

**The Attitude of the Hungarian Generation Z towards the
English Absurd Humour**

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Preface

Using humour in the classroom context is considered to be extremely beneficial to both sides, to teachers as well as to students. Humour is argued to aid in creating a more open communication climate where opportunities to divergent thinking and healthy competition are established, stimulating the students' attention and interest, thus enthusing the students to accept the information and knowledge presented by the teacher. However, once the humorous attempts are misunderstood, the devastating consequences are difficult to be dealt with. Misunderstood ironic and sarcastic statements create a disrespectful environment, manifesting in distancing, indifferent and apathetic behaviour of the students. Therefore, it is advisable to observe what kind of humorous impulse the students are able to appreciate in the classroom.

The aim of this research is to provide evidence on how English absurd humour is perceived by Hungarian secondary school students, who construct generation Z. The main hypothesis of this particular research is that members of generation Z are not familiar with incongruity-resolving strategies (cf. Shultz, 1972, pp. 457-470), thus the majority of this generation reveals negative attitudes towards manifestation of absurd humour.

After describing the primary characteristics of the generation participating in this particular research highlighting the social background, psychological characteristics along with the main societal and family related issues, the specific theories of humour are discussed with special attention to the definition of humour and the beneficial effects as opposed to the negative outcomes of using humour in the classroom context, followed by a brief characterization of the *Monty Python* comedy group regarding the fact that sketches of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* provided the humorous impulse in order to elicit responses from the informants, thus these sketches are part of the measurement system.

The above hypothesis is tested on a population of 344 secondary school students with the help of a 21 minute video compilation including five *Monty Python's Flying Circus* sketches as well as a questionnaire containing open-ended-, closed-ended questions ranking and rating tasks with an Osgood attitude scale of nine bipolar adjectives and statements. Male responses are discussed parallel to female responses in order to reveal eventual differences according to gender.

Chapter 1. Literary background

This chapter describes the main characteristics of the Z concerning social background, psychological characteristics, as well as issues and expectations of society, family, peers, educators and employers the participants of these generations are confronted with in order to provide a thorough picture of the population participating in the present research. A thorough overview concerning humour is provided in order to reveal a detailed definition of humour and what is considered to be humorous in alignment to preliminary scholarly works. After highlighting the positive and negative effects of humour used in various areas of life, the philosophical background is discussed, including different theories such as the superiority theory, disposition theory, relief theory, incongruity theory as well as the mention theory of irony. Special attention is given to the benefits such as enhancing creative and divergent thinking, boosting classroom climate, establishing an open communication climate, stimulating students, facilitating student-teacher rapport as well as negative effects of humour used in the classroom context, including the creation of dangerous precedents, difficulties in communication, discrediting the opinion of a person or a group, as a practical point of view of this entity.

Concerning the work of the *Monty Python* group as manifestations of absurd humour, providing the basis of humorous impulse used for this particular research, thus the sketches being part of the measurement system, a brief characterization about this particular comedy group is provided in this chapter.

1.1 Generation Z

Tari¹ (2011, pp. 16-20) contends that generation Z is constituted by the teenagers born between 1995 and 2000, being the children of generation X members, but amongst the parents of today's teenagers younger baby boomers and older generation Y members can also be found.

Tari (2011, pp. 24-25) asserts that generation Z grew up along with technological developments such as laptops, cell phones and video games which their parents know as well, but with the difference that while today's adults use these gadgets based on some theoretical knowledge, for their children, born into a rapidly changing technology-bound world, this knowledge has turned into simple skills. As a consequence, they are adept in basic computer

¹ Excerpts from Tari, A. (2011). *Z generáció* were translated by the author of this paper.

skills, resilient, and can be considered as cleverer than previous generations concerning the use of the newest technological tools. The constantly available news portals and so called “custom made” (Tari, 2011, p. 42) sites designed and developed according to the taste of its maker present the primary source of information. She warns that children are too early exposed to daily news with contents designed for adults. They are bombarded with various stimuli without selection in the most sensitive phase of their personality development. Information via the internet and television are not filtered or revised in any way. She highlights that despite the rapidly changing and developing technology, the development of a child’s personality cannot be accelerated. Additionally, no matter how intelligent and clever they may seem on the surface, they are not able to process aggressive and violent information.

Children of generation Z have to face the expectations and challenges originating from their parents and teachers from an inreasonably early age on. Tari (2011, p. 153) questions whether the emotional capacities of a 12 year old can handle the pressure in an entrance examination or a preliminary General Certificate of Secondary Education exam. She states that consequently, it is not surprising that they choose the virtual world where the rules seem to be clearer and more definite. On the internet, every member of the social network has an online personality with characteristics more or less differing from those of the offline personality of the same person. For teenagers being in the most important phase of their personality development it is of utter importance what effect the virtual world can cause. Tari (2011, p. 143) lists benefits containing adaptable, divergent thinking, development of a more open personality along with the chance of experimenting with different roles or the cognition of the hidden side of one’s personality. Negative effects can be observed as well, such as regression, splitting up of one’s personality, creating masks and the development of a “false self” (Tari, 2011, p. 143), where the virtual copies are infiltrating into the real life of an individual, or behavioural patterns in which the individual mixes up what is possible and what is real. This generation finds itself in a virtual world where narcissistic characteristics are overrepresented and where the triangle of hedonism, taking risks and autonomy is not the most important issue. Teenagers through the internet have the possibility to appear online featuring adult behaviour, whereas in reality they have to alloy these adult issues with their infantile behaviour.

Hungarian society is affirmed by Tari (2011, pp. 26-27) to be consisting of 70% of people with a martyr attitude, 20% revealing rebellious behaviour with only 9-10% with operative attitudes including people ready to take action when facing a problem. Characteristics of the 21th century manifesting in distrust and indifference conveys the message to a teenager that empathy is only an issue in the most inner circles of a person.

Generation Z teenagers can be witnessed to confidently form their ideas and stick to their opinions as well as value judgement, that is often surprisingly precise, including adult elements and where no respect towards parents or considering the knowledge of former generations can be observed. Their communication skills are way ahead of their age, whereas their emotional state lags behind. This sort of apparent maturity is doomed to fail in difficult emotional situations or in a more difficult conflict. Teenagers do not depend on any tradition or follow a beaten track telling them how to face challenges or overcome difficulties. In a society nursing individualist ambition, where everybody has to rely on his or her own decision, teenagers have become forgers of their own fate. They want to decide, what authority they consider to be significant reveal and nobody has the right to tell them what to do and how to do it.

With trends changing from day to day, members of generation Z have developed the ability of following the rapid changes. Who stays behind, gets left behind considering fashion, music or work. The term “loser” (Tari, 2011, p. 64) has become common knowledge in Hungarian society as well. This means that the fear of being left behind results in constant pressure to meet the expectations of others, furthermore, considering the issues of a developing personality, the questions of who this growing-up generation treats as a reference person or a role model.

Tari (2011, p. 56) points out that according to the multitasking working mode characteristic to this generation, meaning that children are able to take up five or six activities simultaneously on their computers, cell phones and other technological tools, they face difficulties when they have to concentrate on one thing, take the time for consideration or be precise. Concerning learning modes, they collect information from the internet as opposed to the learning habits of former generations who learned the passive way from particular tutors and educators. This learning style results in problems considering attention and discipline. The current education system faces problems resulting from the multitasking working mode. With children used to numerous stimuli reaching them at the same time, classroom work, where they have to concentrate on only one thing can appear as extremely boring to them.

1.2 Humour

Humour, being not a state of mind, but a state of being (Steele, 1998, p. 5) permeates our whole society and is applied for diverse purposes in everyday life at any place where people engage in various forms of social contact. Particular workplaces and specific occupations reveal unique nuances of humour shared between peer workers. A set of humorous references

can be observed that are known to members of a particular group, to which they can refer, serving the basis of further interaction. During the formation of a group, special humorous themes are developed that can repeatedly be turned to. The purposeful application of humour as an element of a joking culture is considered to “serve to smooth group interactions, share affiliation, separate the group from outsiders, and secure the compliance of group members through social control” (Fine & DeSoucey, 2005, p. 1).

Humour or what is considered to be humorous has always been an intriguing and fascinating topic. “Men will confess to treason, murder, arson, false teeth or a wig. How many will own up to a lack of humour?” (cf. Colby, 1926; Chapman & Foot, 1996, p. 1)

Furman (2001, p. 2) states that most people find it difficult to define humour and fun due to these entities being naturally embedded in life and human beings. Fun is associated with “a spirit of light-hearted enjoyment and pleasure” (Furman, 2001, p. 2). Funniness is considered not to reside in the actual situation, incident, or event of the joke itself, but rather in the mind of the individual. Additionally, humour existing in each society reveals differences according to the particular community (Furman, 2001, p. 3).

In a study written by Hobday-Kusch & Mc-Vittie (2002, p. 201), arguing that different people find different things funny, humour is considered to be anything that elicits a psychological response, a smile or laughter from the recipient.

Focusing on types of communication, Furman (2001, p. 2) proposes a more accurate definition, with humour being an act of verbal, nonverbal, written or drawn communication, including jokes, cartoons, witticism, teasing, puns or clowning, inducing amusement.

Shibles (1978, p. 12) highlights that humour is created by people realizing some sort of “mistake, but which is not bad or harmful”.

Maslow considers humour and laughter as “education in a palatable form” (Weaver & Cottrell, 1987, p. 168). Considering the use of humour in English Language Teaching classrooms, Tuncay (2007, p. 4) advises teachers that all jokes being embedded in a system of certain connotations, students have to understand the entire joke, its content and background, before they will be able to understand the punchline itself. Characterising culture-based jokes as “the most difficult ones” (Tuncay, 2007, p. 4) he declares that students as well as teachers have to be familiar with the target culture of the specific joke in order to comprehend the joke fully and to optimize the linguistic function of humour use (Tuncay, 2007, p. 4). Klein (1985, p. 2) emphasizes that despite of the fact that most of the teachers use some sort of humour in the classroom, neither do they use the same amount, nor do they express a unified opinion concerning what constitutes humour.

Preliminary scholarly works list a variety of positive effects resulting from including humour in everyday life. According to Hook (1997, p. 6) apart from boosting at least six human physiological systems such as muscular, respiratory, immune, endocrine, brain and cardiovascular systems and promoting healing, beneficial psychological consequences are observed as well, including the relief of physical and emotional stressors, destruction of negative emotions, enhancing imagination and understanding, promotion of well-being and hopefulness. Humour is enhancing social bonding by involving others in sharing joy (Hook, 1997, p. 10), as well as by directing attention away from a potential discord (Fine & DeSoucey, 2005, p. 9), it can aid in producing a stable social order.

According to Furman (2001, p. 4), the ability of laughing at oneself indicates that an individual is capable of seeing him- or herself as fallible, therefore is protected from humiliation. He argues that “cognitively, humiliation is derived from the self-expectation of perfection in social circumstances” (Furman, 2001, p. 4).

Preliminary scholarly works assert that humour playing an enormously important part in an individual’s life, reveals differences concerning the appreciation by young children or adults. Despite the fact that most forms of humour are based on structural entities believed to be universal, it is affirmed that “young children do not always appreciate ‘adult’ humor” (Klein, 1985, p. 4), as well as indicate their preferences concerning humour corresponding their developmental stage. She argues (Klein, 1985, p. 29) that due to their limited language competencies and analytical skills, children at a young age are encountering difficulties explaining why a joke or any humorous stimulus is perceived as funny. Initial research reveals that young children adapt and enjoy manifestations of concrete humour based mostly on physical incongruities appearing in children’s programmes. More sophisticated forms of humour may be challenging or complicated for young individuals

1.3 Theories of humour

In his seminal paper, Minsky (1980, pp. 2-3) points out that until the 18th century, humour was not used in association with funniness. Presenting a thorough overview concerning the discussion of laughter and comedy, he mentions that according to Plato, emotion was treated as an override of self-control and laughter was considered as malicious; an entity that should be excluded from the ideal state of being. In the Bible, laughter is mentioned as an expression of hospitality.

In literature, three classic theories are presented in order to describe why individuals find something funny (Frymier et al., 2007, p. 5; Morreall, 2013, pp. 4-16).

According to the superiority theory, laughter expresses feelings of disparagement and superiority over others or the former state of an individual. Proponents of this theory, Scruton (1982, p. 205) reflects on amusement as a kind of destruction of a particular person or something connected to that person whereas Hutchenson (1750, p. 361) argues that the feeling of superiority is an entity that is not necessary or sufficient for laughter. He questions the adequacy of this theory, mentioning odd figures of speech or the present state of a person as being one possible cause for laughter without expressing superiority over others.

