The information-conveying ability of humorous texts: an analysis of "semantic objects"

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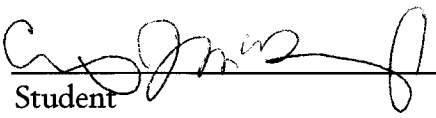

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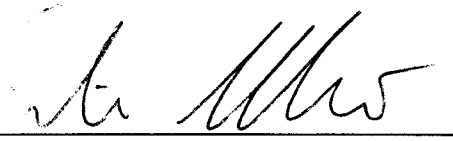

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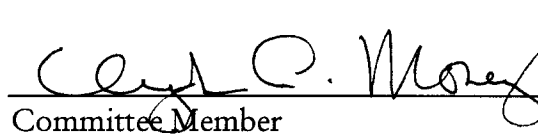

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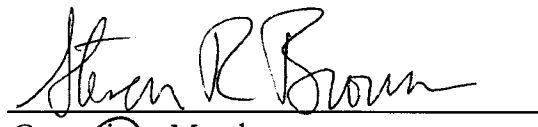

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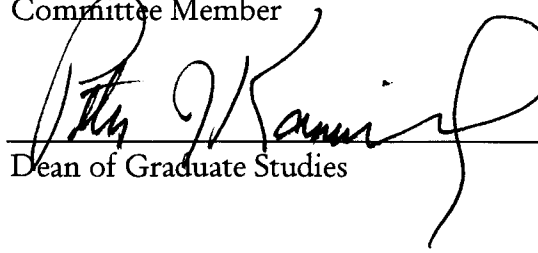

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how humorous texts may convey reliable information, despite the obvious problem that hearers regularly accept that joke tellers are not held to the truth-value of what they utter. Only Zhao (1988) has claimed that jokes may convey objective, factual information. This thesis constitutes the first attempt to answer the question *how* jokes and longer humorous texts may do this. Essentially the argument is this: when presented with a text of any kind (i.e., serious or non-serious), hearers compare their own background assumptions with the assumptions of the text. These "assumptions" are named herein, as a superordinate term, "semantic objects," the sum of which make up the "textual world" (TW). In serious communication, hearers assume that the text's semantic objects match their own background assumptions about what they take to obtain in the "real world" (RW); through Gricean implicature, new, reliable information may be learned when such texts do not match, but are compatible with, their background assumptions. In joke texts, however, hearers must sift through unreliable semantic objects to determine which should be accepted as reliable. Using a taxonomy of these semantic objects to create a version of the TW for four sample jokes, it turns out that in joke texts, the vast majority of semantic objects are true for the RW. Furthermore, those semantic objects that are unreliable for the RW are either blatantly false or are directly associated with the joke's punch line, such that a hearer may determine the reliability of each semantic object (and thus learn new, reliable information) using two heuristics: 1) Is the semantic object incompatible with the RW as you believe it to be?, and 2) Is the semantic object logically necessary for the given punch line? If the answer to both of these questions is no, the semantic object may be accepted as reliable.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

Chapter 2: A review of the history of the claim that jokes may convey reliable information 3

2.1 Introduction
2.2 The paradox: Grice's cooperative principle
2.3 Zhao's explanation of the information-conveying aspect of jokes
2.4 The role of presupposition in the information-conveying aspect of jokes
2.5 Conclusion

Chapter 3: "Semantic objects": presupposition and other semantic and pragmatic tools 12

3.1 Introduction
3.2 Presuppositions
3.3 Modality judgments
3.4 Pragmatic presupposition and "accommodation"
3.5 "Semantic objects" defined
3.6 Conclusion

Chapter 4: The "textual world" of jokes 22

4.1 Introduction
4.2 Sample jokes
4.3 "Textual world" further defined
4.4 The joke text's manipulation of the "real world" for humorous effect
4.5 Conclusion

Chapter 5: How jokes may convey reliable information 33

5.1 Introduction
5.2 How jokes may convey reliable information
5.3 Conclusion

Chapter 6: Case study: the information-conveying ability of longer humorous texts 39

6.1 Introduction
6.2 Joke texts vs. longer humorous texts
6.3 The nature of jab lines and their place in an objective-semantic account
6.4 How jab lines may differ from punch lines

6.5 How one can learn reliable information from longer humorous texts: a survey of other claims
6.6 Conclusion

Chapter 7: Conclusion 50

Appendix A: Script for Scenes 1-6 of "Seinfeld," Feb. 20, 1997 51

Appendix B: Semantic objects instantiated by Scenes 1-6 of "Seinfeld," Feb. 20, 1997 54

1. Introduction

This thesis presents a discussion of the widely recognized fact that jokes (and other humorous texts) may convey information, despite the obvious problematic nature of this claim. Consider the fact that jokes are just as widely considered to be a non-*bona-fide* mode of cooperation (Raskin 1984) or in other words to violate (not flout) the principle of cooperation (Attardo 1993). It appears therefore problematic that reliable, novel information may be conveyed by a type of text not committed to the truth, relevance, etc. of what it says.

What is meant by "reliable" information? In one sense, "reliable" is here taken to be a synonym for "verifiably true," such that the statement "Mexico borders the United States to the south" is reliable, since the information can be checked with a map. Yet, not all reliable information is verifiably true. For instance, if one uttered "I'm exhausted," the reliability of this information can only be ascertained by asking the speaker whether he/she was being truthful. Still, hearers regularly grant the reliability of such statements of belief, unless they have reason to doubt the cooperativeness (in the Gricean sense; see section 2.2) of the speaker. Questions of reliability of this type do not arise in "canned" jokes (those that are retold from person to person or collected in a joke anthology; see Attardo and Chabanne 1992 for a discussion of jokes as a text type), while the opposite is true of "conversational" jokes (those that are made up on the fly by a speaker in conversation). Thus, by claiming that jokes may convey "reliable" information, it is meant here both that the speaker is being truthful to the best of his/her knowledge and/or that the information is verifiably true.

The goal of this thesis is to answer the puzzle of how jokes may convey reliable information, elaborating on and correcting prior suggestions. Chapter 2 reviews the (brief) history of the discussion of this topic. Chapter 3 provides background on the notion of

presupposition and then proceeds to introduce a set of theoretical tools necessary for the ensuing discussion. Essentially the argument boils down to this: the text of the joke instantiates a number of static "semantic objects" (scripts, macro-scripts, anaphors, etc.) which contribute to the establishment of a textual world (a representation of a fragment of the world) together with a number of other dynamic semantic objects built on the fly by the speaker/hearer (presuppositions, inferences, etc.). Any one of these semantic objects is a potential candidate for the status of novel reliable information in the eyes of the hearer. He/she uses two heuristics to discriminate among reliable and unreliable semantic objects: 1) All semantic objects which are incompatible with or cannot be reconciled with the world knowledge of the hearer are rejected, and 2) All semantic objects associated with the punch line are suspicious.

A disclaimer of theoretical significance should be emphasized: there is no claim of completeness for the representations of the complex of presuppositions, inferences, lexical information, etc., which constitutes the textual world. A complete representation of this mass of information is unwieldy, even for short texts. It is not clear if a complete representation is even theoretically feasible, since it seems that the goals of the interaction shape the boundaries of what should be included in the complex. Be that as it may, the textual world representations constructed here should be considered intuitive shorthands for the (locally) complete complexes manipulated by speakers.

2. A review of the history of the claim that jokes may convey reliable information

This chapter focuses on the history of the claim that jokes may convey reliable information—in exclusion of longer humorous texts—for two reasons: 1) joke texts have been more widely researched and 2) the claim that longer humorous texts may convey reliable information rests, at least in part, on proving the claim that joke texts may convey reliable information. Beginning with Chapter 6 longer humorous texts are incorporated into the theory of how non-*bona-fide* communication may convey reliable information.

2.1 Introduction

Before presenting the argument for how jokes may convey reliable information, it is first necessary to orient this discussion within communication in general. The primary obstacle to the claim that jokes may convey reliable information is Grice's cooperative principle (CP). Whereas in normal, serious conversation hearers assume that speakers are following the CP (i.e., are being cooperative)—and thus information is assumed to be reliable, in non-serious, joke communication there is no such guarantee. Nonetheless, as Zhao (1988) has argued, jokes do seem to convey reliable information. Although her examples seem to suggest that only certain classes of reliable information may be conveyed by jokes (e.g., attitudes, feelings, stereotypes), the notion that jokes may convey information not by what they explicitly assert, but by their background assumptions, allows us both to "bypass" the paradox presented by the CP and to assert that jokes may convey factual, verifiably true information.

2.2 The paradox: Grice's cooperative principle

Jokes are noncooperative modes of communication, in that they violate Grice's CP (1975). That is, every joke violates at least one of Grice's conversational maxims: 1) Make your contribution only as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange (*quantity*); 2) Do not say that which you believe is false or for which you lack adequate evidence (*quality*); 3) Be relevant (*relation*); and 4) Avoid ambiguity (*manner*) (45-46). Attardo (1993: 541-542) has illustrated this point conclusively, using the following examples:

- *Quantity*: "Excuse me, do you know what time it is?"
  "Yes."

- *Quality*: "Why did the Vice President fly to Panama?"
  "Because the fighting is over." (Johnny Carson, Jan. 19, 1990)

- *Relation*: "How many surrealists does it take to screw in a light bulb?"
  "Fish."

- *Manner*: "Do you believe in clubs for young men?"
  "Only when kindness fails." (Attributed to W.C. Fields)

Since the CP is supposed to govern how information is conveyed in communication, and given that jokes violate the CP, it should follow that jokes would fail to convey information. It is important to point out that, in Gricean pragmatics, the consequences of violating the CP are not merely that no *reliable* information may be exchanged; indeed, communication breaks down completely. As Attardo (1993) points out, "If the speaker has left the *bona-fide* mode [i.e., is not following the CP—*CM*], the hearer has no warranty that the speaker is not lying about all or some of the aspects of his/her message, or even worse, that the message is not totally irrelevant" (539). And yet, clearly, despite the dubious truth-value of joke texts, they do have an effect on a hearer beyond simply that the speaker has said sentence S; at the very least, joke texts may cause the extralinguistic effect of laughter/groaning in the hearer.

Section 2.3 examines the claims of Zhao's (1988) often-quoted but little analyzed article, in which it is argued that jokes may convey reliable information, despite the apparent paradox that has been pointed out here. (See Attardo 1993 for a more thorough treatment of this "paradox.")

2.3 Zhao's explanation of the information-conveying aspect of jokes

Zhao grounds her argument that "jokes possess semantic potential in conveying information just as nonhumorous language does" (279) in Lyons's (1977) framework of three types of semantic information and Raskin's (1984) script-based semantic theory of humor. It should be pointed out that although Raskin's theory of humor is useful in describing the underlying mechanisms for how humor is produced, for the purposes of this thesis—which, after all, is concerned with how jokes may convey reliable information, something outside Raskin's (1984) concern—it will not be necessary to treat it here.

Drawing from language-function theories of a number of semanticists, Lyons generalizes "three more or less distinguishable functions" of language: "the descriptive, the social, and the expressive" (50). Derived from these functions of language are three eponymous types of meaning "encodable in language-utterances" (50). Descriptive meaning is "factual" in that it can be "explicitly asserted or denied" and usually "objectively verified." Although Lyons admits that the "distinction between expressive and social meaning is far from clear-cut," he characterizes expressive information as *speaker*-based, i.e. serving to establish and maintain "individual identity and personality," and social information as *other*-based, i.e. serving to establish and maintain "social relationships" (50-51).

Following Lyons' categories of language functions, Zhao argues that jokes can convey information of all three types. In the first category she puts jokes that "convey

information about a situation" (283), for which Zhao uses the following joke (from her own personal experience) as an example:

(J1) As one semester was drawing to an end, [the author] found herself hectically busy. Whenever asked "How are you?" she answered honestly, "Fine but busy; always on the run." As the situation became more hectic, she started to say, *'I am always on the roll.*" (283; ital. mine).

In (J1), the hearer may correctly draw the implicature that the speaker is busy, despite the literal inappropriateness of the word "roll." In the second category—jokes which convey "expressive" information—Zhao places sexual jokes. While "descriptive" jokes may convey information based on, as in (J1), the "slight inappropriateness" of the lexical content (283), "expressive" jokes, according to Zhao, convey information based on the speaker's attitude (or the hearer's beliefs about the speaker's attitudes) toward the text: "sexual jokes tend to convey information expressive or suggestive of the intent on the part of the joker" (284). That is, "expressive" jokes focus the hearer's attention on the speaker's attitudes toward the joke—i.e., the desire to "play," the appropriateness of the joke's subject matter, and/or the funniness of the joke. Such communication of attitudes toward a text have been called "metamessages."

