221-222), because it also includes one – or perhaps even two – additional laughter invitations prior to point [1] that failed to invite a response from the audience. This may be a further indication of the lack of an adequate establishment of rapport between Southern and his audience, especially as the speech content presented during this section of his performance was of a potentially challenging nature. The speech content of opening moves in



stand-up comedy performances is typically “safer” and more formulaic (Rutter, 1997), and these particular invitation points may well have successfully invited affiliative audience responses had they been delivered at a later point in Southern’s routine.

***Strong delivery of weak speech content***

On some occasions in the present corpus, audiences produced responses of weak affiliation intensity after utterances that were presented with clear invitational delivery, even though the speech content of those utterances may have been weak or uninteresting. If the use of comedy invitation devices at those points had been less salient, it is doubtful whether these audience responses would have been produced at all. In one sense, this suggestion supports the effectiveness of invitational techniques for successfully inviting the production of affiliative response tokens from audience members. In another sense, it highlights the importance of combining invitational techniques with strong speech content, in order to obtain more enthusiastic responses from audience members. As Martin and Gray (1996) suggested, in order for laughter to function effectively, the material inviting it must be both apposite and sufficiently funny. The following examples from performances in the present sample are presented to illustrate this proposition.

Just over four minutes into his performance, Will Smith delivered the following sequence of utterances (the second and third of which were reported in Chapter 5, p. 156):

So I- I’ve got a lot of catching up to do. You know. And- and- and what I’m learning is that- that men and women are very much different but equal, aren’t they? Although I- I do think that some modern ladies mistake equality for adopting the worst traits of men, like aggression, and selfishness, and tribalism. And- and I think they actually neglect things that make them better than men, like intuition, a- and sensitivity, and daintiness, and pretty little faces. [1] Women, women you are flowers. Do not compete with the trees. [2] Good, so- [3]

The audience responded at points [1] and [3] with collective synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity, but their laughter response at point [2] had weak affiliation intensity and was both isolated and delayed. Smith’s utterance



immediately prior to response [2] ended with a well-formed rhetorical contrast that was delivered very confidently, with a combination of invitational intonation, gaze, and gesture. This combination of comedy invitation devices gave a clear indication to the audience that an affiliative response was salient at that point, and Smith seemed surprised when no response was produced. His subsequent utterance (which overlapped with the audience's response at point [2]) may have been intended as a self-deprecatory space-filler, and that comment was sufficient to invite a synchronous response of normal affiliation intensity at point [3]. It is likely that the audience did not produce an immediate response at point [2] because, although Smith delivered that utterance with a combination of well-executed invitational devices, the speech content behind them was not inherently interesting or amusing enough to evoke enthusiastic laughter. Indeed, one item in Suls' (1972) list of four factors that influence the funniness of humour is the "salience of the joke's context" (Suls, 1972, p. 92).

About a minute and a half into his performance, Greg Burns delivered the following utterance:

Actually, there's a mate of mine going through a break-up period at the moment, right. We've all been through break-ups at some point. And he's going through that weird stage in the break-up, we've all experienced, you know- you know in a break-up where your mind's playing tricks on you. All sorts of weird stuff, like, every song that comes on the radio, no matter what it is, you think it's about you and your exact situation.

The audience responded to this utterance with isolated laughter of weak affiliation intensity, possibly because they did not find the speech content amusing, or because they did not identify with it. Burns delivered this utterance with the use of invitational intonation and gaze to accompany his well-formed puzzle-solution device, but his competent invitational techniques were not sufficient to invite an enthusiastic response from the audience.

The above examples illustrate well-formatted invitational delivery on the part of the respective performers, but in each case the audience failed to produce an enthusiastic affiliative response at the point of invitation. It is therefore possible that invitational devices alone, even when used in combination, are not sufficient to



invite audience affiliation in all cases, and that the audience's connection with the performer or interest in the accompanying speech content is also required for an affiliative response of normal intensity to be produced. The examples in this subsection can perhaps be seen as similar to the non-responses described below (see pp.220-225), and it is possible that the weakly affiliative responses and negative mismatches in this category indicate a genuine lack of affiliation with the performer, albeit temporarily.

### *Topic development*

Responses of weak affiliation intensity can occur to response invitations during part of a performance narrative that builds up towards an even more salient response invitation point for that topic, which accordingly receives a more enthusiastic response. These responses "along the way" can be seen as "extra" responses, and not examples of intentional disaffiliation. They may be potentially similar to backchannels (Yngve, 1970) or minimal responses (Fellegy, 1995) in interpersonal conversations, indicating that the audiences are paying attention to the performance and keen to follow the development of that particular topic. Potential examples of this phenomenon from two performances within the present corpus are presented below.

Two minutes into his performance, Steve Jameson delivered the following pair of utterances:

But she seduced me, right, on the third date, got me into bed. Did the business. I told her I'd been celibate for a year, and she actually believed me, ha. [1] Four years, really. [2]

The audience responded at point [1] with isolated laughter of weak affiliation intensity, and with collective synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity at point [2].

Towards the end of Sean Lock's performance, he delivered the following series of utterances about finding an injured animal on the road:

And you think, "Oh he's still breathing, I can save him". And you wrap him up in your coat, and carry him home, and put him in a box with some straw, and let him lick milk off your finger, like "mmm-mm-mm-mm-mmm", and



nurse it and care for it and look after it, and that. And, er, of course, something happens, you know, like the phone goes, someone comes round- [1] You know, you go down the pub ... You know. [2] Couple of days later, you go “[sniff, sniff, sniff] What’s that smell?” you know, like that? [3] You see, that’s my trouble. I care – but not enough. [4]

The audience responded with isolated laughter of weak affiliation intensity at point [1], and synchronous laughter of weak affiliation intensity at point [2]. At points [3] and [4] they responded with synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity. This extract presents an example of audience responses building in affiliation intensity throughout this section of his routine; the final utterance in this extract was the penultimate utterance in his performance.

### *Pseudo-pursuits*

Audience turns of weak affiliation intensity can occur in response to laughter invitations that are delivered immediately after the performer has received a more enthusiastic response at a particularly salient response invitation point, if the performer does not change the topic of discourse after that response. In effect, these additional invitations on the same topic have a similar structure to that of a rhetorical pursuit device, except that genuine pursuits are only delivered when invited responses are not produced by audience members at their original invitation point (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986). Thus the delivery of a pursuit-like utterance tends to be redundant after a response of normal affiliation intensity has already been received. Although the use of pseudo-pursuit devices might be useful when “milking the applause” in other genres, stand-up comedy audiences appear to require more subtle laughter invitations. Atkinson’s (1984a) enthusiasm for post-response pursuits in political speeches, for example, appears not to translate to the genre of stand-up comedy. While audiences might recognise that a laughter invitation has been given to them, they are less likely to find anything laugh-worthy in a pursuit-like utterance if they have already responded fully to the speech content in the performer’s previous turn. Two extracts from the present corpus that include examples of pseudo-pursuits which received negative mismatches and/or weakly affiliative audience responses are presented below.

Six minutes into his performance, Sean Lock delivered the following pair of utterances:



We don't all get off that light, do we, you know? Like in 1978 I handed in an astonishing piece of geography homework. [1] It was amazing, you know. I get a bit giddy thinking about it now, you know? [2]

The audience responded with synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity at point [1] and with synchronous laughter of weak affiliation intensity at point [2]. Lock did not move the topic of discourse forward after receiving the audience's more enthusiastic response at point [1], and this may have contributed towards the less enthusiastic response at point [2].

About two and a half minutes into Gavin Webster's performance, he delivered the following pair of utterances:

I hope you don't think I'm one of these Champagne Charlie, erm, Geordies that lives in London. I do live in the east end of Newcastle. I was there this afternoon, er, and I was in one of them everything for a pound shops, and I bought meself a nice- house. And, er- [1] D'you know what I mean. For a fiver I could have got the whole terrace, d'you know what I mean, er- [2]

The audience responded with synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity at point [1] and with synchronous laughter of weak affiliation intensity at point [2]. Although on the face of it a terrace of houses is different from a single house and a fiver is different from a pound, the humorous concept underpinning this utterance is precisely the same as that associated with the preceding utterance. The latter utterance thus contained no speech content that could not have been predicted in advance from the former, and so it contained no incongruity or surprise. The audience may have required more of a "clever" follow-up line in order for them to have produced a more enthusiastically affiliative response at this point in Webster's performance.

### ***Summary***

The examples presented above suggest that, on some occasions, affiliative responses of weak affiliation intensity and negative mismatches might be indicators of temporary audience disaffiliation during stand-up comedy performances. In particular, delayed responses can be seen as similar to non-responses (see below), and weakly affiliative responses to pseudo-pursuits may be subtle indications from



audiences that they would prefer the performer to move on to a new topic. Repeated instances of weak affiliation intensity or negative mismatches which occur during the same section of a performance might be indicative of an audience's lack of interest in or connection with the subject matter in that section of the routine. However, not all of the examples presented above are necessarily indicators of temporary audience disaffiliation. For example, weakly affiliative responses that occur during topic development may indicate an audience's continuing interest in the topic of discourse.

One example was found in the present corpus of a weakly affiliative response at a salient invitation point that was considered to be more genuinely affiliative than a laughter response of strong or normal affiliation intensity would have been at that point. Towards the end of Gordon Southern's performance, he delivered the utterance: "They sent me to prison. Me in prison", to which the audience responded with isolated laughter of weak affiliation intensity. In this instance, a weakly affiliative response and a negative mismatch conveyed sympathy for Southern's supposed imprisonment; a laughter response of stronger intensity at this point would have been more disaffiliative, since it would have been overtly laughing at Southern for his claimed misfortune. This particular weakly affiliative response could be comparable to the vocal response described on pp. 113-114 as being an appropriate form of audience affiliation, given the speech content of the utterance to which it was produced.

While several of the examples presented in this section may not constitute actual disaffiliation, the following section will describe a number of suggested non-responses from audience members at salient invitation points in the corpus. The lack of a response at a salient invitation point is arguably a much clearer example of disaffiliative behaviour on the part of stand-up comedy audiences than the production of a weakly affiliative or negatively asynchronous response.

### **Non-responses**

In response to research question 6.4, it is suggested that the failure of audience members to produce an affiliative response to examples of clear invitational delivery during stand-up comedy performances may well indicate audience disaffiliation with the performer at that point. To illustrate this proposition, eight examples will be presented from different performances within the present corpus. Given the difficulty of reliably coding for non-responses (see



above, p. 200), the examples that are described in this section all include a combination of comedy invitation devices, and the reasons for their consideration as invited instances will be outlined.

The previous section presented a series of utterances from the beginning of Gordon Southern's performance, which also included an example of one or possibly two proposed audience non-responses:

So I'm in the bar with my mate, Fat Pete, right, er- which isn't uncommon,  
[1] and he says to me, "Gordon", [2] cos he's got a- squeaky voice.  
"Gordon, when you masturbate-" [3] ...

