

## Cultural differences in humour usage in American and Hungarian TED talks

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of the exploratory study is to detect cultural differences in humour usage in TED talks in two different cultures (American and Hungarian). 62 TED talks have been content analysed based on the three humour theories (Attardo, 1994) combined with the humour typology developed by Barry and Graca (2018). The results indicate that the two analysed cultures are similar regarding incongruity-based humour, but differ along Hofstede's cultural dimensions regarding superiority-based humour types. Gender differences have also been detected both between and within-culture analysis. Managerial implications are offered for international and intercultural business environment. The paper extends Hofstede's cultural model to TED talks through the usage of humour, which is an aspect not yet explored in this context.

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural differences, humour usage, Hungarian and American, TED talks, Hofstede cultural dimensions, intercultural business

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### I. INTRODUCTION

What is considered funny in one culture may not make sense in another or could be seen as boring or even offensive elsewhere. That is the reason why it is of high importance to be aware of cultural differences in an international setting. Using humour can be a way to enhance interpersonal communication and improve relationships, hence the article may be useful for readers working, living, studying or travelling in an international environment. This study aims to explore cultural differences in humour usage manifest in TED talks presented by American and Hungarian speakers. It provides valuable information on what and how humour is created, offering strategies to use humour in order to avoid conflicts in international management.

There are numerous studies on comparing *cultural differences* in several disciplines such as international management (Hofstede, 1984), marketing and advertising (Pollay, 1983), business communication (Singh, 2005), education (Ryan, 2013) and linguistics (Chen, 2004). In addition there is a large number of studies on *humour*, especially in TV commercials (Barry and Graca, 2018) and print advertising (Hatzithomas et al., 2011). Finally, a few researchers have focused on *TED talks* (e.g. Scotto di Carlo, 2013; Romanelli et al., 2014), however, no previous research has combined all these three like this study does, i.e. comparing cultural differences in TED talks through humour.

The study provides an overview of the theoretical framework including Hofstede's cultural model, humour theories and a short introduction of TED talks. After the methods are described, the results and the discussion are presented. Finally, conclusions are drawn and managerial implications are offered along with limitation and further research suggestions.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 1. Cultural framework and background

Several frameworks have been developed to analyse cultural differences. One of the most widely known and accepted frameworks is Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimension model identifying four dimensions along which a culture may be described. The present study focuses on only three of them, namely individualism-collectivism (IDV), power distance index (PDI) and masculinity-femininity (MAS) dimensions. They are described in more details as regards the investigated cultures (American and Hungarian) and are linked to humour theories and categories in a later section. In the following part, I describe American and Hungarian cultural characteristics in a nutshell bearing in mind that most readers are likely to be familiar with the culture of the USA, as opposed to that of Hungary, which is probably known to a lesser extent.

The United States of America has a value system based primarily on Christian values. Kalliny et al. (2006) describe American people as direct, competitive, individualistic and high achievers. They tend to live at a

fast pace, they are practical, egalitarian and live in nuclear families. They believe in hard work and achieving success regardless of origin. Americans are famous for being overly optimistic.

Hungary is located in Central Europe in the Carpathian Basin with a population of about 10 million. It is a medium sized (93,000 km<sup>2</sup>) member state of the European Union. Most inhabitants speak Hungarian, which is a unique language, difficult for foreigners to learn. Hungarians are famous for their creativity, giving several inventions to the world such as holography, the ball-point pen or the Rubik cube (Marx, 2015). Hospitality and traditions are of high importance, but as opposed to American optimism, Hungarians are famous for being overly pessimistic. They mostly live in nuclear families, use less direct communication, and are family-oriented. Being dominated by the Soviet Union for 40 years collectivist values may be inherent in older generations, even though the Hofstede model scored Hungary high on individualism (IDV<sub>HU</sub>= 80 on Hofstede's scale of originally 100). Section '4. Culture through humour' provides further details of the examined cultures in the light of Hofstede's cultural model and links its dimensions to humour categories in order to generate hypotheses.