Zhao uses ethnic jokes as examples of joke texts that convey information of the third type, "social" information—information about the surrounding world. The following joke, quoted from Raskin (1984: 19):

(J2) A patient in the hospital is offered a choice of two kinds of brain transplant. "We have Jewish brains," he was told, "at $5,000 and Polish brains at $10,000." "How come the Polish brains are twice as much as the Jewish brains?" he asks in amazement. "Well, sir, the Polish brains are brand-new. They have never been used."

does, according to Zhao, "reveal some information about Jews and Poles and/or how they are generally regarded" (285). Certainly, (J2) conveys information about the stereotypes of the "unintelligent Pole" and the "intelligent Jew" (and in fact the joke relies on this for its

humor: see Chapter 5). However, Zhao overextends her claim concerning the following joke (quoted from Raskin 1984: 198):

(J3) How do different nationalities respond to adultery? The French husband steps into his bedroom, sees his wife in bed with his best friend, and says, "Oh, Marie, so you are here with Jean. That means that Clotilde must be lonely. I think I will look her up." The English husband says, "All right, my dear. My lawyer will give your lawyer a ring." And the Russian husband yells, "So you are here, having fun, right? Don't you know that they're expecting some cottage cheese in the grocery store at long last and all the good women are standing in line already!"

Zhao comments that "this joke informs us...that, generally and probably speaking, the French husband would be more interested in taking advantage of his wife's adulterous situation" (286). But to grant as truth that "French husbands are sexually liberal" is to make a logical leap from information about stereotypes to reliable information about actual persons. To be sure, there are numerous (or innumerable) stereotypes that have no basis in fact (the "unintelligent Pole" among these). Given the set of any culture's available stereotypes (e.g., dumb blondes, dirty Mexicans, hard-drinking Irish, pompous English, etc.), there exists no semantic or pragmatic mechanism to distinguish between those that are grounded in fact and those that are not. Hence, the temptation to admit any stereotype information as reliable information about actual persons should be resisted.

To the aforementioned three categories of ways that jokes may convey information, it seems that a fourth should be added: jokes which convey information about language itself, in accordance with Kinneavy's notion of the four functions of components of communication: encoder, decoder, reality, and signal. Just as a joke may convey information about the speaker him/herself ("expressive" information), the speaker's reality ("descriptive"), and the speaker's relationship with (a) decoder(s) ("social"), a joke may also convey information about language itself. Puns, of course, are prime examples of jokes that convey information about what the lexicon will admit. Consider the following:

(J4) Q: What's the holiest of all tomes to a TV evangelist?
A: The pocket book. (Rovin 1989: 98)

Given a hearer who had available the stereotype of the "TV evangelist concerned more with money than with the spiritual life of his/her followers," and who, let's say, does not have available the lexical item "pocket book" for "holder for money," he/she may still derive this last piece of information from the text.

After presenting a series of jokes drawn from a Chinese newspaper, which serve as further examples of jokes conveying information of the three aforementioned types, Zhao concludes her argument by drawing a distinction between "substantial" jokes, which carry a "semantic ability to serve some purpose besides amusing," and "nonsubstantial" jokes, which function "almost exclusively to amuse" (289). As an example of a nonsubstantial joke, Zhao uses the following, taken from Raskin (1984: 32):

(J5) "Is the doctor at home?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. "No," the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in."

However, though nonsubstantial jokes "do not carry semantic information, this does not mean that they do not function to convey information" (290); the joker may still convey, "the wish and intention to establish or maintain a good personal relationship with the hearer" (290). Again, the metamessages of such a joke may be said to convey "expressive" information. What is most important for the purposes of this thesis is that Zhao classifies (J2) as substantial and (J5) as nonsubstantial, though both derive their humor from stereotypes. Zhao claims that (J5) "carries no information, unless one is supposed to generalize from it that all doctors' wives are frivolous" (290). Using the same criteria, however, (J2) should also carry no information, unless it is generalized that all Russian husbands would react in this "unromantic, materialistic" (Ibid.) manner. Clearly, this is an

undesirable conclusion. It appears, then, that making a distinction between substantial and nonsubstantial jokes cannot account for the information-conveying ability of jokes.

It should be noted that although Zhao's article assumes a broader notion of "semantics" than is employed here, the only consequences of this difference are terminological. If semantics is defined as "meaning divorced from context," as it is throughout this thesis, then it is clear that "descriptive" jokes convey information because of implicature, "social" jokes do so because of metamessages, "expressive" jokes do so because of inference, and only language-based jokes such as puns convey semantic information. However, this thesis is concerned with *how* jokes may convey information, regardless of whether this information would be classified as semantic or not.

It is important to stress, however, that a theory of how jokes may convey reliable information must take into account such things as implicatures, modality judgments, pragmatic inferences, background assumptions, and the "common ground" of conversational participants (cf. Attardo 1996). As Zhao herself even notes, jokes may convey reliable information "regardless of the truth condition" of the text (286). Given this observation, it should be no surprise that the theory presented here for how jokes may convey reliable information rests upon the role of presuppositions, as section 2.4 should make apparent.

2.4 The role of presupposition in the information-conveying aspect of jokes

Attardo (1993) makes the first mention in humor literature that "jokes may convey information...not by force of what they state, but in force of their presuppositional basis" (552). He notes that the (nonhumorous and assumed to be false) statement "Kennedy's killer was not part of a CIA plot" still presupposes that:

(a) Kennedy died,
(b) his death was not accidental,
(c) his death was materially caused by (at least) one person,
(d) someone has made or might make the claim that he/she was part of a CIA plot,
(e) the CIA may 'plot' under certain circumstances. (552)

Using the "constancy under negation" test (see section 3.2), (a)-(e) remain true even for the negation of the sentence, "Kennedy's killer was part of a CIA plot." Thus, regardless of the truth-condition of the sentence, a hearer who does not have these presuppositions (a)-(e) in his/her encyclopedic knowledge may add them to it. Thus, assuming again for the sake of argument that it is *not* true that Kennedy's killer was not part of a CIA plot, a hearer may nonetheless learn reliable information, based on the presuppositional basis of the text.

This point constitutes the initial observation of the argument for how jokes may convey reliable information. Since the notion of presupposition itself is problematic, and since its incorporation into this theory requires further definition of what is contained in the "storage area" with which a hearer makes sense of a given text, Chapter 3 is devoted to making clear the terminology used to make this argument.

2.5 Conclusion

Grice's CP is supposed to regulate the exchange of information in conversation, and to be sure, speakers maximize the information-conveying potential to the extent that they adhere to the CP. However, as Zhao illustrates, information may be exchanged even when

utterances are literal violations of the CP, as in joking and lying. Suppose that a child lies to his mother and says, "I didn't break the cookie jar." Whether or not the mother is aware that the child is lying, she still may learn the (reliable) information that the cookie jar is indeed broken. Jokes seem to have the ability to convey information in a similar way.

Thus, in non-CP-abiding communication, information may be exchanged based on the background assumptions on which the utterance rests. In part, these background assumptions are presuppositions, which is the subject of the next chapter.

3. "Semantic objects": presupposition and other semantic and pragmatic tools

3.1 Introduction

As pointed out in section 2.4, presupposition seems to play a crucial role in the information-conveying ability of jokes. For, if a joke is a (literally) false statement, and if there still remains in the text true, reliable "chunks" of information, then it makes sense that the notion of presupposition should help explain this. This chapter reviews some attempts at defining presupposition, drawing from both semantic and pragmatic interpretations. There is, as yet, no satisfactory definition for presupposition, but for the purposes of this thesis, this fact is not troubling, since a singular definition is not required. Rather, the point here is to account for the totality of semantic presuppositions, pragmatic presuppositions, modality judgments, inferences, and accommodations that are instantiated by a given text. Once these "semantic objects" have been identified they may be, as Chapter 4 maintains, taxonomized and listed for any given text to represent a fairly accurate (but by no means complete) "textual world" that can be compared to the hearer's "real world."

3.2 Presuppositions

One of the defining characteristics of presupposition is "constancy under negation," introduced in section 2.4. In accordance with Levinson (1983), presuppositions are defined here as "certain pragmatic inferences or assumptions that seem at least to be built into linguistic expressions and which can be isolated using specific linguistic tests" (168). In particular, the "constancy under negation" test has proven to be a useful demarcation between presupposition, on the one hand, and entailment on the other. Take the following sentence (1) and its negation (2):

(1) John sold his house.
(2) John didn't sell his house.

Concerning (1), the following conclusion may be drawn:

(3) John no longer has a house.

(3), then, is an entailment of (1). That is, (3) must be true for the sentence to be true; and, conversely, if (3) is not true, then (1) cannot be true. If, for instance, it is not true that John no longer has his house—that he in fact does still have his house—then it cannot be true that (1). Concerning (2), notice that it does not entail (3); from (2) it cannot be deduced that (3). However, consider the following statements:

(4) There exists a person named John.
(5) John owns or owned a house.

For both (1) and (2), it remains true that (4) and (5). In either state of affairs (1) or (2), i.e. regardless of the truth-value of (1), there are at least two background assumptions or inferences a listener may make, namely (4) and (5). Thus, a tentative (and incomplete) definition of presupposition may be stated as follows (Levinson 1983: 175):

(6) A statement A presupposes another statement B if and only if:
  (a) if A is true, then B is true
  (b) if A if false, then B is true

Though this definition will cover the majority of cases, it fails on both logical and semantic grounds, each of which will be considered in turn.

First of all, basic to (6) is that every statement must be either true or false, such that in a statement of subject-predicate form, such as (7):

(7) Richard Nixon is a crook.
(8) Richard Nixon is not a crook.

either the statement, (7), or its negation, (8), must be true. When presupposition again became the focus of philosophers and linguists at the turn of the century, beginning with Frege, this Aristotelian view was "the prevailing wisdom" (Horn 1996: 300). Though in

natural conversation neither (7) nor (8) would arise unless Richard Nixon were alive, (8) is logically true, since a person who is no longer living may not be a crook. Yet, by (6), one would be forced to conclude that (9) is a presupposition of both (7) and (8):

(9) There exists Richard Nixon.

Certainly, then, (6) is an insufficient definition of presupposition. Frege argued that in sentences like (7) and (8), *Richard Nixon* denotes something. But (9) "is not part of the content of the expressions in question, and hence [7] does not entail the existence of [Richard Nixon]—else the negation of [7] would not be [8], which preserves the presupposition," but rather (10):

(10) Richard Nixon is not a crook, or the name Richard Nixon has no reference. (Horn 1996: 301).

Frege thought this "absurd" and instead "had an answer provided by his distinction between sense and reference: such sentences retain their sense or meaning even if they lack referents and thus fail to have a truth value" (Levinson 1983: 170).

An unfortunate consequence of such an approach is that the classical logic notion that a statement is either true or false must be replaced by a three-valued logic: true, false, or neither-true-nor-false. Rejecting this logical system, Russell argued that sentences such as (7) "have nothing like the simple logical translation that one might imagine," but that their subjects "correspond instead to conjunctions of propositions" (Levinson 1983: 170-1). Thus, the negation of (7) would not be *Richard Nixon is not a crook*, but rather:

(11) Either:
(a) there exists a Richard Nixon and he is not a crook, or
(b) it is not true that either
(i) there exists a Richard Nixon, or
(ii) he is a crook.

Essentially, Russell's argument is that negation may have either, as in (11a), a "narrow scope" in which only the predicate is negated, while the existence of the subject remains presupposed, or, as in (11b), a "wide scope" in which the existence of the subject is denied, and so the question of the predicate applying or not applying to the subject does not arise.

Such a view persisted until Strawson's "ordinary-language intuitions" (Horn 1996: 302). Drawing on a distinction between sentences, to which there inheres no truth-value, and *uses* of sentences to make statements that are true or false, Strawson held that a statement such as (9) is a necessary precondition for judging (15) as either true or false and that such a presupposition is "a species of...pragmatic inference, distinct from logical implication or entailment, a species which derives from conventions about the use of referring expressions" (Levinson 1983: 172). Certainly, this notion is much more in line with conversational practice than is Russell's, since "wide scope" negation is employed extremely rarely, and since hearers do infer—unless given explicit direction—that in a sentence of the form "The F is G," F does exist; in fact, such an inference seems necessary to properly comprehend the sentence, even in situations where the hearer did not previously know that F existed.

