

The Phonopragmatics of Selected British Stand up Comedies

By

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Abstract

The present study investigates how phonopragmatic elements are employed in the context of the British Stand-Up Comedies through the lens of a phonopragmatic approach that is based on phonological and pragmatic theories. The problem is that different variations of prosody convey different meanings when they are performed. Therefore, one of the primary challenges presented in this work is the fact that an incorrect modulation of prosody may result in a different meaning, which may subsequently be misinterpreted. Standup comedy is particularly selected to bridge this knowledge gap by phonopragmatically examining stand up comedies in British context. This study, thus, attempts to achieve the following aims: explaining the oral narrative elements and acts within British stand-up comedies; examining the intensity, frequency, speech rate functions of intonation within oral narratives, illocutionary acts and conversational maxims. In step with its aims, this study hypothesizes that: the abstract and the coda are the least frequent oral narrative elements and oral narrative have the least number of acts within British stand-up comedies; high frequency, high intensity, slow speech rate, contrastive function of intonation, the representative speech acts and the violation of quantity maxim are mostly employed by the comedians. To achieve its aims, the present study follows certain steps: providing an overview phonopragmatic concepts; selecting the data (the British stand up comedies) from the website www.youtube.com.; adopting an eclectic model to analyse the data spectrographically (using PRAAT) and phonopragmatically; conducting a statistical analysis to validate the results, discuss them and to arrive at conclusions. The present study ends up with a variety of conclusions, the most central of which is that British comedians show a preference toward the use of high intensity to have an effect on the audience and load their messages with the appropriate illocutionary force. Also, the abstract and the coda show less employment of the acts as they are optional elements within the oral narratives. Moreover, the most non-observed maxim is the maxim of quantity in British Stand-Up Comedies.

Introduction

People interact with one another in order to pass on messages from one person to the next in a society. Language is the medium via which people convey their messages while they are communicating with one another (Rafika, Yuliasri and Warsono, 2020:475). Dialogue between two or more individuals is the most typical use of spoken language (Syauqillah, 2016:1). Standup comedy as an effective communication style incorporates humour, jokes, puns, and laughter, despite the fact that it is sometimes regarded as unserious social discourse (Haghish et al. 2012:9).

Standup comedy is a kind of humor in which a comedian addresses a live audience and

engages with them while delivering jokes. In this subgenre of comedy, the performer (the comedian) conveys some kind of statement to the audience in hopes of providing them with some form of entertainment. In order to communicate his content in front of a live audience, the comedian, also known as the comedian, makes use of a variety of different language approaches. Language is used to reach a wide range of issues and objectives, including but not limited to people's customs, politics, peculiar and imagined personalities, and many more (Attardo, 2001:62). Furthermore, comedians engage in direct conversation with the audience when they take the stage. (Schwarz, 2010:321). In a nutshell, a receptive audience is responsible for the processing and interpretation of a comedian's planned meanings as well as any (comic) ideas that are proposed.

One way to characterize it as a comedic monologue, which is delivered to an audience in a way that makes as if it is improvised and colloquial. However, a comedian would typically begin his performance by attempting to involve the audience in a discussion (Misje, 2002:87). Standup comedy is, of course, a two-way street and must be able to grab not only the anticipations of communication link participants but also the contributions and commitments that agents make to the common ground (Khairani, 2017:16). Abrahams (2020:491) states that it includes a connection between the comedian and the audience as one of its components. It is a new form of comedy that originated in the United States and England (Rullyanti and Nurdianto, 2019:60). Only one individual, referred to as the comedian, may execute this joke. First, the comic introduces an idea, and then they turn it into something funny (Fitri, Mahyuni and Sudirman, 2018:108). The comedian anticipates receiving comments and reactions from the audience. In an ideal situation, the answer would be a nonstop flow of laughing (Armijo et al., 2011:14).

Standup comedy is a form of narration that has a storyline line, characters who interact with each other, as well as a beginning, middle, and conclusion to the narrative. It should have an Opening, a First canned joke and a Closing (Rutter, 1997:251-252). In any standup comedy, the language functions are discriminated into two main categories, the transactional function and the interactional function (Halliday, 1970:140). Wells and MacFarlane (1998: 265) confirm that the prosodic features of standup comedy need to be studied not only in the context of their immediate interactional environment, but also in the context of the linguistic variety in which they occur. This is something that has been previously established by other researchers. Comedians and audience members engage in a process of negotiation, during which, at each possible conclusion point, comedians have the choice of continuing with the show, or they do not; and (prospective) audience members have the option of joining the show, or they do not. As a result, another angle from which to examine the function of prosody in standup comedy is to consider it in terms of the total prosodic traits it possesses. This means that a comic must generate the first stressed word of his or her turn exactly at the instant at which a next beat is produced by the rhythm of the speaker who came before them. This is true in both British and American English. The application of prosodic elements from one turn to the next is not restricted to the rhythm of the speaker's speech.

Reed (2006:34) explains the tendency of speakers to match or complement prosodic patterns in their own prosody using the term "prosodic orientation." When they respond to anything, such as a query, an agreement, or a return greeting, comedians typically utilize particular intonation contours. For instance, they may use these contours to answer the inquiry. Both rhythmic integration and prosodic orientation demonstrate, first, that comedians are aware of prosody, and second, that prosody can function as a form of alignment between two oral narratives, independent of the words that are being used. This is shown by the fact that comedians integrate rhythm into their routines and that they orient their prosody in a particular

way.

Noting the significance of Speech Act Theory (henceforth SAT), Al-Hindawi et al. (2014: 27) note that SAT is a credible pragmatic idea that has been endowed with studies from its beginnings in 1962 to the present. According to Al-Hindawi (1999:6), "as opposed to linguistics, which has long been concerned with the study of form, the research of meaning has been left to linguistic philosophers." Linguistic philosophers, on the other hand, focused on referential meaning and the truth or falsity of propositions. Despite the fact that this approach was prevalent in philosophical circles throughout the 1930s, Wittgenstein (1958) criticized it later with the motto "meaning in use" and the notion that utterances could only be explained in reference to the activities in which they play a role.