As stated on p. 214, the audience responded at point [3] (in this version of the transcription of that utterance) with synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity. However, Southern also invited an affiliative response at point [2] (and perhaps also, although with somewhat less salience, at point [1]). Immediately prior to point [2], Southern presented his utterance using a combination of comedy invitation devices. He uttered the word "Gordon" in a high-pitched voice, with an accompanying gesture in which he raised both arms slightly. "Gordon" was also the punchline of a headline-punchline rhetorical device, the headline being "and he says to me". However, as pointed out in Chapter 5, headline-punchline devices appear to be relatively rare in stand-up comedy performances. The fact that this example did not successfully invite an affiliative audience response may support the argument that headline-punchline devices are not well suited to the invitational delivery of stand-up comedy material. Another indication that Southern was expecting the audience to produce a response at point [2] was that he paused for a full second before he continued speaking; his subsequent speech content began with an explanation for his delivery of the word "Gordon" in the high-pitched voice that he had chosen to adopt. Southern also delivered a potential response invitation at point [1], although that was somewhat less clear than the invitation at point [2]. At point [1] Southern paused briefly and raised his arms, and if the audience had produced a response at that point it would have appeared entirely natural. However, the absence of a response at point [1] did not seem as disaffiliative as their lack of response at point [2]. It is possible that the audience failed to respond at invitation points [1] and [2] because Southern had not developed an initial rapport with the audience



before launching into the content of his routine. As proposed on pp. 213-215, one possible reason for weakly affiliative audience responses in the opening moves of a stand-up comedy performance could be a performer's failure to establish adequate rapport with his or her audience before moving into the "routine proper" (Rutter, 1997, p. 146). In fact, the only acknowledgement that Southern made of his audience after he arrived on the stage during their welcoming applause was to raise his hands before he started speaking (in a gesture that conventionally requests an audience to stop applauding, which they duly did). It is possible that the audience would have preferred a more engaging degree of contact from Southern before they were sufficiently prepared to affiliate overtly with the content of his routine.

Chapter 5 (p. 156) presented examples of pursuits from the performances of Will Smith and Sean Lock, and a pursuit from the performance of Andy Zaltzman was presented on p. 76. In each case, the pursuit utterance was delivered after the audience had failed to respond at a salient invitation point immediately before the pursuit was delivered.

A clear example of a non-response occurred during Greg Burns' second utterance, which began with "That's good, that's good", acknowledging the audience's verbal response of "yeah" in reply to his opening question (see pp. 112 & 184), and continued:

Let me tell you this, I've just heard this. Apparently, another of Prince William's friends, caught using drugs. [1] No, it's not panto. [2]

Burns delivered the puzzle-solution device immediately prior to response point [1] using rising and falling intonation at the end and accompanied it with invitational gaze, looking at the audience with wide open eyes and raised eyebrows. He paused for a second and a half before he continued speaking, and continued using invitational gaze during that pause, first looking upwards and towards the left, and then looking briefly downwards and towards the right just before he carried on speaking. His pursuit utterance was successful in inviting a synchronous laughter response of normal affiliation intensity. Given that this non-response occurred so close to the start of Burns' performance, it could be that Burns had not developed sufficient rapport with them before beginning his "routine proper" (Rutter, 1997), although his previous utterance had overtly established a connection with them. It is



therefore more likely that the audience did not find anything inherently humorous in the content of Burns' utterance, and were waiting to find out more of the story before being willing to produce a laughter response.

About half a minute into Richard Ayoade's performance, he delivered the following utterance:

I tend to read the graffiti on the toilet door, and in London, where I live, it's just mean and tough and hard. And it will just say something like: "I'm going to rip off your head, and shit down your neck, and ram maggots into every remaining orifice". [1] And then a phone number. [2]

Ayoade invited an audience response at point [1], when he delivered the combination of a puzzle-solution and three-part list with an adopted voice, during the production of which he moved his left hand up to shield the top of the microphone. Immediately after speaking, he moved his hand down from the microphone and placed it on the centre of his chest, and paused for two full seconds before continuing, shaking his head a couple of times during the pause. His next utterance was not a pursuit phrase, but a continuation of the joke narrative itself. It is possible that, after failing to respond at invitation point [1], the audience were not encouraged to produce a late response because of Ayoade's head-shaking gesture during the pause. Although this was a relatively lengthy pause, it appeared to heighten the response of synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity that the audience produced at point [2].

Approximately two and a half minutes into her performance, Sally Holloway delivered the following utterance:

And I- I'd never nick a baby, before anyone- worries, because newborn babies are very useless actually, the only skill they've got when they're born is the ability to cling, and their grip is so tight, they can cling to a washing line, [1] apparently, so try that, if you get one, erm, but, it means-[2] -the only reason you actually ever need a kid is if you run out of pegs, isn't it? [3]



Holloway invited an audience response at point [1] by the invitational use of illustrative gestures (imitating a tight grip with both hands) and prosodic cues. The fact that this was a salient audience response point became more apparent as Holloway's speech became more faltering after the invitation was not responded to, and the audience delivered a belated laughter response at point [2], by which time Holloway was no longer inviting a response. A laughter response of normal affiliation intensity was produced at point [3].

About a minute and a half into his performance, Gavin Webster delivered the following series of utterances:

You weren't so keen on that one down there, mate, oh no, I'm not having that, he's a bit too confident for a transvestite, isn't he, he's a bit, er, full of himself for a cross-dresser. [1] I will come clean with you all, I am a transvestite, nothing to do with the gig, just thought I'd mention that, at the top, because you seem quite, er- erm- [2] Thanks for your support, I expected a little bit more there ... [3] You're expecting a funny little twist here, aren't you, but it's not- it's not gonna- it's not gonna come. Er- [4] Well, I say transvestite, right. [manic laughter] Obviously I do dress like- a lesbian. You know what I mean? [5]

This sequence of utterances contained at least three failed response invitations. It began just after an utterance during which he commented on the potential for audience disaffiliation to his prior speech content. Webster invited an audience response at point [1] with a combination of gestures and intonation, including gradually slowing down and leaving a brief pause between the words "cross" and "dresser", coupled with rising and falling intonation. When no response occurred, he continued talking on the same topic with a series of pursuit-like utterances, appearing to hope that if he just continued to speak on the same subject the audience would eventually produce a response. While he carried on speaking he delivered a number of gestures with his right arm – pointing at himself and then the audience, moving his arm from left to right, up and down, and so forth. When the audience had still not responded by point [2] his gestures became more up and down, and he finally stopped talking in mid-sentence, appearing to be lost for words. He paused for just under a second before continuing with a direct comment



on their lack of response, which successfully invited a synchronous response of normal affiliation intensity at point [3]. That response contained collective laughter along with an isolated whistle at the end. Having departed from the content of his routine in order to comment on the audience's lack of response, his next utterance seemed somewhat awkward, and the audience responded at point [4] with delayed collective laughter of normal affiliation intensity. The delay before this response lasted for approximately two seconds, a highly salient duration for a delay during a stand-up comedy performance, and this contributed to the atmosphere of disaffiliation that appeared to exist during this section of Webster's performance. However, Webster moved his routine back on track with his subsequent utterance, which successfully invited synchronous collective laughter from the audience at point [5], along with isolated applause.

The examples presented in this section all describe utterances or sequences of utterances within the corpus when the performers delivered clear laughter invitations, based on the invitational techniques described in Chapter 5, that were not responded to by the audience. Each of these examples can be said to describe moments of audience disaffiliation within their respective performances, although some of them appeared to be more disaffiliative than others – with the final example, from Gavin Webster's performance, arguably demonstrating the most disaffiliative section within the entire corpus.

Given that only eight examples of non-responses at invitation points have been mentioned here, the sample size was too small to obtain reliability data. In future studies, it would be beneficial to code performances for invitational delivery throughout, both at empirical audience response points and when the audience do not produce responses, in order to establish whether non-responses can be identified reliably.

### **Uninvited responses**

In response to research question 6.5, all of the uninvited responses within the present corpus were subjected to a detailed qualitative analysis, in an attempt to ascertain the extent to which uninvited responses indicate audience disaffiliation. Before presenting the results of this qualitative analysis, some preliminary quantitative findings will be reported. Due to the relatively low number of uninvited responses within the corpus, these will be presented for the corpus as a whole and not broken down by individual comedians. Table 4.5 reported that 11 of the 13



performances in the present corpus contained uninvited responses. Richard Ayoade, Greg Burns, Sally Holloway, Andy Parsons, and Andy Zaltzman received one uninvited response each; Marian Pashley, Jack Russell, and Gordon Southern received two uninvited responses each; Sean Lock and Will Smith received three uninvited responses each; and Matt King received a total of six uninvited responses during his performance. Table 6.4 presents an analysis of these uninvited responses with reference to both synchrony and affiliation intensity.

Table 6.4  
*Analysis of affiliation intensity and synchrony for uninvited audience responses (N=23)*

	Affiliation intensity	
	Weak	Normal
Synchronous (N=2)	1 ( 4.3%)	1 ( 4.3%)
Interruptive (N=9)	2 ( 8.7%)	8 (34.8%)
Isolated (N=4)	4 (17.4%)	0
Isolated & interruptive (N=7)	7 (30.4%)	0
Total	14 (60.9%)	9 (31.9%)

Table 6.4 shows that over a third of the uninvited responses (39.1%) were of normal affiliation intensity and under two thirds (60.9%) were of weak affiliation intensity. None of the uninvited responses in the corpus were of strong affiliation intensity. With regard to synchrony, only two of the uninvited responses were synchronous with the end point of the performer's utterance (8.7%). Of the 21 mismatched responses, seven were both isolated and interruptive (33.3%), four were solely isolated (19.0%), and ten were solely interruptive (47.6%). Calculating the mismatches as a proportion of uninvited responses overall, and including double counting of the mismatches that were both isolated and interruptive, it can be seen that 11 (47.8%) of all uninvited responses were isolated, and 17 (73.9%) were interruptive. Comparing these results with the figures reported in table 4.12, for synchrony and mismatch types for the corpus as a whole, a much lower proportion of uninvited responses were found to be synchronous. A similar finding was noted in the political speeches studied by Bull and Wells (2002). Table 4.15 reported that



the corpus as a whole contained more interruptive than isolated responses, and that trend was also observed in the uninvited responses reported here.

It might be expected that uninvited responses would always be produced in the absence of all forms of invitational delivery on the part of the performer at that point in the performance. However, with regard to the specific invitational techniques that were quantitatively analysed in Chapter 5 – i.e., standard rhetorical devices and use of gestures – ten of the 23 uninvited responses in the corpus (43.5%) were in response to rhetorically formatted utterances, and 12 (52.2%) were in response to utterances that were accompanied by the performer's use of gestures. These responses were reliably judged to be uninvited (see Chapter 4, p. 100), using the coding scheme developed by Bull and Wells (2002) for identifying invitationality in political speeches.

Table 5.2 reported that 78.6% of all invited responses were in response to utterances that were delivered with Atkinsonian and/or additional rhetorical devices, and Table 5.3 reported that 66.7% of all invited responses were delivered with the performer's use of gestures. It can therefore be seen that fewer of these specific invitational devices were present in uninvited responses. However, it can also be seen that audience responses which have been reliably coded as being unambiguously uninvited by the performer at the point at which they were produced can also be preceded by a performer's use of these comedy invitation devices. Given this finding, future studies will need to establish more explicitly the links between invitationality and the use of specific invitational devices. It is possible that one or more of the other comedy invitation devices proposed in Chapter 5 could be more salient than either rhetoricality or use of gestures as a laughter invitation in stand-up comedy performances, and/or that uninvited responses are indicated by specific tokens of dis-invitation on the part of the performer, a concept that has not been discussed elsewhere in this thesis. A possibility for future research is to focus more explicitly on uninvited responses, in order to ascertain how the performer indicates to the audience that a response is not being invited at that point.

A detailed examination of the 23 uninvited responses within the corpus suggested that these could broadly be grouped into three areas: responses to utterances containing rhetorical formats with non-invitational delivery (N=10); responses to utterances containing references with non-invitational delivery (N=5); and deferred responses, i.e., responses occurring after a point in the performer's



turn at which a response would normally be expected, either as a one-off response or as a non-continuous addition to a previous audience response (N=8). Three examples from each of these suggested categories will be presented below.

