MA Thesis

MA Intercultural Communication

"We're Irish dont you know": a qualitative analysis of Irish stereotypes in the YouTube videos of the Irish comedy group *Foil, Arms & Hog*

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Abstract

Based on a long history of studies on negative attitudes towards stereotypes, this study examines the construction and challenge of Irish stereotypes through language in the YouTube videos of *Foil, Arms & Hog*, a comedy group from Ireland, and the audiences' reaction towards these. In particular, I was interested on the audiences' evaluation, authentication and denaturalization expressed within comments, connecting ideas of identity construction, role alignment, and belonging as well as the role of humour in stereotypes. Moreover, I wanted to find out how language was used in the construction and challenge of Irish stereotypes in the comedy group's videos. By means of employing basic quantitative and qualitative analysis methods, I analysed the use of language in the transcripts taken from the Top 5 videos within the group's *Irish themed* playlist. Additionally, I collected the accompanying 790 comments, counting and analysing them qualitatively to find emerging themes and elements that could help in answering the questions. I found that specific IrE (Irish English) linguistic features, such as hedges, were used to construct and challenge Irish stereotypes in the videos. Furthermore, in the comments, the audience evaluated the performances more positively than negatively as well as authenticated them more rather than denaturalizing them. In contrast to existing literature, I argue that *Foil, Arms & Hog's* comedy on YouTube has the potential to reformulate the negative attitudes towards Irish stereotypes by means of creating an environment for both the comedy group and audience to perform identities through their interactions – this could give additional insights on the dynamic nature of identification.

Key words: Irish stereotypes, identity, YouTube, humour

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1. Introduction

1.1 Topic

> researchers – with their own means – should draw attention to the fact that stereotypes act like schemas and that they enclose both the agent and the target of the stereotyping process into a frame from which it is very difficult to break out. (Ajtony, 2015: 58).

Stereotypes play a crucial role in social interaction, for they are part of our social life. They can help to make sense of the world, in other words simplify human interaction, because they facilitate understanding of oneself and the other. However, most of the time stereotypes are seen as something negative, as something from which it "is very difficult to break out" (Ajtony, 2015: 58), as something that cannot be avoided, consequently leading to prejudices and intolerance (cf. Lebedko, 2013).

In today's world, online interaction has been considerably increasing. Social media, for example YouTube or Facebook, facilitate human interaction on a broad scale, providing almost everyone with the necessary resources to communicate at any time and place via videos and comments. Thus, social media has also had a global impact on spreading positive and negative stereotypes. When it comes to the study of national stereotypes, the role of media representations plays another important part, because they might work as templates for those who have not been in contact with members of the group portrayed. And once they have been represented, they are less likely to change (Cinnirella, 1997).

Yet is this really the case with all stereotypes? There are, of course, also positive (e.g. national) stereotypes. Although everyone is described in an ideal and similar way (Holliday, 2017), pointing out that, for example, all 'Dutch are tolerant' (cf. Ketelaar, 1999) could be regarded as something positive. However, positive stereotypes seem not to be as manifested in social life and interaction as negative stereotypes (cf. Lebedko, 2013). In other words, the

focus often lies on the potential threat of stereotyping, reducing people to less than what they are, which can lead to racism, essentialisms, sexism etc (cf. Holliday et al., 2017).

When it comes to national (or ethnic) stereotypes, Irish stereotypes are peculiar for two reasons. Firstly, thinking of St. Patrick's Day celebrated worldwide, it is said that on this particular day "everyone wants to be Irish" (*The Irish Times*, 2010). This desire to be Irish, in other words to identify with Irish people, is strongest during this festival. Moreover, the Irish are generally liked when looking at, for example, the recent events of the UEFA Euro 2016 where Irish fans were awarded an honorary medal for their friendly behavior. However, when looking at various blogs of lists of stereotypes, it is interesting to see that most of them tend to share different views: the Irish are drinking a lot; the Irish are ginger; the Irish are savages; the Irish are very religious; in particular Catholic; the Irish are particularly friendly; the Irish don't speak English (Phelan, 2017).

Yet, what does identification with Irish people entail? Is there something like an Irish identity? And what are, in general, Irish stereotypes? These questions highlight the main interest of this study.

In this research, I will examine Irish stereotypes in YouTube videos uploaded by the Irish comedy group *Foil, Arms & Hog* as well as the audiences' attitudes and reactions in the comments section. Thus, this study will position itself within the imagological approach, a scientific approach which includes "theories of cultural or national [...] stereotypes" (ten Thije, 2016: 584). This context serves as a starting point for examining YouTube videos uploaded by the Irish comedy group *Foil, Arms & Hog* and their humorous portrayal of Irish stereotypes. The audiences' reaction further plays an important role, for these could give additional information on identification in the nation sense, i.e. identification with 'Irishness'.

1.2 Relevance

Within the imagological approach, national stereotypes "continue to be highly recognisable" (Chew III, 2006: 182). Defined as "stored beliefs about characteristics of a group of people"

(Bar-Tal, 1997: 491), stereotypes are often described as static and inert (cf. Dervin, 2011). Moreover, it is argued that these stored beliefs can only be discarded through breaking them.

The aim of this research, however, is to deconstruct and reveal stereotypes instead of breaking or challenging them (cf. Beller & Leersen, 2007; Dervin, 2011). By exposing and analysing stereotypes, we can find out who we are. In other words, research into stereotypes is an integral part of intercultural communication, for it is interesting to see "how stereotypes are created and co-constructed and what they tell us about people who resort to them"; therefore, "working on stereotypes allows researchers […] to reflect on the notion of identity" (Dervin, 2011: 7). Thus, when examining Irish stereotypes uploaded by Irish comedians, we can reflect on identification with 'Irishness'. Therefore, we can discuss the interplay and role of authentication of the Irish comedians displaying Irish stereotypes and the audiences' reaction towards these.

So far, most studies have investigated Irish stereotypes in literature (Beller & Leersen, 2007), film and television (Furkó, 2013; Ajtony, 2015; Goff, 2017; González-Casademont, 2017). These studies have mostly highlighted that certain Irish stereotypes were either represented negatively or constructed in a negative way. Moreover, what is missing from research into Irish stereotypes is the investigation of those in new media. This area is particularly important, for it provides the field of intercultural communication with "new areas of research and theorizing" (Poutiainen, 2014: 4).

This study aims at outlining additional perspectives on the current research of the use of stereotypes, within social media, in particular YouTube. In recent years, studies on YouTube have increased, yet "very few of them empirically examined YouTube videos from the perspective of its potential as a new type of alternative media" (Guo & Harlow, 2014: 282). Moreover, as Guo and Harlow (2014) highlight, "audience interaction (e.g. [...] comments) [is] […] an integral part of YouTube" (282).