The disposition theory observes affective elements of humor, highlighting that the response given by an individual to a humorous stimulus depends immensely on the individual's feeling concerning the target of the joke. Zillmann & Cantor (1996, pp. 96-99) argue that humour attempts are favoured when the target is disliked or not considered to be part of the reference group, whereas attempts are found less likely humorous in cases of the target being a member of a group, the recipient identifies him-/herself with. In this case, any attack on the target is perceived as a personal transgression.

Relief theory reflects on laughter as a pressure relief valve in a steam boiler (Morreall, 2013, pp. 5-10) relieving an individual of built-up nervous energy. Morreall (2013, pp. 6-7) recites that the physical, muscular movements of laughter have no object, they are merely discharging the energy of emotions found to be inappropriate. It is argued that laughter marks the end of a period of suspense and expectation and is considered to be the same phenomenon as the sigh of relief.

Advocating the relief theory, Freud (1974, pp. 146-151) distinguishes three laughter situations according to their ability to relieve superfluous energy. "Der Witz" releases energy used to repress feelings, whereas "comic", as a manifestation of social laughter situation is concerned with energy used to think, and, in the case of "humor", the nervous energy is used to feeling emotions. In addition, Morreall (2013, p. 9) contends that the hydraulic model of the nervous system on which the relief theory is based is outdated.

Attempting to provide a thorough definition of humour, Herbert (1991) states that "While there remains considerable room for disagreement on the essential qualities of humor, several researchers after reviewing the literature appear to have focused on a core quality... incongruity, as experienced cognitively and affectively" (Herbert, 1991, pp. 4-5). Considering incongruity, the perception of humour is based on a special cognitive problem-solving process, the level of which varies from individual to individual according to their cognitive-developmental stage. Shultz (1976, p. 13) defines that what accounts for the surprisingness of the punchline in a joke is the conflict of what the recipient expects and what is actually revealed by the joke. This discrepancy between the body and the punchline of the joke

(Nerhardt, 1976, p. 57), as well as the violation of the expectancies have been identified as incongruity and resolution (Bariaud, 1989, pp. 19-20). Klein (1985, pp. 4-8) reflects that humour cannot be encountered until a stage where the individual recognizes particular comic relationship between the body and the punchline.

Incongruity theory, according to Morreall (2013, pp. 10-16) states that the perception of something incongruous accounts for the funniness in a joke or a situation an individual perceives. Kant (1911, sec. 54) highlights the similar character of jokes and wit, and the enjoyment of games and music. He underlines that pleasure is caused by shifting ideas and expectations in the mind as well as playing with thoughts. Schopenhauer (1907, p. 76) concludes that funniness is located between the sense of perception and the abstract rational knowledge of the same thing. Humour arises when an individual notices the incongruity between the concept and perception concerning the same thing. Kirkegaard (1941, pp. 459-468) emphasizes the philosophical significance of humour. He refers to incongruity as an entity located between what is expected and experienced.

Two stages of humour processing are proposed with the identification of the incongruity as the first phase and the resolution of the discrepant elements by the recipient as the second moment. Shultz (1976, p. 13) adds that it is not incongruity itself an individual enjoys in a humorous attempt, but the resolution of this incongruity. He questions unresolvable incongruity being able to be a basis for something humorous, and therefore he classifies unresolvable incongruity as “nonsense” (Shultz, 1976, p. 13). Highlighting the various human reactions given to something unexpected, Morreall (2013, p. 16) suggests that not every response to incongruity can be considered as humorous amusement. Laughter only arises in cases of an individual enjoying incongruity (Morreall, 2013, p. 16).

Resulting from the individual engaging in the process, the intended humour is understood and is generally followed by a reaction manifesting itself in a smile or laughter. Consequently, believed to be constructed by the individual, humour can be viewed as the interaction between the recipient and the “structural aspect of stimulus” (Klein, 1985, p. 8). According to Suls (cited in Klein, 1985) by the process of identifying a cognitive rule and thus resolving how it has been violated, the individual is able to consider the parts of the particular joke as “congruous” (Klein, 1985, p. 7). In her influential paper, Klein (1985, pp. 4-16) provides a thorough overview of cognitive theorists’ research results agreeing that humour can be defined as a response of an individual to the perception of incongruity. However, based on the works of McGhee, Pien & Rothbart, and Shultz, she highlights that many theorists differ “in their explanation of the cognitive processing necessary for a humor response to occur and in their interpretation of the onset of incongruity humor within the developmental sequence”

(Klein, 1985, p. 8). As a result of her enlightening observations she comes to the conclusion that “a recipient of humor must consider both incongruity and resolution information in order to appreciate a joke fully” (Klein, 1985, p. 23).

The incongruity theory is advocated by Beattie, Kant, Schopenhauer, Kirkegaard and many later philosophers as well as psychologists (Morreall, 2013, p. 10), who state that something that violates our mental patterns and expectations is what results in laughter and is considered to be humorous.

As reported by McGhee (1989, p. 7), associating incongruities with humour does not occur before the acquisition of a certain range of conceptual thought. The developmental stage of the acquisition of concept is marked by the stabilization of thought through the process of “equilibration” according to Piaget (1977, p. 9). Equilibration is considered as a force between the assimilation and accommodation in the process of adaptation to the world. Equilibration is the driving force in the learning process and involves creation or construction of new forms that may lead to a better, improved equilibrium i.e., a state where the available information is in balance with the existing cognitive schemas held in the process of development (Reber, 1985, p. 246).

Capelli et al. (1990, p. 1824) emphasize the incongruity between the intended message and the spoken words concerning irony. He contends that people in the western societies routinely understand irony as a vehicle for sarcasm. Grice (1978, p. 54) defines irony as an act of pretence emphasizing that “to be ironical is, among other things, to pretend, and while one wants the pretense to be recognised as such, to announce it as a pretense would spoil the effect” (Grice, 1978, p. 54). Gibbs (2000, p. 6) points out that when using ironical utterances, the addresser pretends to be some other person, moreover, in some cases also to be talking to another addressee.

Fowler (1965, p. 535) defines sarcasm according to its characteristic of the intention of “giving pain by bitter words” (Fowler, 1965, p. 535). Regarded this way, neither sarcasm necessarily involves irony, nor the reverse. He reveals that irony is in fact a use of words postulating two parts of the same audience, where one meaning is conveyed to the uninitiated part of the audience and another to the initiated part.

According to Capelli et al. (1990, p. 1824), in the process of understanding irony, both the addresser and the addressee know that the words of the speaker do not have to be taken literally. The stage of thorough understanding is reached “with the appreciation why the speaker chose irony to express his idea” (Capelli et al., 1991, p. 1824). Concerning this incongruity between the intended message and the used words it is not surprising that the understanding of irony has first to be developed, beginning at a primitive level of only

understanding the general meaning. Adults are argued to be able to rely on the cue of context in which the utterance is made as well as on the cue of intonation used by the speaker in order to detect irony and sarcasm in the communication process. Children tend to detect sarcasm using only the cue of intonation. However, if only the cue of context is present in an utterance they face difficulties in interpreting the intended message. (Capelli et al., 1990, pp. 1825-1837)

Discussing the results of their research, Capelli et al. (1990, p. 1837) propose two routes concerning the recognition of sarcasm: the context-dependent route in which the recognition of sarcasm is based on the discrepancy between the literal meaning of the context of the utterance, and the intonation-dependent route with intonation functioning as an indicator for sarcasm. The intonation-dependent route is argued to be the more accessible way of understanding concerning children up to the age of 9.

Dews et al. (1996, pp. 3071-3072) emphasize the characteristic of irony in provoking a negative effect in everyday discourse. They point out that in its most common manifestation a negative meaning is conveyed by a positive utterance. They argue that irony serves to mute the implied criticism or praise, therefore ironic criticism may be perceived by the addressee as less critical, moreover, the speaker may appear as more humorous due the humour function of irony, for “ironic utterances are perceived as more humorous than their literal paraphrases” (Dews et al., 1996, p. 3072).

In his fundamental paper, examining irony in talk among friends Gibbs (2000, pp. 12-13) defines the main types of irony concerning the contrast between expectations and reality. He regards jocularly as the participants teasing one another in a humorous way, sarcasm as a manifestation of a negative intent in a positive way, rhetorical questions implying a humorous or critical assertion, the use of hyperboles as an expression of the nonliteral meaning in order to embellish the reality of the situation, and understatements as the speaker stating far less than it is obviously the case.

Emphasizing that irony is routinely used in the flow of communication amongst group members, Gibbs (2000, p. 7) indicates that the use of irony is aimed at affirming solidarity of the members and the exclusion of others from group membership. In addition, he states that the use of sarcasm eases frustration in a situation that is perceived as offensive by an individual. Sarcastic utterances like jocularly is considered as being a more gentle and indirect way to point out some deviation from the social order and can be often observed in conversations between parents and children or romantic partners (Gibbs, 2000, pp. 7-8).

Concerning the mention theory of irony, Clark & Gerrig (2007, p. 28) point out that the use of irony is aimed at mentioning a sentence instead of using it. Referring to the

classical rhetoric where verbal irony is considered as a trope i.e., an utterance with a figurative meaning that deviates from its literal meaning, Wilson & Sperber (1984, pp. 130-131) argue that this kind of echoing is as common a mechanism as pretence. Advocating the mention theory they argue the “typical properties of verbal irony such as the ironical tone of voice or the normative aspect of much irony” (Wilson & Sperber, 1984, p. 131) are best analysed by the mention theory.

1.4 Benefits of using humour in the classroom setting

Humour, intertwining every aspect of life, can also be found in classrooms. According to Klein (1985, p. 28) every teacher incorporates some sort of humour into their teaching performance. Arguing that more experienced teachers tend to use more humour than their less experienced colleagues, Dickmeyer (1993) refers to teachers using humour in the classroom context as “educational superstars” (Dickmeyer, 1993, p. 3). He cites other proponents’ such as Bryant, Comisky, Crane and Zillman, revealing the 93% of the learners at all educational levels, view humour as an essential part in teaching (Dickmeyer, 1993, p. 3).

In her seminal paper, Steele (1998, p. 8) emphasizes the relevance of the opportunity given to teachers to become engaged with students by being active participants in their laughter. She defines effective teachers as individuals, who, despite taking their work and life seriously, are able to take themselves more lightly, and can encourage others to do likewise. Herbert (1991, p. 5) contends that educators sharing a genuine sense of humour with their learners portray themselves as being human, like students. Walker (2008) characterises an effective teacher as a professional who can make learning fun, break the ice in difficult situations as well as bring humour into the everyday classroom.

Preliminary works in this field underline the importance of taking advantage of the coping mechanisms and the psychological benefits of humour use in the classroom context. Associated with various claims about teaching and learning, humour has been proven to own a set of primary values, teachers and students may benefit from.

Ziv (1983) states that “the presence of laughter tends to open learners to divergent thinking previously suppressed by the critical, traditional self. New, often unlikely and outrageous ideas surface in this kind of environment as the „fun mood” increases creativity” (pp. 73-74). Dickmeyer (1993, pp. 6-9) argues that humour, tied to a number of positive classroom issues, enhances creative and divergent thinking as well as aggression catharsis i. e., the cathartic effect of jokes concerning feelings of anger (Martin, 2007, p. 40) within the classroom setting. Steele (1998, p. 11) agrees that unconventional thinking, containing “unexpected consequences, curious but relevant bisociations, fusion of several ‘apparently’

incompatible perspectives, unusual but pertinent ideas” (Steele, 1998, p. 19) as elements of humour may surprise instructors. These investigative, grasping modes of thinking are contended to surface in an environment relieved from stress and tension, triggered by the use of humour, allowing the mind to think more clearly about higher order relationships. She affirms that a child must be encouraged to discover and create unique associations between ideas in order to create a joking relationship (Steele, 1998, p. 11). Hackathorn et al. (2011) emphasize the importance of humour in aiding individuals change their mental perspective by the process of alternative visualisation of the particular problem as well as engaging their social thinking. As an example, they present that word puns occurring in a message are effective in increasing vocabulary, due to the effort of students invested in recognizing, resolving and interpreting incongruities of the message (Hackathorn et al., 2011).

According to Herbert (1991, p. 5) humour aids in bonding relationships as well as enhancing a healthy competition between or within groups, thus strengthening group relations, building the ground for more effective teamwork increasing group and individual productivity.

Relieving stress and tension and therefore boosting classroom climate (Roth, 2008, pp. 58-59) is amongst the primary values of humour used in teaching. In her influential work, Korobkin (1988) argues that using humour leads to “decreased academic stress, anxiety towards the subject matter, dogmatism and class monotony” (Korobkin, 1988, p. 155). The effect of alleviating nervousness reduces the affective filter proposed by Dulay & Burt (1975) concerning attitudes, motivation and sociocultural aspects that influence learning. Krashen (1982, p. 31) hypothesizes that these attitudinal factors are related directly to the process of acquisition and not to learning. He states that according to the Affective Filter hypothesis, acquirers vary according to the “strength and level of their Affective Filters” (Krashen, 1982, p. 31).