### *Rhetoricity*

Ten of the uninvited responses (43.5%), four with normal affiliation intensity and six with weak affiliation intensity, occurred in response to speech content that contained standard rhetorical devices. Five of these responses occurred after a rhetorical list (in three or more parts), three occurred after a contrast, and two occurred after a puzzle-solution. Three examples – one list, one contrast, and one puzzle-solution – will be presented below.

Approximately seven minutes into his performance, Matt King delivered the following set of utterances:

Stop looking- you- That woman over there, she- she keeps going, “He’s got no arse”. [1] Alright, I haven’t got an arse, I I- I mislaid my arse [2] before the show. If anyone’s got my arse, could you please hand it in at reception. [3]

The audience responses at points [1] and [3] contained invited synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity, but their response at point [2] was uninvited and contained interruptive collective laughter of normal affiliation intensity. King’s intonation and body language were not invitational at that point; indeed, he carried on talking during the audience’s response. It is possible that the response occurred at this point due to King’s utterance of the third item in a three-part list (i.e., three consecutive phrases ending with the word “arse”). It could also have arisen because the concept of mislaying one’s arse is not possible in reality, and is thus incongruous to real-world knowledge (see p. 160).

Just over four minutes into his performance, Jack Russell delivered the following sequence of utterances:

You no longer have to shove the drugs up your arse. [1] You can shove them up a dog’s arse. [2] When that sniffer dog starts sniffing around- [3]



As in the previous example, the audience responses at points [1] and [3] both consisted of invited synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity, but at point [2] there was an uninvited isolated laughter response of weak affiliation intensity. Again, Russell's delivery did not indicate that any audience response was invited at point [2], but this response may have occurred due to the rhetorical contrast between "your arse" and "a dog's arse".

Approximately six minutes into his performance, while he was moving the microphone stand back towards the centre of the stage in preparation for his final joke and closing remarks, Will Smith delivered the following utterance:

Anyway, you- ha, you- you've been a delightful audience, which has, er, just- really cheered me up, because earlier in the week, I did make a right royal arse of myself.

The audience responded with an uninvited isolated and interruptive laugh of weak affiliation intensity, even though Smith had not invited a response at this point. He did, however, acknowledge this response with the phrase "difficult to believe, I know", before continuing with the remainder of his routine. It is possible that the response occurred because of the completion of a puzzle-solution rhetorical device at that point, which also contained an incongruous juxtaposition of the phrases "right royal" and "arse".

Coincidentally, all three of the examples described in this section featured the performer's utterance of the word "arse" immediately prior to the audience's uninvited response. While it is possible that it was that particular lexical item which led to the response in each case, it should be pointed out that these were the only three uninvited responses which featured the word "arse", and that this word was also uttered by various performers on other occasions in the corpus when no audience responses were produced. It thus seems more likely that the suggested rhetorical devices occasioned these particular responses.

### ***Referentiality***

Five of the uninvited responses (21.7%), one with normal affiliation intensity and four with weak affiliation intensity, occurred in response to the performer's use of referentiality. Two of these responses occurred after a performer's utterance that contained the name of a famous person, one after a song



title, one after a slogan, and one after the name of a dance step. Three examples – one song title, one dance, and one person – will be presented below.

Just over two and a half minutes into Greg Burns' performance, he delivered the following sequence of utterances:

Song lyrics are weird though, aren't they? Song lyrics can remind you of all sorts of things. Actually, the song that really reminds me a bit of my childhood. Did you ever do this when you were a kid, and you really want to learn a musical instrument, so you nag and nag and nag, and you get one, and you practise day and night, day and night, for a week, and then never touch it again. [1] Brian Adams, Summer of Sixty Nine. [2] It's got that brilliant line: "Got my first real six string. Played it till my fingers bled." Thing is, we're British, we were learning the recorder. [3]

The audience produced invited responses of synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity at points [1] and [3], but the response at point [2] was uninvited. This response of isolated laughter of weak affiliation intensity may have been produced because one or two audience members recognised the song title to which Burns had just referred. This may highlight the importance of referentiality as a salient invitation device during stand-up comedy performances.

Just over two minutes into his performance, Richard Ayoade delivered the following sequence of utterances:

And I think Joseph allows himself a small celebration after that moral victory. [1] Maybe he moon-walked around the cubicle. [2] "For I am Joseph" [3] "And I'm good at what I do." [4]

The audience responses at points [1], [3], and [4] all contained invited synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity, but the response of collective laughter at point [2] was both uninvited and interruptive. It may have arisen in response to the audience's familiarity with the term "moon walk" for a particular form of dance step.

Less than a minute into Will Smith's performance, he delivered the utterance: "If you just think of me as a sort of Hugh Grant type chap", to which the



audience responded with isolated laughter of weak affiliation intensity. This uninvited response may have been produced in recognition of the name of the actor Hugh Grant.

### *Deferred responses*

Eight of the uninvited responses (34.8%), four with normal affiliation intensity and four with weak affiliation intensity, can be said to have been deferred from an earlier response or potential response point. One example that occurred during a sequence in Sally Holloway's performance was described when that section of her routine was presented in the section on non-responses above (see pp. 223-224). Three further examples of deferred responses will be presented below.

Approximately four minutes into his performance, during a section of his routine that contained the antecedent to the first of his reincorporations described on p. 163, Matt King delivered the following sequence of utterances:

I'll tell you who I hate, St John's Ambulance Brigade. Don't you? Oooh, I hate them, don't you? [1] Does anyone else think that St John's Ambulance Brigade are just a group of people that couldn't get in the real ambulance brigade. [2] They're all just the freaks and nutters that they wouldn't let in, aren't they, all the- just- [3] free- and they- just- like- got together and formed a sort of splinter faction breakaway group- [4]

The audience response at point [1] was isolated laughter of weak affiliation intensity, and its invitationality was ambiguous. The response at point [2] was invited synchronous laughter of normal affiliation intensity, and the uninvited isolated and interruptive laugh at point [3] might have been a deferred addition to that previous audience turn. The isolated response of weak affiliation intensity at point [4] was invited.

About a minute and a half into his performance, Gordon Southern delivered the following pair of utterances:

The music faded away. [1] When I found someone. I w- I- c- c- c- My car had broken down in a box junction, it's not important, but anyway- [2]



The first of these utterances was also reported on p. 109, and this speech act (Austin, 1962) had the effect of stopping the background music that had been playing during that part of his routine, after more subtle signals had failed to achieve its cessation. The audience responded at point [1] with a combination of laughter, whoops, cheers and applause, and that invited response was of strong affiliation intensity. The uninvited interruptive collective laughter response of normal affiliation intensity that occurred at point [2] may have been a deferred response to the phrase “box junction” and the double-entendre of the word “box”. Southern might well have been intending to develop that line further – more meaningfully than with the phrase “it’s not important” – but the necessity of having intervened in a verbally explicit manner in order to get the music stopped may have temporarily diverted him from his prepared material.

Approximately five minutes into his performance, Andy Zaltzman delivered the following sequence of utterances:

But I think- I think in this age of democratic apathy we need a strong press to give us a proper perspective on- er- on things, and I don’t think we can really rely on them at the moment. Er, at this year’s Grand National, er, there was an incident at the canal turn, when ten horses ran into each other and all stopped, and a journalist in the Observer the following day described that scene as “reminiscent of the Somme”, which I thought was maybe slightly overstating the case. I don’t know- [1] Maybe we need the clear light of history to give us an accurate perspective on which was the more significant of the two occurrences- [2] the hundreds of thousands of Europe’s young men being meaninglessly slaughtered in their prime, or ten horses stopping. It’s- it’s- [3]

The audience responses at points [1] and [3] both contained invited collective interruptive laughter of normal affiliation intensity, but the isolated interruptive laughter response at point [2] was uninvited. A response could have been produced at that point in response to Zaltzman’s ironic speech content, although it might also have been a deferred addition to the previous audience turn.

The above examples include a number of speculative suggestions as to why the various audience members produced the responses they did at these uninvited



points during the corpus. With regard to the degree of audience disaffiliation signified by these responses, it is suggested that most if not all of them were affiliative rather than disaffiliative. Within the context of a stand-up comedy performance, it can be argued that overtly affiliative audience responses are salient throughout, even though the various microanalytic analyses of the performances within the present corpus have suggested that they are more salient at some points than others. Given that none of the uninvited responses within the present corpus served to put the performer off his or her stride for more than about a second, and none of them occurred during successive audience turns, it is suggested that these responses, whether of weak or normal affiliation intensity, were merely “extra laughs” that contributed towards a convivial and positive general atmosphere within the stand-up comedy performance as a whole. It is thus suggested that, in general, uninvited responses should not be considered as indicative of genuine audience disaffiliation.

## DISCUSSION

This chapter has identified a number of potential ways in which stand-up comedy audiences might indicate their disaffiliation with the performer at a particular point during his or her routine, i.e., the production of overtly disaffiliative response tokens during otherwise overtly affiliative audience response turns; the production of responses with weak affiliation intensity; the production of negatively asynchronous responses; the failure to produce a response at a salient invitation point; and the production of a response when the performer did not invite one at that point. It was suggested that any or all of these occurrences could, under certain circumstances, be indicators of audience disaffiliation with the performer, although some of them appear to be more genuinely disaffiliative than others. Given that none of the audience response turns within the present corpus consisted entirely of overt tokens of disaffiliation, it was necessary to analyse these other potential forms of audience disaffiliation in order to ascertain the extent to which they exhibited genuine audience disaffiliation with the comedian at that point during his or her performance. In future studies, it would be beneficial to compare the results of the present analyses with an analysis of audience response turns that contain only tokens of overt disaffiliation. Some suggestions as to which of these potential forms of disaffiliation might be more or less indicative of *bona fide* audience disaffiliation with the performer at that point in his or her performance will now be discussed.



The first research question in this chapter was concerned with the extent to which audiences disaffiliate when they produce responses that contain tokens of overt disaffiliation during otherwise affiliative responses. The analysis of the ten mixed responses within the present corpus suggested that most of them were unlikely to show genuine disaffiliation with the performer. The typical composition of the mixed responses in this corpus indicated that laughter was the first response to be produced, with the disaffiliative tokens of groans or boos beginning at least half a second after the laughter was under way in all but one case. It could therefore be suggested that it was only in the example in which the groans and laughter started within a fraction of a second of each other that the audience were genuinely disaffiliating with the comedian. In the remaining eight instances that contained groans, it is unclear whether the audience were disaffiliating with the comedian or with each other. However, if groans are a dispreferred response, that would explain the fact that they take a fraction of a second longer to produce than laughter, and in that case it is more likely that the audience members who produced the groans were disaffiliating with the performer than with their fellow audience members. Clayman (1992) referred to two different forms of audience disaffiliation, i.e., direct disaffiliation and indirect disaffiliation, and stated that indirect disaffiliation was much more common. In that case, it may be more likely that the audience members who produced groans were disaffiliating with their fellow audience members, and thus only disaffiliating with the performer indirectly.

In the single audience response turn within the present corpus that contained boos, these began approximately three seconds after a laughter response was under way. In this case it is even more likely that the booing audience members were disaffiliating with the audience members who were already laughing. According to McIlvenny (1996a), no more than one heckler can respond to a speaker, and a heckle can be the target of another heckle. Following the same logic, it is possible that an audience response which is already under way can likewise be the target of a different form of audience response. This interpretation supports the assertion that, in this instance, audience members were overtly disaffiliating with each other, and the boos were only indirectly disaffiliating with the performer.

However, it should also be considered that, at certain points during certain styles of performance, a comedian could be explicitly inviting disaffiliative response tokens from the audience. This could well be the case in each of the four



performances in the present corpus during which overtly disaffiliative response tokens were produced. Therefore, if it is the case that the performer actively wants members of his or her audience to produce groans or boos, those response tokens can hardly be interpreted as disaffiliative.