## 2. Humor theories

Several fields of science show interest in researching humour. It was originally a part of rhetoric, however, these days the study of humour is multidisciplinary as it is considered a linguistic and a cultural phenomenon, moreover using humour per se is a unifying feature of all humanity.

A commonly accepted classification divides humor theories into three groups: (1) incongruity theories, (2) superiority / disparagement theories, and (3) release / relief theories (Attardo, 1994). Based on these theories humour arises from the *incongruity* (1) perceived between an expectation and a communicated idea. Humour processing and incongruity resolution is determined by a cognitive mechanism in the humour receiver. When realizing the incongruity laughter occurs, e.g. hearing 'chocolate milkshake' one expects a delicious chocolate based milk drink, not a bar of chocolate shaking hands with a box of milk. Or would you expect a sleeping pill to be actually sleeping? (See Fig. 1)



Figure 1. Examples of humour types. Source: BrainlessTales.com – with author's written consent

In the case of *superiority / disparagement* theory (2) a person laughs at the misfortunes of others creating a sense of superiority in the humour receiver. For instance, the American online news site, The Onion ridicules CNN by publishing a headline: "CNN Holds Morning Meeting To Decide What Viewers Should Panic About For Rest Of Day" (The Onion, 2014). A special sub-group of this category is self-disparagement when the speaker makes fun of him/herself.

*Release / relief theory* (3) is based on a release reaction given to a heightened emotional arousal which is followed by a safe or inconsequential relief. Typical examples may be sentimental television commercials including cute puppies discovering the world or toddler babies mimicking adults.

These three theories were further divided and classified by Barry and Graca (2018) who adapted the framework to television commercials and researched 2,135 YouTube recast humorous TV advertisement videos with over 50,000 views on YouTube. As a result they specified further subcategories within these theories. Present study adopts a part of their framework based on the similar features of television commercials and TED talks. First, both TV commercials and TED talks can be good representations of a culture's preferred humour. Secondly, both are thoroughly prepared, short videos and can be referred to as marketing tools for a company or a TED speaker. Minor labeling modifications are carried out for easier interpretation when explaining the sub-categories below.

(1a) Incongruity-based instances contain unexpected words, metaphors, actions, examples, visual elements, unusual pairing/personification which do not fit the context as exemplified in Fig.1.

(1b) Surprise includes a change in a course, e.g. a sudden twist in the storyline or an unexpected response.

(1c) Hyperbole (exaggeration) appears when characteristics, qualities or outcomes etc. are exaggerated or understated, e.g. a top mountaineer describing climbing an extremely dangerous mountain as a pleasant walk in a park.

(1d) **Puns**bring laughter by using words which have more than one interpretation, or different words with the same/similar sound. They are used in an incongruous context, e.g. in the case of iPhone and YouTube (see Fig.1).

(1e) **Irony**creates laughter by stating an outright contrast between the humorous instance and what the audience expects, for example a holiday-maker sending home a photo of him/herself at a sunny beach saying “Working hard.”

The described humour theories and sub-categories provide a theoretical framework for the qualitative and quantitative analysis.

### **3. TED talks and related previous studies**

TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) is a non-profit organisation and a special series of conferences founded in 1984 in USA (TED, n.d.). It is dedicated to communicate “Ideas worth spreading” through inspirational talks (TED, n.d.), in other words it is free knowledge dissemination. Based on the TED license several independent TEDx events are regularly organized outside the USA yearly. All TED talks are recorded and published online for free access to the general public. They are maximum 18 minutes long and communicate inspiring thoughts in an entertaining and memorable way. TED’s publicity is immensely growing, the most popular videos have reached more than 68 million views\*. TED speakers are carefully selected (often invited) and are prepared to give convincing talks. The target audience is diverse, from local community influential thinkers, educators, business people to virtually everybody globally. TEDx events’ target audience is mostly local community people with similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Regarding studies on TED talks so far, several aspects have been researched. Romanelli et al. (2014) compared TED talks to university lectures along numerous aspects (structure, aims, visual elements, rhetoric devices etc.) and concluded that TED talks have a high potential in motivating students, generating ideas and enhancing presentation skills. Scotto di Carlo (2013) analysed the previously described three humour theories as they are manifest in three selected TED talks. The author confirmed that TED talks are an innovative tool of popularization, and the content analysis linked the humour examples in the TED talks to theories by explaining and illustrating them.