Proponents of the relief theory mentioned earlier in this paper, argue that the reduction of tension and anxiety is the central element of humour use in the classroom setting. They state that through the reduction of feelings of anxiety in the classroom as well as in test situations may be simultaneously reduced. On the other hand, research performed by Sarason (cited in Steele, 1998, p. 7) demonstrates that better performance is achieved in testing situations by highly anxious students. However, there exists evidence that reduced stress level results in a positive attitude towards school and learning, greater imagination and creativity and enthusiasm towards learning (Steele, 1998, p. 7). Krashen (1982, p. 31) hypothesizes that a low affective filter corresponds to high motivation as well as high self-confidence, facilitating acquisition.

In their crucial paper, Brown & Itzig (1976, pp. 13-14) hypothesize that the use of humorous test questions reduce anxiety and therefore improve performance in the cases of high anxious students. They note that low-anxious students performed better when given the humorous test, and “the subjects reported that the humorous questions helped to relieve their anxiety levels (Brown & Itzig, 1976, p. 13).

Steele (1998, pp. 9-11) contends that interpersonal skills in classroom communication are of primary importance concerning the teaching process. The tools of effective communication are argued to be more efficiently implemented when students feel non-threatened and comfortable. Many scholars argue that using humour in the classroom setting helps create an open communication climate, where students feel safe to try new things and, being not bound by rigorous expectancies, a higher level of performance can be experienced with students more involved in the learning process.

Boredom is considered to represent the greatest pedagogical obstacle in the teaching process. It is believed to be the initial goal of teachers to stimulate their students’ attention and interest as well as increase their students’ participation in the classroom. Steele (1998, p. 7) states that students may be encouraged in the learning process involving temporary setbacks or embarrassing exposure. By using humour in the classroom context, students can be freed from the boundaries of low self esteem and high anxiety which may often limit them in performing, and acquire the characteristic of being more self-forgiving, allowing themselves to make mistakes. Referring to a research of Pollak & Freda, Steele (1998, p. 14) highlights that attention of more reluctant students may be maintained by presenting information in unusual ways.

Preliminary research studies reveal that using humour as a teaching tool facilitates a positive rapport between teacher and student by enabling students to see teachers from a more human perspective, outside his authoritarian role model. Steele (1998) states that students “may never give a teacher the chance to share knowledge or brilliant insights if rapport is not first established” (Steele, 1998, p. 17). Tuncay (2007, p. 2) adds that apart from promoting student-teacher interaction, using humour in the classroom increases the quantity and quality of student time, which is directly related to the increased level of learner responsibility and autonomy.

Apart from aiding students’ willingness accept knowledge and information given by the teacher, humour is acknowledged to increase an individual’s ability to understand the information. Studies carried out by Gorham & Christophel, and Ziv provide evidence that students’ scores for constructs taught with the aid of humour were higher than for other constructs taught without humour (Hackathorn et al., 2011, p. 119).

Steele (1998) suggests that humour can serve as an aid in behavioural management by stating that “students are less reluctant to accept and adhere to rules if delivered in a non-threatening, non-confrontational style” (Steele, 1998, p. 21).

Concerning the beneficial aspect of using humour in the classroom context, instructors are advised to examine the subject matter, their own personal branch of humour as well as their presentation skills, and the needs of their audiences carefully in order to avoid the negative effect of humour use. Integrating humorous activities into the teaching process is argued to be a cautious and slow process, requiring huge amount of practice and revision (Korobkin, 1988, p. 157).

1.5 Negative effects of humour used in the classroom

Concerns about attempts of using humour in the classroom context are highlighted by opponents of classroom humour. They argue that the effects of humour misused in the classroom may be more devastating than the advantages gained by creating a motivating open environment. Types of humour considered to be dangerous in the classroom setting may create dangerous precedents for students. Dickmeyer (1993, pp. 9-12) points out that humour is a very sensitive tool concerning the created environment. A situation where students feel that humour is used to their expense, can create a hostile environment due to the assumed prejudice of the teacher. Miller (2012, p. 36) adds that cross-cultural humour can add an enormous amount of difficulties to communication.

What is considered to be dangerous in the classroom is satirical humour aimed at discrediting the opinion of a particular group member or ridiculing a person of their cultural heritage (Korobkin, 1988, p. 155), sick or disdainful humour, cynicism and sexual humour (Dickmeyer, 1993, p. 9). Hobday-Kusch & McVittie (2002, p. 201) underline that hostility expressed by telling a racist joke resides in the assumption where the addresser feels superior to the addressee. Moreover, they establish a situation where every member of the group understanding the joke may feel superior to the target. Consequently, the addressee may either refuse to participate or react resulting in laughter, thus trying to collude with the oppressor, or express disagreement. In the latter case, the target is confronted with the dismissive reaction of the teller saying “just a joke” (Hobday-Kusch & McVittie, 2002, p. 201). Fine & DeSoucey (2005, p. 6) underline the insulting nature of joking by stating, “‘Just joking’ is not always enough to dissociate intentions from affronts” (Fine & DeSoucey, 2005, p. 6). Other opinions state that the addressee is able to take control of the situation by using humour against the initial addresser (Hobday-Kusch & McVittie, 2002, p 201).

According to Furman (2001, pp. 5-6) many people do not consider sarcasm as humorous, and often interpret comments including sarcasm as disrespectful or degrading.

In his fundamental work, Zsolnai² (1994, pp. 111-112) asserts that it is important to make a clear distinction concerning pedagogy between what is considered as humour and its only seemingly humorous counterparts i.e., irony, teasing with the aim of insult and mockery. He argues that when questioned, individuals make statements about the ideal teacher or educator including that he or she should have a sense of humour but this humour should not be aimed at the students' expense. However, students cannot draw a distinct line between what is perceived as humorous and what is one step over the border, but they can clearly feel the difference.

In her dissertation concerning irony used by an educator entrusted with legitimate power, Molnár³ (2010, pp. 68-70) points out that in a student-teacher relationship a mask of solidarity can be created that indirectly supports the speaker's power to express criticism and insult. Considering verbal aggression and the abuse of the superior position of the teacher as opposed to students, Hunyady⁴ et al. (2006) refer to the term "black pedagogy" (Hunyady et al., 2006, pp. 11-13) as an entity where adults in the family or classroom context override their commission and the inferior position of children. They further define the term considering this aspect of pedagogy as anti-children ambitions aimed at the exploitation of the inferior position of children as well as the overall rationalization of education at the children's expense. Black pedagogy is argued to be always carrying a negative emotional load. Its formation can be connected to conscious teacher behaviour or spontaneous events, whereas its effects remain hidden and latent for a longer period of time. Students participating in the research of Hunyady et al. (2006, p. 91) report behavioural patterns of verbal and physical aggression.

According to Zsolnai⁵ (1996, pp. 47-67), victims of irony show distancing, indifferent and apathetic behaviour as a result of being exposed to verbal aggression.

1.6 Absurd humour

In his seminal work, Kant (1911, sec. 54) argues that in everything that exerts a laughter, something absurd must be included. It is the transformation of the strained expectation into nothing, that triggers the humorous response. Morreall (2013, pp. 16-17) adds, that through a

² Excerpts from Zsolnai, J. (1994) *Humor és pedagógia* were translated by the author of this paper.

³ Excerpts from Molnár, M. (2010). *A pedagógiai iróniának, mint a pedagógiai hatalom kifejeződésének modellezése* were translated by the author of this paper.

⁴ Excerpts from Hunyady, Gy. et al. (2006) „Fekete pedagógia”: *Értékelés az iskolában* were translated by the author of this paper.

⁵ Excerpts from Zsolnai, J. (1996) *A pedagógia új rendszere címszavakban* were translated by the author of this paper.

humorous impulse distorting the world around an individual, a wrong analogy in the mind starts, resulting in a suggestion that cannot be realised. Regarded in this way, he argues that when the individual is confronted with an absurdity, and since being a rational creature, he or she cannot enjoy absurdity as a violation of his or her expectation to a greater extent than the violation of any other physical expectation manifesting in feeling hunger or cold (Morreall, 2013, p. 17).

Brighthouse (2006, p. 60) considers absurd humour as a thought-experiment. Regarded in this way, a piece of absurd humour has to possess the characteristic of an indisputable internal logic that may look absurd from the outside, but that connects the various segments of the particular example into a unity providing the structure, as well as the characteristic of being connected to the world with some experience of the addressee, isolating his or her intuitive judgements concerning the issue of the particular humorous impulse.

1.7 Monty Python

The group Monty Python consisting of five British and an American comedians is remembered even forty years after their last appearance in the United Kingdom as a group that has changed the face of television and, according to Ross (2001, p. 138) is characterised as one of the most innovative and influential examples of British humour. Monty Python's Flying Circus, first broadcast on the 5th October 1969 is a series of brilliantly absurd situations, performances, cartoons and songs written and performed by the six members. Ross (2011, p. 138) reveals that the portals of the BBC considered to be composed and calm at all times, were startled by the thoroughly new and radical form of comedy presented by the Monty Python group.

In his crucial work, Ross (2011, pp. 7-8) presents a list of influencing factors allowing the comic presentation of the cosy life of middle-class, post-war England. He states that "for them, comedy was an escape route and a chance to pinpoint the absurdity of authority through well meaning but faceless figures of the law, religion and medicine" (Ross, 2011, pp. 7-8). He points out, that in this society, Monty Python followed a well distinguished trend by producing not something new but something fresh. Early combinations of the latter Python members appeared in Marty Feldman's ATV series, *At Last the 1948 Show*, followed by *Do Not Adjust Your Set* enclosing Idle, Jones, Palin and Gilliam as well as *The Complete and Utter History of Britain* where Palin and Jones reinvented the history of Britain for the television age, or *I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again* with groundbreaking ideas of Cleeve, Chapman and Idle. Ross (2011, p. 9) adds that the driving force of Spike Milligan is of utter importance concerning television comedy with shows as *Twice a Fortnight*, *The Frost Report*,

No, That's Me Over There, Broaden Your Mind, or Not Only... But Also. Thus, with members sharing the same vision of the world, the animations of Terry Gilliam, the historical elements of Terry Jones and Michael Palin, merged with the twisting of broadcasting convention from Eric Idle, all embedded and entwined with the overall silliness of John Cleese and Graham Chapman, left their mark in television comedy even before joining together to form an individual group.

As reported by Ross (2011, p. 9), after the first meeting of Cleese, Chapman, Palin, Idle, Jones and Gilliam on the 23th May 1969, the group was instructed by the BBC to a 13-show series. This day can be considered as the birthday of Python, however at that time no suitable name existed that “could umbrella the diverse talents of the six comic forces” (Ross, 2011, p. 9). McCabe (2005, p. 215) reveals in several interviews with Python members the struggle concerning the name for the group. He cites Palin reporting that a variety of names were considered in the creative process, such as *Arthur Megapode's Cheap Show*, *Arthur Megapode's Zoo*, *E.L. Moist's Flying Circus*, *The Horrible Earnest Megapode*, *Megapode Atomic Circus*, *Vaseline Parade*, *The Venus De Milo Panic Show*, *Bunn*, *Wackett*, *Buzzard*, *Stubble and Boot*, or, as for some time being referred to by the BBC, *Baron Von Took's Flying Circus*.

I can remember the costume department saying, “What are you going to call it? We've got three different names here written on the labels, we've got to decide.” They were *A Horse*, *a Spoon and a Basin*, *Owl Stretching Time*, and *The Toad Elevating Moment*. I liked that one very much, that was a Jonesy one.

(Palin cited in McCabe, 2005, p. 215)

With numerous versions in mind, the group was forced to settle with only one. *Monty Python's Flying Circus* is a composite name, a result of brilliant brainstorming so characteristic for the creative process concerning the numerous episodes. According to Idle (cited in McCabe, 2005, p. 214) someone just came up with the idea of “Flying Circus”, whereas “Python” is clearly remembered to be an idea of Cleese, who always liked to use animal's names for humour, and “Monty” was added by Idle based on a man in his local pub. Palin (cited in McCabe, 2005) remembers, that

But in the end someone said ‘Monty Python’ and it sounded very funny. John saw it as a sleazy agent and filled out the character while describing it, and we all just fell about. They had very, very soft, modernish furniture in Basil Street and I just can remember literally slipping off the sofa whilst laughing at

this name. Which is ridiculous. So we said, well all right, ‘Monty Python’ sounds good, let’s see what it’s like tomorrow morning. And the next morning it was good.