This serves as a starting point for this study, which investigates Irish stereotypes in YouTube videos uploaded by the Irish comedy group *Foil, Arms & Hog* and the audiences' reaction towards these. The YouTube channel of the comedy group was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, the Irish comedy group uploads short sketches about different topics on YouTube weekly. By now, the group has become one of the most well known comedy groups in Ireland, which might derive from their social media presence. Second, *Foil, Arms & Hog* present an interesting group for investigation as they say about them that they are "an Irish sketch group", explicitly stating on their YouTube channel: "we're Irish dont you know". Moreover, according to Andrew Lynch (2016) in the article 'Meet comedy's three-headed monster – Foil, Arms & Hog put the 'ho ho ho' in Christmas', the comedy group has an "intrinsic Irishness" as they "made a name for themselves by writing sketches that are proudly and distinctly Irish" (n.p.). By choosing to deliberately perform sketches that are "distinctly Irish", the comedy group's material makes for an interesting study.

After meeting at university, the three group members, Sean Finegan (Foil), Conor Mc Kenna (Arms) and Sean Flanagan (Hog) formed their comedy group, or as they call it *Irish sketch group*. The group performs on "TV, radio, the stage and YouTube" (*Foil, Arms & Hog* – About). To them, YouTube has had a major impact on their status and successfulness as comedians, because according to Conor McKenna, the video platform gives them the opportunity to share their ideas:

> [y]ou can put your stuff out there. You don't need to censor it, nobody's telling you what to write. You have full creative control (Interview with Tom Faber, 2016).

Therefore, analysing their YouTube channel is particularly interesting with regards to the previously mentioned importance of research into new media, on the one hand, and the groups' "intrinsic Irishness" (Lynch, 2016: n.p.), on the other.

In conclusion, this research aims at outlining emic ("studied within the cultural and linguistic system" (ten Thije, 2016: 584)) perspectives on the study of Irish stereotypes.

1.3 Outline

In the following section I present the theoretical framework, in which I give a brief outline of recent findings in identity studies, stereotypes as well as the function of humour in stereotypes. This section ends with some background on the video sharing platform YouTube and presents the research questions and sub questions. Within the method section, I provide information on the corpus and method chosen for the purpose of this study, which comprises five videos uploaded by *Foil, Arms & Hog* on YouTube and the accompanying comments. In the results, I highlight the findings based on the analysis of the videos and comments. Finally, I will come to the discussion, where I connect findings to theoretical insights. In the last section, the conclusion as well as limitations and recommendations for further research are highlighted.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Identity

In the socio-political situation of today's globalised world and the "age of 'crisis of belonging'", questions of identity "have never mattered more than with current complex practices of intercultural communication" (Dervin, 2011: 3). In contrast to previous theories on identity that focused on its stability tied to fixed categories, current approaches to identity and identification will be outlined through highlighting the dual and dynamic relationship of sameness and difference in identity construction, as well as underscoring these with references to role alignment and belonging (Bucholtz & Hall 2004, 2005; Agha 2005; Cole & Pellicer 2012; Goebel, to appear).

Defined as the "social positioning of self and other" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005: 586), identity is performed in social interaction depending on context and situation. This

performance, moreover, is intentional and based on conscious decisions, which occur in everyday situations and conversations. Thus, by performing identities people create an environment instead of simply reflecting on it. This performance is also often done in an exaggerated way, for example, in humorous situations and/or comedy. In other words, identity is always constructed through *acting* and *doing* instead of simply *being* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004).

Furthermore, identity construction is connected to the use of language. Previously, it has been assumed that languages as monolithic entities with fixed boundaries reflect people's identities. This is not the case, however. In fact, only through language and its permeable character are identities constructed (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). The use of language in performing identity links to another important concept: role alignment (Agha, 2005).

Whenever speakers, in interactions, perform identities they adjust to multiple roles; therefore, they express their identities through language. By adjusting to different roles, speakers can evaluate roles either positively (symmetric role alignment) or negatively (asymmetric role alignment). Negative evaluations, in turn, might consist of stereotypic values (Agha, 2005; Cole & Pellicer, 2012). For example, in media representations, when audiences also respond to these, they "exhibit a form of role alignment – whether symmetric or asymmetric, whether expressing praise or contempt – vis-à-vis the figures to which they respond" (Agha, 2005: 52). Moreover, through evaluating, speakers recognize these roles, which in turn also "displays membership of the group" (Goebel, to appear: 32). This process is called *belonging* (Agha, 2005; Goebel, to appear).

According to Bucholtz and Hall (2004), the creation of identity occurs within three dialectic pairs of tactics, the Tactics of Intersubjectivity: Adequation and distinction, Authentication and denaturalization, Authorization and illegimitation. As the aim of this research lies on the second pair of tactics, the focus will be on the dynamic pair of Authentication and denaturalization. Authentication refers to the production of an identity that

is "credible" by highlighting "the agentive processes whereby claims to realness are asserted"; for example, "language contributes to nationalist identity formation by providing a sense of cohesion and unity for its speakers" through creating a way of "belonging to the nation-state" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004: 385). Denaturalization explains the "incredible" production of an identity, in which identities "are separated from claims to 'realness'" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004: 385). In other words, denaturalization aims at deconstructing the claims that have been made through authentication.

2.2 Stereotypes

Today, one of the most disputed concepts is stereotypes (Lebedko, 2013). There are various definitions across different disciplines all aiming to describe the nature of stereotypes, their origin, formation, impact, and change, among others. The most basic understanding of stereotypes was first introduced in the 1920s and has been adapted several times (Lebedko, 2013). Since then, there have been various definitions which often share a common denominator yet also vary in certain respects.

For example, in the field of social psychology, stereotypes are defined as "stored beliefs about characteristics of a group of people" (Bar-Tal, 1997: 491). These "stored beliefs" are formed, held and changed by individuals, but are essentially given meaning in group context (Bar-Tal, 1997). The extent to which an individual attaches significance to a group he/she belongs to is defined as *social identification.* Social identification shapes feelings, behaviours and social perceptions. The stronger your social identification is, the stronger you identify yourself as part of an *ingroup.* The overlap between self and group emerges through assimilation of the self to the ingroup's prototype. This process is called *auto-stereotyping* (Veelen et al., 2016). Nevertheless, also within an ingroup there can be differences; in general, the

> smaller the group, the more likely we are to create stereotypes based on what we
> consider the average or typical member to be like. The larger the group, the more

likely we are to base our stereotype on the group members with whom we have interacted (Gudykunst, 2004: 119).

When it comes to national groups, for example, which are "large-scale social categories [that] typically encompass millions of individuals" (Cinnirella, 1997: 49), national stereotypes are even more likely to include diverse characteristics. People, then, tend to have more diverse as well as multiple stereotypes about their own national groups and are likely to think of those as more positive.

Another definition within the field of social psychology has been introduced by Marco Cinnirella (1997), stating that stereotypes are "belief systems which associate attitudes, behaviours and personality characteristics with members of a social category" (37: italics in original omitted). Both definitions highlighted above describe the main elements of stereotypes; they are assumptions about typical features of groups of people. The question is: why do people even stereotype? Cinnirella (1997) argues that one of the reasons for this is the sheer influx of information, which is almost impossible to process for the human mind. In other words, "there are simply too many individuals in our social world for our cognitive apparatus to be able to construe every individual as different and unique to every other" (Cinnirella 1997, 37).