Following Strawson, presupposition literature focused on attempts to formulate a definition of presupposition grounded in semantics. Starting from (4), the following is a simple definition of semantic presupposition:

(12) A sentence A semantically presupposes a sentence B if and only if:
(a) A semantically entails B
(b) Not-A semantically entails B

Though this definition will prove to be insufficient, it is true that certain syntactic, grammatical, or lexical constructs may act as "presupposition-triggers." Consider the following, in which the adverb *cheaply* has been appended to examples (1) and (2):

(13) John sold his house *cheaply.*
(14) John didn't sell his house *cheaply.*

First, both (13) and (14) retain the presuppositions (4) *There exists a person named John* and (5) *John owns or owned a house.* Yet, the presence of the adverb *cheaply* has instantiated a new presupposition, namely:

(15) John no longer has a house.

Levinson (1983) provides a list of presupposition-triggers, culled from other researchers, that includes, among others: temporal clauses (e.g., *Before I took this class, I knew/didn't know grammar* >> I took this class), comparisons/contrasts (e.g., *John is/isn't a better tennis player than Mary* >> Mary is a tennis player), and certain verbs (181-184). Thus, certain words in certain circumstances may trigger new presuppositions. In fact, any of the eight parts of speech may act as presupposition-triggers, as the following list shows.

(16) (a) Verb: John *managed/didn't manage* to sell his house.
>> John tried to sell his house.

(b) Noun: *John* sold/didn't sell his house.
>> John exists.

(c) Adjective: John sold/didn't sell his *old* house.
>> John's house is old/not new.

(d) Adverb: John sold/didn't sell his house *cheaply.*
>> John sold his house.

(e) Determiner: John sold/didn't sell *the* house.
>> There is only one (salient) house.

(f) Pronoun: John sold/didn't sell *his* house.
>> At one time, John owned a house.

(g) Preposition: John sold/didn't sell his house *during* February.
>> A house may be sold during February.

(h) Coordinator: John sold/didn't sell his house *and* car.
>> John does not own only a house or a car.

Yet, despite the appeal of the relative simplicity of semantic presupposition, there are at least two reasons such a theory is untenable. First, presuppositions may be defeasible (i.e., a presupposition triggered by one portion/clause of a sentence may be canceled by a later portion/clause). A second, but related, shortcoming of a semantic theory of presupposition is that presuppositions seem to be sensitive to context.

Concerning the defeasibility of presuppositions, consider the following sentences, in which the presuppositions triggered by the respective sentences in (16) are negated by the second clause of the sentence:

(17) (a) John didn't *manage* to sell his house, because in fact he never even tried.
(b) *John* didn't sell *his* house, because in fact "John" is the alias of an investment group.
(c) John didn't sell his *old* house—that house was built just last year.
(d) John didn't sell his house *cheaply*—he didn't even sell it.
(e) John didn't sell *the* house—in fact, he sold many houses.
(f) John didn't sell *his* house—he sold his father's.
(g) John didn't sell his house *during* February, because in fact there is a law in his town that prevents real estate transactions during that month.
(h) John didn't sell his house *and* his car, because in fact John doesn't even own a car.

Thus, a semantic theory has no way of accounting for the fact that in (17a-h) the presuppositions normally instantiated by (16a-h) are explicitly canceled.

3.3 Modality judgments

A second problem for a semantic presupposition theory is that it cannot accurately project which presuppositions will survive in certain contexts—an observation known as the "projection problem." Modal contexts—used to convey possibility, necessity, and beliefs—prove to be the most enigmatic in this regard. On the one hand, modal verbs such as *should*, *could*, and *must* in (19)-(21) retain the presupposition, (22), from the non-modal sentence, (18):

(18) John is the president of the United States.
(19) John should be the president of the United States.
(20) John could be the president of the United States.
(21) John must be the president of the United States.
(22) It is possible for John to be the president of the United States.

However, verbs of belief and saying, such as *believe*, *think*, *say*, *claim*, etc., regularly cancel the presupposition:

(23) John believes that he is the King of France.
(24) John thinks that he is the King of France.
(25) John says that he is the King of France.
(26) John claims that he is the King of France.

In each of (23)-(26), the speaker makes a distinction between fact and belief, thereby canceling the presupposition that would normally follow, namely *There exists a King of France.* Yet, consider the following:

(27) John claims that he is the president of the United States.
(28) Bill Clinton claims that he is the president of the United States.

In these cases the presupposition *There exists a president of the United States* is not canceled. Whereas (26) appeals to the fact that there is no King of France in 1997, (27) seems to appeal to the fact that someone else (i.e., not John) is the president of the United States. Furthermore, (28) seems to be a nonliteral use of the term "president of the United States," in for instance:

(29) Bill Clinton claims that he is the president of the United States, and that so he is the most powerful man on Earth, but really he is just a slave to public opinion.

In other words, contextual factors to some extent determine what statements remain as presuppositions and which do not. From this it follows, of course, that if semantics attempts to separate language from knowledge of the world, a strictly semantic theory alone cannot work for presuppositions.

3.4 Pragmatic presupposition and "accommodation"

Levinson (1983) does add toward the end of his chapter on presupposition that it "seems likely" that "presuppositions are not correctly treated as inferences associated with linguistic elements item-by-item in a non-predictable way"; rather, presuppositions are "the result of complex interactions between semantics and pragmatics" (225). And it would seem that a pragmatic theory of presupposition can help account for some of the shortcomings of a semantic approach. A basic definition of pragmatic presupposition is given by Levinson (1983: 205):

(30) An utterance A pragmatically presupposes a proposition B iff A is appropriate only if B is mutually known by participants.

Here, "appropriateness" can help restore the two-valued logical system that semantic theories of presupposition had troubles with. Thus, (7) *Richard Nixon is a crook* fails to presuppose (9) *There exists Richard Nixon*, since (7) is merely an inappropriate utterance (because, of course, the subject is no exists), and thus the question of its truth-value does not arise. Furthermore, in utterances expressing modality, one's interlocutor—upon the uttering of (26), (27), or (28)—may discard *There exists a King of France* in (26) and may compare his/her world knowledge with (27) and (28) to arrive at the appropriate presuppositions,

There exists a president of the United States and *Bill Clinton is the president of the United States*, respectively.

The term "mutually known," however, limits the instantiating of presuppositions to what one's interlocutor has in his/her set of world knowledge at the time of the utterance, with the consequence that, by this definition of pragmatic presupposition, nothing new may be learned. If one utters:

(31) I'm not going to the poetry reading—I'd just fall asleep

and if it is known that the speaker is not bored by poetry readings, it must be allowed that the utterance instantiates the presupposition

(32) The speaker is tired

if (31) is to make sense. Again, (32) is instantiated whether or not it was, before the uttering of (31), mutually known that (32). Since people may fall asleep when they are tired, especially when asked to sit for an hour, (32) is *consistent with* the world in which (31) may be uttered. Thus, (30) should be modified to read:

(33) An utterance A pragmatically presupposes a proposition B iff A is appropriate only if B is consistent with the world as the participants take it to be.

Such revisions or additions to the "common ground" have been called "accommodations."

3.5 "Semantic objects" defined

The presuppositions, pragmatic presuppositions, modality judgments, accommodations—along with the inferences and propositional content of a text—are henceforth called, as a superordinate, "semantic objects." Furthermore, it is proposed here that the sum of the semantic objects instantiated by the text makes up the "textual world" (TW). Although the notion of a TW is further defined in section 4.3, at present it is sufficient to say that the TW is what is taken by the speaker to obtain.

3.6 Conclusion

That a sufficient definition of presupposition has yet to be formulated is not worrisome in the context of this thesis; what is important is that there are background assumptions that underlie texts, whether serious or non-serious, and that these can be identified, despite the fact that a singular theory cannot account for all of them. As has been illustrated, in processing any utterance the hearer must weigh, in addition to the literal (propositional) content of the text, its context. This is particularly important for the processing of joke texts, in which the literal content is, from a truth-value perspective, false. Taxonomizing these semantic objects identifies the information a text confronts a hearer with, so that the textual world may be compared to the RW.

4. The "textual world" of jokes

4.1 Introduction

Now that the "storage area" of a given text has been explained, attention is now turned to the (re)construction of the textual world (TW) through the semantic objects that compose it. Section 4.2 provides four sample jokes, for which lists of the (relevant) semantic objects are provided. Drawing from these examples, a more concrete explanation of the TW in terms of the RW is offered in section 4.3. Finally, section 4.4 compares these TWs with the RW and notes some observations that further the argument that jokes may convey reliable information.

4.2 Sample jokes

In brackets following each semantic object, it has been noted which of the above categories it falls in: "sent" = sentential presupposition, "lex" (sem) = semantic presupposition, "ency" (prag) = pragmatic presupposition, and "inf" = inference. For the sake of convenience, inferences are referenced according to which semantic object they are derived from, such that "5 $\Rightarrow$ inf" denotes that the semantic object is an inference drawn from semantic object 5. Also, for ease of reading, the full text of the joke is included before presenting the list. Finally, those semantic objects that seem to be patently false (i.e. contradict one's encyclopedic knowledge, conflict with the "real world") are marked with an asterisk throughout this thesis.

(J2) A patient in the hospital is offered a choice of two kinds of brain transplant. "We have Jewish brains," he was told, "at $5,000 and Polish brains at $10,000." "How come the Polish brains are twice as much as the Jewish brains?" he asks in amazement. "Well, sir, the Polish brains are brand-new. They have never been used."

A patient in the hospital is offered a choice of two kinds of brain transplants.

1. There exists a patient. [sent]
2. There exists a hospital. [sent]
3. There exists a brain. [sent]
4. A patient is a person. [ency]
5. A person may be in the hospital. [ency]
6. A patient may be in the hospital.[5 ⇒ inf]
7. A person may be offered a choice. [ency]
8. A patient may be offered a choice. [7 ⇒ inf]
9. Body organs may be transplanted. [ency]
10. A brain is a body organ. [ency]
11. *Brains may be transplanted. [9, 10 ⇒ inf]
12. There may be more than one kind of brain transplant. [ency]
13. A brain transplant may be performed in a hospital. [ency]

"We have Jewish brains," he was told, "at $5,000 and Polish brains at $10,000."

14. A person may speak. [ency]
15. A person may speak to another person. [ency]
16. A person may speak to a patient. [15 ⇒ inf]
17. There exists a Jewish person. [sent]
18. Something belonging to a Jewish person may be described as Jewish. [ency]
19. Something which used to belong to a Jewish person may be described as Jewish. [ency]
20. There exists a Polish person. [sent]
21. Something belonging to a Polish person may be described as Polish. [ency]
22. Something which used to belong to a Polish person may be described as Polish. [ency]
23. A hospital may have organs for transplanting. [ency]
24. *A hospital may have a brain for transplanting. [23 ⇒ inf]
25. A hospital may have more than one organ for transplanting. [ency]
26. *A hospital may have more than one brain for transplanting. [ency]
27. A surgical procedure may cost money. [ency]
28. A brain transplant is a surgical procedure. [ency]
29. A brain transplant may cost money. [27, 28 ⇒ inf]
30. The cost of a surgical procedure may depend on the surgical procedure. [ency]
31. The cost of a brain transplant may depend on the kind of brain transplanted. [30 ⇒ inf]
32. Something that is a higher price is of better quality. [ency]
33. A brain of a higher price is of better quality. [32 ⇒ inf]

34. Intelligence is a function of the quality of brain. [ency]
35. A higher quality brain gives one more intelligence. [34 ⇒ inf]
36. A Jewish person is intelligent. [ency]
37. A Polish person is not intelligent. [ency]
38. A Jewish person is more intelligent than a Polish person. [36, 37 ⇒ inf]

"How come the Polish brains are twice as much as the Jewish brains?" he asks in amazement.

39. A patient may speak. [ency]
40. A person may ask a question. [ency]
41. A patient may ask a question. [40 ⇒ inf]
42. A person may ask a question in amazement. [ency]
43. A patient may ask a question in amazement. [42 ⇒ inf]
44. A person who asks a question in amazement may not believe information he/she has been offered. [ency]
45. A patient may not believe that Polish brains are twice as much as Jewish brains. [44 ⇒ inf]

"Well, sir, the Polish brains are brand-new. They have never been used."

46. A person may answer a question. [ency]
47. Something may be brand-new. [ency]
48. Something which is brand-new has never been used. [ency]
49. The brain of an unintelligent person may have never been used. [48 ⇒ inf]
50. *The brain of an unintelligent person may be brand-new. [49 ⇒ inf]
51. *A Polish brain may be brand-new. [37, 50 ⇒ inf]
52. A brain may have been used. [ency]
53. The brain of an intelligent person may have been used. [ency]
54. A Jewish brain may have been used. [36, 53 ⇒ inf]
55. Something that is brand-new costs more than something that is used. [ency]
56. A brain which is brand-new costs more than a brain that has been used. [55 ⇒ inf]
57. A Polish brain may cost more than a Jewish brain. [51, 54, 56 ⇒ inf]

(J6) Visiting the zoo on his first ever trip to San Diego, a Scotsman paused by one of the cages. "Lord," he said, "an' what animal is that, then?" Overhearing him, the keeper said, "That, sir, is a moose." "A moose!" he said. "Kee-rist! An' I suppose ye've got rats the size of elephants, then?"