(Palin, cited in McCabe, 2005, p. 217)

The name, finally accepted by the BBC as well, over the years became a term characterising an institution influencing British culture immensely (Hardcastle & Reisch, 2006, p. 2).

Ross (2001, p. 9) remarks that *Monty Python’s Flying Circus* was not such a huge rating success than expected. However, despite young viewers not understanding everything the show tried to convey, the core of viewers instantly recognised the “gleefully bypassing adult concessions of taste, dissecting sacred cows and making authority a laughing stock” (Ross, 2001, p. 10).

Idle (cited in McCabe, 2005, p. 197) comments that having no producer or director, the six comedians had the opportunity to enjoy the creative process without restrictions. He states that “put together we formed almost one completely mad person. Everybody was mad, but in a slightly different way, each had his own element of madness” (Idle cited in McCabe, 2005, p. 197). Forming writing groups “because it would have been too scary writing on your own, to know whether you are doing something funny or not” (Cleese, cited in McCabe, 2005, pp. 159-160) with the usually aligned pairs of Cleese-Chapman and Palin-Jones – with Idle and Gilliam preferring to write alone – the comedians presented the written material during the meetings, followed by a voting whether the particular idea would be funny enough to become a part of the following show. Every episode reveals a stream of consciousness idea with one situation leading to another or with two disconnected ideas bridged by the often crude and violent animations of Gilliam.

The only things that we discussed really were not what you could be funny enough or where the material could come from, but how the show should be shaped. As that has really got as far as a stream of consciousness idea, it wasn’t restrictive at all, quite the opposite. (...) It didn’t really set any rules and what we tried to do was to create a situation where anything seemed to be funny.

(Palin, cited in McCabe, 2005, pp.204-205)

The importance of the works of the Monty Python group lies in presenting the viewers with an unpredictable world that seemingly lacks meaning. The different sketches are based on common stereotypes and the contradictions and ironies inherent in them leading the viewer to a conclusion that the real world itself is incoherent and absurd.

Chapter 2. Research methodology

The following chapter presents the hypothesis considering the attitude resulting from the incongruity-solving strategies of generation Z. After providing a description of the population participating in this particular research, the applied method is described including a 21 minute video compilation of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* sketches and a five-point questionnaire.

2.1 Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this research is that Hungarian secondary school students as members of generation Z are not familiar with the specific strategies mentioned by Shultz (1972, pp. 457-470) in order to resolve cognitive incongruity thus reveal a negative attitude towards sketches as manifestations of absurd humour.

According to Shultz (1976, pp. 12-13) humour is defined as a problem-solving task, where some sort of solution is required before the thorough understanding of the joke. Members of generation Z, who grew up in a society hushing them along, failing to give them the time and patterns necessary to engage with their own feelings and inner life have not yet developed the ability to engage with the complex task of solving cognitive incongruity as manifestations of absurd humour meaningfully. Steele (1998, p. 18) advises teachers to refrain from humour use due to the lack of faculties and knowledge of students to understand it. Forms of “distortion humour” may cause confusion as well as easily create faulty ideas, which are difficult to correct later on.

2.2 Sampling (Population)

This study was designed to provide evidence about the absurd humour perception of Hungarian secondary school students. For purposes of the current research a 21 minute video compilation of five sketches extracted from the *Monty Python's Flying Circus* series as well as a questionnaire were established. With this device the specific hypothesis was tested that Hungarian secondary school students do not possess the ability to solve cognitive incongruity as manifestations of absurd humour meaningfully.

Current research was administered in 5 secondary schools in Hungary in order to extract a representative statistical sample. 344 secondary school students, including 97 male and 247 female teenagers from various schools, namely I. István Head Secondary School, Hunyadi Mátyás Member Secondary School, Jáky József Member Secondary School, Vasvári Pál Secondary School in Székesfehérvár, as well as the secondary grammar school of Csanádi

Árpád Primary School, Secondary Grammar School, Sport School and Pedagogy Institute in Budapest participated in this research.

2.3 The applied method

In alignment with the common schedule in Hungarian secondary schools, the research was established to be manageable during one session of a 45-minute classroom session. The questionnaire was presented in Hungarian language along with the subtitled version of the original sketches in order to exclude comprehension errors.

In the process of establishing this particular research, five sketches of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* were selected for inclusion into the video compilation for this research in order to provide the subjects with a humorous impulse, thus trigger written response. The sketches presented in a video compilation were selected according to their characteristic of representing and mocking everyday situations the subjects as members of generation Z would be able to relate with. *Hell's Grannies* represents news about aggression and vandalism these teenagers are constantly exposed to in news broadcasts or newspaper articles. *Bicycle Repair Man* mocks the superhero-cult being present in today's teenagers lives due to the various Hollywood adaptations of the Marvel comics. Common bureaucratic behaviour and authority are mocked in *Ministry of Silly Walks* as well as in *Gumby the Brain Specialist*, whereas the *Parrot Sketch* presents an everyday situation of returning damaged ware in a shop.

A questionnaire including two closed-ended major questions with the first major question followed by two closed-ended and three open-ended additional questions as well as three rating tasks concerning the given stimulus was established. Additional questions were included in order to increase the reliability of the retrieved information (Falus⁶, 2004, p. 173). Open-ended questions allow for uncovering the opinions, motives, points of view of the participants towards the subject matter, whereas the evaluation of closed-ended questions are argued to be easier, especially in the case of a large sampling (Falus, 2004, pp. 174-176).

The content, language level, tone and length of the questionnaire was established in alignment with the interest, bearing strength and concentration capacity of the subjects (Falus, 2004, p. 185). Special attention was given to the fact that the time span of a secondary school classroom session is limited to 45 minutes.

In order that the retrieved data could be kept confidential, only a nickname or a monogram as well as the age of the subjects were required to be given.

⁶ Excerpts from Falus, I. (2004). *Bevezetés a pedagógiai kutatás módszereibe* were translated by the author of this paper.

In the first part, the two major closed-ended questions as well as the five minor questions were established to provide evidence about the background of the students concerning their previous experiences with absurd humour. In addition to the data retrieved through the core of the questionnaire containing three rating scales it was considered to be of importance to map the current state of the subjects concerning their previous experience with absurd humour, i.e. whether they have or have not come in contact with absurd before this particular stimulus. The assumption was held that individuals with previous experience would rate the sketches in the video compilation in a more positive way.

The second major question was aimed at revealing the future intentions of students concerning absurd humour due to this particular stimulus.

The second part of the questionnaire included three rating scales in order to establish the attitudes and opinions of the subjects. For this particular study an attitude is considered based on the influential work of Likert (1932, p. 8) as an either innate or learned entity of personality as disposition of- as well as valid substitute for an overt action. Regarded in this way, attitudes are neither inflexible, nor rigid “but rather a certain range within responses move” (Likert, 1932, p. 8), as well as according to Thurstone (1928, p. 531) as an umbrella term for an individual’s feelings, inclinations, “prejudice or bias, preconceived notions, ideas, fears, threats, and ambitions about a specified topic” (Thurstone, 1928, p. 531). As indicated by Thurstone (1928, p. 531), the term opinion is adopted as a verbal manifestation of an attitude.

Regarding the fact that according to Thurstone (1928, p. 530) an attitude is a complex affair that cannot be described by a single numerical index as well as in order to keep the final instrument to a convenient length, three scaling tasks were included in the second part.

The first scaling task – question 3 in the questionnaire – included a five-scale multiple choice Thurstone scale with the intention to reveal which sketch was considered by the subjects as “very funny”, “moderately funny”, “not so funny” and “not funny at all”. Between the positive and negative choices an additional column was established concerning the possibility of students not understanding the perceived humorous impulse.

In order to specify the information about the subjects’ attitude concerning this particular stimulus, an Osgood attitude scale was included. The subjects were provided with a “set of bipolar adjectival scales” (Osgood, 1957, p. 20) against which they could differentiate the previously presented concept. The task of the individual was to indicate the direction of his or her association for each item. A small but carefully devised set of 9 bipolar adjectives and statements were established. In order to keep the retrieved data to a manageable size each adjective and statement pair was presented at the ends of a five-point scale, the meaning of

which were included in the table itself. The informants had to mark their attitude along the scales: interesting-boring, funny-not funny, makes me laugh-makes me nervous, understandable-complicated, I like it-I do not like it, educative-non-educative, lifelike-non-realistic, clear-unclear and contemporary-old-fashioned.

In the last rating task, subjects were asked to rank the specific sketches according to the perceived funniness. This task was established to aid and enumerate the information retrieved in task 3 of the questionnaire. At the end of the questionnaire, the students' opinion was asked in order to underline and support their choice in the ranking task as well as to retrieve some additional information concerning the perception of the particular visual stimulus.

2.4 Description of the research

The video compilation as well as the questionnaire were presented to the classes during a 45 minute classroom session. Instructions were given to the participants prior to the presentation of the visual stimulus. The participants were asked to read through the questionnaire and, after watching the particular video compilation, to fill in the questionnaire according to their personal opinion.

Chapter 3. Results

The data retrieved from the questionnaire are presented and analysed in the following chapter including verbal information about the opinion of the subjects as well as the results of the rating tasks.

The questionnaire was administered to a total of 247 female- and 97 male students at secondary level between 14 and 19 years.

The analysis of data representing the subjects' background knowledge about the subject of the research is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

	male		female	
students who could name the group, members, or any additional information about the stimulus	25%		7%	
students who could not provide any background information	75%		93%	
students who would watch sketches of absurd humour in future	% of students who could not name the stimulus	% of total male students	% of students who could not name the stimulus	% of total female students
	38%	29%	32%	30%

The data presented in Figure 2 reveal that most of the female informants could not provide any background information about the presented visual stimulus, whereas 25% of the male population has some knowledge about this particular manifestation of absurd humour. Concerning the retrieved verbal information retrieved through the additional open-ended questions it is clear that 25% of the male and 7% of the female population could identify the group *Monty Python*. Three outstanding female participants could provide information including two subjects reciting five of the six group members (one leaving out *Michael Palin* and one *Terry Gilliam*) as well as one informant recalling other films, such as *The Life of Brian* and *The Holy Grail*. One male participant was able to give the full name of the series *Monty Python's Flying Circus* with additional films including *The Meaning of Life*, *The Life of Brian* and *The Holy Grail*. The same person has succeeded in localizing the presented stimulus by stating "England of the 1970's".

With 38% of those students who have not come in contact with such sketches of absurd humour but would watch similar videos, male participants have proven themselves more “open” to absurd humour compared to the 32% concerning female informants.

Figure 2 shows the results of the first rating task concerning the funniness of the sketches.

Figure 2.

	very funny		moderately funny		cannot decide		not so funny		not funny at all	
	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f
Hell's Grannies	24%	21%	37%	39%	6%	9%	20%	17%	13%	14%
Gumby the Brain Specialist	21%	21%	34%	24%	7%	9%	16%	20%	22%	26%
Bicycle Repair Man	9%	4%	20%	17%	12%	9%	21%	29%	38%	41%
Ministry of Silly Walks	23%	32%	31%	33%	8%	8%	21%	15%	17%	12%
Parrot Sketch	6%	8%	24%	28%	11%	11%	27%	18%	32%	35%

Data presented in Figure 2 displays the percentage of the informants rating the particular sketch as very or moderately funny, not so funny or not funny at all. Subjects who could not decide whether to rate the presented visual input positively or negatively concerning its funniness are presented in the middle bars. The percentage numbers of each field are compared to a total of 247 in case of female students, whereas concerning male participants, to a total of 97.

Information retrieved from Figure 2 allow for establishing an ordinal scale concerning the humour rating of the sketches. In order to compile the results, points were assigned to each trait, five points for “very funny”, 4 points for “moderately funny”, 3 points for “cannot decide” and so on. The trait “cannot decide” represents neither positive nor negative opinions, thus it is placed in the middle. With the aim of establishing the ordinal scale, the following calculation was made: the percentage of choices concerning “very funny” multiplied with five added to the percentage of answers concerning “moderately funny” multiplied with four and so on. For example in the case of male students and the sketch *Hell's Grannies*: $24 \times 5 + 37 \times 4 + 6 \times 3 + 20 \times 2 + 13 \times 1 = 339$.

Considering the fact that the highest score was assigned to the most positive opinion i.e., “very funny”, the sketch with the highest score was perceived as the funniest. The retrieved ordinal scales are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3.

	male	score	female	score
most funny ↓ least funny	<i>Hell's Grannies</i>	339	<i>Ministry of Silly Walks</i>	358
	<i>Ministry of Silly Walks</i>	322	<i>Hell's Grannies</i>	336
	<i>Gumby the Brain Specialist</i>	316	<i>Gumby the Brain Specialist</i>	294
	<i>Parrot Sketch</i>	245	<i>Parrot Sketch</i>	256
	<i>Bicycle Repair Man</i>	241	<i>Bicycle Repair Man</i>	214

Figure 4 reveals the results of the attitude-scale.