Seven years after Austin (1962) created the SAT, Austin's student Searle (1969:33) developed the SAT and gave it its ultimate formal structure. Searle makes a distinction between two different types of rules that govern speech actions (henceforth SAs), namely constitutive rules and regulative rules, in his work (ibid.: 33). However, according to Searle, there are a few distinct categories of speech actions. These categories include representatives, directives, commissives, declarations, and expressives (1976:8). According to Levinson (1983:240) and Mey (2004:122), with representatives, an interlocutor either commits himself to the reality of the assertions being made, or they do not commit themselves to whether or not they consider the statements to be true. In directives, the speaker attempts to persuade the listener to take certain action. It is an illocutionary force that causes the hearer to act in a certain manner. The speaker's desires are communicated through directive acts, and the hearer is expected to help the speaker bring the world fit with the words (Yule, 1996: 54). For example, please join us for dinner on Friday. While commissives require the speaker to undertake some action. According to Yule (1996:54), the speakers utilize commissive to commit activities that will take place in the future. According to Leech (1991:106), it might take the form of a promise, a vow, an offer, a sworn statement, or a threat. For example, I'm going to study for tomorrow's test.

As for declaratives, utterances are the ones that are responsible for the current condition of affairs. By making the declaration, the speaker has the power to change the outward appearance, status, or condition of an object or situation (Leech, 1991:105). For example; I pronounce this amusement park opened. Expressives convey a psychological attitude or mental state of affairs (Yule, 1996:53). It is capable of conveying a wide range of sentiments, including congratulating, apologizing, wishing, greeting, and thanking (Sitorus, 2019:13). For example, Wow! That was a brilliant idea.

In order to achieve its goals of entertaining, informing, and criticizing social problems, standup comedy attempts to attract listeners' ability to laugh at the phenomena in question. These three goals of standup comedy have the ability to be accomplished through any one of the five forms of illocutionary acts, which are declaratives, representatives, expressives, and directives and commissives (Putri and Murni, 2012:7).

Moreover, Grice (1975) distinguishes the following pragmatic maxims in his Cooperative Principle:

- A) Maxim of Quantity: 1. "Make your contribution as informative as required". and 2. "Do not make your contribution more informative than is required".
- B) Maxims of Quality: 1. Be truthful., 2. "Do not say what you believe to be false." and 3. "Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence."
- C) Maxim of Relation: 1. "Be relevant."

D) Maxims of Manner:

1. "Be perspicuous.", 2. "Avoid obscurity of expression.", 3. "Avoid ambiguity.", 4. "Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)." and 5. "Be orderly."

Grice (1975) proposes that communication takes place unconsciously following these maxims. It is noteworthy that Grice distinguishes instances where the maxims are flouted, opted out, or violated (Armijo et al. ,2012:26-27). Cutting highlights four different practices that are considered to be non-observing of maxims: opting out, violating, infringing, and flouting (2002: 36-41). When the speaker fails to follow the maxim, this is referred to as non-observance of the maxim.

The integration of both phonological and pragmatic theories is referred to as phonopragmatics. It is the study of the pragmatic theory of pronunciation and the sounding aspect of speech. The study of the functional properties of phonetic units of both levels makes it transparent and accessible for understanding the relationship between the parties involved in communication, the intentions of their statements, as well as the emotional background and atmosphere of the act of communication (Ilinichna, 2018: 336-337).

Methodology

Chafe explains that narratives are composed of chronological or structural elements such as "abstract, orientation, and resolution" (1980). One of the forms of spoken language, oral narratives feature a wide variety of essential traits that set them apart from written language. The organizational structure of oral texts is the first type of general feature that must be considered. Brown (1991:15) notes that "speech is less richly ordered than written language, including less densely packed information, but containing more interactive indicators and planning fillers." The first element of an oral narrative is called abstract. It is defined as a short summary of the whole story usually told in a few idea units. There is no abstract in the informant's narrative because he starts telling the story as soon as he finishes his introduction. The second part of the narrative is the orientation. It establishes spatial and temporal orientation. The spatial and temporal orientation has been previously exemplified. In addition, this narrative does include a very complete introduction before the speaker starts telling his brother's danger-of-death experience. This short introduction is followed by the complex events that tell the action of the story. Another element is the resolution, that is, how the story reaches its end. Therefore, one of the tasks in order to analyze a spoken text (oral narrative) is to divide it into its intonation groups; that is, the basic elements of consciousness that are used by the narrator to successfully transmit a message. These idea units can be identified taking into account *intonation*.

In this study, the researcher adopts an eclectic model throughout the analysis of the present data. According to the study's aims, the model above has been constructed to help analyze the collected data. It is founded on the premise that standup comedy narrative is a multidimensional practice that can be evaluated at several levels. The aforementioned models are supposed to be the model for this study. It contains Rutter's (1997) structure of standup comedy, Oliveira's (2000) prosodic features of oral narratives, Hidalgo's (2017) phonetic-functional interactive approach, Wennerstrom's (2001) discourse functions of intonation, Searle's (1969) model of the classification of SAs *Speech Act: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* such as representatives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives. Simultaneously, it includes Grice's (1975) CP model *Logic and Conversation*. The eclectic model is used to analyse the oral narratives which include , namely, being funny (2011) full show | Jimmy Carr