So far, stereotypes have been regarded as preliminarily negative. It is argued, for example, that stereotypes can be harmful, because they reject the uniqueness of the individual, creating "self-fulfilling prophecies" (Gudykunst, 2004: 122). The potential harm of stereotypes is further highlighted by Furkó (2014) who focuses on the definition of stereotypes in cross-cultural communication. He claims that "stereotyping refers to the process whereby conversational partners extend negative impressions of their interlocutor to the social group and/or speech community their interlocutor is ostensibly a member of" (126). Holliday et al. (2017) further claim that

many argue that it is natural to form stereotypes, and that they indeed help us to understand 'foreign cultures' – that they act as a template, or as an ideal type,

against which we can measure the unknown. We disagree with this view. One reason is that we do not behave sufficiently rationally [...] to be able to work with such templates objectively. A major reason for this is that stereotypes are often infected by *prejudice*, which in turn leads to *Othering* (26, italics in original).

So, stereotypes can derive from belief without basis and thus lead to reducing others to less than what they are.

I disagree with the above mentioned general tendency to view stereotypes as something entirely negative by pointing out that

'this liberal distaste for stereotyping was held by many social scientists and reinforced by the cultural emphasis on personal uniqueness [...] [which is a] characteristic of the individualist societies where most research into stereotypes is conducted' (Smith & Bond, 1998 cited in Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009: 42).

According to Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009), Smith's and Bond (1998) statement is "an observation which can be viewed as a more general warning about the problems which can be caused by the culture-centredness of much research" (42).

Thus, although stereotypes have often been referred to as negative, they are not "inevitably irrational, harmful, or pejorative" (Cinnirella, 1997: 37). There can also be positive stereotypes, describing for example a group of people as tolerant or hard-working. Here it is important to state that those categories can vary and that they can be valued positively or negatively among different groups of people and/or individuals.

Furthermore, stereotypes help people to make sense of the world around them and to categorise different behaviours and patterns according to "stored beliefs". These beliefs do not necessarily lead to racism, sexism, etc. As already highlighted, stereotypes can also be positive and most importantly, they can also change. Although they are "often described as being static, limited and inert" (Dervin, 2011: 6), I argue that stereotypes have the potential to develop and transform as well as to connect groups and facilitate (intercultural) communication by providing a set of various tools, which will be elaborated on in the findings. Whether or not these tools are applied depends on context and the individual involved.

2.3 Irish stereotypes

A main focus of this research is Irish stereotypes. This subchapter aims at outlining, in brief, recent findings on the study of Irish stereotypes across various fields. In general, the investigation of Irish stereotypes has been most prevalent in film and television (Furkó, 2013; Ajtony, 2015; Goff, 2017; González-Casademont, 2017). However, it must be noted that these findings are not exhaustive and only shortly elaborated on.

Either Irish stereotypes were analysed in a broad sense or through focusing on more specific ones, for example, Irish English stereotypes. Furkó (2013), for instance, examined common Irish English (IrE) stereotypes and their representation in movies by focusing on pragmatic features of Irish English. His findings include that the, for example, predominant use of hedges (fillers such as *like, now, you know*) can be seen as a contributing factor to the assumption that indirectness is a feature of IrE (cf. Vaughan & Clancy, 2011). Another study that focused on pragmatic markers in Irish English, for example, concluded that "the use of conversational understatements, hedges, minimalizations [...], in-group identity markers and conventional optimism are particularly salient aspects of politeness in Ireland" (Kallen, 2005 cited in Barron & Schneider, 2005: 4).

González-Casademont (2017), for example, focused on the representation of the highly stereotypical representation of *Irish drinking culture on the screen* linking it to its persistence in Irish tourism campaigns, Irish and international movies, and literature.

Studies that focused on the representation of Irish stereotypes in films in relation to the use of humour highlighted that irony is often used in an exaggerated way to represent them in literature and television (Ajtony, 2015). The humorous approach towards the portrayal of stereotypes has various functions: to "entertain[...] the audience" and "to direct viewers' attention at the ironic" (Ajtony, 2015: 58). Thus, it can be stated that the role of humour in stereotypic performances plays an important part. This will be elaborated on in more detail in the next subsection.

2.4 Stereotypes and the function of humour

Humour, in its essence, can be regarded as central for human interaction. It can be defined as a "quintessentially social phenomenon. Jokes and other humorous utterances are a form of communication that is usually shared in social interaction" (Kuipers, 2008: 361). Thus, humour varies among different groups of people, but also among individuals. Moreover, it depends on the content, context, and situation whether or not jokes, sketches, etc. are perceived as amusing.

According to Bleicher (2003), humour plays an important role in media, for example television, not only to entertain, but also to critically reflect upon various representations of social groups. When it comes to the role and function of humour and stereotypes, one can see that those two concepts are often intertwined, creating blurred boundaries for what is accepted in society. Acceptance, in turn, is related to familiarity; so, the more we accept something as familiar, i.e. a joke or comedy sketch, the more we can laugh about it. Therefore, humour can also be seen as cultural phenomenon, because only in sharing similar views on what is familiar, can we accept it. In other words,

> [in] using stereotypes, the humorist must be very careful first to make sure that the stereotypes he is using really is a stereotype that is immediately recognizable by the majority of the audience (Triezenberg, 2008: 538).

National stereotypes are often the content of jokes and are also often used by comedians as an important way of representing the 'other'. When it comes to groups of people, sharing laughter is a way of sharing similarities. Using stereotypes in humour supports groups and helps to contextualize 'the Other', to relieve tensions as well as to reduce differences between but also within groups, and to increase the sense of self-esteem of individuals and groups (cf. Hoffmann et al., 2008).

2.5 YouTube

The free social media site YouTube was founded in 2005. Within a year after its first introduction, YouTube was purchased by Google for $ 1.65 million because of its rapid

growth and increase in value. Since then, YouTube has become the most influential video-sharing platform in the social media business (Caliandro & Gandini, 2017) and, in 2015, it was ranked third most influential social media site after Google and Facebook (Benson, 2017). Thus, among various other video-sharing platforms, YouTube has been the only one most welcomed by the public because of its variety in content (Burgess & Green, 2009).

YouTube consists of a variety of tools for users when subscribing to the platform. First, they subscribe to it "by creating a profile – more precisely, a 'channel' – through which their videos can be viewed" (Caliandro & Gandini 2017: 42-43). One of the key features of YouTube is the possibility to comment underneath the videos uploaded, creating a unique and active environment for communication.

Although YouTube and its content have been regarded as simple and comical, it has the potential to contribute to the discussion of identity construction (Guo & Lee, 2013; Guo & Harlow, 2014; Ho, 2016). So "even with some comedic, satirical or caricatured performances, narratives and responses can prompt serious […] identity management in the form of exchanges and comments among YouTube users" (Ho, 2016: 3). Moreover, this is crucial as humorous videos are most popular (Guo & Harlow, 2014). This is particularly relevant to the current study, in which stereotypes and identity construction in connection to the function of humour are investigated in more detail.