Visiting the zoo on his first-ever trip to San Diego, a Scotsman paused by one of the cages.

1. There exists a zoo. [sent]
2. There exists a San Diego. [sent]
3. There exists a Scotsman. [sent]
4. There exists a cage. [sent]
5. There exists more than one cage. [lex]
6. A Scotsman is a person. [ency]

7. A person may take a trip. [ency]
8. A Scotsman may take a trip. [7 ⇒ inf]
9. A trip may have a goal. [ency]
10. A place may be the goal of a trip. [9 ⇒ inf]
11. San Diego is a place. [ency]
12. San Diego may be the goal of a trip. [10, 11 ⇒ inf]
13. A person may take a trip to San Diego. [ency]
14. A Scotsman may take a trip to San Diego. [13 ⇒ inf]
15. A person may take a trip to San Diego for the first time. [ency]
16. A Scotsman may take a trip to San Diego for the first time. [15 ⇒ inf]
17. A person may visit place. [ency]
18. A Scotsman may visit a place. [17 ⇒ inf]
19. A zoo may be in a place. [ency]
20. A zoo may be in San Diego [19 ⇒ inf]
21. A person may visit a zoo. [ency]
22. A Scotsman may visit a zoo. [21 ⇒ inf]
23. There exists a zoo in San Diego. [ency]
24. There is only one (salient) zoo in San Diego. [lex/inf]
25. A Scotsman is a man from Scotland. [ency]
26. Scotland is a long way away from San Diego. [ency]
27. San Diego is a non-Scottish city. [ency]
28. Cages may be in a place. [ency]
29. Cages may be in a zoo. [ency/28 ⇒ inf]
30. A person may be near something. [ency]
31. A person may be by a cage. [30 ⇒ inf]
32. A person may pause. [ency]
33. A Scotsman may pause. [32 ⇒ inf]
34. A person may pause by a cage. [ency]
35. A Scotsman may pause by a cage. [34 ⇒ inf]

"Lord," he said, "an' what animal is that, then?" Overhearing him, the keeper said, "That, sir, is a moose."

36. The Scotsman is male. [lex]
37. A person may speak. [ency]
38. The Scotsman may speak. [37 ⇒ inf]
39. A person may ask a question. [ency]
40. The Scotsman may ask a question. [39 ⇒ inf]
41. A person may see an animal. [ency]
42. The Scotsman may see an animal. [41 ⇒ inf]
43. An animal may have a name. [ency]
44. A person may see an animal and not know its name. [ency]
45. The Scotsman may see an animal and not know its name. [44 ⇒ inf]
46. There exists a keeper. [sent]
47. The keeper is a person. [ency]
48. A person may hear a question. [ency]

49. The keeper may hear a question. [48 ⇒ inf]
50. A question may have an answer. [ency]
51. A person may answer a question. [ency]
52. The keeper may answer a question. [51 ⇒ inf]
53. A keeper may be in a zoo. [ency]
54. There exists a moose. [sent]
55. A moose is an animal. [ency]
56. Animals may be kept in cages. [ency]
57. A moose may be kept in a cage. [56 ⇒ inf]
58. Animals may be kept in cages in a zoo. [ency]
59. A moose may be kept in a cage in a zoo. [58 ⇒ inf]
60. The keeper believes that there is a moose within the cage. [? ⇒ inf]

"A moose!" he said. "Kee-rist! An' I suppose ye've got rats the size of elephants, then?"

61. There exists a rat. [sent]
62. There exists an elephant. [sent]
63. A rat is relatively much smaller than an elephant. [ency]
64. There exists a mouse. [sent]
65. A mouse is an animal. [ency]
66. A mouse is much smaller than a moose. [ency]
67. The Scotsman has seen a mouse. [ency]
68. The Scotsman is aware that a mouse is a very small animal. [ency]
69. A Scotsman pronounces the American's "ow" sound as "oo." [ency]
70. The keeper speaks with an American accent. [ency]
71. The keeper pronounces the Scotsman's "oo" sound as "ow." [ency]
72. The keeper's pronunciation of "moose" sounds like the Scotsman's pronunciation of "mouse." [ency/inf]
73. *The Scotsman does not take into account the difference in accents. [71 ⇒ inf]
74. The size difference between a mouse and a moose is analogous to that of a rat and an elephant. [ency]
75. The size difference between a mouse and a moose is analogous to that of a rat and an elephant. [ency]
76. The Scotsman believes that the keeper has told him that the animal within the cage is a mouse. [73 ⇒ inf]

(J7) Q: How did the male elephant find the female elephant in the grass?
A: Refreshing.

1. There exists grass. [sent]
2. There exists an elephant. [sent]
3. An elephant is an animal. [ency]
4. An animal may be male. [ency]
5. An elephant may be male. [4 ⇒ inf]
6. An animal may be female. [ency]
7. An elephant may be female. [6 ⇒ inf]
8. Something may be in the grass. [ency]

9. An animal may be in the grass. [8 ⇒ inf]
10. An elephant may be in the grass. [9 ⇒ inf]
11. "To find" may mean "to come upon [something] by searching or effort." [lex]
12. An animal may search or give effort. [11 ⇒ ency]
13. An elephant may search or give effort. [12 ⇒ inf]
14. A male elephant may search or give effort. [13 ⇒ inf]
15. Searching has a goal. [lex/ency]
16. The goal of a search may be an animal. [ency]
17. The goal of a search may be an elephant. [3, 16 ⇒ inf]
18. The goal of a search may be a female elephant. [17 ⇒ inf]
19. An animal may come upon something by searching or effort. [ency]
20. An elephant may come upon something by searching or effort. [3, 19 ⇒ inf]
21. A male elephant may come upon something by searching or effort. [20 ⇒ inf]
22. A female elephant may be in the grass. [21 ⇒ inf]
23. An animal may come upon something by searching in the grass. [19 ⇒ inf]
24. An elephant may come upon something by searching in the grass. [23 ⇒ inf]
25. An male elephant may come upon something by searching in the grass. [24 ⇒ inf]
26. Something in the grass may be difficult to perceive. [ency]
27. An animal in the grass may be difficult to perceive. [26 ⇒ inf]
28. An elephant in the grass may be difficult to perceive. [27 ⇒ inf]
29. *A female elephant in the grass may be difficult to perceive. [28 ⇒ inf]
30. Something in the grass may require finding. [ency]
31. An animal in the grass may require finding. [30 ⇒ inf]
32. An elephant in the grass may require finding. [31 ⇒ inf]
33. A female elephant in the grass may require finding. [32 ⇒ inf]
34. "To find" may mean "to experience [in a sexual manner]. [lex/ency]
35. An animal may experience something in a sexual manner. [ency]
36. An elephant may experience something in a sexual manner. [35 ⇒ inf]
37. A male elephant may experience something in a sexual manner. [36 ⇒ inf]
38. An elephant may experience another animal in a sexual manner. [37 ⇒ inf]
39. An elephant may experience another elephant in a sexual manner. [38 ⇒ inf]
40. An elephant may experience a female elephant in a sexual manner. [39 ⇒ inf]
41. A male elephant may experience another animal in a sexual manner. [40 ⇒ inf]
42. A male elephant may experience another elephant in a sexual manner. [41 ⇒ inf]
43. A male elephant may experience a female elephant in a sexual manner. [42 ⇒ inf]
44. An animal may find something experienced in a sexual manner to be refreshing. [ency]
45. An elephant may find something experienced in a sexual manner to be refreshing. [ency]
46. A male elephant may find something experienced in a sexual manner to be refreshing. [ency]
47. A male elephant may find an animal experienced in a sexual manner to be refreshing. [ency]

48. A male elephant may find another elephant experienced in a sexual manner to be refreshing. [ency]
49. A male elephant may find a female elephant experienced in a sexual manner to be refreshing. [ency]

(J8) Q: How does an elephant hide in a cherry tree?
A: By painting its toenails red.

1. There exists an elephant. [sent]
2. There exists a cherry tree. [sent]
3. Something may hide in a cherry tree. [ency]
4. An animal may hide in a cherry tree. [3 ⇒ inf]
5. *An elephant may hide in a cherry tree. [4 ⇒ inf]
6. There exists toenails. [sent]
7. An animal may have toenails. [ency]
8. An elephant may have toenails. [7 ⇒ inf]
9. An animal may paint its toenails. [ency]
10. *An elephant may paint its toenails. [9 ⇒ inf]
11. Toenails may be painted red. [ency]
12. An animal may paint its toenails red. [11 ⇒ inf]
13. *An elephant may paint its toenails red. [12 ⇒ inf]
14. A cherry tree bears cherries. [ency]
15. Cherries are red. [ency]
16. To hide, something must blend in with the surroundings. [ency]
17. The surroundings of a cherry tree are cherries. [ency]
18. To hide in a cherry tree, something must blend in with cherries. [16, 17 ⇒ inf]
19. To hide in a cherry tree, something must be red. [15, 18 ⇒ inf]
20. To hide in a cherry tree, (a part of) an elephant must be red. [19 ⇒ inf]
21. To hide in a cherry tree, an elephant's toenails must be red. [20 ⇒ inf]

4.3 "Textual world" further defined

What is thus rendered by listing the semantic objects for each of (J2) and (J6)-(J8) is the textual world (TW) of the joke. As has been mentioned in section 3.5, the TW is the sum of the relevant semantic objects—the propositions, presuppositions, inferences, pragmatic presuppositions, accommodations, and modality judgments—derivable from the text. The RW, in contrast, consists of what is known by a hearer about the world, independently of any TW he/she are presented with. It should be noted that no rigorous methodology is used in constructing the RW; it is irrelevant to take into consideration any

radical notions of epistemology, nor does is thesis concerned (in any depth, at least) with questions of what mutual knowledge all possible hearers may share. It is sufficient to say that the RW is the background assumptions that a possible hearer may take to obtain.

4.4 The joke text's manipulation of the "real world" for humorous effect

The TW, of course—in which brain transplants are possible, in which elephants may hide in cherry trees, and in which there exist utterly provincial Scotsmen—is different than the "real world" (RW). The crucial difference seems to be that the RW is governed by the cooperative principle, whereas the TW is not. But this is not to say that the TW of the joke is a language free-for-all. On the contrary, one sees that, for instance, syntactic rules obtain: the pronoun "its" in (J8) refers to "elephant" in the previous sentence, as it would in *bona-fide* communication. Lexical definitions for the RW obtain[1] as well for the TWs instantiated by (J2) and (J6)-(J8): a "hospital" is still a place in which medical procedures are performed, a "moose" is still a large animal one might find in a zoo, "cherries" are still red and grow on trees—despite the fact that, since joke texts are violations of the cooperative principle (see Attardo 1993), they are free (theoretically, at least) to put forth TWs in which cherries, for instance, are blue. But clearly this is not in the best interest of the joke. A joke such as

(J9) *How does an elephant hide in a cherry tree? By painting its toenails blue

is devoid of humor—despite proposing (or presupposing) the absurdity of an elephant perched in a cherry tree. The reason is that although this "joke" instantiates the script-opposition POSSIBLE vs. IMPOSSIBLE (cf. Raskin 1984), there is no resolution to the incongruity, there is no "logical mechanism" (cf. Attardo 1997) that can answer how this impossibility is, on some level, made possible (i.e., cherries are red, the red toenails of an

[1] Puns, of course, are exceptions.

elephant might perhaps be mistaken for cherries, thus an elephant may not be perceived in a cherry tree). A hearer's reaction to (J9) might be something along the lines of, "Well, *that* doesn't explain how an elephant would hide in a cherry tree."

By the same token, joke texts are free (at least theoretically) to instantiate unreliable semantic objects that are not necessary for the eliciting of humor. For example, suppose that (J6) is modified so that it begins, "Visiting the zoo on his first ever trip to Youngstown, Ohio...," thus instantiating the (false) presupposition **There exists a zoo in Youngstown, Ohio.* The resulting joke would still generate humor, based on the script-opposition AMERICAN ACCENT vs. SCOTTISH ACCENT, but such a modification strikes one as undesirable. Again, this seems to be because such a joke may detract the hearer's attention from the punch line.

Hence, while joke texts may violate the cooperative principle *per se*, they do seem to follow certain rules limiting the amount and extent of those violations. Along these lines, one suggestion is the non-cooperation principle (NCP), put forth by Attardo (1996)[2]. Essentially, the NCP postulates two maxims:

(1) Violate the CP only to the extent necessary for your conversational purposes; make your violation the closest possible to cooperation;
(2) Keep your violation short, i.e. return to the CP as soon as possible after completing your conversational purposes.

