

# CREATIVITY AND POWER: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE CO-CONSTRUCTED MULTIMODAL CREATIVITY-POWER RELATION IN *HOUSE M.D.*

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## ABSTRACT

Multimodal creativity in popular culture is an area with great potentials for linguistics research, yet the number of analytical frameworks and demonstrations available is very limited. This article adapted a systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis approach to the investigation of the co-constructed multimodal creativity-and-power relation in the American TV medical 'dramedy' *House M.D.* Using a combination of Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) systemic functional theory, Bednarek's (2010)

multimodal analysis and Law's (2020a, 2020b, 2020d) analytical framework for creativity in multimodal texts (AFCMT), the dialogues and videos from two selected scenes were analysed. The analysis was conducted with respect to the interpersonal meanings (i.e., tenor values and speech function), *mise-en-scène*, nonverbal behaviour and performance at moments of co-constructed verbal repetition/pattern-forming creativity production. This study has found that power equality is construed verbally using pattern-forming creativity and that interpersonal meanings (denoted by tenor values consisting of power, contact and affective involvement) are construed nonverbally through spatial movement and various combinations of facial expression, head movement and body movement. It has also shown that hand/arm gestures and some *mise-en-scène* elements (e.g., set design, lighting, space, costume, or auditory soundtrack) are unlikely to be correlated to the production of pattern-forming creativity in *House M.D.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Creativity, in applied linguistics, is the manipulation of semi-otic resources to form or reform patterns and create meaning in the process (for a detailed description of creativity, see Carter 2004 and Law 2021). Multimodal creativity is a mode of creativity that is realised “through configuring and reconfiguring relationships between words, images, sound, and movement in original and recycled texts” (Maybin 2015: 37). This mode of creativity in TV drama (and other forms of popular media as a matter of fact) is a research scope that has often been overlooked by linguists. Some possible reasons include:

1. the traditional preference towards literary texts (Law 2015, Vo and Carter 2010);
2. the lack of interest in exploring non-literary texts and genres in popular culture (Law 2020a; Norton and Vanderheyden 2004; Pennycook 2007; Richardson 2010b);
3. the belief that spoken discourse as data is more ‘real’ than scripted telecinematic discourse (Bednarek 2010, Bignell and Lacey 2005);
4. the absence of agreement on a universal definition of creativity (Carter 2004, Sawyer 2006);
5. the paucity of (multimodal) frameworks for the analysis of linguistic creativity (Law 2019b, 2020d, 2021);
6. the scarcity of methodological guidelines and reliable statistical values (e.g., cut-off values) for automatic extraction of linguistic creativity from big data (Law 2019a, 2020c);
7. and as a result of all these, low impact from related publications, which leads to further decrease in related output.

Realising “the urgent need [...] for a treatment of fictional cinema and television from various linguistic perspectives” (Piazza et al. 2011: 2), several linguists have carried out various investigations on some well-known TV dramas. Chamber (2003) looks at the political discourse through close analysis of the dialogues in one particular episode of *The West Wing* (NBC, 1999-2006). Brock (2004) analyses humorous communications in the *Monty Python’s Flying Circus* (BBC1, 1969-1973; BBC1, 1974) scripts and suggests the viability of dual-script analysis. Buber (2006) performs a conversation analysis of dialogues of the American television drama *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-2004) to understand the characters’ relationship perceived by the audience. Quaglio (2008), using Biber’s multidimensional methodology (Biber 1988) and functional

analysis tools, compares a corpus of the American situation comedy *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004) with the American English Conversation subcorpus of the Longman Grammar Corpus to determine the sitcom’s suitability as a teaching resource for the English as a second language learners. Bednarek (2010) provides a comprehensive analysis of the fictional television series *Gilmore Girls* (The WB/The CW, 2000-2007) and offers an insightful identity characterisation through corpus linguistics and multimodal discourse analysis in parallel. Richardson (2010b), Culpeper (2005) and Culpeper et al. (2003) discuss the impoliteness of Dr. Gregory House in *House M.D.* (Fox, 2004-2012) in qualitative terms. However, it is not until recent years that the study of creative language in TV drama makes a significant methodological advancement. Working with *House M.D.* dialogues and videos, Law (2018) establishes statistical cut-off values for the semi-automatic extraction of linguistic creativity using corpus linguistics methods (Law 2015, 2019a, 2020c) and proposes frameworks for the analysis of multimodal creativity based on a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) approach (Law 2019b, 2020b, 2020d, 2021).