### **4. Culture through humour – hypothesis generation**

This section sheds light on Hofstede’s cultural model and links the dimensions to humour theories in order to generate hypotheses. However, first of all, it should be mentioned that humour is a unifying feature of all cultures, which is confirmed by Alden et al. (1993), who content-analyzed more than 1600 television commercials across different cultures (US, Korean, German and Thai) and found that the incongruity resolution process was dominant within the examined sample (from 57% in Korea up to 92% in Germany). They concluded that incongruity process is a culture-free, universal humorous language. In agreement with this previous study, Hatzithomas et al. (2011) compared a sample of 12,351 print advertisements from the largest circulation magazines in two culturally rather different cultures (the UK and Greece) and found that an overwhelming majority (86% and 89% respectively) of the humorous ads were based on the incongruity – resolution process. In light of the foregoing the following hypothesis is assumed: *H1 – The researched TED talks sample will predominantly contain incongruity-based humour types.*

Hofstede’s (1984) cultural dimensions are employed to examine whether and how culture impacts humour usage in American and Hungarian TED talks. Hofstede surveyed around 117,000 IBM employees from 50 countries worldwide based on value questionnaires and identified four basic dimensions along which cultures may be similar or different. Later he added two more dimensions following further research. His first publications appeared more than 35 years ago and since then they have been validated in large cross-cultural surveys (Hoppe, 1998; Shane, 1995; Mouritzen et al., 2002, van Nimwegen, 2002; Hofstede, 2001).

Based on Hofstede’s (1984) definition of individualism/collectivism (IDV), in a high individualist culture people look after themselves and their immediate family only, whereas collectivist cultures prefer belonging to in-groups that look after them in exchange for loyalty. Collectivists tend to separate themselves from out-groups at the same time. Both the USA and Hungary score high on individualism (93 and 80 respectively on Hofstede’s scale of originally 100). Individualist cultures find disparagement of other persons/groups entertaining as opposed to collectivists that tend to identify with the disparaged person/group (Hatzithomas et al, 2011). In view of the foregoing, the second hypothesis is assumed as follows: *H2: The researched corpus will contain a higher percentage of superiority-based humour instances than release-based ones.*

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\*Robinson: Do schools kill creativity? (TED2006)

In the Hofstede cultural model power distance index (PDI) shows how much members of a certain culture can tolerate that power is distributed unevenly, i.e. in high PDI countries status, ranks, job positions, titles and other features linked to high power are important, whereas in low PDI countries there is more focus on equality between society members. The USA scores relatively low on this scale (40 out of originally 100), hence status differences are smaller, and there is less to “lose” when using self-disparagement humour (Kalliny et al., 2006). Even people of high authority and power (such as US presidents) often use self-deprecating humour to create benevolence and show equality with their voters (Sorenson, 2014). Hungary’s PDI score is higher on Hofstede’s scale (46), thus status and power-related aspects carry higher importance, hence *the US corpus is expected to have a higher ratio of self-disparagement than the Hungarian corpus (H3)*.

Both the USA and Hungary are considered masculine societies ( $MAS_{HU}= 88$  and  $MAS_{US}=62$  on Hofstede’s scale of originally 100). Hungary scores much higher on Hofstede’s masculinity/femininity dimension which represents a more competitive society and a preference for assertiveness and material rewards for success as opposed to feminine cultures where harmony, support, family and non-material rewards are of higher importance (Hofstede, 1984). Based on Barry and Graca (2018) more masculine cultures show more interest in aggressive humour, consequently *a higher percent of ‘disparaging others’ type of humour is expected in the Hungarian corpus (H4)*.

Previous research (Kalliny et al., 2006) indicates that men use more humor, in general than women. This is especially true in more masculine cultures. Hidasi (2018) analyses gender differences in humour creation and concludes that society expects men to be humour “producers” whereas women are expected to receive humour. This may be due to the inflexible role allocation between male and female participants of a masculine society, i. e. traditional roles are relatively fixed, thus men are associated with focusing on career, being the breadwinner, the “producer” in a competitive society whereas women are expected to care for family, create harmony and be the “receiver”. In this light the following hypothesis is formulated: *H5: More humour instances will be presented by male than female speakers in the Hungarian TED talk sample*.