If the conversational purpose of a joke text is taken to be the eliciting of humor, then it makes sense for the joke's TW to depart from the RW only to the extent necessary to elicit that humor. Thus, just as a hearer, in CP-abiding communication, trusts the speaker to offer truthful and relevant information, a hearer hearing a joke (according to the NCP) trusts the speaker to offer truthful information unless it has relevance to the generation of humor.

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[2] No attempt will be made here to discuss the NCP in this context.

Finally, another interesting possible conceptualization of the relationship between the joke's TW and the RW is a "CP for Jokes" (CPJ) according to which a joke teller might be directed to: 1) Provide only as much information as is necessary to the joke (e.g., do not add to (J8) that the elephant "wears mascara and fake eyelashes" (Attardo 1996: 94)) [*quantity*]; 2) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence, unless it is necessary for the purposes of the joke (e.g., do not say in (J6) that the Scotsman visited a zoo in Youngstown) [*quality*]; 3) Do not add information that is not relevant to the purposes of the joke (e.g., do not add to (J2) what the patient ate for breakfast) [*relation*]; and, 4) Do not be ambiguous unless it is necessary for the joke (e.g., do not omit mention in (J8) of the sex of either elephant) [*manner*].

The CPJ has the advantage of a similar wording to the CP, thereby emphasizing the degree to which the joke TW overlaps the RW. Although the CPJ seems to account for a majority of the TW-RW discrepancies (see section 5.2), its importance in the context of this thesis is limited, since, like the CP, it cannot explain how jokes convey reliable information.

4.5 Conclusion

Given the semantic objects that are instantiated by the four sample jokes, it is striking that although they are literally non-CP-abiding communication, their departures from the RW are minimal and, to some extent, predictable. Joke texts do not simply violate the CP for the sake of doing so; rather, each violation seems to have the specific purpose of eliciting humor. Thus, when comparing the joke's TW with the RW, the focus should be on the particular semantic objects which lead to CP violation.

Now that the relationship between the TW to the RW in joke texts is clear, Chapter 5 proceeds with an explanation of how this relationship is exploited so that jokes may convey reliable information.

5. How jokes may convey reliable information

5.1 Introduction

Now that it is clear where this thesis fits in with past humor research, how information may be conveyed by a text's presuppositional basis, and how the notion of the TW compared to the RW, the discussion of how jokes convey reliable information may begin in earnest. This chapter begins with a look at the unreliable semantic objects from the sample jokes. Given the observation, made in Chapter 4, that even jokes are to some extent cooperative texts, two heuristics are developed which allow the hearer of a joke text to safely categorize any particular semantic object as reliable or unreliable.

5.2 How jokes may convey reliable information

The TW is more properly thought of as a "tweaking" of the RW—in which the joke text departs from the RW only to the extent necessary to produce humor—an assertion borne out by the item-by-item representation of the TW in terms of the (relevant) instantiated semantic objects. For (J2), only 5 of 57 (8.2%) semantic objects are true for the TW but false for the RW; for (J6), just 1 of 76 (1.3%); for (J7), 2 of 49 (4.1%); and for (J8), 3 of 21 (14.3%). For ease of reference, here is a list of those 11 semantic objects from the sample jokes that seem to be unreliable:

(J2)	(11)	*Brains may be transplanted.
	(24)	*A hospital may have a brain for transplanting.
	(26)	*A hospital may have more than one brain for transplanting.
	(50)	*The brain of an unintelligent person may be brand-new.
	(51)	*A Polish brain may be brand-new.
(J6)	(73)	*The Scotsman does not take into account the difference in accents.
(J7)	(28)	*An elephant in the grass may be difficult to perceive.
	(29)	*A female elephant in the grass may be difficult to perceive.

(J8) (5) *An elephant may hide in a cherry tree.
(10) *An elephant may paint its toenails.
(13) *An elephant may paint its toenails red.

That is, taking the aggregate semantic objects for these four jokes, 192 of 203 (94.6%) semantic objects are both true for the RW and the TW. Based on this sample, then, there is in joke texts approximately a 19:1 ratio of reliable semantic objects to unreliable ones.

The goal of this thesis is to explain how a hearer may decide for him/herself which semantic objects are reliable and which unreliable. In other words, the attempt is to provide a hearer of a joke with heuristics with which to decide whether a given instantiated semantic object is reliable or unreliable. From this, a hearer may be with the ability to decide, when confronted with semantic objects of which he/she is unsure, which semantic objects to accept as new, reliable information and which to discard as unreliable. To this end, a hearer may first be directed:

(34) Take as true whatever semantic objects are instantiated by the joke text.

Already, a hypothetical hearer will correctly reconstruct the RW from the TW about 95% of the time—much more accurate than one would ever expect. Of course, he/she will still be wrong the other 5% of the time.

Returning to the list of what appear to be unreliable semantic objects instantiated by (J2), (J6), (J7), and (J8), a generalization may be made. There seem to be several semantic objects that are, by normal standards, blatantly and obviously unreliable, namely (11), (24), (26), (50), and (51) from (J2); (28) and (29) from (J7); and (5), (10), and (13) from (J8). Thus, the directive in (34) may be transformed into a heuristic:

(35) Is the semantic object in question incompatible with the RW as you believe it to be?
- If yes, take it to be unreliable.
- If no, take it to be reliable.

How exactly does this "hearer" determine whether a given semantic object is reliable or unreliable? Take, for example, (23) *There exists a zoo in San Diego* in (J6). One may have visited the zoo in San Diego or have heard that panda cubs have been born at the San Diego Zoo, in which case determining the reliability of (23) using heuristic (35) is not difficult. Yet, given (15), it is not requisite that a hearer have such "first-hand" knowledge to determine the reliability of a semantic object such as (23). In fact, a person who is unsure may draw on his/her knowledge about the RW and thus may reason as follows: zoos are usually found within the limits of large cities, San Diego is a large city, many large cities do have zoos, it is therefore compatible with the RW that there exists a zoo in San Diego, and thus (23) is reliable information. As another example, take (24) *Brains may be transplanted* in (J2). Again, supposing a hearer unsure of the reliability of (24), he/she may reason as follows: he/she has never met nor heard of a person who has undergone a brain transplant, nor has he/she read or seen a news account of a successful brain transplant, brain transplants are the subject of the fictional *Frankenstein* (and the movies spawned by it), a brain transplant requires the reattachment of neurons, which is not possible given current technology, it is therefore incompatible with the RW that brains may be transplanted, and thus (24) is unreliable information. With this heuristic, a "normal" hearer may thus correctly categorize the instantiated semantic objects of the four sample jokes in 202 out of 203 cases (99.5%).

As is mentioned above, a joke that provides social information does not derive its information-conveying capacity from how cultural groups actually are in the real world, but rather from how they are stereotypically perceived in the culture in which the joke is told. To see that this is so one need only substitute for the Jew and Pole of (J2) two cultural groups with which one is unfamiliar or for which no stereotypes are readily available—say, a South African and a Brazilian. Or, simply substitute "Jew" for "Pole" and vice-versa.

Certainly, these two reworkings of (J2) transform the joke into something quite different: of the first reworking one would have to conclude that the speaker's culture has available the (hypothetical) stereotypes "intelligent South African" and "unintelligent Brazilian," while of the second reworking a hearer would probably conclude, simply, that the speaker had gotten the two confused. At any rate, these two reworkings of (J2) would probably be construed as "less funny," since in the first case the hearer shares no "common ground" with the speaker, and in the second case, the speaker's and hearer's "background assumptions" explicitly clash.

Determining what mutual knowledge is held by the set of all possible hearers of a particular joke is, of course, impossible. For the purposes of this thesis, the joke teller him/herself is relied on to make judgments about whether a particular joke is suitable for his/her audience. Thus, (J2) would most likely not be told to a hearer who had no knowledge of the stereotypes "intelligent Jew" and "unintelligent Pole," while (J6) would most likely not be told to a four-year-old, who would not be aware of the difference in accents between an American and a Scot. Likewise, a joke about market trading on Wall Street told to the average, non-initiated person will be as impenetrable as serious conversation on the subject. It is seemingly for this reason that canned jokes instantiate such blatantly unreliable semantic objects: since a hearer's recognition is a primary condition for the joke to have any chance of being funny, it is in the best interests of the joke to present blatant and obvious discrepancies between the RW and the TW; hence, (J8) makes reference to an animal easily identifiable as not being able to climb a cherry tree and (J2) makes reference to a medical procedure that is easily identifiable as not currently possible (although it would be interesting to see how this joke is taken when and if brain transplants do become feasible). If the reader is not convinced, consider a version of (J8) in which "elephant" is replaced by "lion." In this version, it is quite possible that a hearer may

wonder, "Gee, I don't *know* whether a lion may climb a tree"—certainly not what the joke teller wants him/her to be focusing on. Conversational jokes, on the other hand, are many times impenetrable when retold, since all relevant pragmatic presupposition, inferences, and accommodations must be explicitly stated for the joke to elicit a laugh, as is most certainly the case with (J1). This point should be apparent to anyone who has ever said, or been told, "I guess you had to be there."

It should be pointed out that when a TW presents a semantic object contrary to what is taken, by a hearer, to obtain in the RW, that semantic object remains constant throughout the text. That is, in (J2) for example, the hearer is made to believe that brain transplants are possible (or, is made to suspend his/her belief that they are not possible). This remains constant throughout the joke text: it is not as if halfway through the joke, brain transplants are no longer possible. Though the TW is different from RW, it too is constant.

Finally, to account for the sole remaining semantic object in the heuristics, take the following observation: (73) *The Scotsman does not take into account the difference in accents* is absolutely necessary for the punch line. If the joke text were to instantiate, for example, that all Scotsmen are aware of the difference in accents of an American and a Scotsman, then there could be no joke. Here again, however, a hearer may reason thus: most Scotsmen (most Scots) would be aware of the difference in accents, some Scots may not have been exposed to American culture, in any given population there may be individuals who lack such world knowledge, and therefore: it is possible that this particular Scotsman (especially since the TW points out that it is his first visit to San Diego, and perhaps also to the U.S.) is not aware of the

difference in accents. And so a final revision of the heuristics for determining the reliability of information instantiated by a joke text is as follows:

(36) (a) Is the semantic object in question incompatible with the RW as you believe it to be?
- If yes, take it to be unreliable.
- If no, go to (b).

(b) Is the semantic object in question logically necessary for the given punch line?
- If yes, take it to be either unreliable or indeterminate.
- If no, take it to be reliable.

In this way, then, the hearer may safely determine the reliability of most semantic objects instantiated by a given joke text.

5.3 Conclusion

The characterization of the joke TW as a RW that has been minimally manipulated for humorous effect allows a hearer to learn new information. Since it turns out that joke TWs are approximately 95% reliable, this task is made much easier. Furthermore, the nature of the joke TW allows the hearer to trust his/her perception of the RW when making judgments as to the reliability of semantic objects. This would help explain why jokes often present such blatantly "unreal" situations, rather than just "unusual" ones: doing so maximizes the effect of the punch lines for a larger audience and minimizes confusion with the hearers TW.

6. Case study: the information-conveying ability of longer humorous texts

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the implications of broadening the theory of the information-conveying ability of jokes to account for other, longer humorous texts is examined. As such, section 6.2 examines the structural differences and similarities of joke texts and longer humorous texts, drawing from conclusions made in Attardo and Chabanne (1992) as well as Attardo (1997). In section 6.3, the theoretical basis for the terminological distinction between jab lines and punch lines is examined, drawing again from Attardo (1997). Section 6.4 then examines some preliminary claims of how jab lines may function differently than punch lines, in terms of an objective-semantic account of how jokes may convey good information. Section 6.5 includes some (highly) conjectural, but interesting, claims as to the significance of the objective-semantic account for longer humorous texts such as sitcoms.

Appendix A provides a partial script for an episode of the NBC sitcom "Seinfeld." Care has been taken to represent, in brackets, visual information that contributes to the humorousness of the text. In Appendix B, a list of semantic objects, organized by scene, is provided. Once again, semantic objects that are false are marked with an asterisk preceding them.

Appendices A and B are included to allow the reader to compare the TWs of sitcoms with those of jokes. Essentially, the difference is in modality judgments. Whereas in canned jokes there are no observable actors, TV sitcoms offer at least a "straw actor," that gives at least a weak impression that, for example, it is possible for someone to believe that germs may be knocked out by something landing on them.

Finally, of the 312 semantic objects instantiated by scenes 1-6, only 16 are appear to be false (although a few of these, again, concern modality judgments that seem to be untenable, although not impossible). Interestingly, the reliable semantic objects in the TW of this longer humorous text make up 94.8% of the TW, just a 0.2% difference than for the sample jokes' percentage of reliable semantic objects (94.6%).