Research questions and sub questions

The subsections of the theoretical framework aim at outlining the various crucial insights which comprise this research. In light of the findings outlined above, the following main and sub questions (research questions RQ (1) and RQ (2), as well as sub questions) can be formulated:

> **RQ (1): How is language used to construct and challenge Irish stereotypes in the YouTube videos of *Foil, Arms & Hog*?**

RQ (2): How do audiences evaluate, authenticate or denaturalize the performance of Irish stereotypes in the YouTube videos of *Foil, Arms & Hog*?
Sub question 1: What are common stereotypes about the Irish?
Sub question 2: What role does humour play in the construction of stereotypes?

These questions are at the centre of this study. In the next chapter, the corpus and method chosen are described.

3. Corpus

When selecting social media data in quantitative and qualitative research, it is important to highlight the individual steps that led to the material chosen for analysis (Page et al., 2014).

To increase the coherence of the research, the focus lied on one specific social media platform, YouTube. The video sharing platform has been successful in recent years, representing a valuable environment, which is open to qualitative (Caliandro & Gandini, 2017) and quantitative research (Page et al., 2014).

The lists with numbers including subscribers, views, and comments presented below (see Table A and B) were selected from the same day, 03.03.2018. The limited time period allows the researcher to focus on a specific number and not get lost in the fast-changing and dynamic world of YouTube.

The nationality of the comedy group chosen was another important criterion for this research, as all of them are Irish. *Foil, Arms & Hog*s YouTube channel was first introduced in 2008; it has a total of 22,823,305 views, 151,010 subscribers, 212 videos, and 14 playlists (see Table A) (for full list of playlist see appendix (I)), which makes them one of the most influential Irish comedians on YouTube. In terms of videos chosen, a two step approach, which is outlined below, led to the final number of five videos for analysis.

Name	Channel (Publication date)	Subscribers	Views	Playlists	Videos
Foil, Arms & Hog (Sean Finegan, Conor McKenna, Sean Flanagan)	26.10.2008	151.010	22.823.305	14	212

Table A YouTube channel of Foil Arms & Hog

Firstly, the YouTube channel of *Foil, Arms & Hog* was closely investigated by looking at the various video playlists and gathering information about the channel as well as a description of the group. The playlists, for example, already present the viewer with short but informative titles. *Foil, Arms & Hog* also provide a short description about them on their channel, including statements on their tasks: "we work out of an Office in Dublin, where we write, perform, film and edit our YouTube sketches, as seen in our 'Office Sketches' playlist" and on reasons for choosing YouTube to broadcast their videos: "we started our Youtube [sic.] channel in order to figure out how to be funny in front of a camera".

The next step included the collection of videos that specifically contained themes related to the word *Irish* to generate the population, in other words, the ideal data for analysis (cf. Page et al, 2014). This presented itself as an easier task, for the comedy group has one collection of videos called 'Sketches with an Irish Theme' with the subtitle 'We're Irish don't you know'. This playlist includes 18 videos, has 29.243 views (03.03.2018), and the last video was uploaded on 17.06.2016 (for full list of 18 videos, including views, see appendix (II)). Thus, this playlist was chosen to be analysed, as it was essential to find those videos related to the theme *Irish*. Additionally, the comedy group itself identified these videos as *Irish*, which can be regarded as an important factor for the research itself.

Next, those 18 videos were closely analysed, by opening each video as provided by the playlist and collecting information on views and comments. By choosing the Top 5 videos (see Table B), in terms of views, I wanted to focus on the most popular ones, in other words

those with the most audience interaction to be able to answer RQ (2). Moreover, as Guo and Harlow (2014) highlight, "analysing videos with the most audience interaction helps to understand whether their content has the potential as a new source of information exchange" (287). The five videos chosen comprise the material for analysis, the sample for this research (cf. Page et al., 2014). These five videos have a total amount of 1,803,691 views and 790 comments. Here, it is important to point out that each video of *Foil, Arms & Hog* ends with a short update on their next shows and tours. Moreover, they ask viewers to subscribe to their channels, like their videos and/or visit other channels, to generate followers. These parts were deliberately excluded in the analysis because the main focus was on the sketches itself (see Table B column Length (Length of sketch).

	Title	Views	Comments	Publication Date	Date of Retrieval	Length (Length of sketch)
1	How to speak Dublin	779.209	295	03.12.2015	03.03.2018	3:04 min. (2:05 min.)
2	Never Take an Irish Person Literally	408.710	162	19.11.2015	03.03.2018	2:26 min. (2:02 min.)
3	A Kerryman Gives Directions	287.122	172	11.02.2015	03.03.2018	0:58 min. (0:58 min.)
4	An Irish Intervention	164.955	87	26.11.2015	03.03.2018	2:42 min. (2:42 min.)
5	Renting in the City	163.695	74	27.03.2015	03.03.2018	1:53 min. (1:46 min)

Table B Sample of YouTube videos for analysis

In the following, short descriptions of the five videos are provided to give an overview on their content and which stereotypes they represent.

Sketch Number 1, *How to Speak Dublin*, is described by *Foil, Arms & Hog* as "a class for foreign students in speaking the Dublin lingo". The video shows a Dublin Language School with one teacher and five "foreign" students. The teacher gives a lesson on how to learn "Dublish" (Dublin English, a variety of Irish English), including how to change first names and how to pronounce Dublin English idiomatic expressions. He also introduces a list of Dublin English pronouns. All these features are represented in a stereotypical way through the use of the northern Dublin English accent which is further reinforced by the appearance of the teacher (Northern Dublin English is usually associated with a primitive appearance).

The video *Never Take an Irish Person Literally,* described by *Foil, Arms & Hog* as "what happens when Irish Slang and sarcasm [sic.] taken Literally", features a businessman from outside Ireland, who visits his company's Dublin office. In the dialogue between him and the employee of the company, from Ireland, the businessman is confused by various statements the employee makes. In the end, he is even more bewildered by these statements and they depart not knowing what they wanted in the first place. The stereotypical performance through the use of various expressions considered to be commonly used in Irish English is reinforced through references to Irish slang words and indirectness.

In *A Kerryman Gives Directions*, which follows the group's statement of "what happens when you ask for directions in rural Ireland", a man dressed as a medieval character on a horse asks another man dressed poorly for directions to a place called Mayo. This person then tells him in a very detailed as well as confusing way how to get there. In the end, the man on the horse leaves frustrated exclaiming that he loathes Ireland. This sketch takes on the stereotypical performance of a person from Kerry which is enhanced through the use of his accent, his appearance, and his recitation of a GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association: responsible for Gaelic games in Ireland) sports commentary. Moreover, his references of agriculture enhance the common stereotype of a "rural Ireland".

Video number 4 from the list, *An Irish Intervention*, follows the group's description of "an intervention for a son who has a drinking problem...". The sketch is comprised of a family gathered together in a living room discussing the "drinking problem" of the youngest family member. The mother is desperate after finding out that her son kept a water bottle in his room realising that he does not drink alcohol. They discuss the importance of alcohol, with which the son disagrees. Although they seem to find consensus, the son is expelled from the family. This sketch takes on the common stereotype of the *Irish drunkard* with various references towards the importance of alcohol in Ireland.