,Russell Howard on tucking his willy | stand up , stripped 2009. , Stewart Lee - 2012 - carpet remnant world, standup comedy special a whole different story Kevin Bridges UK uncensored, chatterbox (2011) full show | Sarah Millican, Sophie Duker: you don't know "aunties" | Jonathan Ross' comedy club, Pippa Evans on tonight at the palladium, why I love my working class parents: best bits of Suzi Ruffell's live from the BBC and Yuriko Kotani on stand up central. The eclectic model is presented in the following figure below which shows its different components:

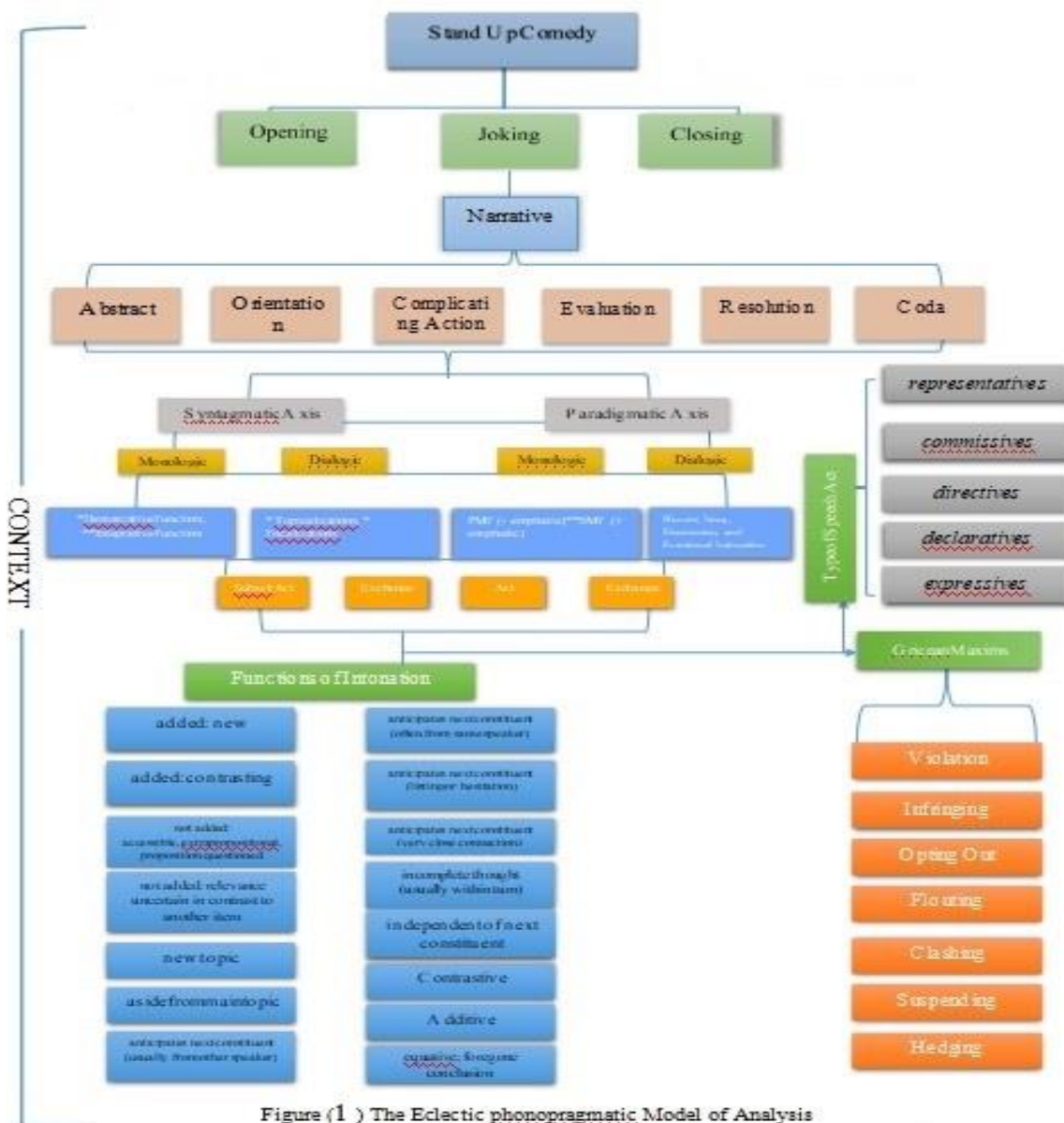


Figure (1) The Eclectic phonopragmatic Model of Analysis

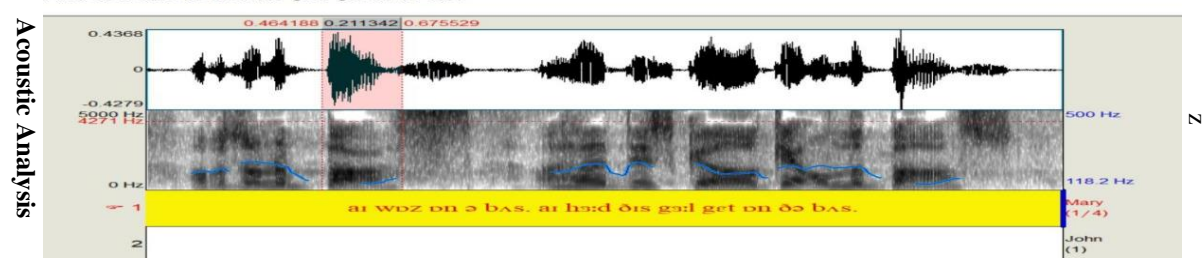
The data of the research are representative of live stand-up comedies, which are comedy routines performed in front of an audience by one comedian (male or female). Recorded videos, which may be seen on websites such as www.youtube.com, serve as the major source of the data for this study. The transcripts of stand up comedy may be obtained on the website www.scrapfromtheloft.com are the secondary source of the data. The oral narratives that are retrieved for this study provide an explanation of a certain subject or story, such as racism, personal experience, social relationships, and politics.