Mulken et.al. (2005) argue that since a pun is a humorous rhetorical device, it is an effective way of giving the audience a pleasurable experience thus creating a positive attitude. Moreover, a pun can be considered a riddle and solving it ensures that the audience is at the same wavelength which creates a positive feeling towards the communicator. Similarly, prepared speeches such as TED talks are expected to contain numerous memorable puns as they can help the audience remember the message and create a positive feeling towards the speaker. Hence Hypothesis 6 *proposes that the examined corpus will contain several examples of puns (H6)*.

### III. METHODOLOGY

Present study applied a mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative content analysis based on the three humour theories (Attardo, 1994) combined with the humour typology developed by Barry and Graca (2018). The research population consists of American and Hungarian TED talks, the sample corpus of the analysis consists of randomly sampled 31 Hungarian and 31 American TED talks recorded at the official TED and TEDx standard events in 2018 (partly in 2017) and published online in 2018/2019. Non-speech performances and report-like talks were excluded from the sampling as well as dominantly foreign and/or non-native speakers in order to better focus on cultural aspects. Although the sample number may seem low, the selected 62 talks contain more than 11.5 hours (700 min) of talk-time resulting in more than 94,000 words. The 62 talks are presented by 71 speakers in total as some talks are presented by more than one speaker. The setting is in two different cultures (American and Hungarian), however, the context is very similar, the same licensed TED event. The talks include a high number of scientific results, quotes, personal stories, humorous instances and examples, thus a diverse corpus is ensured. The popularity of the sample videos measure several million views e.g. one of the highest views reached 9,567,849 views\* (as of 5 Nov 2020).

All the examined talks have been transcribed and content-analysed with ‘RQDA’, R-based Qualitative Data Analysis software (Huang, 2018) selecting all the humorous instances of the talks. This provided the basis for both the quantitative and qualitative analysis. Selecting the humorous elements did not pose any challenge since most of the time the audience’s laughter (sometimes clapping) was clearly audible in the recording. The bigger challenge was to classify each and every humorous instance into one single category detailed in the Literature Review section. The difficulty lied in the fact that some instances could be sorted into more than one category. In this case the most dominant category was selected based on the context and the speaker’s communicative intention. The different categories were then further examined by descriptive statistical indicators calculated in MS Excel and SPSS statistical software.

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\*Honnold: How I climbed a 3,000-foot vertical cliff — without ropes. (TED2018)

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 62 talks by 71 speakers examined a corpus which is more than 11.5 hours of talk-time resulting in 94,128 words as seen in Table 1. This amount equals approximately 188 single spaced, fully typed, English language pages. The total number of male and female speakers were almost equal (35 males and 36 females), the Hungarian (HU) and American (US) sub-corpora showed a similar allocation. This is probably due to TED's selection criteria of having both genders equally represented.

On average each talk had 1.14 speakers, however the standard deviation (SD) was higher in the Hungarian sup-corpus as one talk had an unusually high number of six speakers ( $SD_{HU} = .93$  and  $SD_{US} = .18$ ). The average talk time was 11.29 minutes per talk. The Hungarian (HU) talks were somewhat longer than the total average (12.26 min/talk) whereas the American (US) ones were a bit shorter (10.32 min/talk).

	Length (min)	Number of Talks	Number of Words	Number of Speakers	Male Speakers	Female Speakers	Speakers/Talk	Min/Talk
HU	380.05	31	46,962	39	20	19	1.26	12.26
US	320.07	31	47,166	32	15	17	1.03	10.32
Total/average	700.12	62	94,128	71	35	36	(ave) 1.14	(ave) 11.29

Table 1. Statistical parameters of the examined TED(x) talks

Based on the humour theories outlined in the Literature Review all the detected humour instances (N=401) were classified into one of the three theory categories. As expected incongruity-based humour was the most popular subgroup with a value of 65.59% (see Fig. 2).