On balance, it is likely that the mixed responses within the present corpus were at best only marginally disaffiliative. Given that every mixed response in the corpus contained collective tokens of both overt affiliation and overt disaffiliation, it might be more appropriate to think of them as “neutral” responses, with the elements of affiliation and disaffiliation effectively cancelling each other out. They could also potentially be thought of as ambiguous or ambivalent responses.

The second and third research questions were concerned, respectively, with the extent to which audiences disaffiliate when they produce responses of weak affiliation intensity and negative mismatches. Given the extent of overlap between these two categories, these forms of responses were analysed together. As with mixed responses, it appeared in general as though weakly affiliative responses and negatively asynchronous responses were not more than mildly disaffiliative, if at all.

It was found that the invited incidences of weak affiliation intensity within the corpus could be grouped under the subheadings of position taking, failure of referentiality, insufficient initial rapport, strong delivery of weak speech content, topic development, and pseudo-pursuits, and examples of utterances that illustrated each of these categories were presented on pp. 210-219. Some of these categories could be areas for performers to consider with regard to developing their comedy performance skills (see Chapter 7). For example, it could be suggested that stand-up comedians would do well to minimise the use of position taking and pseudo-pursuits and to maximise the development of initial rapport with their audiences in order to avoid weakly affiliative responses. However, the weakly affiliative responses that were produced during topic development could be viewed as “extra laughs” on the way towards an even more salient laughter response point.

Although weakly affiliative responses and negative mismatches were seen as affiliative or neutral for the most part, there was one form of negative asynchrony which appeared to be more disaffiliative than the other forms of response that were considered in this section. Delayed responses appeared to be more disaffiliative than either isolated responses or weakly affiliative responses in general. This may



be because delayed responses are relatively rare in stand-up comedy performances, compared with synchronous responses and other forms of audience mismatches. Delays of a second or more appear to be highly salient during the fast-paced speaker-audience interaction that occurs in stand-up comedy performances, and when an overt audience response is produced after a delay, it can seem more unenthusiastic than any other form of overt response. It is thus suggested that delayed responses constitute a special form of audience non-response, even though the lack of response only lasts for a second or so.

The fourth research question was concerned with the extent to which audiences disaffiliate when they fail to produce a response at a point when the performer issues a clear response invitation. In other words, when a performer uses a combination of the comedy invitation devices proposed in Chapter 5 to signal that a response is salient at a given point in their routine, if the audience remain silent at that point, they could be tacitly conveying their disaffiliation by refusing to do what the performer has subtly requested of them. The assumption underlying this research question is that audience members are aware of the signals that comedians use to invite responses from them – at a subliminal level, if not consciously. This is the same assumption that underpins the work of Atkinson (e.g., 1984b), Heritage and Greatbatch (1986), Clayman (e.g., 1993), *inter alia*, in their studies of audience responses during political speeches.

Of the five research questions considered in this chapter, it is suggested that these non-responses constituted the most disaffiliative behaviour of audiences during the present corpus. This echoes Lindtberg's (1984) contention that the worst kind of laughter is silence, or the laughter that does not happen. Non-responses are forms of indirect disaffiliation (Clayman, 1992), in that no overt token of disaffiliation is produced. It is suggested that, as long as such non-responses only occur from time to time during any given performance, they do not necessarily convey disaffiliation to the performance as a whole, but merely provide an indication to the performer that his or her side of the "conversation" has not connected with the audience, and that when the performer "selects the next speaker" (i.e., the audience) to "take their turn" (i.e., to produce a response) and they fail to take up that turn, some form of "repair" is required (i.e., to deliver some more material that will connect with the audience). This process of conversational repair occurs perfectly normally during interpersonal conversations (Sacks *et al.*, 1974).



Such instances may not be a problem during stand-up comedy performances if the performer's subsequent requests for affiliative audience responses are taken up appropriately, and if the performer is not put off his or her stride by the lack of an audience response. The example presented from Gavin Webster's performance on pp. 224-225 showed that he was put off his stride for two further turns after two successive audience non-responses, but by his third turn after these disaffiliative moves he had recovered. This section within Webster's performance demonstrated the most blatant example of audience disaffiliation that was observed within the present sample.

Based on the assumption that mixed, weakly affiliative, negatively asynchronous, or absent responses at salient response invitations might indicate audience disaffiliation, the fifth research question was concerned with the extent to which audiences disaffiliate when they do produce a response at a point at which the comedian has not specifically invited one. However, a detailed analysis of the uninvited response tokens within the present corpus suggested that such responses tended to be "extra laughs" that contributed towards the general positive ambience during a stand-up comedy performance. Given that they occurred relatively rarely, as compared with the overt responses that were produced at salient invitation points, it was considered that they could generally be interpreted as affiliative rather than disaffiliative.

Based on the previous observation that weakly affiliative invited responses may be more disaffiliative than invited responses of normal affiliation intensity, a distinction was made between uninvited responses of weak and normal affiliation intensity. It was suggested that uninvited responses of normal affiliation intensity might have seemed more disaffiliative than uninvited responses of weak affiliation intensity, but no such interpretation was supported by the qualitative analysis of the individual uninvited responses within the corpus. However, it was noted that several of these uninvited responses occurred in connection with the performer's non-invitational uses of referentiality and rhetoricality. This suggests that performers may need to develop more of an awareness of these potential response triggers, so that they are only used when a response invitation is intended. This issue will be addressed further in the final chapter. It is thus suggested that none of the uninvited responses within the present corpus were genuinely disaffiliative.



To summarise the findings of the present chapter, it is suggested that uninvited responses tend to be affiliative, mixed responses tend to be neutral, and weakly affiliative responses need to be examined in context. Of the negatively asynchronous responses, isolated mismatches need to be examined in context, but delayed responses are likely to be indicators of genuine audience disaffiliation. Non-responses at salient invitation points are proposed to be genuinely disaffiliative, especially when a number of successive response invitations are not taken up by the audience. Indeed, any of the potentially disaffiliative tokens that were considered within the present chapter could be interpreted as markers of genuine audience disaffiliation if several of them were to occur in close succession, especially if they succeeded in throwing the performer out of the flow of his or her routine and he or she had difficulty in resuming it. A performer's ability to handle such disaffiliative or unexpected moments during their routine could well be a key factor that contributes to skill as a stand-up comedian, and this topic will be addressed in the final chapter.



# CHAPTER 7

## Success and the single stand-up: Features of skilled comedy performances

### INTRODUCTION

So far, this thesis has analysed audience responses during stand-up comedy performances, proposed a number of specific invitational techniques used by stand-up comedians, and evaluated a range of potentially disaffiliative audience responses. Consideration has been given to how stand-up comedians and their audiences behave, and what happens when the interaction between them “goes wrong” in some way. One further issue that can be considered is what happens when the interaction between them “goes right”. The present chapter will therefore address the question of what constitutes success in stand-up comedy, with reference to the findings reported in previous chapters.

An evaluation of successful stand-up comedy can be undertaken from the perspective of the performer and/or the audience, and this chapter will attempt to address both of these viewpoints. Firstly, comparisons of different forms of audience responses will be made, in order to suggest potential ways of evaluating the relative popularity of the different performances in the corpus. These comparisons will attempt to quantify the combined perspectives of audience members. Secondly, comparisons of invited and uninvited responses of different affiliation intensities will be made, in an attempt to examine the relative quality of the interaction between the performers and audiences within the present corpus. Thirdly, a series of examples of effective stand-up comedy performance techniques will be suggested, based on the analyses of performers’ turns that were reported in Chapters 3-6. These areas will attempt to address the viewpoint of the performer, in terms of both identifying “what works” and pointing out areas for future skill development. After these analyses have been presented, this chapter will go on to summarise the key findings of the thesis as a whole, and then a number of specific areas for future research will be proposed.



## SUCCESS

All of the stand-up comedians whose performances were analysed for the present thesis were successful enough to be broadcast on national television. The current corpus therefore reflects a baseline level of competence in the craft of stand-up comedy performance. The following suggested indicators of success as a stand-up comedian were therefore gleaned from a corpus containing the performances of comedians who are already successful. Studies of less successful performers might lead to the identification of a number of additional techniques used by the performers in this corpus that will only be seen to be effective when compared with the behaviours of less skilled comedians. For now, only those techniques that were observed to be the most effective within the present corpus will be highlighted, although this might lead to an unduly parsimonious list of skill indicators.

Before going on to present this list, a speculative analysis of performer popularity will be presented, from the perspective of the audiences within the present corpus.

### **Indicators of performer popularity**

It can be argued that one way of measuring success in stand-up comedy is by measuring the audience's response to it in some way. The objective quality of a comedian's material may be less important than his or her performance of it, which includes appropriate interaction with the audience. This is not to suggest that skilled delivery can compensate for poor material: the previous chapter found that strong delivery of weak speech content did not lead to enthusiastic audience responses. However, a combination of effective speech content and effective delivery might well be the most effective way to appeal to stand-up comedy audiences.

Bull and Wells (2001) presented an analysis of the relative popularity of political speakers by calculating the proportion of audience responses during their speeches. This approach could also be used as a crude measure of the relative popularity of stand-up comedians. Table 4.2 (see p. 101) presented an analysis of audience response rate, by comedian, for the 13 performances in the present corpus. According to this table, Richard Ayoade could be considered the most popular performer, in that he received a response every 5.47 seconds throughout his performance, on average. In contrast, Sally Holloway could be considered the least popular, in that she received a response every 10.48 seconds, on average. However, given the frequency and variety of audience responses during stand-up comedy



performances, a more sophisticated analysis is likely to be required. Two further suggestions as to how performer popularity can be calculated within stand-up comedy performances will now be presented.

***Synchrony and positive mismatches***

One way of achieving a more sophisticated analysis of performer popularity is to recalculate the average audience response rate without including any of the negatively asynchronous audience response turns that were identified in Table 6.1 (see p. 207). It was noted in Chapter 4 that, in terms of affiliation intensity, the profile of interruptive responses was very similar to that of synchronous responses. This suggests that combining synchronous and interruptive responses (positive mismatches) and excluding delayed and isolated responses (negative mismatches) might provide a more effective benchmark for measuring performer popularity. The results of this analysis are reported in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1  
*Audience response rate, by comedian, excluding negative mismatches (N=13)*

Comedian	Duration of performance (in seconds)	Number of positive responses	Proportion of positive responses
Richard Ayoade (N=47)	257	45	5.71
Marian Pashley (N=35)	208	33	6.30
Sean Lock (N=86)	591	81	7.30
Gordon Southern (N=56)	433	51	8.49
Jack Russell (N=60)	485	55	8.82
Matt King (N=68)	607	61	9.95
Will Smith (N=45)	401	39	10.28
Gavin Webster (N=33)	312	30	10.40
Sally Holloway (N=29)	304	29	10.48
Andy Parsons (N=44)	436	41	10.63
Andy Zaltzman (N=40)	387	36	10.75
Steve Jameson (N=22)	205	19	10.79
Greg Burns (N=40)	369	32	11.53
Total	4995	552	9.05
Mean (SD)	384.2 (128.8)	42.4 (16.3)	9.34 (1.87)



According to Table 4.2 – which accounted for all of the responses in the corpus – the audience responded, on average, once every eight and a half seconds. After the negatively asynchronous responses were excluded, Table 7.1 shows an average response rate for the corpus as a whole of approximately once every nine and a quarter seconds. Like Table 4.2, Table 7.1 is presented in rank order from the performer with the highest audience response rate to the lowest, and the first five rows in both tables contain the names of the same five performers, in the same order. There are some changes further down the list, however, and calculating audience popularity by means of positive audience responses alone suggests that the least popular performer in the corpus is Greg Burns, who received a positive audience response, on average, once every eleven and a half seconds.