The study follows certain criteria as it discards any oral narratives that do not indicate a series of "discrete, chronologically and non-randomly arranged units," they must be broken down into separate pieces. Oral narrative- to be manageable- need to be "brief" (no more than three minutes). This research only investigates data (acts) that are followed by feedback (laughter, cheer, applause, humming, etc.). The scheme of data analysis qualitatively and quantitatively. On the other hand, quantitative analysis utilizes methods that collect data in numerical forms such as intensity, frequency and speech rate which are given by dB and Hz respectively. Moreover, the following steps are followed in analyzing the data; selected recorded videos are downloaded and converted into wave. and mp3. formats to be suitable for Praat software analysis; Each audio file is segmented (manually) using Praat by marking the comedian's utterances; An annotation of the audio files is applied and matched to the chosen oral narratives; All the oral narratives are divided into abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda. The oral narratives elements are divided into intonation groups; The unit of analysis of this study is the intonation group in oral narratives from the British stand up comedies. The study focus is the oral narrative in jokes, not the performance of the standup comedy such as gesture, facial expressions, etc.

Data Analysis

Sample of Analysis

Table (1) Sample of Analysis



	Narrative Analysis	No. of Acts	Phonological Analysis			Pragmatic Analysis		
			Intensity	Frequency	Speech Rate	Function Of Intonation	Speech Act type	Gricean Maxims
	//	-						
Orien	I WAS on a bus. I heard this GIRL get on the bus.	2	72.02	225	0.166	contrastive	Representative/ Representative	Violation of quantity maxim
Complicating	WALKED up to driver and go: "Can I get RETURNED?" And the driver went: "Where TO?" And She went: "Back HERE."	4	66.28	184	0.789	contrastive	Directive/ Directive	Violation of relation maxim
Eval	It TOOK me like an extra beat to... what's going on?	2	76.2	231	0.379	equative	Representative	Violation of quantity maxim
Resol	OH, she is a fucking idiot. "Case CLOSED."	2	75	326	0.111	contrastive	Expressive	Violation of quality maxim
Coda	//	-						

Discussion

The above narrative, the abstract is an optional element. The orientation contains the first intonation group, a high tonal level which is used to show contrast and violates the quantity maxim in the orientation and helps the joke delivered to the audience. Two speech acts; a representative speech act of stating as in “I was on a bus”, the second is a representative speech act of reporting as in “I heard this girl get on the bus”. Additionally, the speaker provides more information than is needed and violates the maxim of quantity. These elements are amalgamated together to give a contrastive function of intonation.

In the complicating action, a contrastive function of intonation within the intonation group is delivered to the listeners through high tonal level. Thus, these help the comedian to deliver a directive speech act of requesting that is “Can I get returned” and violates the maxim of relation at the same time. ‘The girl in the narrative uses a directive speech act for requesting an action from the bus driver.’ The second speech act “She went: “Back HERE” is a directive speech act of requesting. The maxim of relation is violated in these two utterances as the girl asks the bus driver and his answer is different from her question.

In the evaluation element of the narrative, the intonation group consists of low tonal level to deliver an equative function of intonation which indicates a conclusion of what is gone before. Moreover, a representative speech act of reporting as in “It TOOK me like an extra beat to” is used to conclude information about the girl with a violation of quantity maxim are seen above. The violation happens as the speaker does not provide enough information and he does not finish his utterance.

In the resolution part, the comedian employs high within the intonation group. An expressive speech act of disliking “she is a fucking idiot” to express the speaker’s attitude and opinion about the ‘girl’ and the violation of maxim of quality is also employed. This kind of violation happens as the speaker exaggerates in his description of the girl. This leads to a contrastive function of intonation. While the coda is an optional part in this narrative. The narrative contains different speech acts and violation of the maxims. The employment of such devices enhances the chances audience’s engagement.

Statistical Analysis

In this study, the two qualitative and quantitative are integrated together to have a mixed approach in the study of stand-up comedies. Following the completion of the phonopragmatic analysis, the emphasis of this section turns to the statistical analysis, which serves to provide a quantitative basis for the conclusions of the phonopragmatic analysis. Basically, the purpose of this statistical analysis is to provide objective answers to the questions raised by the study, fulfill its aims, and validate its hypotheses. The results of the statistical analysis are presented in figures that are structured in a manner that corresponds to the presentation of their constituent parts in the eclectic model. The presentation of the figures that are associated with them takes place in the following order.

1. Oral Narrative Elements

In the statistical analysis of the oral narrative elements, it seems to that the elements are equally dominant within the oral narrative itself. Yet, the abstract and coda show the lowest rates with 12% for the abstract and 8% for the coda because they are optional in some oral narratives. This is clearly shown in figure (2) below.