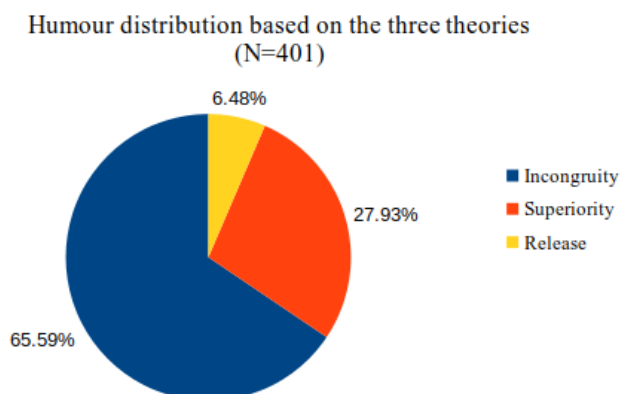


Figure 2. Humour distribution based on the three humour theories

Incongruity is a more neutral and less offensive type of humour, thus it is considered the safest one especially in an international context with a high number of unknown people in the audience such as a TED global audience. Moreover, in a scientific, intellectual and business environment cognitive humour is probably more expected than humour based on interpersonal (superiority theory) or affective mechanisms (release theory). Consequently, hypothesis 1 (H1) is supported as follows: *The researched TED talks sample predominantly contains incongruity-based humour types.*

Even though both sub-corpora include high amounts of incongruity-based humour instances (61.47% and 70.49% for HU and US respectively) they also seem to have **relatively high ratios of superiority-based** humour elements (31.65% and 23.50% for HU and US respectively) which is typical in **high individualist cultures** as cited earlier (see Fig.3). **Release theory-based** humour instances are less than 7% in the total corpus, thus Hypothesis 2 (H2) is supported as follows: *The researched corpus contains a higher percentage of superiority-based humour instances than release-based ones.*

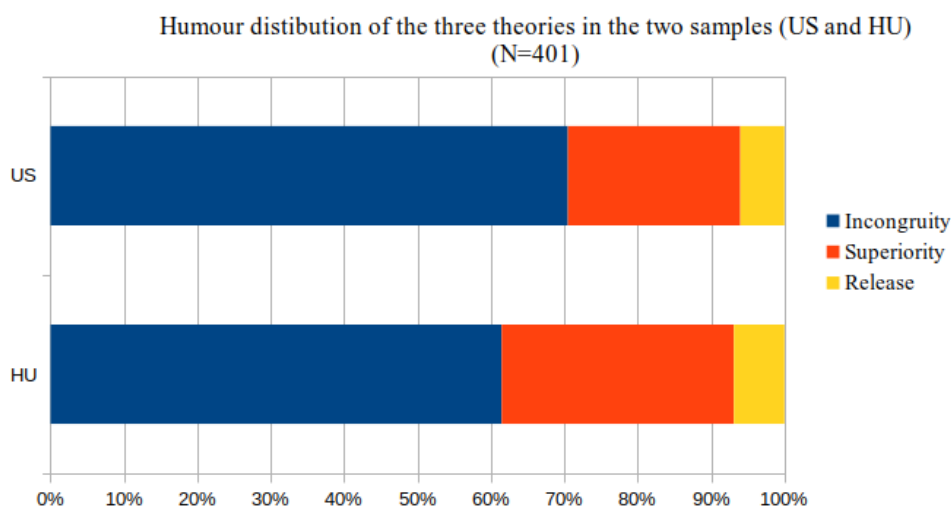


Figure 3. Humour distribution of the three theories in the two samples.

Comparing the two sub-corpora, American TED talks (US) and Hungarian TEDx talks, both have an overwhelming majority of incongruity-based humour instances as seen on Fig.3. above However, the Hungarian corpus contains a higher amount of humour instances based on superiority theory 31.65% versus 23.5% (compare the orange parts in Fig. 3). When the humorous instances are further classified (i.e. into the subcategories of ‘self-disparagement’ and ‘disparaging others’), we can see that the American corpus contains a somewhat higher ratio of self-disparagement humour (see Fig.4). However, the difference is not significant probably due to the small sample size. As a consequence hypothesis H3 saying that *the American corpus contains a higher percentage of self-disparaging humour* is only partly supported.