6.2 Joke texts vs. longer humorous texts

Before a semantic objects account of how jokes convey good information is applied to longer humorous texts, it should of course be determined that it *can* be applied. Although it is not yet certain that theories of humor can be applied to longer humorous texts without some difficulty, it should be pointed out that a semantic object account relies on the notion of presupposition, as especially delineated in Levinson (1983) (see Ch. 4), and as such can handle such differences as 1) having more than one speaker (i.e., with no narrator or joke-teller), 2) passages of a nonhumorous nature, 3) the presence of plot, and 4) the presence of jab lines.

In the case of (1), Joke texts rarely have more than one speaker, or joke-teller, except in the case of riddles, knock-knock jokes, light-bulb jokes, and the like, where the listener is asked to provide a formulaic response. In such cases, the second speaker's contribution is essential only in that it helps the joke maintain a sense of "conversationality"; one could just as easily tell a riddle or knock-knock joke narrating both parts, as does frequently happen. For the purposes of this thesis, the relevant point is that, in joke texts, this second speaker's part does not instantiate any semantic objects; there is only one version of the RW. However, in longer humorous texts, there may be any number of speakers with any number

of versions of the RW within the TW. Take for instance this passage (from Scene 4, "Seinfeld," 2/20/97):

(J10) George: Keys! I can't find my keys!
Jerry: You lost Phil Rizzuto's head?
George: Have you seen 'em?
Jerry: No.

In this passage, the character George's second conversational turn yields the semantic object, "Either Jerry has seen George's keys or he has not," while the character Jerry's second turn yields the semantic object, "Jerry has not seen George's keys." Thus, a semantic object account of how longer humorous texts may convey good information can handle this feature.

As for (2) and (3), they seem to be related, in that passages in a longer humorous text that seem to further a plot seem also to be characterized by a lower concentration of humorous episodes. Since a semantic object account works equally well with humorous passages as it does with nonhumorous passages, this in itself presents no problems for the theory. It should be pointed out at this time that the peculiarity seems to be that passages considered "serious," or nonhumorous, are characterized by a virtual conflation of the TW and the RW, as will be shown in section 6.5.

The most interesting difference between joke texts and longer humorous texts, from the point of view of this thesis, is the presence in longer humorous texts of "jab lines." A discussion of the notion of jab lines and their implications for a semantic object account of how jokes may convey information in longer humorous texts follows in section 6.3.

6.3 The nature of jab lines and their place in an objective-semantic account

"Jab lines" have been defined in Attardo (1997) as "humorous parts of the text which are essential to the narrative in which they appear or to the development of the text itself" (98). They are further differentiated from punch lines as: 1) having different actants than the macronarrative (i.e., the longer text itself), 2) being separate from the scripts being developed in the text, and 3) instantiating a script which furthers a final script (111). That is, in function, jab lines are similar to punch lines; it is their structural placement which is the primary (however arbitrary) difference. Although the terminological difference is somewhat new, it is used here for its uses to an objective-semantic account for how longer humorous texts may convey good information. However, as will be argued later in this chapter (see section 6.4), jab lines do seem to behave somewhat differently than punch lines, at least in terms of this account.

As demonstrated by Attardo (1997), the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) can be applied to jab lines, using the six Knowledge Resources (KRs): script opposition (SO), logical mechanism (LM), situation (SI), narrative strategy (NS), target (TA), and language (LA). An example, from Scene 3, "Seinfeld," 2/20/97, is used to show how the GTVH would handle the first jab line. (For the sake of convenience and to highlight the difference between a jab line and a punch line, the quoted passage continues to the end of the scene.)

(J11) *[Elaine is ordering food, to be delivered to her apartment. She is responding to the Owner's request for her address.]*
Elaine: 78 West 86th Street, Apartment 3E.
Owner: That's south side. Sorry, we don't deliver below 86th.
Elaine: I'm not below.
Owner: Yes, you are. The street itself is boundary.
Elaine: Your guy can't cross to my side?

Owner: If we delivered to you, then what? 85th Street? Wall Street? Mexico? 84th Street? [JAB LINE]
Elaine: All right, fine, I'll just cross and meet him.
Owner: Sorry, food only for those who live within boundary. [JAB LINE]
[Owner hangs up. Elaine calls back.]
Owner: China Panda.
Elaine: *[In disguised voice.]* Uh, yeah, yeah. I'd like to place an order. [PUNCH LINE]
Owner: What you like?

According to the GTVH, the KRs for this first jab line would be as follows:

(37) SO: Realisitic vs. unrealistic (bending rules vs. adhering strictly to rules)
LM: A food-delivery boundary must be drawn somewhere
SI: Telephone conversation between restaurant owner and (potential) customer
NS: Statement
TA: Elaine
LA: Rhetorical question

Thus, the GTVH can handle jab lines without any problems.

An objective-semantic account can also handle jab lines, as is demonstrated by the following list of semantic objects instantiated by the passage quoted above:

1. Elaine lives at 78 West 86th Street, Apartment 3E.
2. A restaurant may deliver food.
3. A restaurant may deliver food within a certain range.
4. A restaurant may not deliver food outside a certain range.
5. China Panda will not deliver food south of 86th Street.
6. Elaine's apartment is on the south side of 86th Street.
7. Elaine is not below 86th Street.
8. Elaine is not outside the delivery range of China Panda.
9. Elaine's apartment is outside the delivery range of China Panda.
10. A street itself may be a boundary.
11. A street itself may be a boundary of a restaurant's delivery range.
12. 86th Street is the boundary of China Panda's delivery range.
13. Elaine's apartment is outside of the delivery range of China Panda.
14. China Panda will not deliver food to Elaine's apartment.
15. Either a [China Panda delivery] guy can cross the street to Elaine's side or he can't.
16. Delivering food to Elaine's apartment will lead to undesirable consequences. [JAB LINE]
17. There exists an 85th Street.
18. There exists a Wall Street.
19. There exists a Mexico.
20. There exists an 84th Street.

21. 85th Street, Wall Street, Mexico, and 84th Street are all outside of the delivery range of China Panda.
22. A [China Panda delivery] guy cannot cross the street to Elaine's apartment.
23. Elaine may cross the street to meet the [China Panda delivery] guy.
24. Elaine may not cross the street to meet the [China Panda delivery] guy. [JAB LINE]
25. A person may disguise her voice.
26. Another person who has just spoken with someone may not recognize that person's voice when it is disguised. [PUNCH LINE]

Thus, an objective-semantic account also has no difficulties handling jab lines. In section 6.4, the discussion moves to a discussion of differences in the function of punch lines and jab lines.

6.4 How jab lines may differ from punch lines

There seem to be three main differences between the functions of jab lines and punch lines: 1) Encyclopedic semantic objects show a higher ratio of unreliability in jab lines than in punch lines, 2) Jab lines, on the whole, instantiate more reliable semantic objects than do punch lines, and 3) Jab lines show a lower ratio of "new" semantic objects than do punch lines. It should be pointed out that these conclusions are, at best, conjectural; further analysis needs to be done to determine whether they can be supported. The following passage (from Scene 3, "Seinfeld," 2/20/97), with its attending semantic objects, is included to make the above-mentioned three differences more clear:

(J12) George: Keys! I can't find my keys!
Jerry: You lost Phil Rizzuto's head? [JAB LINE]
George: Have you seen 'em?
Jerry: No.
George: Damn it!
Kramer: Come on, retrace your steps. What'd you do today?
George: I got up, I was supposed to go to work, I came here instead. [JAB LINE]
Kramer: All right.
Jerry: Well, they're not here. You'll have to dig up your spare set.
George: I don't have a spare set. All my keys say, "Do not duplicate."
Jerry: So?
George: So you can't duplicate 'em. [JAB LINE]
[Jerry and Kramer laugh.]

Kramer: Sure you can! *[Places a hand on George's shoulder.]* Such a sweet kid! [PUNCH LINE]

1. One may lose one's keys. [ency]
2. George has lost his keys. [lex/inf]
3. Either George has lost his keys with the Phil Rizzuto key chain, or he has not.
4. George has lost the keys with the Phil Rizzuto key chain. [inf]
5. Either Jerry has seen the Phil Rizzuto key chain, or he has not.
6. Jerry has not seen the Phil Rizzuto key chain. [lex]
7. One may be upset about losing one's keys. [ency]
8. George is upset about losing his keys. [inf]
9. One may retrace one's steps. [ency]
10. Retracing one's steps may aid in finding one's keys. [ency]
11. Retracing one's steps may aid in remembering where one lost one's keys. [inf]
12. Retracing one's steps may aid in remembering what one has done. [inf]
13. George has done something today. [lex]
14. George did not go to work. [lex/inf]
15. George came to Jerry's apartment instead of going to work. [lex/inf] [JAB LINE]
16. There exists a spare set of keys. [ency]
17. A person may have a spare set of keys. [inf]
18. When one has lost his/her keys, one should find the spare set of keys. [ency]
19. George has a spare set of keys. [lex]
20. George does not have a spare set of keys. [lex]
21. Keys may have "Do not duplicate" written on them. [ency]
22. George's keys have "Do not duplicate" written on them. [lex/inf]
23. *A person may [choose] not to duplicate keys because they have "Do not duplicate" written on them. [ency]
24. George did not duplicate his keys because they have "Do not duplicate" written on them. [inf] [JAB LINE]
25. George does not have a spare set of keys because his keys say "Do not duplicate." [inf]
26. A person may duplicate keys, even if they have "Do not duplicate" written on them. [inf]
27. *Someone who does not duplicate his/her keys because they have "Do not duplicate" written on them is a sweet kid. [lex/inf]
28. *George is a sweet kid. [inf] [PUNCH LINE]

Concerning the first proposed difference between jab lines and punch lines, it should be noted that of the eight semantic objects that fall into the category of encyclopedic knowledge, there is one that is unreliable: (23) *A person may choose not to duplicate keys because they have "Do not duplicate" written on them.* Though there may be cases when this would be reliable, in this particular instance, it is unreliable. Of course, one such example will not prove the point conclusively, even when balanced with the observation that rarely in joke

texts are encyclopedic semantic objects unreliable. A preliminary reason may be that longer humorous texts admit the possibility of juxtaposed interpretations of the RW (i.e., between different speakers) within a TW, while in joke texts only one speaker's TW is salient.

Perhaps paradoxically—considering the possibility that jab lines contain a higher ratio of unreliable encyclopedic semantic objects—jab lines seem *in general* to instantiate more reliable semantic objects than do punch lines. In each of the first seven scenes analyzed closely, the closing punch line instantiates an unreliable semantic object. (In this case, each punch line was simply surveyed, rather than subjected to the objective-semantic account.) However, as is the case in the first and second jab lines of the above-quoted passage, jab lines may more often reliable. A preliminary theory is that this is the case because jab lines, as they contribute to the furthering of the macronarrative's plot, may use as a default script opposition REAL vs. UNUSUAL, rather than the punch line's primary/overall script opposition REAL vs. UNREAL.

Finally, a third difference between jab lines and punch lines, for the purposes of this theory, seems to be that jab lines instantiate "new" semantic objects less often than punch lines, which virtually always provide new (albeit unreliable) information. Of the three jab lines in the above-quoted passage, two contain no new information. The first, "You lost Phil Rizzuto's head?," is a rhetorical question, emphasizing the presupposition George had already instantiated, namely, (2) *George has lost his keys* (on which there is a chain with Phil Rizzuto's head). The third jab line, "So you can't duplicate 'em," again simply reiterates the inference drawn from George's preceding conversational turn: (24) *George did not duplicate his keys because they have "Do not duplicate" written on them.* This may be because these jab lines function as (local) repetitions.

In conclusion, the conjectural nature of these claims cannot be stressed enough. Not enough analysis has been done to ascertain whether these assertions, which seem to be supported by a survey of the text, can actually be supported by data.

6.5 How one can learn reliable information from longer humorous texts: a survey of other claims

This section comprises some further thoughts as to the nature of longer humorous texts, with respect to shorter (joke) texts.

1. *The TW of longer humorous texts is internally consistent.* Because sitcoms may contain non-cooperative utterances, they are not held—theoretically, at least—to internal consistency. Within a particular episode, this may be manifest, as in "Seinfeld," 2/20/97, in the existence of the Arthur Berghart Expressway (which, incidentally, does not exist, so far as this author knows). Its existence is maintained throughout the episode by each character. Across episodes there is also an internal consistency: Newman is a postman in each episode, and it is expected that he will continue to be a postman, until such time as his character is fired, takes on a new job, etc.