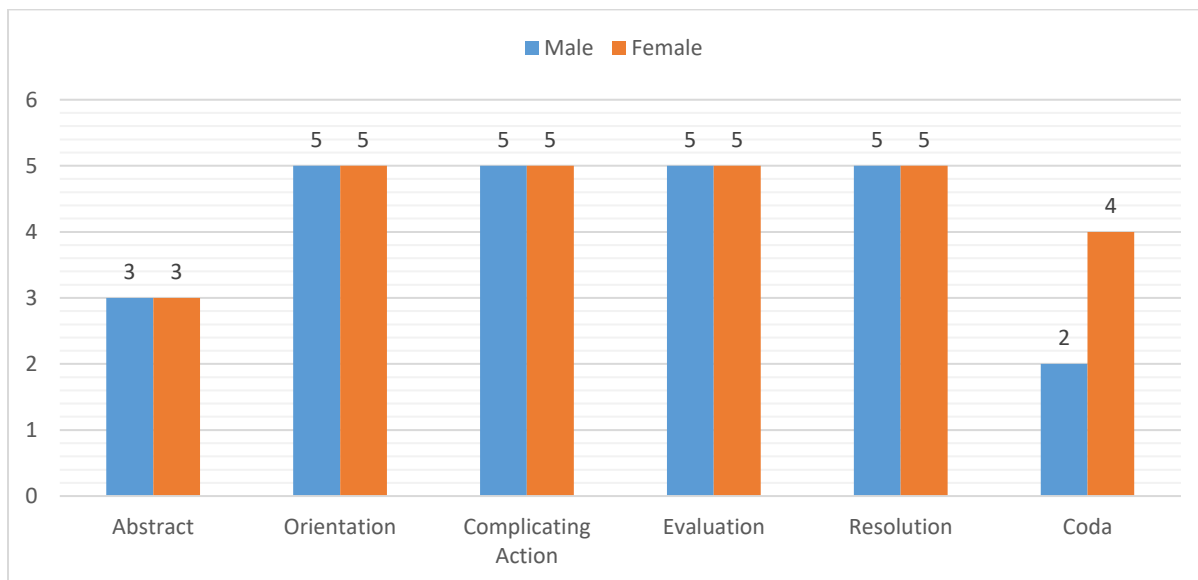


Figure (2) Rates of British Oral Narrative Elements

2. Acts of Oral Narrative

Statistically speaking, the complicating action shows a high percentage of 24% for British male comedians while it shows a percentage of 35% for British female comedians within the oral narratives. 13% is the percentage for the abstract element and 6% is the percentage of coda element for British male comedians. While 4% is the percentage of the abstract element and 5% is the percentage of the coda element for British female comedians. The two elements show the least percentage in the analysed data. This is clearly shown in figure (3) as follows:

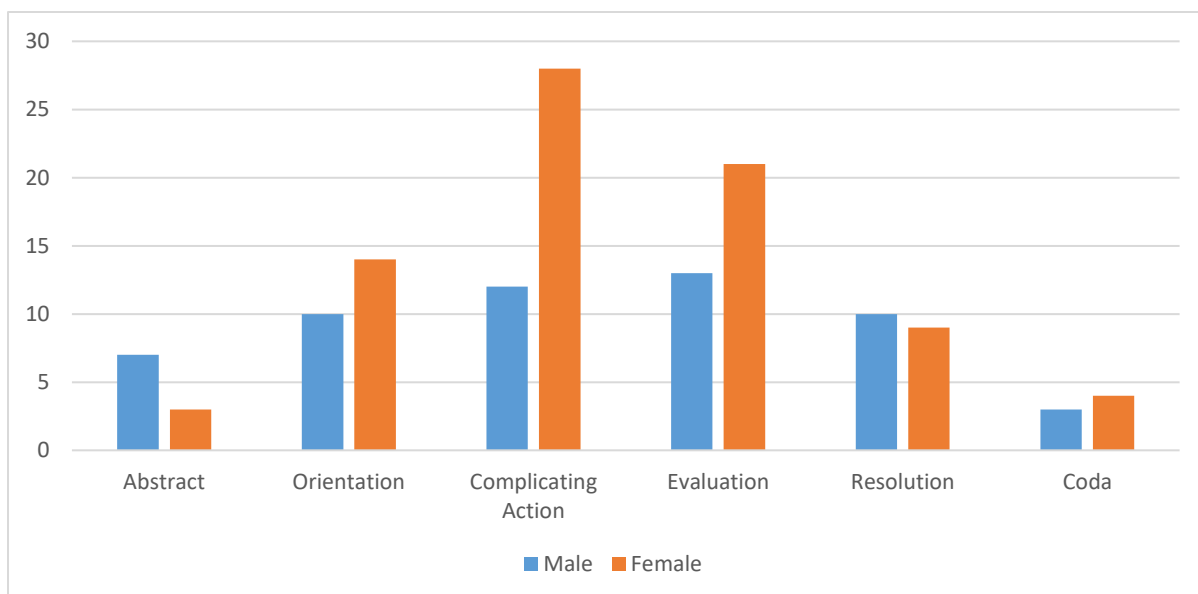


Figure (3) Rates of Acts in British Oral Narratives

3. Intensity in Oral Narrative

The maximum intensity for British male comedians is 87 dB, while the maximum intensity for British female comedians is 81 dB. The minimum intensity for British male comedians is -332 dB, while the minimum intensity for British female comedians is -20 dB. The high type of tonal level is the one that predominates most of the time. In the British stand up comedys, the majority of the acts have a high tonal level. This is clearly shown in and figure (4) below.