A third potential way of calculating the relative popularity of different stand-up comedy performances is by using the results of the coding schemes for affiliation and affiliation intensity that were described in Chapter 4. This method will be illustrated below.

***Relative weightings of strong, normal, and weak affiliation intensity***

Table 4.4 (see p. 119) presented the results of affiliation intensity codings for all of the audience responses in the corpus that contained purely affiliative tokens. A further ten responses (described on pp. 114-118) contained a combination of overtly affiliative and overtly disaffiliative tokens. Another potential way of analysing performer popularity would be to use these analyses of affiliation and affiliation intensity, allocating different weightings to the strongly affiliative, normally affiliative, weakly affiliative, and mixed responses in the corpus. The proportions of audience responses could then be recalculated, based on these new indexed values. The resulting proportions would still suggest that the lower the proportion, the more popular the performer. This suggested method is illustrated by allocating a value of 1 to every mixed response and every weakly affiliative response in the corpus, a value of 2 to every normally affiliative response, and a value of 3 to every strongly affiliative response. This is based on the assumption that weakly affiliative and mixed responses are half as affiliative as responses of normal affiliation intensity, and that strongly affiliative responses are one and a half times as affiliative as responses of normal affiliation intensity. Since it was suggested in Chapter 6 that the mixed responses and weakly affiliative responses in the present corpus did not usually indicate genuine audience disaffiliation, it is more



logical to give them a partially affiliative weighting than to discount them. Of course different weighting values could be applied to mixed, weak, normal, and strong affiliation intensity responses; the present weightings are just one potential illustration of how this method could be applied. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2

*Audience response rate, by comedian, weighted by affiliation and degree of affiliation intensity (N=13)*

Comedian	Duration of performance (in seconds)	Number of weighted responses	Proportion of weighted responses
Richard Ayoade (N=47)	257	87	2.95
Marian Pashley (N=35)	208	67	3.10
Sean Lock (N=86)	591	156	3.79
Jack Russell (N=60)	485	115	4.22
Gordon Southern (N=56)	433	102	4.25
Matt King (N=68)	607	125	4.86
Steve Jameson (N=22)	205	41	5.00
Gavin Webster (N=33)	312	62	5.03
Andy Zaltzman (N=40)	387	76	5.09
Greg Burns (N=40)	369	72	5.13
Will Smith (N=45)	401	78	5.14
Andy Parsons (N=44)	436	84	5.19
Sally Holloway (N=29)	304	53	5.74
Total	4995	1118	4.47
Mean (SD)	384.2 (128.8)	86.0 (31.5)	4.58 (0.85)

*Note.* Weakly affiliative responses and mixed responses were given a value of 1, normally affiliative responses were given a value of 2, and strongly affiliative responses were given a value of 3.

As with the previous examples, Table 7.2 is presented in rank order of performer, from the highest weighted response proportion to the lowest. Again, the first five names are the same performers who were the first five names in the



previous two methods, although Gordon Southern and Jack Russell have now changed positions (from 4 to 5 and 5 to 4, respectively). At the bottom of the list, Sally Holloway is once again in the lowest position, and Greg Burns is now in position 10. The respective positions of all of the performers in the corpus for each of these suggested popularity calculation methods will be presented in Table 7.3 (see p. 245).

As stated in Chapter 4, there is relatively little variation between the different performances in terms of audience response rate. For the corpus as a whole, the standard deviation was 1.55, for positive responses only the standard deviation was 1.87, and for the weighted responses the standard deviation was 0.85. This suggests that all of the performances in the corpus may have been similarly popular with their audiences, and that using these audience response rates as potential indicators of audience popularity might be “over-analysing”, or “reading too much into” these relatively small differences. Such methods might, however, be useful for larger and more varied corpora of stand-up comedy performances.

Based on the present evidence, any one of these three potential methods of calculating audience popularity might be a useful indicator of the relative popularity of the different performances in the corpus. A mean Pearson correlation coefficient of +0.97 ( $p < 0.01$ ) was obtained from the three pairwise comparisons. This shows that the three different proposed methods for calculating audience popularity ratings are producing highly similar results. Further research will be needed in order to discover which of these methods is the most successful. It would also be useful to obtain audience response rates for more than one performance by each performer, in order to minimise the possibility that the single performance analysed in the present sample was unrepresentative. It is also likely that these methods might more usefully be compared in an analysis of a wider range of performances, incorporating both more skilled and less skilled stand-up comedians. Audience members could also be asked to state which of the performers on any given bill they preferred, and these preference ratings could be compared with the popularity calculations suggested here, in order to ascertain which of these methods provides a more accurate measure of audience popularity.

As stated in Chapter 1, a traditional way of reflecting a performer’s popularity at a stand-up comedy venue is his or her relative position on the bill. According to Nilsen and Nilsen (2000), on a bill containing three performers, the



most successful “name” will be the final performer, and the newest or least successful comedian will be the second act. This implies that the performers with third billing – the “headliners” – are expected to be most popular, and that those in second position are expected to be least popular, with those in first position falling somewhere in between. The present corpus contained performances from comedians in all three positions on the bill, and these will be detailed in Table 7.3. This table also contains the proposed popularity rankings for each performer according to the three previously suggested methods, as well as a composite ranking which reflects the mean ranking of each of these three methods, combined.

Table 7.3  
*Position on bill and suggested audience preference rankings, by comedian (N=13)*

Comedian	Position on bill	Suggested rankings			Composite ranking
		Table 4.2	Table 7.1	Table 7.2	
Sean Lock	3	3	3	3	3
Gordon Southern	3	4	4	5	4
Matt King	1	7	6	6	6
Greg Burns	1	8	13	10	=10
Andy Parsons	1	12	10	12	12
Richard Ayoade	2	1	1	1	1
Marian Pashley	2	2	2	2	2
Jack Russell	2	5	5	4	5
Will Smith	2	6	7	11	7
Gavin Webster	2	10	8	8	8
Steve Jameson	2	9	12	7	9
Andy Zaltzman	2	11	11	9	=10
Sally Holloway	2	13	9	13	13

According to the scheduling pattern described by Nilsen and Nilsen (2000), it is suggested that Sean Lock and Gordon Southern could be expected to be the most popular performers in the present corpus. However, according to the suggested audience performance ratings presented above, the most popular performers were Richard Ayoade and Marian Pashley, each of whom appeared second on the bill. Table 7.3 shows that Gordon Southern and Sean Lock, the two “headliners”



represented in the present corpus, both had good to moderate audience preference ratings, which supports the idea that they were likely to be considered good, “solid” performers. The audience preference ratings for performers who were second on the bill ranged from most popular to least popular, which may reflect the fact that they were “riskier” choices. In some cases, their reception by the audience might have exceeded the schedulers’ expectations, and it would be interesting to discover whether those particular performers have become more successful in the field of stand-up comedy since that series of programmes was made.

A different method for evaluating the relative popularity of performers would be for live audience members to vote on a hand-held touch-pad immediately after each performance, and to store these results as a composite numerical value for each performance. These results could then be compared with later microanalytic studies of the performances in question. It might also be useful to compare these responses with similar voting results from the television-viewing public, in order to ascertain whether there is any agreement between the audiences watching the performances live and those watching later in their living rooms. The analyses presented in this chapter are intended to suggest relative popularity from the viewpoint of the live audiences, and it is this perspective that is the most useful for microanalytic studies of performer-audience interaction. This is because the television audience do not interact directly with the performers, and so members of this audience cannot influence the performances in the way that members of a live audience can.

Further to the analysis of potentially disaffiliative responses reported in Chapter 6, if a reliable count could be obtained of the response invitations that were not taken up by audience members, it would be possible to calculate a proportion of “non-responses” per performance. It might be interesting to see whether this would reflect genuine audience popularity ratings more or less closely than the other forms of calculation suggested here, all of which are based on overt audience responses.

Having speculated on the relative popularity of the performances in the present corpus from the viewpoint of their respective live audiences, potential indicators of successful performer-audience interaction will now be considered.

### **Indicators of effective performer-audience interaction**

A comparison of relative strengths of the quality of performer-audience interaction in the stand-up comedy routines from the present corpus will now be



presented. One way in which such a calculation can be undertaken is by hypothesising that invited responses of normal or strong affiliation intensity are more positive than those of weak affiliation intensity or mixed responses, and that uninvited responses of weak affiliation intensity are more positive than those of normal affiliation intensity. This hypothesis was originally suggested in Chapter 4 (see p. 142), and the results of this analysis are presented in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4

*Proportions of invited and uninvited mixed and affiliative responses of weak, normal, and strong affiliation intensity, by comedian (N=562)*

	Invited (N=539)		Uninvited (N=23)	
	Mixed/Weak	Normal/Strong	Weak	Normal
Andy Parsons (N=40)	3 ( 7.5%)	36 (90.0%)	1 ( 2.5%)	0
Andy Zaltzman (N=35)	3 ( 8.6%)	31 (88.6%)	1 ( 2.9%)	0
Marian Pashley (N=33)	2 ( 6.1%)	29 (87.9%)	1 ( 3.0%)	1 (3.0%)
Steve Jameson (N=20)	2 (10.0%)	18 (90.0%)	0	0
Jack Russell (N=52)	6 (11.5%)	44 (84.6%)	2 ( 3.8%)	0
Matt King (N=60)	5 ( 8.3%)	49 (81.7%)	4 ( 6.7%)	2 (3.3%)
Sally Holloway (N=26)	3 (11.5%)	22 (84.6%)	0	1 (3.8%)
Gavin Webster (N=32)	5 (15.6%)	27 (84.4%)	0	0
Greg Burns (N=37)	6 (16.2%)	30 (81.1%)	1 ( 2.7%)	0
Richard Ayoade (N=45)	7 (15.6%)	37 (82.2%)	0	1 (2.2%)
Sean Lock (N=84)	14 (16.7%)	67 (79.8%)	2 ( 2.4%)	1 (1.2%)
Will Smith (N=43)	9 (20.9%)	31 (72.1%)	2 ( 4.7%)	1 (2.3%)
Gordon Southern (N=55)	12 (21.8%)	41 (74.5%)	0	2 (3.6%)
Total	77 (13.7%)	462 (82.2%)	14 (2.5%)	9 (1.6%)

Table 7.4 is presented in the order of most successful to least successful interaction quality, as suggested by the hypothesis described above. The performances are listed in rank order by adding the highest proportion of invited and normal or strong responses to the highest proportion of uninvited and weak responses. It can be seen that this proposed rank ordering of successful performer-audience interaction differs from the proposed indicators of performance success from the audience's perspective. It is possible that smooth and effective performer-audience interaction is not a key contributing factor to performance success from an audience's point of view. However, the hypothesised factors contributing to



successful interaction quality would benefit from being tested on a larger sample from a wider range of stand-up comedy performances, in terms of both performance length and relative skill of performer, in order to gain a broader spectrum of results. Greater heterogeneity in this respect would be more likely to facilitate the identification of both audience enjoyment factors and interaction strength analyses. The analysis presented in this chapter should be considered speculative, given that the sample size is relatively small, and each comedian only performed for one audience.

In Chapter 4 it was suggested that strongly affiliative audience responses were particularly likely to reflect effective performance skills at that point in a comedian's routine. A brief analysis of each of the strongly affiliative responses in the corpus will therefore now be presented.

As reported in Table 4.4, a total of 21 strongly affiliative responses were found in the present corpus. Twelve of these were in response to the performer's final turn, and a further two were in response to direct requests for "noise" in Jack Russell's performance (see p. 104). The only performer in the corpus to receive a response of normal affiliation intensity in her final turn was Sally Holloway, and this may be a further indication that her routine was not as popular with the audience as the other performances in the corpus. Of the remaining seven strongly affiliative responses, two occurred during each of Matt King's and Jack Russell's performances, and one occurred during each of Andy Parsons', Gordon Southern's, and Gavin Webster's performances. Six of these contained a combination of laughter and collective applause, and one contained laughter with isolated applause.