2. *Semantic objects not associated with punch lines or jab lines will always be reliable.* This seems to be a dangerous claim, since its corollary—in terms of an objective-semantic account—is that "no semantic object will be perceived as incompatible with the RW unless it is instantiated by a punch line or jab line." However, given the "quasi-realism" of even sitcoms, it does not seem all that far-fetched that a longer humorous text would not want to instantiate an unreliable semantic object, unless the point was to do so humorously.

3. *Semantic objects which are deemed "indeterminate" because of their instantiation by a punch line or jab line may later be reclassified, based on later text.* Situations where this could be the case seem peculiar to longer humorous texts, since jokes end with punch lines and no further comment. It is suggested here that in a longer humorous text, there is an opportunity for these "indeterminate" semantic object to be classified as reliable or unreliable. It seems worthwhile to pursue this point, since if it were proved, it would further illustrate that punch lines and jab lines do not *ipso facto* instantiate unreliable semantic objects. Moreover, in conjunction with (2), it would lend further credibility to the validity of an objective-semantic account of how humorous texts, short and long, may convey good information.

6.6 Conclusion

That an objective-semantic account of how humorous texts can convey good information can be applied to longer texts, as well as shorter, joke texts, is seen as further confirmation of its validity. Since longer humorous texts such as sitcoms may have more than one speaker, as opposed to joke texts, which almost without fail have a single narrator, and since sitcoms are shown on television, right in front of our eyes, the notion of a TW as opposed to a RW becomes all the more blurred. In the first case because not all people have exactly the same conception of the RW, and in the second case because it is sometimes difficult to argue that something does not exist when it is presented on the television screen—as is the case with the Phil Rizzuto key chain. An objective-semantic-based analysis also seems have some important consequences for the terminological difference between punch lines and jab lines. Perhaps most important to the distinction is that they seem to

behave differently—both in the kind of information instantiated and the reliability of the information each contains. The data seem to point to a different class of script oppositions for each. Whereas punch lines seem primarily to function within a REAL/UNREAL paradigm, jab lines more often than not seem located in a REAL/UNUSUAL paradigm. This seems consistent, at least in the case of sitcoms, with the "building up" effect of punch lines.

7. Conclusion

Zhao deserves credit for being the first to claim that jokes do, indeed, convey reliable information. In her article, she expresses the hope that "full awareness of the information-conveying effect of jokes may urge humor researchers to adopt a new and serious look at jokes" (292). This thesis contributes to the fulfillment of this hope.

Once it is granted that jokes may convey reliable information, the question that must be answered is *how*? The possibility that reliable (i.e., true) information may be derived from unreliable (i.e., false) statements seems to point to the importance of presupposition in answering this question. Yet, as this thesis has hopefully made clear, there is more to the processing of a joke text than either or both semantic and pragmatic presuppositions.

The discovery that joke texts and other humorous texts are made up of an overwhelming majority of reliable semantic objects closes the gap between serious and non-serious communication. It is hoped that future researchers may use this semantic object model to compare the two types of communication more closely. Perhaps this thesis will begin to blur the lines between *bona-fide* and non-*bona-fide* communication, for as has been shown, jokes may be told with the primary intention of communicating and the secondary purpose of humor.

Appendix A:
Script for Scenes 1-6 of "Seinfeld," Feb. 20, 1997

Scene 1

[Jerry's girlfriend Jenna's apartment.]

Jenna: Morning.

Jerry: Morning.

Jenna: Hope you don't mind baking soda flavor.

Jerry: Ugh! Baking soda—annoying little product. "I can do this, I can do that." Why doesn't this stuff just shut up?

Jenna: Let me grab you a towel.

[Jerry knocks toothbrush into the toilet, then pulls it out. Jenna, not seeing this, brushes her teeth with the toothbrush.]

Scene 2

[At Restaurant.]

George: So?

Jerry: So? She used the toothbrush!

George: You said you grabbed it out of there real fast, right?

Jerry: Yeah.

George: So, I'm sure whatever germs it landed on were knocked out, and by the time the rest of them realized what was going on, you had already grabbed it out.

Jerry: How many years of med school did you have?

George: Was she mad? *[Jerry shrugs.]* You didn't tell her.

Jerry: Jenna's like me. She's very...

George: Finicky? Prissy? Fastidious?

Jerry: I'll take fastidious. *[Looking at something on the table.]* What is that?

George: Oh! Steinbrenner gave them to us in honor of Phil Rizzuto being inducted into the Hall of Fame.

[Key chain: "Holy cow!"]

Jerry: They don't actually have to squeeze his head to get him to say, "Holy cow!" do they?

George: Just the last few innings of a doubleheader.

[Enter Kramer.]

Kramer: Look at this! *[Shows an old sewing machine.]* I'm in the passing lane of the Arthur Berghart Expressway, going 70, and boom! I dragged this thing for five exits.

Jerry: Why didn't you pull over?

Kramer: Well, I was drafting behind a semi. I didn't want to lose him! The infrastructure, Jerry, it's crumbling!

[Key chain: "Holy cow!"*]*

Kramer: Well, look at that: talking Nixon.

Scene 3

[Elaine in her apartment, on the telephone to employee at China Panda Restaurant.]

Man: China Panda.

Elaine: Yeah, I'd like to place an order.

Man: Yes, what you like?

Elaine: This "Supreme Flounder." It says "first time served in America." Is that true?

Man: What number?
Elaine: Forty-seven.
Man: Yeah, first time. What else?
Elaine: Uh...that's it.
Man: Address?
Elaine: 78 West 86th Street, Apartment 3E.
Man: That's south side. Sorry, we don't deliver below 86th.
Elaine: I'm not below.
Man: Yes, you are. The street itself is boundary.
Elaine: Your guy can't cross to my side?
Man: If we delivered to you, then what? 85th Street? Wall Street? Mexico? 84th Street?
Elaine: All right, fine, I'll just cross and meet him.
Man: Sorry, food only for those who live within boundary.
[Man hangs up. Elaine calls back.]
Man: China Panda.
Elaine: *[In disguised voice.]* Uh, yeah, yeah. I'd like to place an order.
Man: What you like?

Scene 4
[Jerry's apartment.]
[Enter Kramer.]
Kramer: Well, I'm a papa!
Jerry: Bring it on. Nothing's throwing me at this point.
Kramer: Well, as of today, I am a proud parent of a one-mile stretch of the Arthur Berghart Expressway.
Jerry: Oh, that "adopt a highway" thing.
Kramer: Yeah, I'm part of the solution *now*, Jerry. Yeah, I went down there, and I checked it out this morning. Here, take a look. *[Shows pictures to Jerry.]* Mile 114!
Jerry: Looks just like you.
Kramer: I'm beaming, Jerry!
Jerry: So what did you have to do? Pay to keep it clean?
Kramer: They try to push you into using their cleaning crew, with all their so-called maintenance equipment.
Jerry: That old scam!
Kramer: Yeah, well, that's why I'm doing it myself. This parenting isn't about delegating responsibility. It's about being there.
Jerry: At the side of the road with a pile of garbage.
Kramer: Quality time!
[Enter George.]
George: Keys! I can't find my keys!
Jerry: You lost Phil Rizzuto's head?
George: Have you seen 'em?
Jerry: No.
George: Damn it!
Kramer: Come on, retrace your steps. What'd you do today?
George: I got up, I was supposed to go to work, I came here instead.
Kramer: All right.
Jerry: Well, they're not here. You'll have to dig up your spare set.

George: I don't have a spare set. All my keys say, "Do not duplicate."
Jerry: So?
George: So you can't duplicate 'em.
[Jerry and Kramer laugh.]
Kramer: Sure you can! *[Places a hand on George's shoulder.]* Such a sweet kid!

Scene 5

[On the street.]
Elaine: Oh, oh, China Panda?
Delivery Boy: Why are you waiting on the street and not in you apartment?
Elaine: I...thought that I would meet you half way.
Delivery Boy: You really live here?
Elaine: Oh, yeah. *[Takes bag of food, hands the delivery boy money.]* Here you go. You keep the change. [Walks up the stoop to apartment complex main door.] Bye now! *[The delivery boy waits, as Elaine tries to open the door, but of course, it's locked. She finally comes back down the steps, hands back the bag of food, and gets her money back.]* You know, this isn't fair. This is address discrimination.

Scene 6

[On the street.]
Jerry: Well, I cleaned out their whole dental hygiene shelf.
George: So, the plan is to secretly sterilize her mouth.
Jerry: By the time I'm through with her mouth, she'll be able to eat off it. Is it safe to drink bleach if you dilute it?
George: No, stings the throat. So, I was coming along here, and I felt like a piece of cake, you know, but then I thought, It's morning. I should really have a muffin. I like those chocolate chip ones. And then I figured, well, they're really both cake. So I sat on that bench for a while—twenty minutes or an hour—and then I figured I'd check and see what you were up to. Wait a minute. Wait a minute! The broad jump! The broad jump over the pothole on 86th Street! *[George runs off. Jerry follows. Scene cuts to 86th Street.]* Now I remember. As I jumped over the hole, I heard a...like a jingling sound.
Jerry: You didn't look down?
George: I was trying to stick the landing. *[Looking at the ground.]* Well, it would've been right around here. *[Sees the newly paved-over pothole.]* No! No! *[As a car drives over the erstwhile pothole, a muffled* "Holy cow!" *is heard.]*
Jerry: Poor son of a bitch.

Appendix B:
Semantic objects instantiated by Scenes 1-6 of "Seinfeld," Feb. 20, 1997

Scene 1

1. There exists morning.
2. People may speak.
3. A woman may speak.
4. A man may speak.
5. A person may greet another person.
6. There exists baking soda.
7. Something may be baking soda flavor.
8. A person may find baking soda flavor unpleasant.
9. Baking soda is a product.
10. A product may be annoying.
11. A person may pretend that an object can speak.
12. A person may pretend that baking soda may speak.
13. A person may pretend that baking soda may speak of its uses.
14. A person may pretend that speaking baking soda may cease speaking.
15. A person may wonder.
16. A person may wonder about an action.
17. A person may wonder about a speaking baking soda.
18. A person may wonder why shutting up does not happen.
19. A person may wonder why speaking baking soda does not shut up.
20. A person may offer someone something.
21. A person may offer to get someone something.
22. There exists a towel.
23. A towel may be gotten.
24. A person may offer to get someone a towel.
25. There exists a toothbrush.
26. There exists a toilet.
27. A person may knock a toothbrush.
28. A person may knock a toothbrush into a toilet.
29. A person may retrieve a toothbrush from a toilet.
30. A person may not see another person do something.
31. A person may not see another person retrieve a toothbrush from a toilet.
32. A person may use a toothbrush.
33. There exist teeth.
34. A person may have teeth.
35. Teeth may be brushed
36. A person may brush one's teeth with a toothbrush.
37. A person may brush one's teeth with a toothbrush that has previously been in a toilet.
38. It is undesirable to brush one's teeth with a toothbrush that has previously been in a toilet.

Scene 2

1. A person may describe an event.
2. A person may not understand another person's meaning.
3. A person may repeat a previous utterance.
4. A person may repeat another person's utterance.
5. There exist germs.
6. Germs may be present in a toilet.
7. Germs may be landed on.
8. Germs may be landed on by a toothbrush.
9. *Germs may be knocked out.
10. *Germs may be knocked out by a toothbrush
11. *Germs may be aware of events going on around them.
12. One may do something without germs being aware what is happening.
13. One may do something without germs being able to react.
14. There exists med school.
15. Med school may last for more than one year.
16. One may attend med school.
17. One may attend med school for more than one year.
18. One may attend med school for more than one year and not be done.
19. George attended med school.
20. Semantic objects 5-13 are rejected.
21. A person may be mad.
22. A person may be mad if he/she was aware that another has dropped his/her toothbrush in the toilet.
23. If a person did not see his/her toothbrush dropped into the toilet and was not told, that person would not be mad.
24. A person may not be mad if he/she is not aware that his/her toothbrush has been dropped into the toilet.
25. Jenna is not aware that her toothbrush had been dropped into the toilet.
26. Jenna is not mad.
27. One may decide not to impart information to another person.
28. One may decide not to impart information to another person based on that person's expected reaction.
29. People may have similar personalities.
30. A person may recognize that two person's personalities are similar.
31. One may decide not to impart information to another person based one's expected reaction.
32. Jenna may be finicky.
33. Jerry may be finicky.
34. Jenna may be prissy.
35. Jerry may be finicky.
36. Jenna is fastidious.
37. Jerry is fastidious.
38. Semantic objects 32-35 are rejected.
39. There exists a table.
40. A table may be between two people.
41. Something may be on the table.