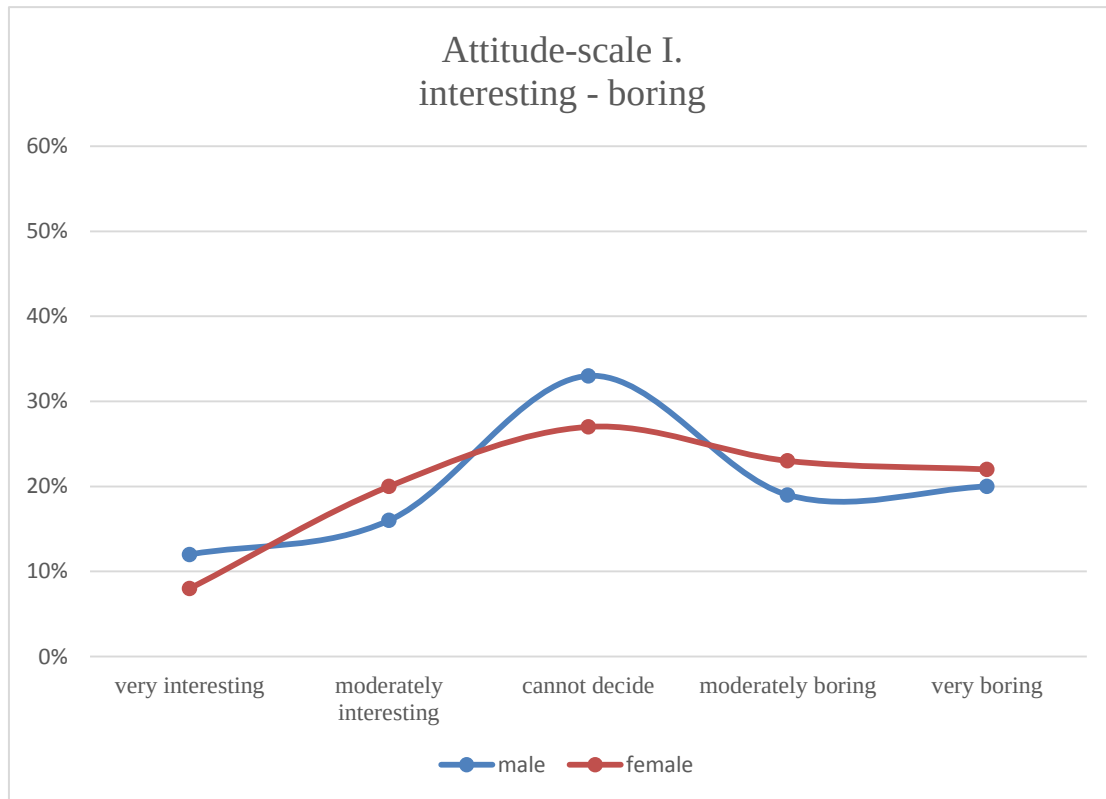
Figure 4.

	very		moderately		cannot decide		moderately		very		
	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	
interesting	12%	8%	16%	20%	33%	27%	19%	23%	20%	22%	boring
funny	14%	15%	25%	24%	21%	17%	26%	24%	14%	20%	not funny
makes me laugh	12%	21%	28%	21%	40%	24%	18%	21%	2%	13%	makes me nervous
understandable	35%	28%	30%	29%	25%	28%	8%	11%	2%	4%	complicated
I like it	13%	16%	23%	15%	26%	24%	22%	16%	12%	23%	I do not like it
educative	1%	1%	6%	5%	28%	13%	20%	22%	45%	59%	non-educative
lifelike	1%	2%	8%	6%	14%	18%	28%	24%	49%	50%	non-realistic
clear	15%	14%	24%	25%	35%	32%	19%	21%	7%	8%	unclear
contemporary	1%	2%	5%	7%	25%	26%	36%	27%	33%	38%	old-fashioned

Regarding the aim of this particular research being to provide evidence about how absurd humour is perceived by members of generation Z, a more detailed inspection of the data retrieved from the attitude-scales is considered to be relevant.

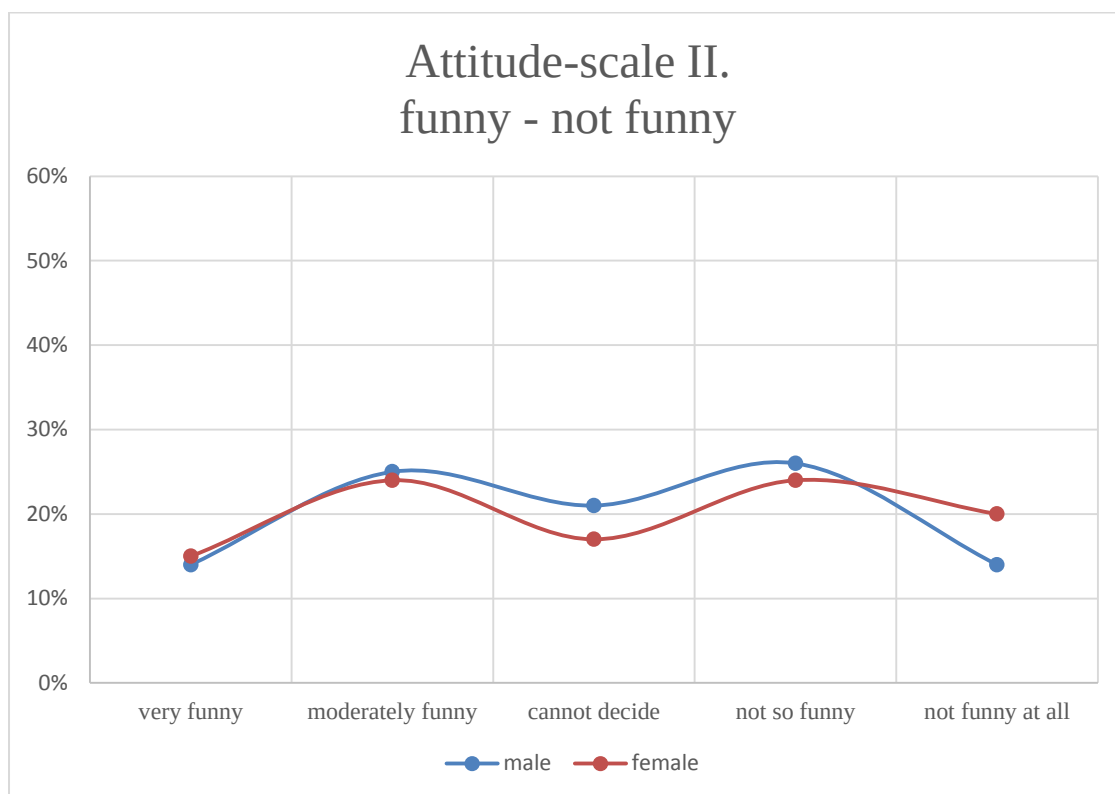
Detailed results of the attitude scale attempting to compare the performance of male and female informants are presented in the following diagrams.

Figure 5.



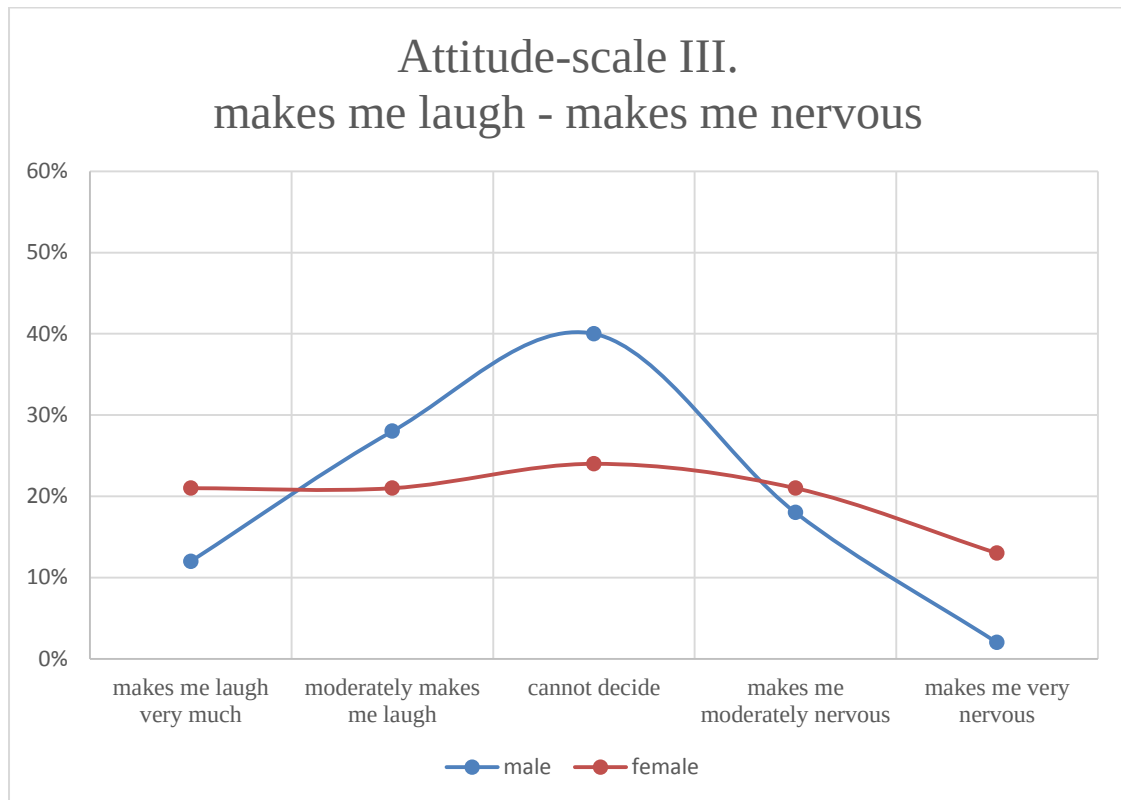
Data presented in Figure 5 concerning the responses in the case of the interesting-boring bipolar adjective reveal that to 4% more male students perceived the presented humorous impulse as “very interesting”, whereas more female students found the stimulus “moderately interesting” to the same extent. Both sexes display a high rate of indifference being “cannot decide” the most recurrently chosen trait in the case of 27% of the female- and 33% of the male participants. A higher rate of female students regarded the visual stimulus as “moderately boring” to 4 % or “very boring” to 2% compared to the male responses.

Figure 6.



Responses presented in Figure 6, regarding the funniness of the presented visual stimulus display a somewhat even distribution of judgement. Concerning the positive side of the scale, both sexes show only insignificant differences. 14% of the male- and 15 % of the female population regard this particular stimulus as “very funny”, and 25% male students perceive the impulse as “moderately funny” compared to the 24% of the female informants. The highest rate of responses is projected in the moderate part of the scale. To 6% more female informants reveal a more negative attitude towards this particular humour impulse concerning funniness.

Figure 7.



Responses presented in Figure 7 regarding whether the particular stimulus elicits laughter or feelings of nervousness in the informants reveal a more even distribution of choices in the case of female students compared to the male participants. The most striking outcome in the present figure is the high uncertainty in the case of male responses with 40% indicating that they “cannot decide”. The second most common choice of male students was the trait “moderately makes me laugh” including 28% of the male population. The presented humorous impulse is reported to make 9% more female informants “laugh very much”. The negative extremity reveals noticeable differences as well with 11% more females reporting that the presented sketches make them “very nervous”.

Figure 8.

