

HUMOUR THAT DIVIDES, HUMOUR THAT UNITES: AMERICAN SITCOMS. A CASE IN POINT

Ria Snellinx

Hasselt University, Belgium , ria.snellinx@uhasselt.be

Abstract:

As globalisation has promoted cross-access to different media, local networks are flooded with programmes from all over the world. Particularly the United States are playing an important role in distributing their local products worldwide. As a result, American series are becoming increasingly popular.

*Starting out from the popular American sitcom *Sex and the City*, this paper aims to analyse the kind(s) of humour that make the series so popular with a large, international audience. Between 1998 and 2004, SATC was a blockbuster TV series that chained large audiences (mainly women, but also men) to American, Asian, Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and European TV sets. The series dealt humorously, frankly and directly with the subject matter in the title, which caused mixed reactions to the – by some dubbed “racy” – TV show, which ranged from rave to condescension to total rejection, to academic interest: a conference on the series was held at Princeton University.*

In the first part of this paper, the kinds of humour that are used in the series will be analysed. A clear distinction between linguistic and sociolinguistic features on the one hand, and multimodal features that give rise to humorous situations on the other, will be made. The second part consists of an analysis of the effect that the humour used in the series may have on different cultures.

*Richard Alexander’s *Aspects of Verbal Humour in English*, Geert Hofstede’s work on cultural dimensions and Theo Van Leeuwen’s works on critical discourse analysis and multimodality will make up the theoretical background of this paper.*

Keywords: *Television-verbal; Situational humour; Sociolinguistics; Cultural differences; Multimodality.*