42. Something on a table may be observed.
43. Something on a table may be observed by the two people on either side.
44. There exists a person named Steinbrenner.
45. Steinbrenner is the owner of the New York Yankees baseball team.
46. Steinbrenner may give something to people.
47. Steinbrenner may give something to George.
48. There exists a person named Phil Rizzuto.
49. There exists a key chain.
50. A key chain may have a [plastic/rubber] likeness of a person's head on it.
51. A key chain may have a [plastic/rubber] likeness of Phil Rizzuto on it.
52. Phil Rizzuto was formerly a baseball player.
53. There exists a baseball Hall of Fame.
54. A former baseball player may be inducted into the Hall of Fame.
55. Phil Rizzuto has been elected into the baseball Hall of Fame.
56. Steinbrenner may give a key chain bearing the likeness of Phil Rizzuto's head.
57. A [plastic/rubber] likeness of a person's head on a key chain may be squeezed.
58. A [plastic/rubber] likeness of a person's head on a key chain may emit a sound when squeezed.
59. A [plastic/rubber] likeness of a person's head on a key chain may emit a voice when squeezed.
60. A [plastic/rubber] likeness of a person's head on a key chain may utter a sentence when squeezed.
61. A [plastic/rubber] likeness of a person's head on a key chain may utter "Holy cow!" when squeezed.
62. Phil Rizzuto actually says "Holy cow!"
63. Either one must squeeze Phil Rizzuto's head to get him to say "Holy cow!" or one doesn't.
64. There exists a doubleheader.
65. A doubleheader may have a last few innings.
66. A doubleheader has more than just a few innings.
67. One must only squeeze Phil Rizzuto's head to get him to say "Holy cow!" during the last few innings of a doubleheader.
68. *There exists the Arthur Berghart Expressway.
69. There exists a passing lane.
70. An expressway may have a passing lane.
71. An expressway may have more than one lane.
72. A person [in a car] may be in a passing lane.
73. A person [in a car] may be going 70.
74. A person [in a car] may be going 70 on an expressway.
75. *A person [in a car] may be going 70 on the Arthur Berghart Expressway.
76. There exists a sewing machine.
77. A sewing machine may be on the expressway.
78. A person [in a car] may run over a sewing machine.
79. A car that has run over a sewing machine on the expressway while doing 70 mph may make a sound approximating "Boom!"
80. A sewing machine that has been run over by a car may get stuck.
81. A sewing machine that has been run over by a car may get dragged.
82. There exists an exit.

83. *There exists at least five exits on the Arthur Berghart Expressway.
84. A sewing machine that has been run over by a car may get dragged for five exits.
85. A person [in a car] may pull over.
86. Kramer did not pull over.
87. There exists a semi.
88. A person [in a car] may be drafting.
89. A person [in a car] may be drafting behind a semi.
90. Pulling over [to the side of the road] precludes drafting behind a semi.
91. Kramer believes that a person [in a car] drafting behind a semi may not want to pull over though a sewing machine is being dragged.
92. There exists an infrastructure.
93. An infrastructure may be in the process of crumbling.
94. Kramer believes that the [plastic/rubber] likeness of a person's head on the key chain is Nixon.

Scene 3

1. There exists a telephone.
2. A person may talk to another person in a different place using the telephone.
3. There exists a China Panda restaurant.
4. One may place an [food] order from a restaurant.
5. An employee of the restaurant may ask a person what she would like [to order].
6. There exists a Supreme Flounder.
7. Either this is the first time Supreme Flounder has been served in America or it isn't.
8. A menu item may have a number.
9. The Supreme Flounder has a number.
10. The menu number for Supreme Flounder is 47.
11. This is the first time Supreme Flounder has been served in America.
12. An employee of a restaurant may ask a person ordering food if she would like anything else.
13. An employee of a restaurant may ask a person ordering food for her address.
14. Elaine lives at 78 West 86th Street, Apartment 3E.
15. A restaurant may deliver food.
16. A restaurant may deliver food within a certain range.
17. A restaurant may not deliver food outside a certain range.
18. China Panda will not deliver food south of 86th Street.
19. Elaine's apartment is on the south side of 86th Street.
20. Elaine is not below 86th Street.
21. Elaine is not outside the delivery range of China Panda.
22. Elaine's apartment is outside the delivery range of China Panda.
23. A street itself may be a boundary.
24. A street itself may be a boundary of a restaurant's delivery range.
25. 86th Street is the boundary of China Panda's delivery range.
26. Elaine's apartment is outside of the delivery range of China Panda.
27. China Panda will not deliver food to Elaine's apartment.
28. Either a [China Panda delivery] guy can cross the street to Elaine's side or he can't.
29. Delivering food to Elaine's apartment will lead to undesirable consequences.
30. There exists an 85th Street.
31. There exists a Wall Street.

32. There exists a Mexico.
33. There exists an 84th Street.
34. 85th Street, Wall Street, Mexico, and 84th Street are all outside of the delivery range of China Panda.
35. A [China Panda delivery] guy cannot cross the street to Elaine's apartment.
36. Elaine may cross the street to meet the [China Panda delivery] guy.
37. Elaine may not cross the street to meet the [China Panda delivery] guy.
38. A person may disguise her voice.
39. Another person who has just spoken with someone may not recognize that person's voice when it is disguised.

Scene 4

1. A man may be a papa.
2. Kramer is a papa.
3. That Kramer is a papa is unusual or unexpected.
4. There exists an "Adopt-a-Highway."
5. A person may take responsibility for the clean-up of a section of a highway.
6. "Adopt" may mean to take responsibility for.
7. A person may take responsibility for the clean-up of a section of a highway, as part of "Adopt-a-Highway."
8. "Adopt" may mean to take responsibility for the clean-up of a section of highway.
9. A person who is part of "Adopt-a-Highway" may be said to be a parent of that section of highway.
10. An expressway may be a highway.
11. An expressway may have a one-mile stretch.
12. The Arthur Berghart Expressway may have a one-mile stretch.
13. A person who is part of "Adopt-a-Highway" may be part of the solution.
14. A person who is part of "Adopt-a-Highway" may help prevent the infrastructure from crumbling.
15. A person may visit the section of highway he has adopted.
16. A person may take a picture.
17. A person may take a picture of a section of highway.
18. There exists a Mile 114.
19. Mile 114 is the section of the Arthur Berghart Expressway that Kramer has adopted.
20. Mile 114 may look like a person.
21. Mile 114 may look like Kramer.
22. Either Kramer had to pay to keep Mile 114 clean or he did not.
23. There exists a cleaning crew.
24. *The "Adopt-a-Highway" program pushes participants to use their cleaning crew.
25. *Pushing participants to use one's own cleaning crew is a scam.
26. *Pushing participants to use one's own cleaning crew is a scam that has been tried before.
27. *Pushing participants to use one's own cleaning crew is a scam that has been tried many times.
28. Kramer believes that pushing participants to use one's own cleaning crew is an old scam.
29. Kramer is taking responsibility for the clean-up of Mile 114.
30. Parenting of a child means doing things for that child oneself.
31. Parenting of a highway means cleaning it up oneself.

32. Parenting of a highway means being on the side of the road with a pile of garbage.
33. Parenting of a child means being on the side of the road with a pile of garbage.
34. There exists quality time.
35. "Quality time" is useful time one spends with his child.
36. "Quality time" is useful time one spends cleaning up one's highway.
37. Being of the side of the road with a pile of garbage is quality time.
38. One may lose one's keys.
39. George has lost his keys.
40. Either George has lost his keys with the Phil Rizzuto key chain, or he has not.
41. George has lost the keys with the Phil Rizzuto key chain.
42. Either Jerry has seen the Phil Rizzuto key chain, or he has not.
43. Jerry has not seen the Phil Rizzuto key chain.
44. One may be upset about losing one's keys.
45. One may retrace one's steps.
46. Retracing one's steps may aid in finding one's keys.
47. Retracing one's steps may aid in remembering where one lost one's keys.
48. Retracing one's steps may aid in remembering what one has done.
49. George has done something today.
50. George did not go to work.
51. George came to Jerry's apartment instead of going to work.
52. There exists a spare set of keys.
53. A person may have a spare set of keys.
54. When one has lost his/her keys, one should find the spare set of keys.
55. George has a spare set of keys.
56. George does not have a spare set of keys.
57. Keys may have "Do not duplicate" written on them.
58. George's keys have "Do not duplicate" written on them.
59. A person may [choose] not to duplicate keys because they have "Do not duplicate" written on them.
60. George did not duplicate his keys because they have "Do not duplicate" written on them.
61. George does not have a spare set of keys because his keys say "Do not duplicate."
62. A person may duplicate keys, even if they have "Do not duplicate" written on them.
63. Someone who does not duplicate his/her keys because they have "Do not duplicate" written on them is a sweet kid.
64. George is a sweet kid.

Scene 5

1. A China Panda delivery person may be on the street.
2. There is a reason Elaine is waiting on the street.
3. A person who is waiting for food to be delivered usually waits in his/her apartment.
4. Elaine is waiting in the street to meet the delivery boy half way.
5. Either Elaine lives at the apartment, or she does not.
6. Elaine lives at the apartment.
7. Elaine has given the delivery boy more money than is required.
8. Elaine wishes that the delivery boy leaves.
9. Elaine does not live at the apartment.
10. Elaine must return the food since she does not live within the delivery range.

11. It is unfair that someone who lives outside the delivery range of a restaurant is not able to receive food from that restaurant.
12. Something that is unfair may be called discrimination.
13. There are different types of discrimination.
14. Discrimination because of X may be called 'X discrimination.'
15. Discrimination because of one's address may be called address discrimination.

Scene 6

1. There exists a dental hygiene shelf.
2. A store may have a dental hygiene shelf.
3. A pharmacy may have a dental hygiene shelf.
4. *A person may clean out the whole dental hygiene shelf.
5. Jerry has cleaned out the whole dental hygiene shelf.
6. Jerry has cleaned out the whole dental hygiene shelf for a reason.
7. Dental hygiene products may sterilize a person's mouth.
8. Jenna is not aware that her toothbrush was previously knocked into the toilet.
9. Jenna is still brushing her teeth with the toothbrush that was knocked into the toilet.
10. Jenna's mouth is not sterilized.
11. A person's mouth may be sterilized.
12. A non-sterilized mouth may be undesirable.
13. A non-sterilized mouth may contain germs.
14. Jenna's mouth contains germs.
15. It is undesirable for a person's mouth to contain germs.
16. It is undesirable for Jerry that Jenna's mouth contains germs.
17. One who is in an undesirable situation may want to do something to make the situation desirable.
18. Jerry has cleaned out the whole dental hygiene shelf to secretly sterilize Jenna's mouth.
19. Something that has been sterilized may be eaten off of.
20. *A mouth that has been sterilized may be eaten off of.
21. *A person whose mouth has been sterilized may oneself eat off of it.
22. It is not safe to drink bleach that has not been diluted.
23. Either it is safe to drink bleach that has been diluted, or it is not.
24. It is not safe to drink bleach that has been diluted.
25. Drinking diluted bleach causes stinging in the throat.
26. *Drinking diluted bleach causes nothing worse than stinging in the throat.
27. George has drunk diluted bleach previously.
28. George has previously walked that section of street.
29. George was walking that section of street the day he lost his keys.
30. There exists cake.
31. A person may eat cake.
32. A person may want to eat cake.
33. A person should not eat cake in the morning.
34. Cake is not an acceptable food to be eaten in the morning.
35. There exists a muffin.
36. A muffin is an acceptable food to be eaten in the morning.
37. There exist chocolate chips.
38. A muffin may have chocolate chips in it.
39. Both cake and a muffin are similar.

40. Both cake and a muffin are baked batter.
41. Any baked batter may be called a cake.
42. Cake and a muffin are both cake.
43. There exists a bench.
44. A bench may be located on the sidewalk.
45. A person may sit on a bench.
46. A person may sit on a bench for twenty minutes.
47. A person may not be aware whether he sat on a bench for twenty minutes or an hour.
48. A person may broad jump.
49. There exists a pothole.
50. A person may broad jump over a pothole.
51. There is a pothole on 86th Street.
52. George heard a jingling sound when he broad jumped the pothole.
53. The jingling sound he heard was his keys falling out of his pocket.
54. Either George looked down when he heard the jingling sound, or he did not.
55. A person who hears a jingling sound while broad jumping should look down.
56. George did not look down when he heard the jingling sound.
57. George did not look down when he heard the jingling sound because he was trying to stick the landing of his broad jump.
58. *A person who hears a jingling sound while broad jumping should try to stick the landing.
59. *A person who hears a jingling sound while broad jumping should not look down.
60. The Phil Rizzuto key chain fell into the pothole and was covered over.
61. It is undesirable to be inside a covered-over pothole.
62. It is undesirable for a key chain to be inside a covered-over pothole.

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