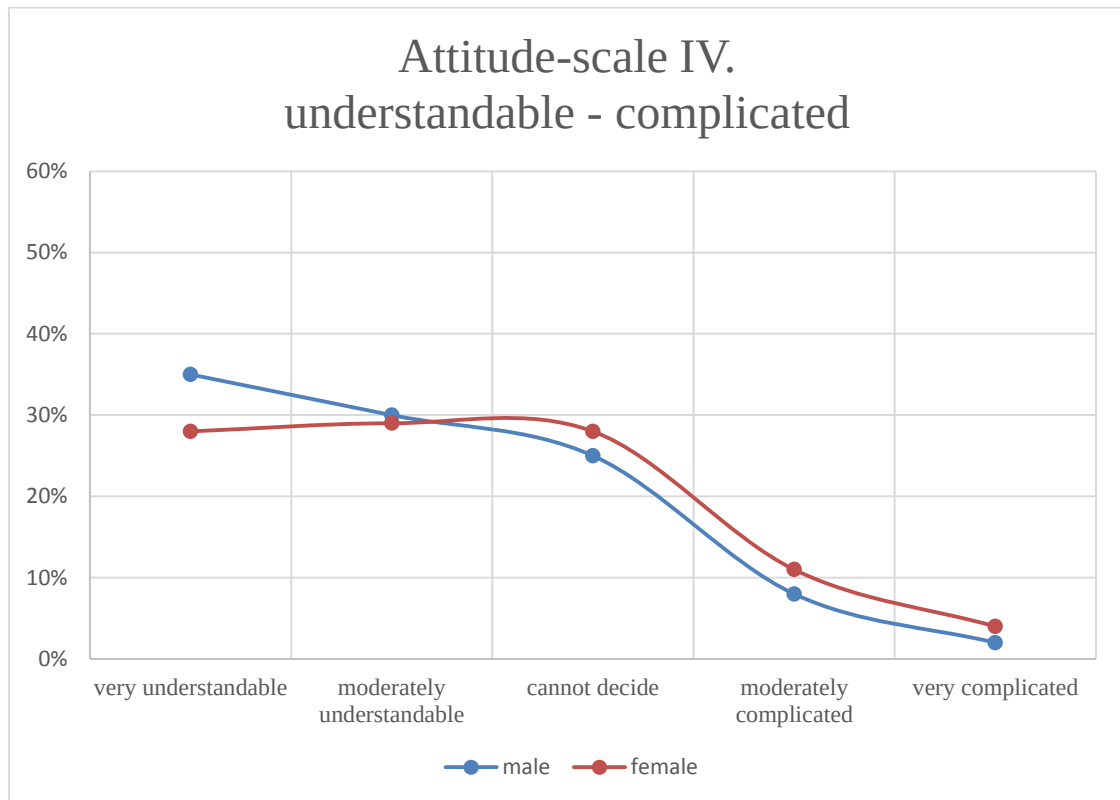
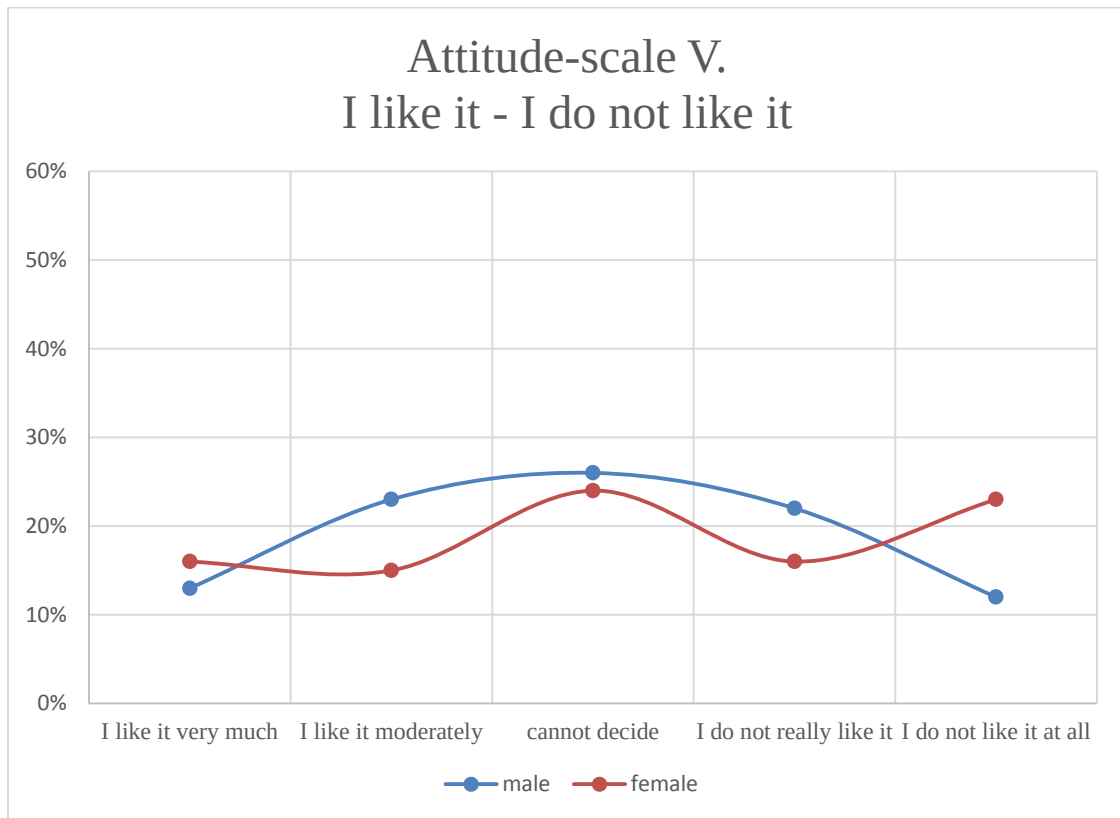


Figure 8 illustrates that the majority of the population found the presented impulse “very understandable”, and not “very complicated” with 2-3% more female participants revealing negative attitude compared to male students. Remarkable differences can be observed between the two extremities revealing a certain determination of the participants with 35% of the male- and 28% of the female population perceiving the stimulus as “very understandable” and only 2% of the male- and 4% of the female students reporting that the particular visual impulse was “very complicated”.

Figure 9.



Data presented in Figure 9 displays the responses of the participants concerning whether they liked the presented humorous impulse or not. The most frequent choice of the informants was that they “cannot decide”. The male responses reveal positive and negative attitude to an equal amount. Concerning female responses, a somewhat negative attitude can be observed taking into consideration the relatively high response on the case of “I do not like it at all” compared to the 15-16% of “I like it very much” and the responses in the moderate part of the scale.

Figure 10.

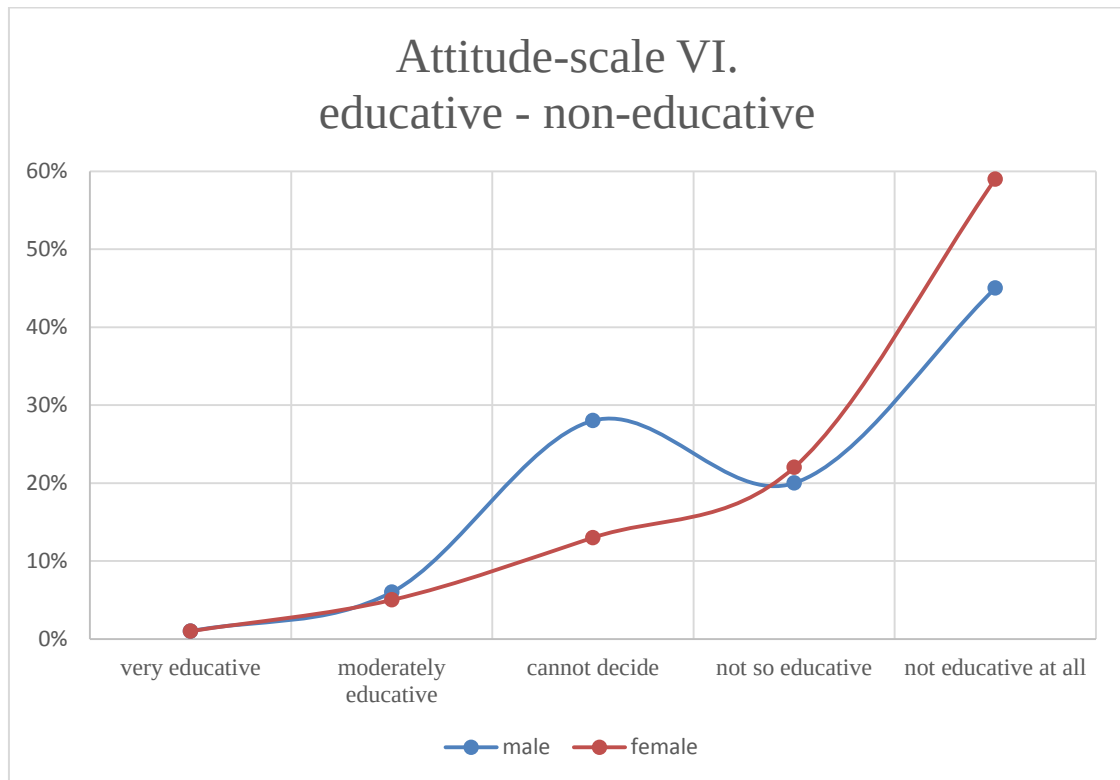
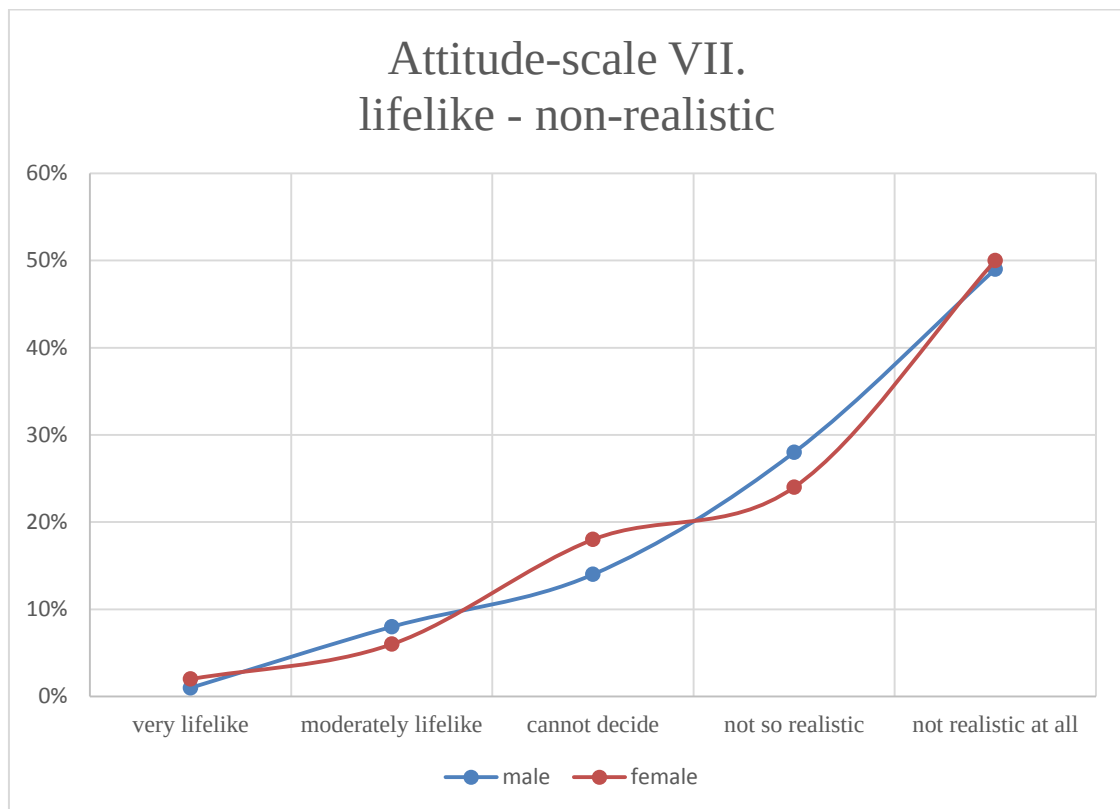


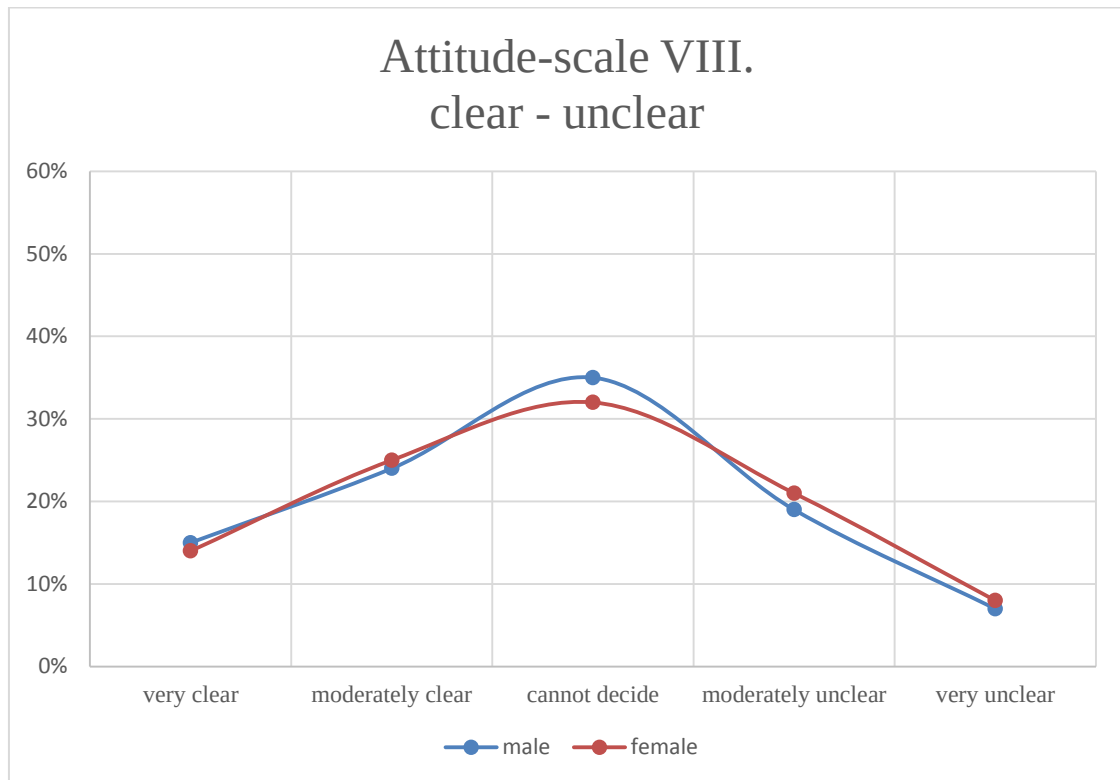
Figure 10 reveals a significant distribution of choices concerning the perceived educative characteristic of the presented visual stimulus. Again, the male uncertainty is relatively high with 28% of the total number of male participants compared to the responses of the female students with only 13%. Data presented in this particular scale display the clear attitude of the students with 59% of the female informants and 45% of the male students stating that the humorous impulse was perceived as “not educative at all” compared to the other extremity of the scale with 1% of the responses concerning both sexes.