The last video of the five chosen, *Renting in the City*, is described by the group as "a video about what its [sic.] like to rent in the City". In this sketch, we see two men, a real estate agent and an interested party, standing in a very small room and discussing the property. The rent for the room increases considerably the longer they have the conversation. Moreover, suddenly another person appears on screen that already lives there. In the end, the man who is interested decides to take the apartment and the real estate agent asks for a long list of requests, including the Junior Certificate results (states whether the student successfully completed the junior cycle of secondary education). As a deposit, the real estate agent chops off the man's hand. In this sketch, the stereotypical situation of renting in Dublin city is portrayed. Although no specific reference is made in the title, the group still talks about the renting situation in Dublin for they mention, for example, public transportation in Dublin (Luas).

After outlining the corpus chosen for this study, each step that led to the results will be discussed next.

4. Method

To answer research question RQ (1): *How is language used to construct and challenge Irish stereotypes in the YouTube videos of Foil, Arms & Hog?* and RQ (2): *How do audiences*

evaluate, authenticate or denaturalize the performance of Irish stereotypes in the YouTube videos of Foil, Arms & Hog?, a basic quantitative and qualitative content analysis was applied. The transcripts of the five videos as well as comments were analysed to find emerging themes, which was done by following Dörnyei's (2007) different stages of "analytical process", including "transcribing the data", "pre-coding and coding", "growing ideas" and "interpreting the data" (246). The comments were counted, too.

First, YouTube provides users with the opportunity to select transcripts of the videos which are automatically synchronised with the video. This was very helpful as it meant that the transcripts were online available. However, out of the five videos, only three transcripts, for video 1, 2, and 4, were available and also those three transcripts were sometimes inaccurate, for words were missing or sentences did not make sense. So, the first step was to watch these videos again, and fill in the transcriptions. For those parts that where still inaudible, the transcription convention *(( ))* was used. Next, the other two videos were transcribed by carefully listening to the videos and transcribing them into a word document.

Afterwards, these transcripts were coded by means of an initial and second coding phase. These labels were taken from key words in the titles and descriptions of *Foil, Arms & Hog*'s videos outlined above within the summaries section of each video. This was done in order to increase the clarity of the coding process and "to make the preliminary codes more authentic" (Dörnyei, 2007: 251). These initial codes included, for video 1, "Dublin lingo", video 2, "Irish slang", "sarcasm", and "taken literally", for video 3 "rural Ireland", for video 4 "drinking problem", and for video 5 "rent in the city". So, everything related to these labels was colour coded. After going through the transcripts again, in the second coding phase, the initial codes were revised and broader categories formulated. So, instead of using, for example "Dublin lingo", the broader category of "Dublin English – linguistic features" was used and instead of, for example, "rural Ireland" for video 3, the broader category of "countryside" was used. Moreover, other categories that were closely related could thus "be

clustered together" (Dörnyei, 2007: 252). Afterwards, memos were created via mind maps to see the connections between the videos and categories. This enabled the researcher to see 'the bigger picture' and draw conclusions. In the next step, two categories (highlighted as references in the results) were formulated.

A similar analytical approach was chosen for the 790 comments of the five videos. First, all comments were selected on the same day, 03.03.2018, and converted into a pdf file. Working with a pdf file proved as valuable, because all comments could be saved and colour coded, too. Saving them was essential, for it should never be taken for granted that they appear in the same way as they used to and that they are always online (cf. Page et al., 2014).

Once all comments were saved, coding began. Following an initial familiarisation with the data, codes were created and, following subsequent recoding, broader category labels were developed. Initial codes were positive evaluation (including positive appraisal and praise), negative evaluation (negative appraisal and disapproval), identification with Irishness (themes, places, etc), responses by Foil, Arms & Hog, sharing experiences, repetitions of content, whether or not the stereotypic performances were confirmed or not, and other (for unrelated comments, references to other commentators, responses to *Foil, Arms & Hog*s' initial responses). Similar to the analysis of the videos, all categories were then connected to draw conclusions. In the final step, comments were counted to get an overview on the numbers of them regarding positive and negative evaluation, authentication, and denaturalization (see section 5.2.Comments). As the comedy group responded to various comments made by the audience, examples of these are also taken into account. The final categories (as well as sub categories highlighted as references in the results) are elaborated on within the comments section in the results.

To increase the validity of this study, a reliability check was performed with a colleague. This included a check of the various themes by discussing those the researcher came up with in a Skype meeting. Although it was a short control, it served as a "useful

feedback for the further course of the study" (Dörnyei, 2007: 61). Nevertheless, although it is highly suggested to have second coders go through the transcripts (cf. Dörnyei, 2007); we were unable to so due to time constraints. In the next chapter, the categories will be presented.

5. Results

5.1. Videos

In answering research question RQ (1), "How is language in the YouTube videos of *Foil, Arms & Hog* used to construct and challenge Irish stereotypes?", the list of main categories regarding languages, which resulted from the analysis of the transcript of each video, will be described within the following (represented by *Foil, Arms & Hog* in a stereotypical way): references to Irish English and references to Irish English varieties – dialects and accents. Next, each category will be elaborated on by choosing various extracts represented in the five videos.

5.1.1. References to Irish English

In the following, various excerpts of the transcripts are presented to show the use of Irish English as a specific marker in the performances of *Foil, Arms & Hog*.

When it comes to the use of specific phrases considered to be Irish English phrases, video 2, *Never Take an Irish Person Literally*, is particularly interesting because both speakers (henceforth Speaker A (not from Ireland) and B (from Ireland)) perform different accents as well as have difficulties to communicate effectively. The sketch lasts for two minutes. The following situation between the speakers occurs just after speaker A enters the office and believes that he is interrupting the work of Speaker B:

> *A: You prefer if I come back later*
> *B: Would you stop. Come here to me*
> *A: Right*
> *B: What's the story?*
> *A: The what?*
> *B: The scandle, the craic, the scale. What's happened like?*
> *A: Oh I'm here from the European office for the Financial Review*

By using the phrase "What's the story", Speaker B asks Speaker A for the reason of his visit. Speaker A, however, is not familiar with this phrase, so Speaker B continues by using synonymous expressions of "the story", i.e. "the scandle", "the craic", "the scale". The comedy group refers to these expressions as being part of the Irish English vernacular or 'Irish slang'; all of these expressions refer to asking 'What is going on?'. Only after asking "What's happened like?" does speaker B react and states the reason for his visit.

When it comes to the use of language specific features of Irish English, such as hedges, various examples of the videos highlight their frequent use. In all videos, for example, the use of *now* as a filler is used 15 times. In the next example, taken from video 2, it can be seen which possible outcome the use of this particular hedging item can have:

> *A: Huh thank you. So I'd like to at some point have a look at the latest sales figures*
> *B: Yeah I'll get them for you now in a while*
> *A: You'll get them now?*
> *B: Yeah*
> *A: Great*
> *B: In a while.* [...]

In this example, the humorous adaptation of the use of *now* can be seen. Speaker A wants something from speaker B. Speaker B states that he will get the "figures" in a while, yet through his use of the filler *now* speaker A believes that speaker B will get them in a moment. In other words, speaker B does not use *now* to indicate the temporal aspect by using it as a temporal adverb, but as a filler; however, speaker A thinks of *now* as in the temporal aspect, which is comprehensible in this context.