The response that contained isolated applause occurred during Matt King's performance, and was previously described in Chapter 5 (see p. 169) as an example of the use of a catchphrase or slogan as a form of external referentiality. The other strongly affiliative response during King's performance was described on pp. 105-106, and also referred to on p. 163 as an example of a reincorporation.

The first strongly affiliative response in Jack Russell's performance was described on p. 108 as a complex utterance that may have appealed to the audience's sense of superiority in decoding its "cleverness". This interpretation was also proposed with reference to the second strongly affiliative response in Russell's performance, which was described on pp. 108-109.



The strongly affiliative response in Andy Parsons' performance was described on pp. 106-107 as occurring shortly after the audience had responded at an ambiguous invitation point. It was suggested that the audience wanted to give "something extra" at the point at which Parsons unambiguously invited a response from them.

The strongly affiliative response in Gordon Southern's performance was described on p. 109, where it was noted that Southern displayed considerable skill in turning a technical mishap to his advantage. The audience responded extremely appreciatively to his competent handling of a difficult situation. The strongly affiliative response in Gavin Webster's performance was also described on p. 109.

In summary, the strongly affiliative responses in the present corpus were in response to 12 performance-final turns, two direct requests for "noise", one catchphrase, one reincorporation, one instance of dealing effectively with a technical mishap, two narrative gestures, and two complex and "clever" utterances, one of which occurred very shortly after an ambiguously invited response had received an enthusiastic response of normal affiliation intensity. It is suggested that each of these responses are illustrative of skilled performance, and a more detailed examination of the factors that contribute to the effective performance of stand-up comedy will be presented below.

### **Indicators of skill as a stand-up comedian**

After having performed a series of detailed qualitative analyses of the performances in the present corpus, the findings of which were reported in Chapters 3-6, a number of performance strengths and relative weaknesses were observed. The most salient of these will now be summarised.

#### ***Establish and maintain good rapport with the audience***

In Chapter 6 it was suggested that the failure to establish a strong initial rapport with the audience was likely to lead to weakly affiliative audience responses during the opening section of a performance. Rutter (1997) stated that it was important for stand-up comedy performers to establish rapport with their audiences before delivering their "first canned joke" (Rutter, 1997, p. 166). Establishing rapport could involve a greeting sequence or question-answer sequence that invites a verbal response from the audience (see pp. 111-113). It might also involve comments on the setting (see p. 162). Rapport can be maintained throughout a performance by the appropriate use of external referentiality, in terms of both



recognisability by audience members and appropriate contextualisation within the routine. It is also suggested that good performer-audience rapport can be maintained by acknowledging interruptions, uninvited responses, and potentially disaffiliative response tokens whenever they occur.

Gulbranson (1972) found that a greater degree of interaction by audience members at the beginning of a humorous theatrical performance establishes a “comic rhythm” which is then maintained during the remainder of the performance. By actively establishing rapport with their audiences before moving into the main body of their routines, stand-up comedians appear to be more likely to encourage consistent audience affiliation throughout their performances. The skilled development of effective audience rapport can be illustrated by the opening turns from Matt King’s performance, which were described on pp. 76-77.

### *Combine salient invitation techniques at key response points*

Chapter 5 presented a suggested taxonomy of comedy invitation devices that were used by the performers in the present corpus to invite affiliative responses from their audiences. It is suggested that combining a number of these techniques at particularly salient response invitation points during stand-up comedy performances is more likely to lead to affiliative audience responses of normal or strong affiliation intensity. It is advisable to employ a range of invitational techniques at key points in the performance, and to combine verbal and non-verbal techniques.

Some verbal invitational techniques that are thought to be particularly effective for inviting audience responses include internal referentiality (especially reincorporations), external referentiality (especially people, titles, slogans, and catchphrases), and some standard rhetorical formats (especially lists, contrasts, and puzzle-solutions). However, the use of position taking and pseudo-pursuits (i.e., post-response pursuits) should be avoided, as these techniques tended to be associated with responses of weak affiliation intensity within the present corpus. External referentiality appears to be a particularly salient invitational technique if it is highly topical. For example, Andy Parsons and Jack Russell both invited enthusiastic audience responses by referring to Jeffrey Archer being in prison (see pp. 106 & 155).

It is thought that prosodic cues such as adoption of voices, the strategic use of pauses, and slowing down and/or using rising and falling intonation immediately prior to a key response invitation point are all effective invitational techniques. Of



the non-vocal non-verbal techniques, the use of illustrative and narrative gestures at key response invitation points appears to be particularly effective, as does the use of props (although there were relatively few examples of this in the present corpus).

More detailed quantitative analyses of the present corpus would be required in order to ascertain which of the specific invitational techniques proposed within this thesis are most effective at inviting audience responses. The suggestions presented here are solely based on a qualitative overview of the performances in the corpus.

### *Avoid sending conflicting response signals*

A corollary to the previous suggestion is that performers should avoid sending out conflicting signals to their audiences at the most salient response invitation points in their routines. It is important that no hint of “dis-invitation” is conveyed to audience members at these key moments, because weak or absent responses at salient response points appear to be especially disaffiliative, as exemplified during a short section of Gavin Webster’s performance (see pp. 224-225). Strong invitational delivery techniques should only be used along with strong speech content, because the combination of strong invitational signals with weak speech content is another way of sending a contradictory response message to the audience.

It is equally important to avoid the use of particularly salient comedy invitation devices at points during the routine when an audience response is definitely not being invited, such as just before a major joke punchline, a particularly salient change of discourse topic, or any other key response invitation point. In particular, the use of rhetoricality and referentiality (especially lists, contrasts, puzzle-solutions, people, titles, slogans, and catchphrases) should be avoided at specific points in the performance when uninvited audience responses would spoil the flow of the routine. An audience response just before an intended key point can cause the intended response invitation to “fall flat”, and this does not lead to the smooth development of the structure of the routine.

Andy Parsons successfully invited audience laughter in response to the fourth element of a list by using finger gestures to “count off” the list items, along with appropriate intonation and stance. This example was presented on p. 153. Although according to Atkinson (e.g., 1984b) there is a certain amount of inherent invitationality in the third item of a rhetorical list, it is possible to “trick” this



potential response automaticity by uttering the first three list items without any hint of invitational delivery, while using a form of delivery which suggests that a response invitation will be made after a subsequent list item. Parsons' delivery made it very clear that the list did not end at the third item, and the audience responded enthusiastically when he invited their response with the fourth and final item in the list.

### *Mask invitation requests at non-key response points*

This thesis has suggested that affiliative audience responses are generally welcome during most parts of a stand-up comedy performance. It is therefore suggested that performers would do well to mask their response invitation signals at non-critical response points. If audience members fail to take up such an invitation, this will not appear to be a disaffiliative act on their part. However, if audiences do respond at these points, this may appear to convey additional enthusiasm for the performance in question, in that audience members are not merely seen to respond at major joke punchlines or other salient response points. From observation of the performances in the present corpus, many audience responses did not occur at major transition points during the performances concerned, and it has been noted that frequent audience responses appear to be a feature of successful stand-up comedy performances.

Audience response invitations in stand-up comedy appear to be more subtle, in general, than applause invitations in political speeches. This reflects the more conversational, less formal nature of stand-up comedy performances. Frequent, clearly telegraphed response invitations might seem overly "clunky" in this genre, and might thus fail to elicit the responses that were being sought. Although it is not in the interests of political speakers to mask their applause invitations, ambiguous delivery can often be advantageous for stand-up comedians, especially at non-critical response invitation points during their performances. It is especially advisable to mask overtly invitational delivery during topic development and areas of relatively weak speech content.

One way of masking an invitation request is to deliver a pursuit device ambiguously. If the pursuit does not receive a response from the audience, this then appears to be a natural part of the flow of the performance discourse, as opposed to standing out as a highly salient failed response invitation. If a response does occur, it will appear to be perfectly "natural" in context. This technique can be illustrated



by the ambiguously invited audience response during Matt King's performance that was described on p. 231.

### *Maintain the flow of the performance*

There were occasional moments in the present corpus when performers needed to overcome difficulties of some sort (including unforeseen errors, which will be described below). Audiences sometimes respond at times when the performer has not invited and does not expect a response from them. It is important for performers not to allow such uninvited responses to disrupt their performances, even if these occur immediately before particularly salient response points. A skilled performer will accept uninvited responses whenever they occur, and continue with his or her performance. If an uninvited audience response occurs immediately prior to a key scheduled response point, it is possible that they will then produce an even more strongly affiliative response at the intended point. Uninvited responses can be acknowledged by a brief nod or pause, or the performer can continue to deliver his or her routine without changing pace. If the performer is thrown "out of step" by such responses, the smooth flow of interaction between performer and audience appears to be disrupted. In this case, it is important to resume the flow of the performance as soon as possible.

It is equally important to be able to deal competently with audience non-responses at key invitation points during the routine. If audience members fail to respond at such points, it is recommended that performers do not pursue their response more than once. An example was presented from Gavin Webster's routine (see pp. 224-225) where he was temporarily thrown "off his stride" by a string of non-responses. If audience members fail to respond during any section of a stand-up comedy routine, it is important to move seamlessly on to the next topic, in the hope that they will connect more effectively with that segment instead.

In Chapter 6 it was suggested that non-responses and delays of a second or more are always indicators of temporary audience disaffiliation. A stand-up comedian can therefore deliver an accomplished performance by masking or concealing such non-responses as skilfully as possible; for example, by continuing with the performance discourse well before a delay of a second or longer has occurred. The relative rarity of delayed responses in the present corpus suggests that most stand-up comedians at this level are reasonably skilled at doing this. It is suggested that delayed responses tend to occur when performers are insufficiently



skilled to “talk into” the audience’s silence after a projected response invitation has not been taken up.

### *Take advantage of unforeseen errors*

As well as effectively managing mistimed responses and non-responses from their audiences, it is possible for stand-up comedians to turn unforeseen errors during their performances to their advantage. Some of the most strongly affiliative audience responses in the present corpus occurred in response to such instances. For example, on p. 109, Gordon Southern’s failure to stop his musical prop on time was described. When he was forced to make this technical support error overt, this led to an extremely enthusiastic audience response. He handled this mishap with skill and confidence, although his immediately subsequent utterance (presented on pp. 231-232) may have suffered as a result. Similarly, Sean Lock took advantage of his lack of skill in operating the microphone stand, as described on pp. 186-187. In an utterance that has not been reported in this thesis so far, which followed on from the utterance reported on pp. 77 and 112, Andy Zaltzman capitalised on his failure to articulate a key joke punchline clearly:

One. So the rest of you are kind of apathetic about the apathy, um, which is the only thing per- peep- people are pare- prepared to commit to these days. You might notice me stumbling over the punchline there, probably diminished the quality of the joke by round about sixty five to seventy per cent. Anyway-

The audience responded to this utterance with enthusiastic interruptive laughter of normal affiliation intensity. By acknowledging their own failures, both Lock and Zaltzman successfully invited affiliative audience responses (which may even have been more strongly affiliative than if they had not made the errors in the first place). If performers can turn either their own mistakes or the errors of their technical support crew to their advantage, this can be a strong indicator of performance skill.

It is informative to contrast these instances with the example from Gavin Webster’s performance that was described above. If a performer can turn an error or mishap to his or her advantage, the audience is likely to be particularly appreciative



of the skill involved in doing this, whereas if a performer gets “stuck” in the problem, the audience are likely to remain stuck in it as well.