At the same time a remarkable difference can be seen in the ‘disparaging others’ subcategory between US and HU corpora, namely Hungarians disparaged others more than two times as often as they disparaged themselves (see Fig. 4). This may be due to the competitive nature of high masculine cultures ( $MAS_{HU}=88$  as opposed to  $MAS_{US}=62$ ). It also might be the consequence of Soviet history-based inherent collectivism that is unknown in the US culture. Collectivists feel more separated from out-groups, as a consequence out-groups may be disparaged safely. Hence hypothesis H4 assuming that *a higher percent of ‘disparaging others’ type of humour is contained in the Hungarian corpus* is accepted.

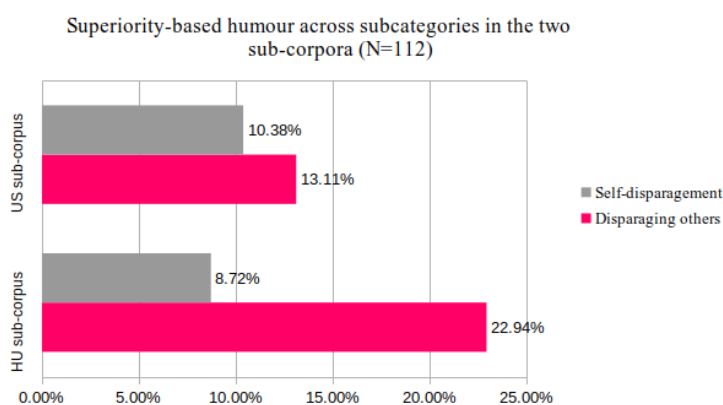


Figure 4. Superiority-based humour across the two sub-categories.

Regarding the allocation of humour instances by gender (see the left side of Fig.5), we can state that almost two times (exactly 1.83) as much humour was performed by males in the Hungarian corpus as by females. However, among the American TED speakers more female-produced humour made the audience laugh. Consequently, H5 is accepted as follows: *More humour instances are presented by male than female speakers in the Hungarian TED talk sample.*

An interesting aspect can also be detected, that is when comparing aggressive humour, i.e. the subcategory of ‘disparaging others’ across gender and country, we can see that the American corpus is more

gender balanced, meaning that males and females disparaged others at an equal frequency (see the right side of Fig. 5). However, Hungarian males disparaged others 2.5 times as often as Hungarian females. This might again be due to the high masculine feature of Hungarian culture, i.e. gender roles are fixed and men are more competitive.

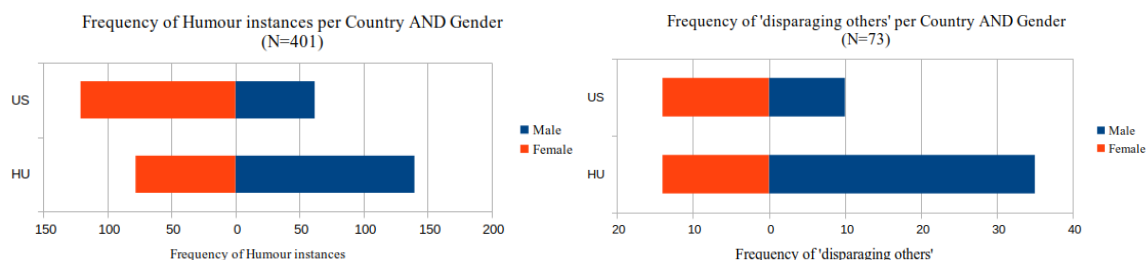


Figure 5. Gender differences in humour use (total humour and 'disparaging othes' category)

Examining incongruity-based humour subcategories on Fig. 6. (1a. Incongruity-based, 1b. Surprise, 1c. Hyperbole, 1d. Puns, 1e. Irony), we can see that most subcategories are represented in a similar ratio in the two cultures (HU and US). However, puns have an extremely low frequency in the Hungarian corpus (only 5 pieces) and are totally absent in the American corpus. This is contrary to hypothesis 6 which assumes that *the examined corpus contains several examples of puns*, thus H6 is rejected.