Another hedging item that is frequently used in the videos is *you know* as well as in combination with the reflexive pronoun *you know yourself*. Overall, these items are used in various examples. For example, in video 4, An Irish intervention (U: uncle, S: son, M. mother), we see uses of *you know*:

U: You look me in the eye this instant and you tell me right now that you've been
using that water to deal with the hangover
S: What's a hangover?
M: Oh jesus my only boy he's a teetotaller
U: Oh no it's alright Mary it's okay
M: To [sic.] you know every morning I come down those stairs and I pray I pray
that I'll see him there you know passed out in a pool of his own puke but it never
happens
S: But drinking's bad for your health

The hedging item *you know* is used twice. This extract is also interesting in terms of word choice. The son, for example, is not familiar with the concept of a "hangover" and also states that "drinking is bad". The mother, however, expresses her wishes that her son ought to drink alcohol and that she wants to see him drunk and in "his own puke".

5.1.2. References to Irish English varieties – dialects and accents

Within the five videos, there are two most prevalent performances of different varieties of Irish English regarding dialects and accents.

In video 1, for example*, How to Speak Dublin*, we are even presented with a fictional language school that aims at teaching "foreigners" Dublin English. By using the following example of specific Dublin English grammatical features, the teacher (T) points out how Dublin English is a variety in its own right:

T: Alright now the pronouns this can be difficult to some people alright yi, you,
yiz, you'iz, youz, yer wan, yer man, dem lot. Will we try that together yeah
All (five students and teacher): Yi, you, yiz, you'iz, youz, yer wan, yer man, dem
lot
T: Again

In the video, the teacher presents a list of pronouns on a white board and then reads them to the class to let them know how they are pronounced 'correctly'. Afterwards, he asks the class to repeat them with him.

In video 3, *A Kerryman Gives Directions*, the comedy group performs a stereotypical Kerry accent, which will be outlined through the following example:

> *"[…] she died too can you believe it then there'll be a fellow standing there with a spade in his hand and if he's got a smile on his face it's a left […]"*

Through this performance, a certain phonological feature of the Kerry accent is presented, because /s/ in the words *standing, spade*, and *smile* is pronounced as /ʃ/. By means of using this pronunciation, a stereotypical accent is reinforced.

5.2. Comments

In answering research question RQ (2), "How do audiences authenticate or denaturalize the performance of Irish stereotypes in the YouTube videos of *Foil, Arms & Hog*?", results of the 790 comments are presented in the following categories: evaluation, authentication, and denaturalization. First, it is outlined how the audience evaluated the performances in the videos by looking at positive and negative evaluation. By positive and negative evaluation, I refer to general feedback they gave, i.e. praise or criticism. This presents an overall indication on the audiences' approval or disapproval. Afterwards, I present findings on how the audience authenticated the comments, in other words how they commented on *Foil, Arms & Hog's* credible production of Irish stereotypes, and how they denaturalized these, so how they evaluated the performance as incredible. At the end, as *Foil, Arms & Hog* also responded on various comments, various examples of their responses are outlined, highlighting their interaction with the audience.

5.2.1. Evaluation – positive and negative feedback

Out of the 790 comments, a total number of 252 commented positively on the five videos of *Foil, Arms & Hog* and only 3 commented negatively. Positive feedback included comments

such as the following (examples of comments taken from all five videos): *Great job, you guys; Brilliant as usual gentlemen. ; Great stuff again lads!; Brilliant video guys!; Still the best one; Really funny; Omg I'm dying....i mean this is absolutely amazing; Excellent sketch, one of your best; Still love this video lads; Absolutely brilliant – never fails to crack me up; This makes me laugh, every damn time.; You guys are so talented when it comes to this craic; I'm in total awe of the endless talent these guys have. keep up the good work lads; Great sketch!; Watched 3 times. Absolutely love this!!!; Wow; Nice job, love everything of it!; funny; You Irish are funny lol :); You cannot not like the Irish humour!*

In contrast to the general positive attitude towards the five videos, in terms of the humorous performances in the sketches, in only three comments did the audience include negative remarks. One referred to technical issues regarding a video (*Y'all guys' sound mixing is pure shite, fix it yeah?*) and two comments simply stated that the videos were not good (*so dumb, Shame!*).

5.2.2. Authentication

Out of the 790 comments, the audience authenticated the performances within 49 comments. The following comments are examples taken from all five videos in which the audience highlights the authentic performance of *Foil, Arms & Hog* regarding the various Irish stereotypes. These are listed within five sub categories comprising (for reasons of scope the researcher decided to choose four to five comments per category as examples of findings): references to place and/or origin, references to similar experiences, references to ingroup/outgroup, references from people who visited Ireland, have lived there or are still living there, and references to language use (dialects and accents).

(a) References to place and/or origin:

In the following examples, commentators mention places and/or origin to highlight the authentication of the performances:

> *"I actually live in Dublin and this is so true"*
>
> *"IM from Dublin and I find this amazing... He is soooo right"*
>
> *"I'm from Dublin and yer man playing the teacher was bloody brilliant"*
>
> *"Lol I'm a kerrywoman my self and this is so true [...]"*
>
> *"being a lightweight is the worst thing you can be in Ireland, it's all about the sesh"*

By mentioning places and/or origin as in "I actually live in Dublin and this is so true", commentators claim the realness of the performance.

(b) references to similar experiences

Through sharing similar experiences on various incidents, commentators reinforce the accuracy of the performances:

> *"When I first moved to Ireland I couldn't stand this kind of behaviour!"*
>
> *"Hilarious and accurate! I remember the time my Ma asked a farmer for directions to the nearest church [...] when we were in Killarney. He spoke for about 5 minutes and all we understood was 'big mossy stone'."*
>
> *"I've been to Kerry and I've been lost there, it's scary."*
>
> *"I am from Wexford and one day I was walking to the shop I took a wrong turn and had to ask for directions and I can tell you this the man went on talking talking talking and the last thing he said was "you will be passing a field" and I said "what one" and he said "it has grass"*

These experiences also highlight that through sharing similar incidents that occurred in Ireland, such as asking for directions in Killarney (a city in county Kerry), the audience reinforces the realness of the performance.

(c) references to ingroup / outgroup

The third sub category refers to the creation of ingroups and outgroups through which commentators identify with some groups but not with others:

> *"It really summed up how we Irish people act! No one outside of Irish people understand what we mean sometimes and ye showcased that point perfectly [...]"*
>
> *"Love the irish thank god I am one"*

> *"If ur not Irish u have no idea what any of dis means"*
> *"Thanks this'll help me talk to me dub relatives. Tough being a culchie."*
> *"This is why i love being irish […]"*

In expressing belonging to the ingroup within comments such as "Love the irish thank god I am one", commentators not only align to roles but also display group membership.