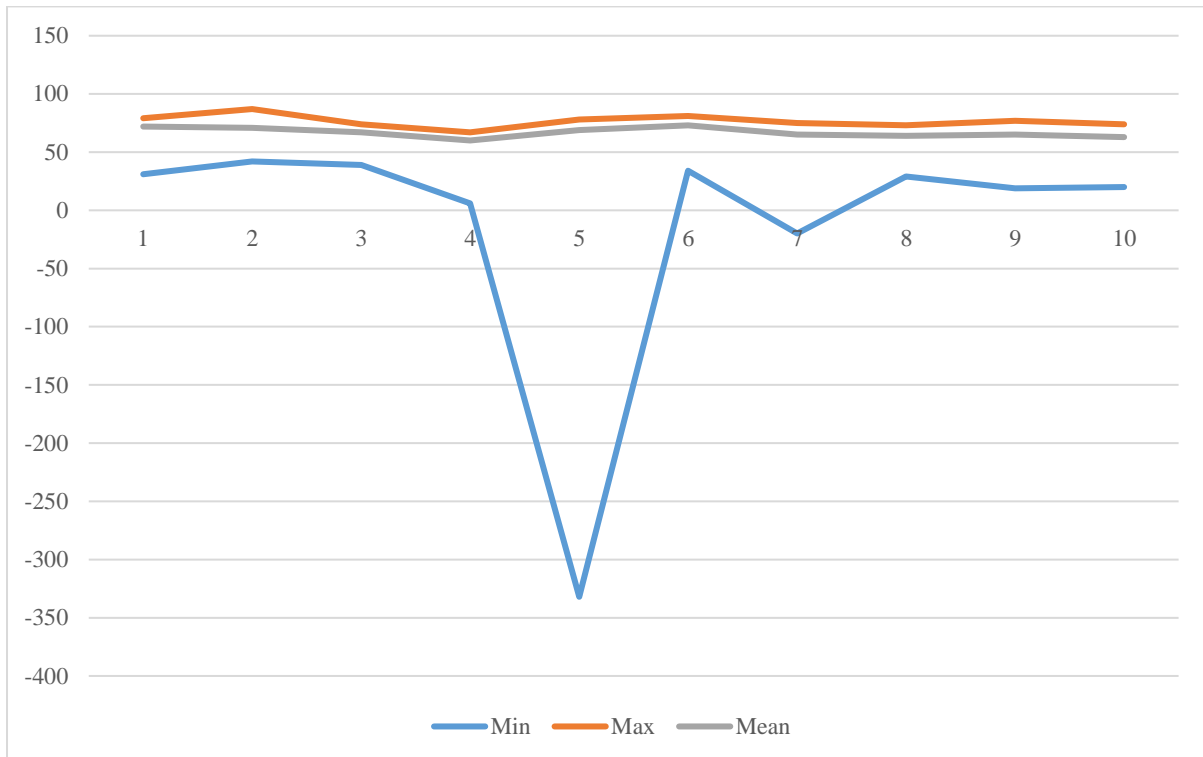


Figure (4) Rates of Intensity in British Oral Narratives

4. Frequency of Oral Narratives

In British stand-up comedies, the maximum frequency for male comedians is 525Hz, whereas the maximum frequency for female comedians is 518Hz. The minimum frequency for male comedians is 69 Hz, whereas the minimum frequency for female comedians is 72 Hz. This is shown in figure (6) below.

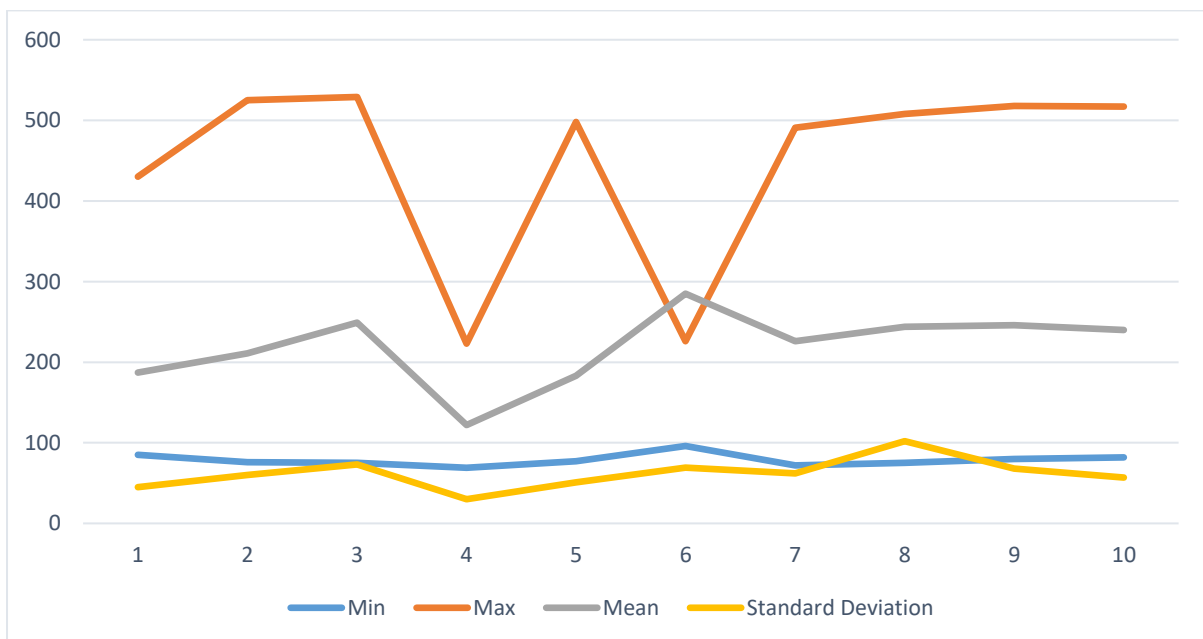


Figure (5) Rates of Frequency in British Oral Narratives

5. Speech Rate of Oral Narratives

Within speech rate, British male and female comedians show normal and slow speech rate which is between 4.64-2.38.