*Use appropriate invitational techniques to intensify audience responses*

According to Atkinson (e.g. 1984b), political speakers can intensify audience applause by “talking over” that applause. This may also be true of responses that contain applause in stand-up comedy performances. An illustration of this can be seen in the example from Steve Jameson’s performance that was presented on p. 105, in which Jameson delivered a supplementary utterance in the form of an aside while the audience’s laughter was waning. This additional utterance successfully invited a sustained burst of audience applause which overlapped with the fading laughter.

Another effective way of heightening audience applause during stand-up comedy performances can be the use of invitational gestures, as in the example from Andy Parsons’ performance that was described on pp. 106-107. Parsons’ gesture was simultaneous with the applause, and served to intensify it.

The use of gestures can intensify audience laughter, but talking over audience laughter may be as likely to curtail that laughter as to intensify it. It is therefore recommended that performers do not talk over audience laughter until it is definitely waning, to avoid the risk of abruptly interrupting an audience’s collective affiliative response.

*Leave the stage on a positive note*

All of the performers in the present corpus received collective audience applause in response to their final turn, and in 12 of the 13 performances in the corpus these responses were judged to be of strong affiliation intensity. It is important to receive an enthusiastic response when leaving the stage, and the forms of utterances used by stand-up comedians when finishing their performances are usually relatively formulaic (Rutter, 1997), providing a very clear signal to the audience that an enthusiastic and sustained applause response is required while they leave the stage. Such utterances usually include thanking the audience and saying goodnight, and are often delivered using the standard rhetorical format of a three-part list.

In addition to delivering this formulaic final utterance, it is also good for stand-up comedy performers to deliver a strong final joke or punchline before moving into their closing comments. Most performers in this corpus delivered



reasonably strong performance-penultimate utterances. Reincorporations can be particularly effective invitational devices to use during the last three or four performer's turns, as illustrated by Matt King and Andy Parsons (see p. 163). Gordon Southern acknowledged the potentially inappropriate speech content of his performance-penultimate utterance (see p. 116), and this speech act on his part seemed to serve the function of re-establishing a positive rapport with his audience.

It is not entirely clear why the audience's response to Sally Holloway's performance-final utterance did not convey strong affiliation intensity. Holloway's final utterance contained the required formulaic elements, and was presented using strong invitational delivery. However, her penultimate utterance involved potential deprecation of others, and it is possible that this is not the safest invitational format to use in a performance-final joke. Although self-deprecation is considered to be appropriate at any point during a stand-up comedy performance, the same may not hold true for deprecation of others. However, this is a speculative suggestion. More examples of performance-final audience turns without strong affiliation intensity would need to be analysed in order to establish the probable reasons for why this phenomenon occurs. Holloway's performance also seemed to be the least popular in the present corpus, according to the other measures reported in this chapter (see Table 7.3), and this lower level of popularity might well have been reflected in the audience's final turn during her performance.

Having speculated on audience popularity judgements and indicators of skill as a stand-up comedian, this chapter will now summarise the key findings reported within the thesis as a whole. After that has been done, a list of potential future research projects will be presented, suggesting how the research findings reported in this thesis can usefully be developed in future studies.

## **SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS**

This thesis began by presenting a selective review of the literature on humour, laughter, and interaction research, and a summary of the literature relating to audience responses in political speeches and public oratory, to provide the necessary background for the analyses that were undertaken throughout the remainder of the thesis. In the first of these, a pilot study analysing four televised stand-up comedy performances found that a series of coding schemes that were originally designed for audience applause in political speeches could also be applied to laughter and other affiliative responses in stand-up comedy. A number of



individual differences were identified between different stand-up comedians, and more variation was found between the delivery styles of different comedians than different politicians. Some of the codings that were developed for use in political speeches were more straightforward to apply than others to stand-up comedy performances. Invitability was found to be particularly difficult to code, and a three-point scale was introduced (with the values invited, uninvited, and ambiguous), to replace the two-point scale (invited/uninvited) used in political speeches.

This study was then extended in Chapter 4 to a corpus of 13 stand-up comedy performances, and the quantity and quality of audience responses across the corpus was also addressed. The forms of audience response turns within stand-up comedy performances were found to be more varied than the forms of audience response during political speeches, where audiences normally respond with applause. While the most common form of response during stand-up comedy performances is laughter, responses in this corpus included laughter, applause, cheers, whistles, and brief verbal utterances. Some audience turns contained a single form of response token, and some contained multiple forms. It was not always easy to distinguish all of the different response tokens that occurred during such combinations.

With respect to applause responses during stand-up comedy performances, a qualitative difference was suggested between applause that accompanies laughter and applause that occurs without laughter. Responses consisting of primarily applause occurred in response to more formulaic utterances that contained less subtle invitational cues than responses consisting of applause in addition to collective laughter. Verbal audience turns in the present corpus also occurred in response to less subtle invitational cues than laughter invitations. Verbal responses were often invited by the use of greetings or rhetorical questions, and these appeared to be more effective when used during the opening turns of a performance. In general, verbal audience responses were more salient at the start of a performance, applause responses were more salient at the end, and responses containing a combination of laughter and other response tokens appeared to be salient at any point throughout the performance. In an analysis of the relative affiliation intensity of audience responses, it was found that weakly affiliative responses tended to be associated with uninvited responses and normally or strongly



affiliative responses with invited responses, suggesting an apparent double-dissociation between invited and uninvited responses.

Affiliative audience responses during stand-up comedy performances were found to be similar in some ways to audience applause during political speeches. In particular, stand-up comedians were found to invite similar proportions of affiliative audience responses as politicians. However, comedians appear to be more subtle in their style of delivery than politicians, and are often less prone to telegraph their response invitations. Ambiguous delivery could be a positive advantage for stand-up comedians, which is not the case for political speakers. Delivery in the genre of stand-up comedy was found to be more complex than in the genre of political speeches.

The standard rhetorical devices that were found to be effective applause invitations in political speeches were also used to invite affiliative audience responses in stand-up comedy performances, although they appear to be used to a lesser extent in this genre. The standard rhetorical formats used by politicians were found to be a substantial subset of the verbal invitational techniques used by stand-up comedians. It is suggested that position taking, pursuits, and direct requests are more suitable for inviting applause, and rhetorical questions are more suitable for inviting verbal responses from the audience. Position taking appears to be a more effective rhetorical device in political speeches than stand-up comedy performances, and headline-punchline devices are rarely used as invitational techniques in stand-up comedy performances, although they are commonly used to invite applause in political speeches.

It was possible to apply the same mismatch coding categories to asynchronous audience responses in stand-up comedy performances as to audience applause in political speeches, and these categories were found to be sufficient to describe all the forms of asynchronous audience responses in the present sample. Individual differences were found between the stand-up comedy performances in the present sample in terms of the proportions of synchronous vs asynchronous responses, and these differences were largely due to individual differences in the proportions of interruptive audience responses. Some of the interruptive responses in the present corpus can be thought of as “deferred” responses, in that audience laughter occurred after the completion of a humorous utterance and overlapped with a performer’s subsequent utterance. These responses could not be coded as delays,



because there was no silence of at least one second's duration before the response was produced. It is possible that an additional subcategory of deferred responses needs to be added to the current mismatch typology in order to account for this phenomenon, and future studies will be required to investigate how widespread a phenomenon this is.

Interruptive and isolated audience responses seem to be a natural feature in stand-up comedy performances, whereas delayed responses appear to be highly salient in this relatively fast-paced genre, and are much rarer in stand-up comedy performances than in political speeches. Delays of less than a second do occur, and it is possible that delays lasting less than a second should be accounted for in stand-up comedy performances, in order to acknowledge the more rapid nature of performer-audience interaction within this genre.

A detailed taxonomy of comedy invitation devices was proposed in Chapter 5, which listed a range of verbal and non-verbal invitational techniques used by stand-up comedians in the present corpus. A quantitative comparison was made between the use of standard rhetorical devices and the use of gestures at response invitation points, and these qualitatively different invitational techniques were found to make a statistically equivalent contribution towards invitationality in the present corpus. Given that these two techniques did not, between them, account for all of the invited responses within the corpus, further quantitative comparisons will need to be made for the remaining comedy invitation devices. These additional comparisons will be able to show whether the techniques proposed in this taxonomy are sufficient, between them, to account for all of the invited responses within the corpus.

It was suggested in Chapter 6 that the optimal or ideal flow of a stand-up comedy performance might be adversely affected when audience members respond disaffiliatively or unenthusiastically, when they fail to respond when invited, or when they produce uninvited responses. Each of these forms of potential audience disaffiliation were analysed, and non-responses were found to be the most genuinely disaffiliative of these phenomena. Delayed responses were considered to be a special form of non-response, and thus were also considered to be disaffiliative. Although there were no sustained periods of audience disaffiliation within the present corpus, it was considered that any of these potentially



disaffiliative tokens could be interpreted as markers of genuine disaffiliation if they were to occur in several successive audience turns.

Building on the analyses reported in previous chapters, the present chapter has presented some speculative suggestions as to how performer popularity might be calculated, and how successful performer-audience interaction might be assessed empirically. A range of specific performance factors have been proposed which are likely to contribute towards skill as a stand-up comedian. These factors can be developed by current or aspiring stand-up comedians and honed through repeated practice with different audiences. It is also possible that these skills might be useful for performers in other genres of public performance where good speaker-audience interaction skills are required.

Some of the limitations of the research reported in this thesis include the fact that the present corpus contained no audience turns consisting of purely disaffiliative tokens, and only ten responses contained tokens of overt disaffiliation along with laughter. There was only one vocal (non-verbal) audience response turn in the corpus, which also contained limited evidence of other forms of response tokens, such as whistles and cheers, with no instances of those response tokens in isolation. It was relatively difficult to identify all of the specific audience response tokens that occurred within combined response turns. The corpus contained only one performance by each comedian, meaning that comparisons between different audiences to the same performer could not be made. Although several comedy invitation devices were identified, it was only possible to analyse two of these quantitatively throughout the corpus. It seems clear that further quantitative analyses will need to be carried out in order to ascertain the relative contributions of each of these proposed devices to invitationality in the corpus.

The present study has addressed the performance of humorous material by stand-up comedians. While it may well provide a clear starting point for the analysis of comedy in different contexts, its findings are only of direct relevance to the genre of stand-up comedy. This thesis has therefore presented a series of analyses of performance and speaker-audience interaction, as opposed to an analysis of the structure of jokes, or of the phenomenon of humour in general. It is hoped that the present findings will provide a valuable contribution to the field of humour research, from the perspective of stand-up comedy material as it is actually performed in front of live audiences.



Having summarised the key findings within this thesis and pointed out some of the limitations of the present research, a number of specific areas for future research will now be proposed.

## **PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Based on the findings reported within the present corpus, a number of specific areas for future research can be identified. These will be outlined in three different subsections below. Firstly, a number of additional research issues will be suggested that can be addressed with reference to the present corpus. Secondly, a range of research questions will be presented that will require larger and more heterogeneous samples of stand-up comedy performances. Thirdly, some possibilities will be suggested for extending this research into other genres of performer-audience interaction.

### **Additional studies within the present corpus**

#### ***Gestures***

The coding scheme used for gestures in the present thesis might have been overly broad. Certain forms of gesture may be more effective invitational devices than others. It is proposed that a more detailed coding scheme for gestures should be developed, in order to identify the most effective invitational ways in which gestures are used in stand-up comedy performances. A limited range of specific invitational gestures may be discovered, similar to the limited range of standard rhetorical devices that were identified by Atkinson (e.g., 1984a) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) in political speeches.