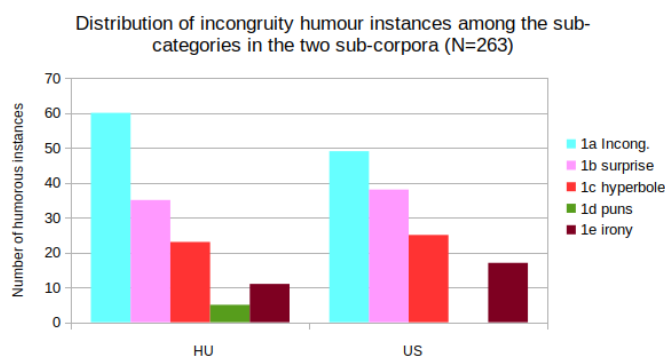


Figure 6. Incongruity-based humour across subcategories and country.

The low number of puns may be due to the fact that wordplay and puns are difficult to create and are often interpreted differently depending on the audience's culture and other cognitive skills. Moreover, it is often difficult or impossible to translate puns into another language (most TEDx talks are simultaneously interpreted into English on the spot). The American TED's audience is indisputably global, hence a possible reason why American TED talks contained no puns at all could be the risk that an international audience might not interpret it the way the speaker intends to communicate it.

However, the Hungarian TEDx talks contained five puns, which may be due to the fact that these talks are mostly viewed by a local, Hungarian audience with the same cultural background and linguistic skills, thus puns are less risky to use. An interesting - and surprisingly enough - international example of the few puns in the Hungarian corpus is demonstrated below by an interpreter TED speaker. She based her pun on knowing (or at least hoping) that the audience is familiar with Obi-Wan Kenobi's famous quote in the Star Wars series: "May the force be with you", thus she added the below goodbye sentence to her talk given on May 4, 2017 in Budapest: „*May the 4th be with you*” (Bozsik, 2017).

The following qualitative analysis summarizes further results and demonstrates a number of humorous instances as examples of the investigated corpus. When conducting a qualitative research on the talks it is interesting to explore whether humour frequency correlates with certain topics. Examining the top humorous talks and their topics in the two sub-corpora, the following themes come up among the Hungarian talks: aging as a problem in society, Hungarian (pessimistic) national character, interpersonal communication, social media and its effects on people, critical thinking, leaving one's comfort-zone and perseverance as a key to success. As for the most humorous US talks, the topics are as follows: human relationships, biologic/natural processes, mountain-climbing, global problems such as overpopulation and climate change, social media, communication. As we can see the topics are diverse and there is not much overlapping or correlation.

Below is an illustration of a humorous example from the most viewed\* 2018TED talk. It was presented by a mountain-climber ascending a 3000-foot vertical rock without ropes who retells the story of his dangerous challenge. The speaker ironically describes the event as follows: *“It felt as comfortable and natural as a walk in the park, which is what most folks were doing in Yosemite that day”* (Honnold, 2018)

As a counter-test of the listing the topics of the most humorous talks, I examined whether “sad” talks contained any humour instances. Talks considered to be sad were about the death of a close relative, coping with our own diseases and upcoming death, school massacre in Florida, oppression of women – gender issues, how to overcome depression etc. Surprisingly, they also contained a few (0-5) humorous instances. As a consequence, we can state that the topics of humour are rather diverse which suggests that topic choice and humour frequency do not necessarily correlate, hence almost any topic may include humorous instances. To demonstrate it, here is an example of a US speaker talking about his mourning grief while his wife was slowly dying of cancer virtually in his arms. After her death the speaker received several marriage proposals from unknown women based on an article published by her late wife earlier. The speaker recited his experience: *“I got this letter from a woman reader who read the article, declaring, ‘I will marry you when you are ready’ (...) How could I say NO to that proposal?”* (Rosenthal, 2018).