    (d) references from people who have visited, lived there or are still living there

The fourth sub category is based on whether commentators have been to Ireland, already lived there, or are still living there:

> *"I've been away from Ireland for a few years now. This brought back memories :D"*
> *"Having visited Ireland many times I've been given direction just like this."*
> *"For my studies I lived in Dublin, everything they say is so true…:/"*
> *"As a foreigner living here, I could have used this dub lesson about 6 months ago"*

Comments highlighted in this sub category, refer to authentication by means of claiming realness through pointing out own experiences in relation to place of residence and travel.

    (e) references to language use (dialects and accents)

The last argument introduces commentators' examples of language use, regarding dialects and accents in Ireland:

> *"[…]I know people who, literally, speak like that."*
> *"The poor foreigners wont have a clue what we are saying lol"*
> *"Oi tink tis waz pre-y accureh"*
> *"From Thailand but living in Mayo for 10 years now..and i like the accent here but Dublin accent is super awesome!<3;D"*
> *"Who would want to speak like a Dubliner, one of the most awful, crude accents in the world."*

Through comments such as "The poor foreigner wont have a clue what we are saying lol" claims of realness towards the stereotypical performance are made as well as belonging and accepting expressed.

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5.2.3. Denaturalization

Out of the 790 comments, the audience denaturalized the performances within 26 comments. The following comments are, again, examples taken from all five videos in which the audience highlights the denaturalized performance of Foil, Arms & Hog regarding the various Irish stereotypes. Related to the above sub categories, these are also listed within three sub categories. The categories references to similar/other experiences and references to ingroup/outgroup have been omitted as there are no comments available). The categories comprise: references to other place and/or origin, references from people who never visited Ireland, and references to language use (dialects and accents) (alphabetical numbering continues).

(f) references to other places and/or origins

"To be honest, this is the same as how we talk in Australia haha, no difference there really haha. Sarcastic countries we iz!"
"Huh, you guys just described Helsinki.... xD"
"Clearly none of you have lived in Sydney"
"in latin America we have kind of the same sense of ironic humour..."

These comments highlight that commentators relate the performances to places outside of Ireland, deconstructing claims of Irish authenticity.

(g) references from people who never visited Ireland

"Hi, I'm from Poland, I live in Poland, never been in Ireland, I understood every word as it was meant. I think Irish folks are Poles in their soul :P"

In this example, it can be seen that the commentator denaturalizes the claim made in the performance through referring it to his own place of origin.

(h) references to language use (dialects and accents)

"im from southeast asian. n this irish accent looks normal here. Lol."
"Because it's not the real Kerry accent."

> *"Shite Kerry accent"*
>
> *"Heard people sound damn similar from Cork, Limerick, and South Tipp, so I imagine there's parts of the very North or East edges of Kerry where it's possible, but most people in Kerry don't sound like that."*

In this sub category, the examples show that the audience deconstructs the claims made through the performances of the group within references to language use. Either commentators point out that the accent performed is not "real" and, thus, denaturalize it, or they deconstruct the claims by pointing out own experiences relating the accent portrayed to other cities or regions of Ireland.

Responses to comments by Foil, Arms & Hog

Out of the 790 comments, 98 comments are responses from *Foil, Arms & Hog* on various comments. Most comments refer to praises raised by the audience including, for example: *Cheers, thanks for commenting; Thanks a mil; Too kind; Thanks*. Moreover, the comedy group also responds to praise regarding specific topics, such as accents: *Yeah, the real Dublin accent is brilliant. It's got such fun and divelment to it*. This response is also particularly interesting with regards to authentication, as the group claims that their performance of the accent "real". In other examples, when the audience discusses the performance of accents in video 2, the group members state: *I was going for Non-descript european!!*. In this response, they claim that the accent performed is of another variety, of one that should not be labelled. Furthermore, they for example respond to one comment made with regards to video 4: *It's a very serious problem in Ireland at the moment. Please do what you can!*. This response highlights that the comedy group accepts that drinking in Ireland proves indeed to be a "very serious problem".

6. Discussion

In this chapter, various interesting findings outlined above will be connected to theoretical insights outlined in chapter two. Firstly, some findings on language and representation of stereotypes in the YouTube videos of *Foil, Arms & Hog* are interpreted in an attempt to answer RQ (1) and to see if they can be adjusted to the theoretical underpinnings of stereotypes. Second, the possible links between identity construction through authentication and denaturalization are highlighted in an attempt to answer RQ (2). I will also take insights on role alignment and belonging into account. Last, within both sections, I further connect the stereotypic performances of *Foil, Arms & Hog* to the role of humour and YouTube.

Firstly, a connection can be drawn between the use of language in the performance of Irish stereotypes and findings of previous studies. For example, the hedging item *now*, which was regarded as a salient feature of IrE indirectness was also apparent in the videos; however, used in a playful and ironic way. This deliberate play on features regarded to be predominant in IrE is a self-reflective way of performing Irish stereotypes. Moreover, it is interesting that through the use of a different repertoire of words in one of the videos, the group reinforces the persisting stereotype of an Irish drinking culture, which can also be regarded as a common stereotype, on the one hand (cf. González-Casademont, 2017) but also challenges it, on the other. Through deliberately playing on words that are usually related to drinking, yet in an opposite way, the group deconstructs this stereotype. In other words, through their deliberate play on the use of language in terms of word choice and accents in the context of their videos, the group performs identities.

Furthermore, it is argued that stereotypes can only be seen in a negative light as they are predominantly harmful, reducing groups to less than what they are, as well as prescribing fixed beliefs on them (Holliday et al., 2017; Gudykunst, 2004). Moreover, although most of the findings suggest that there is a predominant negative representation of Irish stereotypes; additional diversified layers can be suggested. The nuanced display of various Irish

stereotypes indicates claims of realness but also essentialist claims made towards them, which relates to the identification with these. The comedy group claims group membership enacted through the portrayal of the stereotypes. Thus, it can be argued that the positive aspect of stereotypes contributes to identification with ingroup and outweighs the claims of negativity associated with them.

It is also argued that the interpretation of stereotypes in a mostly negative way stems from the fact that most research focuses too much on culture instead of taking other factors into account (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). This research aimed at taking semiotic resources such as language into account in order to carefully steer away from essentialist claims made towards the persistence of stereotypes in a cultural perspective.

Second, it is argued that when speakers adjust to different roles, they do so either by positive or negative evaluation (Agha, 2005; Cole & Pellicer, 2012). The findings of this study contribute to this claim. In response to the five videos analyzed for the purpose of this research, the audience adjusted to the roles in multiple ways and evaluated the performances by presenting a wide range of feedback. There was an overall tendency in providing positive feedback (symmetric role alignment) through praising the work of the comedy group, their performances, their humour, and their talent. Commentators rarely provided negative feedback (asymmetric role alignment).

This evaluation exceeded the general feedback of the audience by means of authentication and denaturalization. Authentication occurred more often, in comments that referred to, for example, ingroup and outgroup as well as similar experiences made. In comments such as "*It really summed up how we Irish people act! No one outside of Irish people understand what we mean sometimes and ye showcased that point perfectly [...]*", the commentator highlights the credibility of the performance by using the collective pronoun *we* and contrasting this with the outgroup that most of the times does not "understand" what it means "to be Irish". In this and other similar comments, commentators recognized the roles as

they felt the need to claim their membership of and identification with the group, which were, in turn, performed by the comedy group.