#### ***Comedy invitation devices***

Each of the comedy invitation devices that were identified in the present thesis should be investigated systematically within the corpus. This will involve the development of reliable coding systems, the application of these systems to every invited response within the corpus, and the comparison of each separate device with respect to its relative contribution to invitationality in the corpus. As part of these analyses it will be discovered which invitational techniques are widely used and which appear to be idiosyncratic to a limited range of performers. When these analyses have been completed, it can be ascertained whether all of the proposed invitational techniques are sufficient, between them, to account for all of the invited responses within the present corpus. In addition, hypotheses can be generated to be



tested in more heterogeneous corpora of stand-up comedy performances, and also (potentially) in corpora from other genres of performer-audience interaction.

### *Non-responses*

After completion of the analysis of comedy invitation devices, a reliable coding scheme should be developed which can be applied throughout the entire corpus, not just immediately prior to audience responses. This will enable the reliable identification of non-responses at salient invitation points throughout the corpus. The results of these analyses will provide further information about the effectiveness or otherwise of performer-audience interaction within the corpus, and enable a more detailed evaluation of both performer skill and genuine audience disaffiliation within the corpus.

### *Delays*

The identification of delayed responses in the present study was based on delays of one second or greater, since that was the measure used for the political speeches studied by Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) and Bull and Wells (2002). However, it is arguable that in a more fast-paced genre of public performance, delays of less than a second might also be considered to be asynchronous. Given that it is important not to confound delays with natural pauses, a range of potential delay durations would need to be evaluated, with the aim of identifying the optimum duration of an asynchronous delayed response in stand-up comedy performance. Adobe Premier software will permit delay durations of anywhere between 1 and 24 frames to be tested.

### *Deferred responses*

It has been proposed that a subset of the interruptive responses in the present corpus are actually responses that were delayed from a previous joke punchline or response invitation point. However, these responses could not be coded as delays in the present study, because there was no pause that lasted for at least one second. It is possible that a different measure for delays in stand-up comedy performances might account for some of these responses (see above). However, it is also possible that such “late laughs” will still be coded as interruptive responses, and an investigation needs to be undertaken as to how many of the interruptive responses in the present corpus contain deferred laughter, whether this phenomenon is widespread within the corpus or restricted to a limited number of performers, and whether a further mismatch coding is required to account for these deferred



asynchronous responses (thus distinguishing them from other forms of interruptive responses).

Having completed these additional analyses within the present corpus, it will then be possible to extend this work to corpora containing more heterogeneous samples of stand-up comedy performances.

### **Studies of wider corpora of stand-up comedy performances**

It is proposed that more heterogeneous corpora of stand-up comedy performances are collected. These corpora will include:

- A wide range of performance durations, including much longer performances
- Multiple performances by the same comedian, for different audiences
- A series of performances by different comedians for the same audience
- Performances where the performer and audience are from the same (non-British) culture
- Performances where the performer and audience are from different cultures
- Performances with separate video footage of performers and audience members
- Performances containing overtly disaffiliative responses
- Performances containing a wide variety of non-laughter responses
- Performances in which the performer was not able to continue performing due to sustained audience disaffiliation
- Performances with more than one comedian on the stage at a time, including double-acts, multiple-acts, and single-act performers with “guests”
- Performances in which individual audience members are selected, such that there is a three-way (or more) interaction between performer, selected member, and remainder of audience
- Performances which reflect different skill levels of performers, ranging from established comedians to new performers to complete amateurs



Having assembled these corpora, the following studies can be undertaken:

- Establish the average audience response rate in longer performances and in performances by less skilled comedians
- Calculate the proportions of invitationality, rhetoricality, synchrony, mismatch types, use of gestures, and other invitational techniques with reliable coding schemes, in more heterogeneous corpora
- Establish the extent to which the proportion of interruptive responses can vary between different performances
- Investigate delayed and deferred responses with reference to more extensive comedy corpora
- Perform a detailed investigation of a wide range of non-laughter responses, to include audience turns containing combinations of response tokens, as well as single non-laughter tokens
- Perform more detailed investigations of audience disaffiliation
- Test and develop the taxonomy of comedy invitation devices to account for invitationality in a broader range of stand-up comedy performances
- Perform detailed analyses of the verbal and non-verbal behaviours of audience members during live stand-up comedy performances
- Identify whether the same audience members produce affiliative and disaffiliative response tokens within the same audience response turn, or whether affiliative and disaffiliative tokens are produced by different sections of the audience
- Identify the similarities and differences between performances by the same comedian for different audiences
- Identify the similarities and differences between performances of British comedians for British audiences and other same-culture comedian-audience performances
- Identify the similarities and differences between performances where the performer and audience are from different cultures
- Compare the enjoyment ratings of live audience members with various methods for calculating performer popularity from empirical behaviours during those performances



- Compare the enjoyment ratings of live audiences with the enjoyment ratings of television audiences for the same performances
- Identify the different interactional processes that occur when there is more than one performer on the stage
- Identify the different interactional processes that occur when specific audience members are selected during comedy performances

As well as performing a range of studies in various corpora of stand-up comedy performances, it will be possible to extend the findings of some of these studies into other genres of speaker-audience interaction. A selection of such potential studies will now be outlined.

### **Studies to be performed in different genres**

Other genres which can be considered for the possible extension of the findings reported here include the performances of management gurus (e.g., Greatbatch & Clark, 2005); after dinner speeches; speeches made at weddings; interactions between teachers and students (in school classrooms, universities, evening classes, etc.); training courses; religious services; improvised theatrical performances; corporate management meetings; scout troops; psychotherapy groups; etc.; etc. It is likely that different research questions will be appropriate for different genres, and also likely that it will be easier to obtain suitable research corpora from some genres than others.

The investigations that can be carried out will include:

- Identify the similarities and differences between the content and duration of audience response turns within different genres
- Ascertain which of the invitational techniques described in the proposed taxonomy of comedy invitation devices are used in other genres of speaker-audience interaction, and to what extent
- Identify additional invitational techniques used in other genres
- Ascertain whether performers in different genres invite similar proportions of audience responses as stand-up comedians and political speakers



- Ascertain whether the coding scheme for synchrony and mismatch types developed by Bull and Noordhuizen (2000) is sufficient to account for audience responses in different genres

In Chapter 5 it was proposed that the gesture coding scheme used in the present thesis could usefully be extended to the corpus of political speeches analysed by Bull and Wells (2002), in order to identify the extent to which politicians use gestures to invite audience responses. A comparison of the use of gestures with the use of standard rhetorical devices within that corpus could then be made, and the results compared with those reported for stand-up comedy performances within the present thesis.

It was also noted in Chapter 5 (and by Rutter, 1997) that the headline-punchline device proposed by Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) is rarely used to invite audience responses in stand-up comedy performances. While it is clear that the headline-punchline is an effective device for inviting audience applause in political speeches, its relative absence in stand-up comedy response invitations suggests that it might be politics-specific. It would be necessary to investigate the relative prevalence of this device in other genres of performer-audience interaction in order to ascertain which of these findings is the more anomalous – its relative absence as an invitational technique in stand-up comedy, or its relative prevalence in political speeches.

Given the similarity between the structure of the headline-punchline and the puzzle-solution, it might be more parsimonious in terms of performer-audience interaction as a whole to consider these devices as two closely related sub-forms of a single superordinate rhetorical format. Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) described the headline-punchline as being structurally similar to the puzzle-solution, but simpler and with less potential for elaboration. Unlike any of the other standard rhetorical formats proposed by Atkinson (e.g., 1984a) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986), each of these devices occurs in two parts, the former of which alerts the audience that the latter will communicate something significant to them. In the case of the headline-punchline, the salience of the punchline is signalled by the utterance of the headline, and in the case of the puzzle-solution, the salience of the solution is signalled by the utterance of the puzzle. While it is true that the speech content of a headline is simpler than that of a puzzle, and the speech content of a punchline is



more likely to be complete and understandable in and of itself than the speech content of a solution, both devices are, in functional terms, “signal-completion” formats. Both headline and puzzle act as signals to the audience that completion will be delivered in the format of a subsequent punchline or solution.

By extending the present research into other genres of public performance, it is suggested that a number of the invitational techniques proposed in this thesis will be found to be less important within performer-audience interaction as a whole. A number of additional important invitational techniques are also likely to be identified by meticulous microanalytic studies of corpora that contain samples of performer-audience interaction from other genres of public performance.

## **CONCLUSION**

The first chapter in this thesis pointed out that the relationship between a public speaker and his or her audience is considerably less formal in a stand-up comedy performance than in a political speech. This thesis has made a number of comparisons between performer-audience interaction in stand-up comedy and political speeches, and has also analysed various components of performer-audience interaction within the genre of stand-up comedy, including the specific behaviours of performers and their audiences. It is clear that there is room for much more detailed analysis of the interaction between stand-up comedians and their audiences, and a number of future studies have been proposed, both within the genre of stand-up comedy and in other genres of public performance. Such studies would build on the findings reported in the present thesis, and extend the present research in a range of fruitful directions. This would enhance our understanding of the processes involved in stand-up comedy, as well as the processes which potentially underlie speaker-audience interaction overall.

The studies reported in this thesis have identified some of the underlying processes that occur during stand-up comedy performances. A number of specific techniques used by stand-up comedians to invite responses from their audiences have been proposed, and two of these have been quantitatively analysed with respect to their contribution to invitationality in a corpus of live televised stand-up comedy performances. The various ways in which audiences respond during stand-up comedy performances have also been analysed with respect to this corpus, and consideration has been given to a number of ways in which audience members subtly convey disaffiliation within stand-up comedy performances. It is hoped that



these findings can inform future studies within stand-up comedy and within other genres of public performance.

The present chapter has built on the results presented in the previous chapters in order to speculate which of the performances in the corpus might have been more popular with their audiences than others, and which performance factors are more likely to lead to skill as a stand-up comedian. The research presented within this thesis has also been contextualised with respect to the genre of stand-up comedy, and also to the wider field of performer-audience interaction in general. Finally, an outline of future research was presented, suggesting a number of ways in which the present studies can be extended, including further studies within the present corpus, studies of more extensive and heterogeneous stand-up comedy corpora, and studies of performer-audience interaction in other genres. A more overarching series of research questions can be suggested, involving the “rules” for performer-audience interaction in any context. Undoubtedly, many of these rules will be found to be genre-specific, but some – such as, for example, invitationality – might well be more widely applicable.

Among the practical implications of this research are the potential to train public speakers in ways to deliver humorous speech content effectively. It is also possible to train public speakers how to build rapport with their audiences, and to be able to identify ways in which they can empirically test that they have achieved this. It is hoped that the performance techniques that were found to be more and less successful within the present corpus can inform training programmes for performers of stand-up comedy material, as well as public speakers in other genres who would like to use humour to connect with their audiences, and anyone who would like to be more successful at developing positive communicative interactions with their audiences. Practising some of the performance techniques identified in this thesis can be useful for public speakers in many situations: from politics, to comedy, to a best man’s speech at a wedding.

Greenbaum (1999) identified three aspects of successful comedy performance: Natural talent, Praxis, and Theoreia (see Chapter 1, p. 39). On the basis of a series of empirical analyses, the present thesis has proposed a number of features of effective stand-up comedy performance. These contribute towards the Theoreia element of Greenbaum’s (1999) paradigm. Performers who develop and practise the skills identified in this thesis – Praxis, in Greenbaum’s (1999)



terminology – will be more likely to improve their ability to interact effectively with their audiences than those who do not.

As well as being helpful for current and aspiring stand-up comedians, the findings reported in this thesis will also be of potential use to politicians, managers, chairmen, teachers, trainers, coaches, therapists, and after dinner speakers.

Finally, it has often been said that the detailed analysis of humorous material can cause the humour in it to evaporate. As Bjorklund (1985) colourfully put it, “humour can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process”. It is profoundly hoped that no frogs have been killed during the making of this thesis.



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