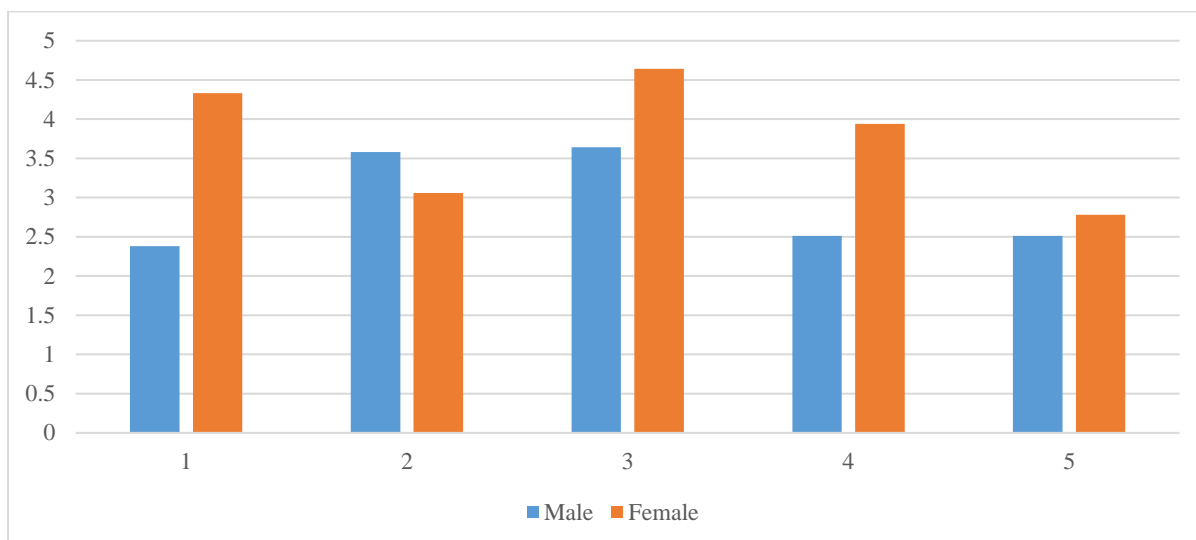


Figure (6) RATES of Speech Rate in British Oral Narratives

6. Functions of Intonation in Oral Narrative

In the functions of intonation, British comedians show use of contrastive function of intonation with 21.7% percentage, while other functions such as anticipates next constituent (usually from other speaker), anticipates next constituent (often from same speaker), Additive of 17.4% percentage of the overall functions of intonation. For British female comedians, the functions of intonation such as anticipates next constituent (usually from other speaker) shows a percentage of 16% and the anticipation of next constituent (often from same speaker) is 12% percentage, contrastive function of intonation is 12% percentage, while the anticipation of next constituent (very close connection) is 12% percentage. These are clearly stated in the following figure (8).

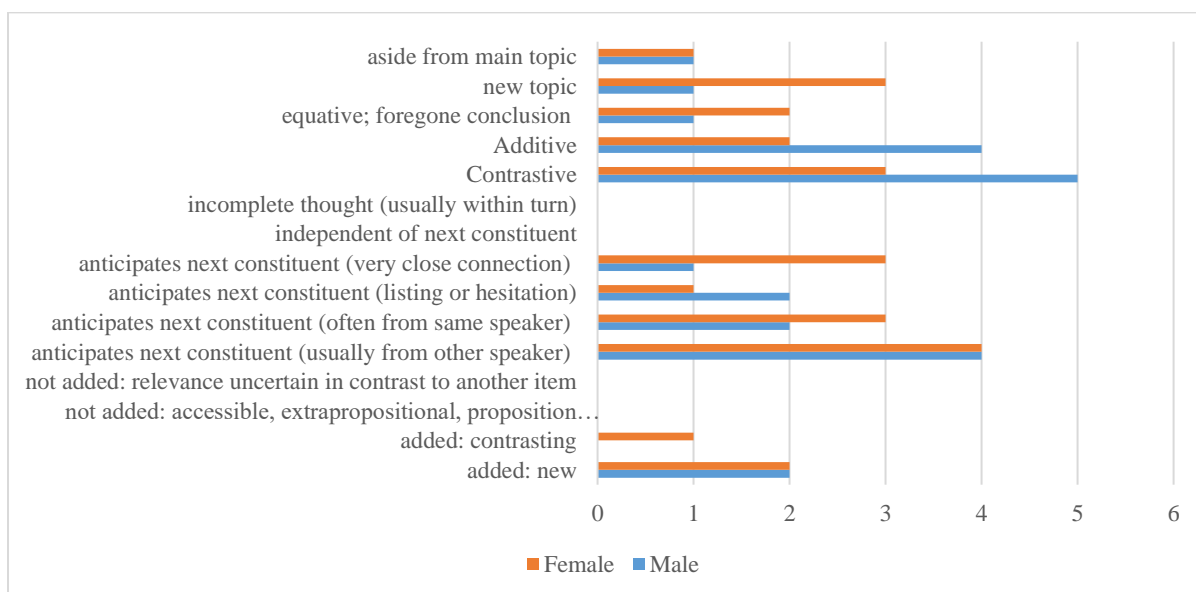


Figure (7) Rates of Functions of Intonation in British Oral Narrative

7. Speech Acts of Oral Narrative

Concerning the speech acts, the representative SAs demonstrate a percentage of speech acts including 50 % percent for male British comedians and 40 % of the total for female British comedians. In addition, expressive SAs reveal that male British comedians have a percentage of 17.8 of SAs, while female British comedians have a percentage of 16.6% of SAs.