Figure 11.



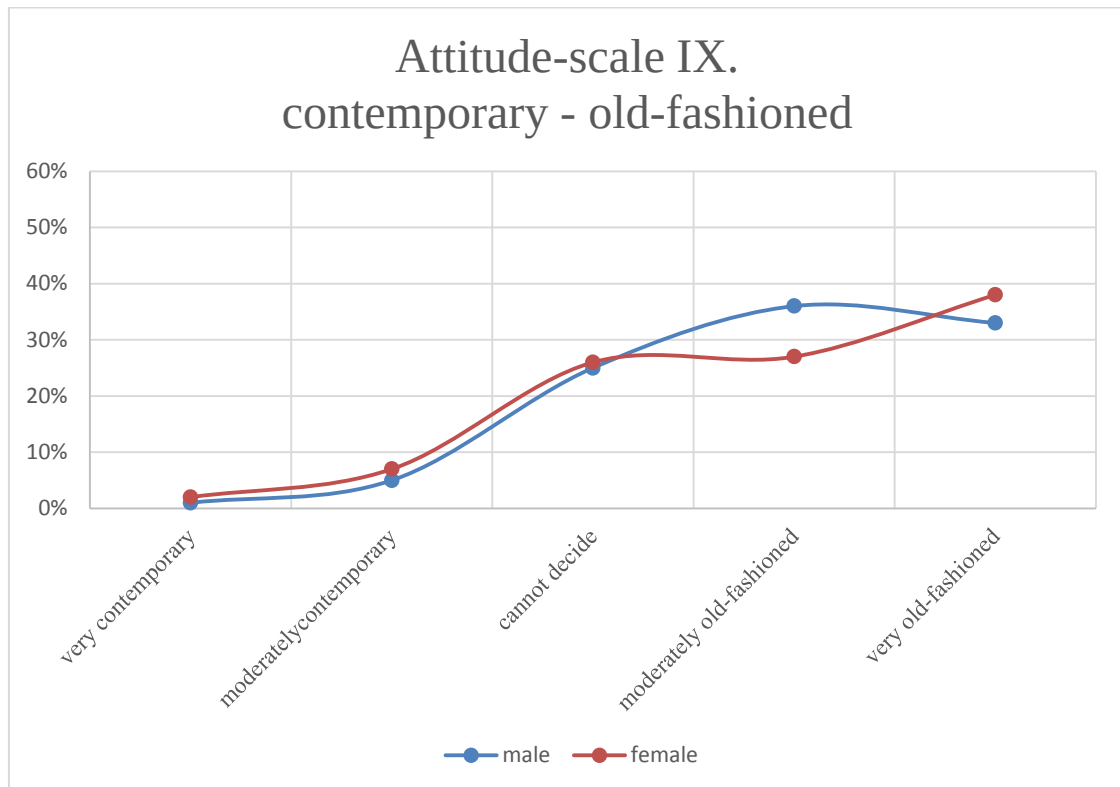
The same kind of resoluteness can be observed considering Figure 11 concerning whether the humorous impulse was perceived as lifelike or non-realistic. The two extremities reveal significant differences in favour of the treat “non-realistic at all” including 50% of the total female- and 49% of the total male responses compared to the 2-3% in the “very lifelike” part.

Figure 12.



The data presented in Figure 12 displays the relatively high indifference of the responses concerning the clarity of the presented humorous impulse concerning 32% of female- and 35% of the male population. Positive responses can be observed slightly more frequent including 15% and 24% of the male responses revealing some rate of clarity as opposed to the negative side with 19% and 7% compared to the female responses with 14% and 25% revealing a positive attitude opposed to the 21% and 8% of the female students regarding the stimulus as “moderately-” or “very unclear”.

Figure 13.



Information presented in Figure 13 project a relative determination in the distribution of choices concerning whether the presented visual stimulus was perceived as contemporary or old-fashioned. 38% of the female- and 33% of the male informants regard the presented humorous impulse as “very old-fashioned” compared to the 1-2% of students on the other side, perceiving the sketches as “very contemporary”.

Figures 14 and 15 display the summarized data of responses concerning the gender of informants.

Figure 14.

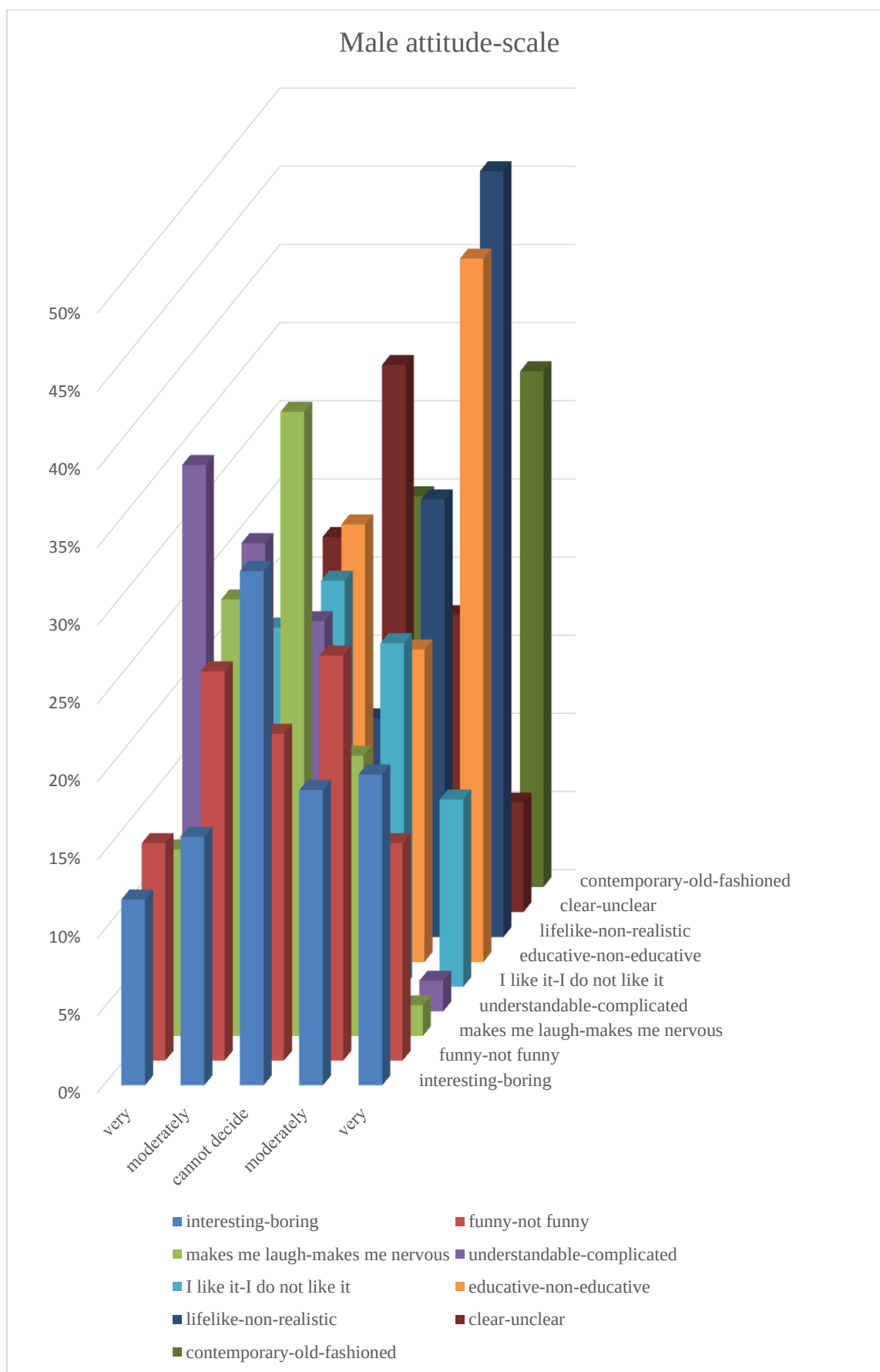
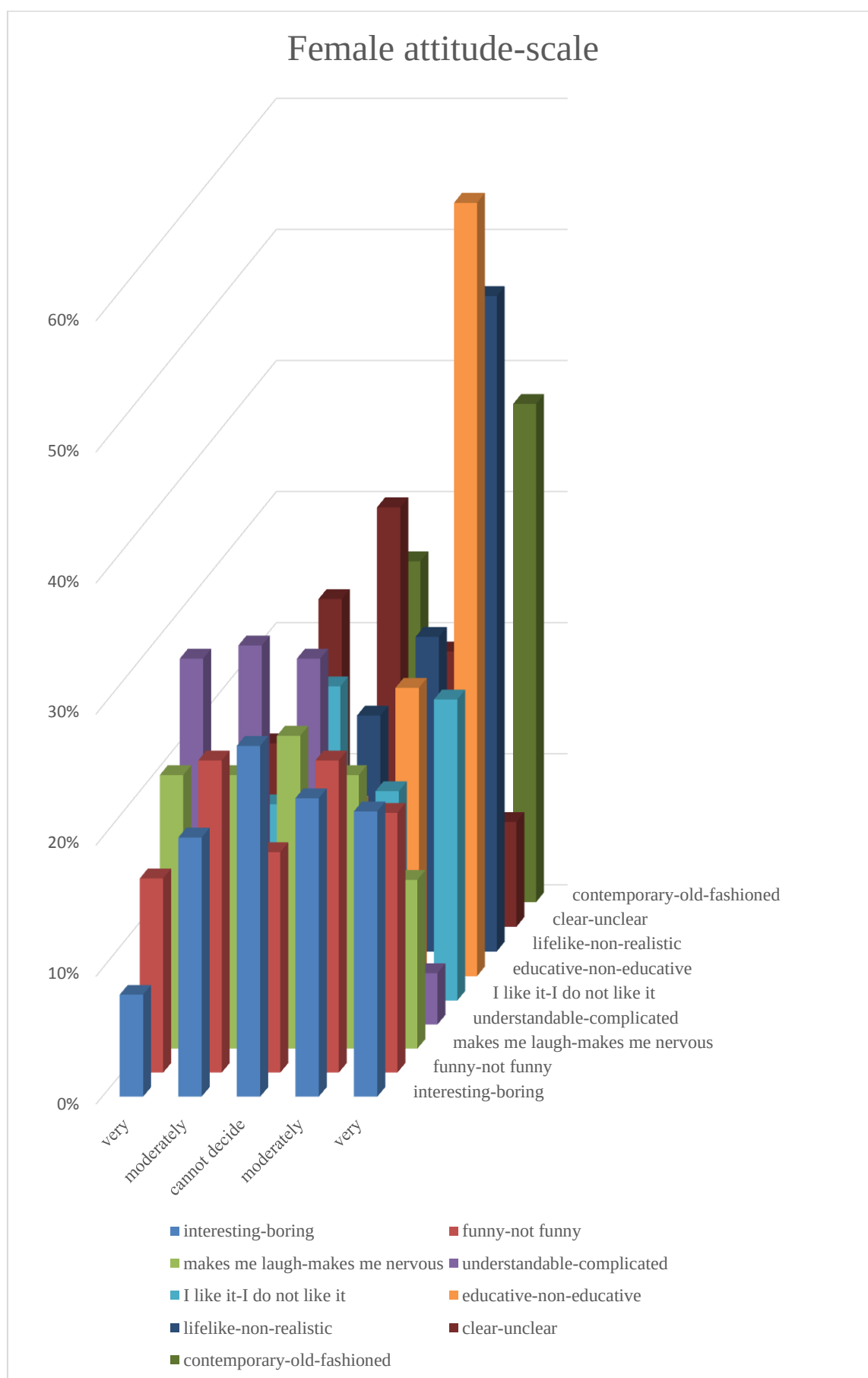


Figure 15.