Furthermore, within denaturalization connections between identity construction, role alignment, and belonging can be detected. In comments such as *"Heard people sound damn similar from Cork, Limerick, and South Tipp, so I imagine there's parts of the very North or East edges of Kerry where it's possible, but most people in Kerry don't sound like that."*, the commentator deconstructs the essentialist claims made in the videos. By referring to various places that can be connected to which was first claimed to be an accent related to one particular region, the commentator deconstructs this claim. In giving these examples and highlighting that "most people in Kerry don't sound like that", he further separates these claims from their assumed 'realness'. To sum up, by referring to the interplay of authentication and denaturalization, role-alignment and belonging, the dynamic and dual relationship between identity construction and co-construction enacted through the performance of *Foil, Arms & Hog* can be highlighted.

Moreover, it is interesting to see that the comedy group itself chose to perform their identities by means of videos, albeit in a fictional way, which is further mirrored in their answers to the comments made by the audience. Through their interaction with the audience, they further authenticate and denaturalize claims raised in the interaction. In general, the group mostly evaluated positive feedback by accepting compliments raised.

Third, humour plays an additional important role within the function of stereotypes for they help groups and individuals by, for example, downplaying differences (Hoffmann et al., 2008), which can also be highlighted in the findings of this research. Moreover, as it was argued that YouTube has the potential to contribute to the discussion of identity construction (Guo & Lee, 2013; Guo & Harlow, 2014) through, for example, audience interaction within the comments, the findings contribute to this assumption, for the audience performed identities in various ways.

The findings of this study suggest an additional factor: performing language in a stylized, in other words exaggerated, as well as humorous way enhances the positive functions of stereotypes by constructing a safe environment for belonging. Of course, it needs to be stated that although these stereotypes are still, in their essence, fixed beliefs about a group of people, they can also be deconstructed by that very same group.

7. Conclusion

This section presents an overview of the course of the present study through answering the main research questions and sub questions, ending with implications for further research and limitations, an essential feature of every research conducted.

In answering research question RQ (1), *How is language used to construct and challenge Irish stereotypes in the YouTube videos of Foil, Arms & Hog?*, I found that certain IrE linguistic features are used stereotypically to perform Irish stereotypes. These features include pragmatic markers such as hedges indicating indirectness, which is said to be a salient characteristic of IrE (cf. Kallen, 2005). Moreover, *Foil, Arms & Hog* further reinforce certain stereotypes, with regards to the Irish drinking culture, yet also challenge them in the same instance.

In answering research question RQ (2), *How do audiences evaluate, authenticate or denaturalize the performance of Irish stereotypes in the YouTube videos of Foil, Arms & Hog?*, as well as the sub question regarding the role of humour in stereotypes, I found that the humorous approach towards the performance of Irish stereotypes contributes to the audiences' positive attitude towards them, which is also mirrored through their overall tendency in authenticating them. Moreover, the audience performs identities through authentication and denaturalization, and thus, either claiming realness or not.

The comedy group deliberately broadcasts these stereotypes to the world by first identifying which stereotypes exist in order to then (re)construct or challenge them. This

happens most frequently through the use of language, in other words, dialects and accents. It is also reinforced by the predominantly positive attitudes as well as authentication of the audience towards these performances. These are all indicators of the permeable components of identity construction. YouTube, as already highlighted, provides an environment for the performance of identities as well as interaction for the comedy group, but also the audience. Moreover, the references of and towards the stereotypic performances by both comedy group and audience, highlighted within the results, can be regarded as tools that enable them to connect and facilitate interaction.

This study shows the importance of highlighting a more positive understanding of stereotypes and Irish stereotypes in particular, by relating it to the very conscious and self-reflective performance of *Foil, Arms & Hog* and the audiences' attitudes, through evaluation, authentication or denaturalization, towards them. Thus, this study highlights that a deconstruction of stereotypes can tell us indeed a lot about identification and how people perform identities by means of adjusting to roles and highlighting belonging in interactions. Moreover, the role of humour in deconstructing stereotypes and performing identities should not be underestimated, as it might help to further relieve tensions in today's 'crisis of belonging' (Dervin, 2011).

Limitations

As every research has its limitations, it is only fair to highlight the limitations of this research as well. First, especially in qualitative research, the researcher's subjective perspective needs to be highlighted. First, I need to highlight that I am an admirer of the comedy group's work, watch their videos regularly and already been to one of their live shows in Ireland. Thus, I see them in a more positive light which could have affected the entire research. With regards to the language used in the videos as well as the comments, I sometimes had difficulties to either understand everything or to detect the cultural meanings referred to. Additionally, this could

have affected the outcome of the research. For reasons of scope and length, I executed the whole course of this research on my own, with only a few insights from colleagues regarding the codes and categories. Moreover, the results of this research should not be taken as generalizable as I only analysed five videos of the Irish themed playlist. For example, with regards to both research questions, different findings might have been concluded if I had analysed all videos of the playlist, which should be done in further research.

Further research

Further research could also focus on another method, e.g. interviews, to find more in depth results. For example, these interviews could be held with an audience before and after watching the videos to find a more nuanced insight of the audiences' evaluation, authentication and denaturalization. Furthermore, the role and function of comedy within other types of social media in combination with studies on stereotypes and identification might offer additional valuable insights within the field of intercultural communication. Other factors that should be taken into account are the interplay of role alignment and belonging and how audiences create environments for these. Studies of such environments might reveal further insights on communities of practice through connecting ideas of belonging and alignment (cf. Wenger, 2000; Agha, 2005; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

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Appendix

(I) Playlists and number of videos on *Foil, Arms & Hogs* **YouTube channel** (order of playlists as they appear on the YouTube channel):

Office Sketches (100 videos)

Out of Office Sketches (58 videos)

Live Sketches (13 videos)

Oisín & Parents (6 videos)

Parody & Satire Sketches (23 videos)

Driving Instructor (3 videos)

J1 Visa (2 videos)

The McCormack Family (5 videos)

The Business Dudes (6 videos)

Promo Sketches (16 videos)

Irish Themed Sketches (18 videos)

Us Messing (8 videos)

Hard Lads (3 videos)

Ceol Agus Ól (2 videos)

(II) Population (List of 18 videos and views) (order of titles as they appear in the playlist on the YouTube channel)**:**

Irish Lad on J1 chats up American Girls (128.945 views)

Election Time in Ireland (138.308 views)

How to Speak Dublin (779.209 views)

An Irish Intervention (164.955 views)

Never Take an Irish Person Literally (408.710 views)

A Very Irish Film (Trailer) (142.582 views)

50 Irish Towns in 1 Conversation (156.128 views)

Gaelic Flúrt (87.272 views)

A Kerryman Gives Directions (287.122 views)

Renting in the City (163.695 views)

The Communion Dealer (75.835 views)

Luas Tannoy in Real Life (109.718 views)

The Ryanair Song (153.686 views)

Ceol agus Ól 2 (94.576 views)

Excuses (119.607 views)

Ceal agus Ól (76.675 views)

Budget (45.951 views)

Brennans Bread (151.783 views)