When scrutinizing the “victims” of disparagement, we can see that Hungarians in the sample mostly ridiculed pessimistic Hungarians, people addicted to their phones, people constantly posting on social media, oppressors of women, office clerks, lazy and unhealthy people. In the below example Hungarian pessimism is disparaged in a talk presented by a TED speaker: *“...and I want to talk about this special Hungarian added unhappiness which at the same time makes us so happy. It is just hidden to foreigners”* (Csepeli, 2018 – translated by the author).

Analysing the US corpus American speakers made fun of office clerks, narrow-minded intellectuals, people addicted to their phones and to social media, people constantly shopping and boring meeting organizers. A US speaker disparaged her own life being over-controlled by her smart devices. She said: *“Can you imagine even my toothbrush had a password?”* (Hill, 2018).

Social media addicts seem to be popular disparagement “victims”. The following quote exemplifies ridiculing people posting photos on social media and forgetting to enjoy the wonders of nature at the same time. The speaker is a professional photographer and ridicules a person who turns his back to a highly interesting moment to take a selfie picture. The screen shows a picture of a boy smiling into the camera on a boat when a whale emerges from the water in the background. The speaker adds: *“and the most important things do not happen TO us... but BEHIND us”* (Kallo, 2018 – translated by the author).

As we can see disparagement topics may be diverse and may be targeted at any person, any nation or group of people or characteristics. However, TED’s ultimate aim is to call attention to the problematic phenomena, hence invite people to solve the targeted problems.

## V. CONCLUSION

Summarizing the presented study the results indicate that there are both differences and similarities between the American and Hungarian culture examined through humour usage in TED talks. The concluded managerial implications may be valuable for all participants working, living, studying or travelling in an international environment.

First of all, we can confirm the finding of Alden et al. (1993) that even though the two investigated cultures (and basically any two cultures) may differ from each other in several aspects, incongruity-based humour is the most universal and culture-free type of humour, thus it is the most neutral and safest to use in an international environment and for a global audience. As an addition to earlier research, the present study concludes that humour is not restricted to certain themes and topics, thus almost any topic, setting or context may include humour.

Secondly, superiority-based humour is favoured in the two investigated countries which are both high individualist cultures. However, we can confirm the finding of Kalliny et al. (2006) that the special subcategory, i.e. self-disparagement (self-deprecating humour) more often works in lower power distance cultures, where exposing one’s vulnerabilities does not risk losing status or respect. In a high power distance country it may not be considered appropriate. Hence, Americans (and other low PDI culture members) are not advised to apply self-deprecating humour in order to show equality with locals in a high PDI culture as they risk losing respect.

Thirdly, collectivist countries feel loyal to their in-groups, but are likely to disparage out-groups increasing the feeling of belonging together with the audience. Consequently, in an international cooperation a foreign manager may easily become the ‘victim’ of disparaging humour as he/she is a member of an out-group.

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\*9,567,849 views as of 5 Nov 2020



It may be best handled by agreeing with the audience (locals) and maybe trying to find another context where they both can be in-groups, for example the company they both work for, or a team working for a common goal.

Fourth, wordplay and puns are not advised to use in an international setting since they may be difficult to interpret, or it may not make sense in another culture if the foreign language knowledge and other linguistic skills of the audience are not at the appropriate level. Solving puns requires certain experience and flexibility in cognitive skills. Instead, incongruity-based humour is suggested such as surprise, hyperbole or irony.

As for limitations, the study is exploratory and is based on a relatively small sample, however, the results offer some valuable insights. It may open doors to further research aiming at validating the results. Further limitation is that the qualitative analysis is based on a single author evaluation regarding the dominant humour category, in other words humour instances that may be sorted into a multiple or combined categories may be evaluated differently by other researchers. This risk is attempted to be reduced by clear definitions of humour categories and subtypes so that later studies may carry out identical classification. Thirdly, the present study focuses mostly on incongruity and superiority theories, however, release-based humorous instances may be researched in more details to find cultural differences.

Further research at this special field of international social interactions can lead to a fuller understanding of humour usage in different cultures, thus it can have a positive effect on communication and on a peaceful and fruitful coexistence in an international environment.

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