The above attitude scales reveal the notable uncertainty of the subjects concerning the interest-rate, and clarity as well as whether the presented visual stimulus elicits laughter or nervousness, or whether the informants “liked” the presented humour stimulus or not. Adjectives conveying a negative attitude were favoured by the male as well as female informants revealing that the presented visual impulse was rated boring, not funny, not educative, not realistic and old fashioned by the majority of the population. The presented stimulus was considered to be understandable and clear, that elicits rather laughter than nervousness as a response.

Figure 16 shows the data retrieved from the ranking task.

Figure 16.

	Hell's Grannies		Gumby the Brain Specialist		Bicycle Repair Man		Ministry of Silly Walks		Parrot Sketch	
	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f
1.	40%	31%	24%	18%	2%	4%	28%	39%	6%	8%
2.	22%	28%	28%	18%	15%	9%	17%	31%	18%	15%
3.	24%	22%	18%	23%	20%	15%	24%	15%	16%	26%
4.	8%	13%	15%	21%	25%	34%	24%	11%	27%	22%
5.	6%	6%	15%	20%	38%	38%	7%	4%	33%	29%

In order to achieve an overview about the responses concerning a scale including the different sketches according to their funniness as reported by the informants, a similar method to that presented in case of the data of Figure 3 can be applied. In order to retrieve an ordinal scale 5 points were assigned to the sketch, informants that put on the first place in the ranking task, 4 points to the second place, 3 points to the third and so on. Considering each sketch, through a calculation including the percentage of students who had put that particular sketch on the first place multiplied with five was added to the percentage of students putting the same sketch on the second place multiplied with four, added to the percentage of informants placing the sketch on the third place multiplied with three and so on, a coefficient can be retrieved. Regarding the fact that the highest points were assigned to the first place, the higher the coefficient number, the funnier the particular sketch was perceived by the subjects. In the case of male students and the sketch *Hell's Grannies* the following calculation was made: $31 \times 5 + 28 \times 4 + 22 \times 3 + 13 \times 2 + 6 \times 1 = 382$. According to the retrieved coefficients, the ordinal scales including male and female ranking are presented in Figure 17.

Figure 17.

	male	score	female	score
most funny ↓ least funny	<i>Hell's Grannies</i>	382	<i>Ministry of Silly Walks</i>	390
	<i>Ministry of Silly Walks</i>	335	<i>Hell's Grannies</i>	365
	<i>Gumby the Brain Specialist</i>	331	<i>Gumby the Brain Specialist</i>	293
	<i>Parrot Sketch</i>	237	<i>Parrot Sketch</i>	251
	<i>Bicycle Repair Man</i>	218	<i>Bicycle Repair Man</i>	207

Compared to the ordinal scale presented in Figure 3, Figure 17 reveals significant similarities to the ordinal scale of the retrieved from the data in the first rating task. Male participants regard *Hell's Grannies* as the funniest sketch out of the five presented sketches, and *Ministry of Silly Walks* as the second funniest, whereas female informants perceive *Ministry of Silly Walks* as the funniest, and *Hell's Grannies* is put on the second place by the majority of the subjects. The last three ranks including *Gumby, the Brain Specialist*, *Parrot Sketch* and *Bicycle Repair Man* were perceived funny more or less to the same amount by both sexes.

Significant correspondence concerning the verbal responses of both sexes reveal can be observed. Positive statements of males as well as females include:

"it has awakened my interest"	"they make everyday things and situations funny"
"it is a good way of entertaining"	"it is like a distorting mirror"
"humorous /witty/funny/amusing"	"purely original"
"tiring in a positive way"	"surreal"
"imaginative"	"it totally gets the message across".
"creative"	
"I had tears in my eyes from laughing so hard"	

Negative responses occurred more frequently at the end of the questionnaire including:

"they parodied old people and dead animals"	"absolutely nonsensical"
"sick humour"	"waste of time"
"primitive/imbecile"	"pathetic"
"annoying"	"absolutely not entertaining"
	"it does not make any sense"

“far-fetched/forced humour”

“overplayed”

“it is not interesting any more in our time”

“not my style”

“blasphemous”

“you should not teach young children to such things”

“fraud”

“humiliating”

“it makes fun of serious issues”

“I am happy that I did not have to grow up with this”

“morbid”

“it is simply bad”

“weak humour”

“terrible”

“it does not have any storyline”

“they do not speak Hungarian”

“it is subtitled”.

3.1 Discussion of the results

The specific hypothesis tested in this research paper was that members of generation Z are not familiar with the cognitive incongruity-solving strategies that function as a prerequisite to understanding absurd humour.

The evidence appeared to indicate that a very low percentage of today's teenagers come in contact with the works of the *Monty Python* group, although sketches are available on the internet, on DVD-s as well as on the Hungarian television channel Comedy Central.

The most striking outcome of this research was the almost hostile, negative attitude revealed on the questionnaire. Verbal responses display that the majority of the informants are not able to solve the cognitive incongruity presented in the sketches meaningfully. They take the topic of the sketches as well as their its humorous presentation literally and to a high percentage, they are offended by it.

The surprisingly high uncertainty rate presented in the responses opposes the characteristic of generation Z teenagers presented earlier in this paper, concerning their confidence and precision in forming their ideas, opinions as well as value judgement. This factor can be explained with reference to the fact that if teenagers are not specifically interested in a particular issue, they simply refuse to take sides for example in case of the attitude-scale.

Differences according to the gender of the informants reveal that female teenagers project negative attitudes to a slightly higher rate than males, whereas males appear to be more uncertain concerning their opinions.

Although humour in the classroom context can be an extremely effective technique of education, if misused or simply misunderstood, it can have devastating consequences concerning the student-teacher relationship or the classroom atmosphere. It is therefore advisable to observe the ability of students in understanding different types of humour in order to adapt the teaching methods respectively to the competence of the students. Teachers should carefully treat this particular technique in order to avoid accidentally embarrassing, ridiculing or otherwise harming a student. Moreover, humour in the classroom content should have a specific purpose, and should not be used for its own sake, for according to the research of Rareshide (1993, p. 20), aimless humour is likely to result in misbehaviour of the students as well as in the waste of class time.

Conclusion

Using humour in various areas of life is clearly not a peripheral issue. Using humour in the classroom aids in creating a relaxed atmosphere where students can experience the freedom for divergent thinking, creative problem-solving with a teacher that is able to reveal his/her human side and therefore can connect with his/her students, motivate and enthuse them. However, types of humour as an educational technique should be carefully considered in order to avoid the destructive consequences resulting from the students' misunderstanding the humorous attempt.

After having described the main characteristics of the generation participating in the present research, the social background, psychological characteristics along with the main societal and family related issues were highlighted. The specific theories of humour were discussed with special attention to the definition of humour and the beneficial effects as opposed to the negative outcomes of using humour in the classroom context, followed by a brief characterization of the *Monty Python* comedy group regarding the fact that the sketches of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* provided the humorous impulse in order to elicit responses from the informants.

The hypothesis that Hungarian secondary school students as representants of generation Z are not acquainted with the cognitive incongruity-solving strategies that function as a prerequisite to understanding absurd humour has been confirmed according to the present research conducted among 344 Hungarian secondary school students. The thoroughly negative attitude revealed on the attitude scale as well as the verbal responses on the questionnaire underline that the majority of the informants were not able to solve cognitive incongruity presented in the sketches of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* meaningfully. Moreover, they take the humorous presentation literally and thus, are offended by it.

In light of the results of this particular research it is advisable for teachers to use absurd humour in the classroom context at secondary level only after carefully observing the students' incongruity-solving ability.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. The questionnaire in Hungarian language.

Kedves Adatközlő! Kérlek az alábbi kérdőív kitöltésével segítsd pedagógiai munkámat. A válaszadás anonim és önkéntes. Kérlek, írd le a válaszod vagy jelöld x-szel a rád jellemző választ.
--

Monogram vagy becenév: _____

Életkor: _____

Nem: ☐ fiú ☐ lány

1. Meg tudod-e mondani, hogy milyen sorozatból láttál részleteket?

☐ igen

☐ nem

a) Ha igen, nevezd meg a sorozatot, az előadókat, vagy bármit, ami eszedbe jut a társulatról.

b) Ha igen, láttál-e már más jeleneteket is ettől a csoporttól?

☐ igen

☐ nem

c) Ha igen, mikor néztél először hasonlót? (Mire emlékszel, kb. hány éves voltál?)

d) Emlékszel, minek a hatására, kinek a javaslatára nézted meg akkor?

☐ igen

☐ nem

e) Ha válaszod igen, kérlek részletezd, mi vagy ki keltette fel érdeklődésedet a sorozat iránt?

2. Ha még nem láttál hasonlót, a mostani vetítés után szívesen néznél még hasonló jeleneteket?

☐ igen

☐ nem

Kérlek, indokold a válaszodat.

3. A megfelelő négyzetben x-szel jelöld a szerinted legmegfelelőbb jellemzést.

	nagyon vicces	kicsit vicces	nem tudom eldönteni	nem annyira vicces	egyáltalán nem vicces
1. A pokol nagyijai					
2. Mr. Gumby az agysebész					
3. A biciklijavító					
4. Hülye járások minisztériuma					
5. Papagáj jelenet					

4. Kérlek az alábbi skálákon oda tegyél x-et (minden sorba külön-külön), ami a legjobban egyezik a véleményeddel.

„Amit láttam, számomra /engem/nekem...”

	nagyon	kicsit	nem tudom	kicsit	nagyon	
érdekes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	unalmas
nem vicces	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	humoros
idegesít	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	megnevettet
érthető	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	követhetetlen
nem tetszik	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	tetszik
tanulságos	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	nem tanulságos
nem életszerű	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	életszerű
egyértelmű	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	zavaros
ódivatú	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	korszerű

5. Tetszési sorrendben rangsorold az egyes jeleneteket. Írd be a jelenetek címeit. A 3. feladatban megtalálod a jelenetek címeit.

(1. a legjobb, 5. a legkevésbé tetszett)

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Indoklás:

Köszönöm a munkád.

Appendix 2. The questionnaire translated into English language.

Dear Informant,

please help my pedagogical work by filling in the present questionnaire.

Data providing is anonymous and voluntary.

Please write down your answer or mark the answer most suitable for you with an x.

Nickname or initial letters of your name: _____

Age: _____

Gender: ☐ male ☐ female

6. Can you tell from which series the excerpts were taken that were shown in the video compilation?

☐ yes

☐ no

- f) If your answer is yes, please identify the series or name the actors or write down anything that comes to your mind about this group.

- g) If your answer is yes, have you seen other sketches from this group?

☐ yes

☐ no

- h) If your answer is yes, when have you watched similar sketches? (What do you remember, how old were you?)

- i) Do you recall why or to the influence of what or whom you have watched similar sketches?

☐ yes

☐ no

- j) If your answer yes, please give detailed information about who or what raised your interest concerning this series?

7. If you have not seen similar sketches to the presented ones, would you watch such sketches after this presentation?

☐ yes

☐ no

Please justify your answer.

8. Please mark the most suitable characterisation with an x.

	very funny	moderately funny	cannot decide	not so funny	not funny at all
6. Hell's Grannies					
7. Gumby the Brain Specialist					
8. Bicycle Repair Man					
9. Ministry of Silly Walks					
10. Parrot Sketch					

9. Please mark the statement that represents your opinion with an x on the following scales (in each line separately).

“What I have seen is.../makes me...”

	very	moderately	cannot decide	moderately	very	
interesting	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	boring
not funny	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	funny
makes me nervous	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	makes me laugh
understandable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	complicated
I do not like it	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	I like it
educative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	non-educative
non-realistic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	lifelike
clear	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	unclear
old-fashioned	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	contemporary

10. Please rank the sketches according to which one you liked the most. Fill in the titles. The titles of the sketches can be found in task 3.

(1. I liked it the most. 5. I liked it the least.)

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Please justify your answer.

Thank you for your cooperation.