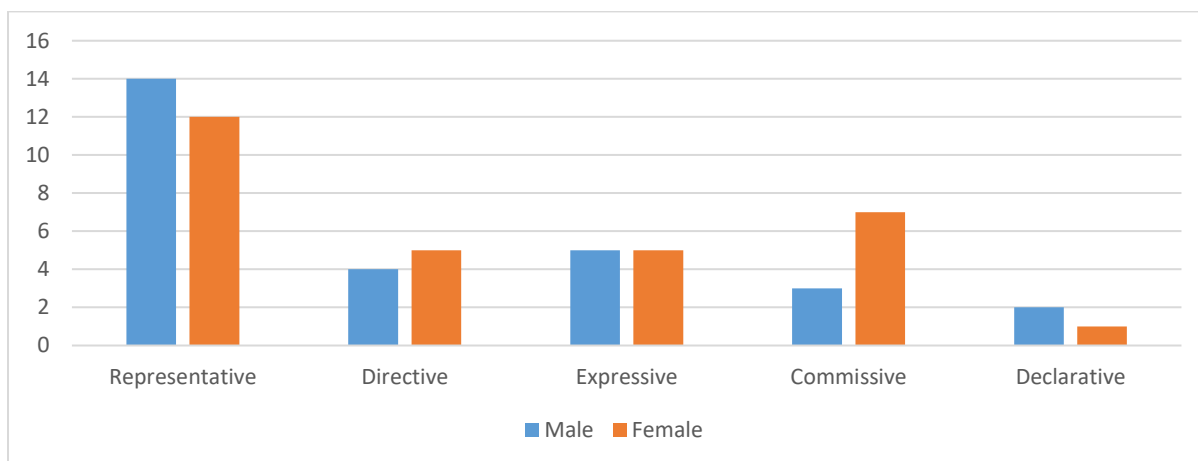


Figure (8) Rates of Speech Acts in British Oral Narratives

8. Conversational Maxims

When it comes to the observance of the conversational maxims, the percentage of male who do so is 33 % of the whole data, while the percentage of women who do so is 35.7 %. The percentage of males who violate the quality and quantity maxims equally is 14%, while the percentage for females is 35.3 %. The percentage of British male comedians who are found to have violated quantity maxims is 17.8 %, whereas the percentage of British female comedians who do so is 28.5 %. These are shown in figure (10) below.

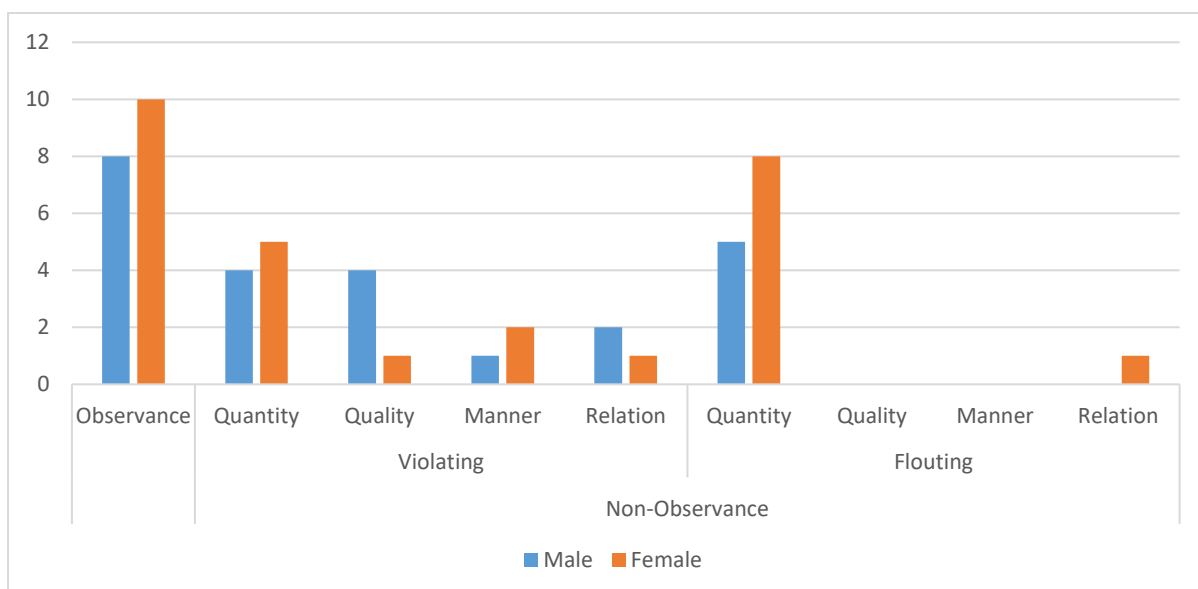


Figure (9) Rates of Conversational Maxims in British Oral Narratives

Conclusions

After analyzing the data which are ten British oral narratives form stand up comedies and setting the results of the analysis, conclusions are drawn to verify the validity of the hypotheses of the study. Therefore, the results of the phonopragmatic analysis allow drawing the following conclusions:

The abstract and coda have the least parentage and the least number of acts within the oral narratives as they are optional elements. They are either present or not within the oral narrative in British stand up comedys. The other elements such as orientation, complicating

action, evaluation, resolution are equally employed by British standup comedians.

British comedians show a preference toward the use of high intensity to have an effect on the audience and load their messages with the appropriate illocutionary force. Additionally, both show a tendency to the use of high frequency especially when delivering expressive SAs. They raise their voices and use a high tonal level to deliver an emotional message.

British comedians use high frequency and high intensity which are associated with the contrastive function of intonation in oral narratives. The anticipation of next constituent (usually from other speaker) is also extensively employed by British comedians to deliver their stories (oral narrative).

1. It is concluded that various speech acts are used in British stand up comedies, although there are some differences in the frequencies and the percentages between the two. In the British stand up comedies, it is (58) with a ratio of (47.15%). Every single SA is designed for a certain purpose. Therefore, SAs, in the standup comedies, vary according to their functions and significance of their context in the oral narrative.

2. British comedians show an extensive use of the representative speech acts in the oral narrative. The representative SA is the most dominant category used in British stand up comedies, with a frequency of (26) and a ratio of (44.8%). Since the comedian tries to say or describe a state of affair when narrating his experience, also to impart a piece of information to the audience. It is suitable for narrating the series of events to grasp the attention of the audience and deliver the joke within. the declarative SA, is less used in since it is highly used in the legal and institutional contexts and not in telling stories.

3. The most non-observed maxim is the maxim of quantity since it is heavily violated and flouted to generate conversational implicatures, it shows a frequency of (9), with a ratio of (23.7%) at both levels. Since comedians exaggerate in their description of the events, flouting the maxim of quantity is prominent, consequently, generating conversational implicature. Moreover, the maxim of quantity is the second maxim that is flouted in oral narratives as it shows a frequency of (13) with a ratio of (92.9%).

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