By adopting a range of qualitative and quantitative approaches, these researchers have successfully produced significant linguistic insights. Their attempts have demonstrated that TV drama is not only a rich resource waiting to be explored, but also a unique form of “mediated” text rich in language and culture (Richardson 2010a: 177), or what literary agent Steven Axelrod considers as “the true heir to great literature” (Lavery 2012).

The present study aims to provide qualitative evidence to support Law’s (2021) quantitative findings of a possible negative correlation between co-constructed/pattern-forming creativity production and power difference among characters of *House M.D.* Using a systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis (SFMDA) approach, this study analyses the multimodal creativity in dialogues and videos to reveal the construal of power by actors/characters.

The multimodal creativity emphasised in this study occurs at the moments of repetition in co-constructed common talk (Tannen 2007, Carter 2004). In popular TV dramas such as *House M.D.*, the consistent use of verbal repetition by a character is a character trait – also known as a motif – and is central to the viewers’ familiarisation and identification of characters (Bordwell and Thompson 2008). Verbal repetition/co-constructed creative language belongs to the category of pattern-forming creativity, which is one of the two types of linguistic creativity in everyday common talk hypothesised by Carter (2004). Pattern-forming creativity refers to “creativity

via conformity to language rules rather than breaking them, creating convergence, symmetry and greater mutuality between interlocutors”, whereas pattern-reforming creativity is the “creativity by displacement of fixedness, reforming and re-shaping patterns of language” (Vo and Carter 2010: 303). The former type is the focus of this multimodal creativity study.

This article is structured as follows. Section two briefly introduces the TV drama *House M.D.* and provides reasons to support a linguistic study of the series. Section three describes the theories involved in the methods of analysis. Section four analyses two selected scenes using the proposed analytical frameworks and discusses findings. Finally, section five concludes this article by summarising the results and suggesting directions for future research.

## 2. THE ‘DRAMEDY’ *HOUSE M.D.*

*House M.D.* is an American television medical ‘dramedy’ aired on the FOX Network from 16 November 2004 to 21 May 2012 (Wikia n.d.). The eight-season-177-episode series was created by David Shore, who won the Primetime Emmy Award 2005’s Outstanding Writing for a Drama Series with *House M.D.*, and brought to life by British actor Hugh Laurie, whose performance in *House M.D.* has twice crowned him winner of the Golden Globe’s Best Performance by an Actor in a Television Series – Drama in 2006 and 2007<sup>1</sup>.

The series is based on the premise (which is also the title of the pilot): “Everybody lies” (Werts 2009), a motto inscribed deep in the mind of Dr. Gregory House (Hugh Laurie), a pain medication-dependent, arrogant, misanthropic, genius diagnostician who heads an innovative Department of Diagnostic Medicine at the fictional Princeton-Plainsboro Teaching Hospital (PPTH) in New Jersey (Jauhar 2005; Jensen 2005, 2007).

Unlike most TV medical dramas in English, *House M.D.* places much emphasis on the diagnostic process (Gonzalez 2009). Taking around “maybe one in twenty cases” a week (“Lockdown”, 6.17; Valentine 2011), House shows a strong resemblance to Sherlock Holmes in his reluctance to accept cases he considers uninteresting (Wild 2005)<sup>2</sup>. Such routine behaviour makes earning House’s acceptance of a case

a highly linguistically-creative negotiated process, ranging from the use of false pretences to striking deals with former university classmate/House’s boss/hospital administrator/Dean of Medicine, Dr. Lisa Cuddy (Lisa Edelstein). Supporting House is a team of “overqualified doctors” consisting of Dr. Robert Chase (Jesse Spencer), Dr. Allison Cameron (Jennifer Morrison), and the new hire Dr. Eric Foreman (Omar Epps) (1.01). House’s team is mainly responsible for giving House creative ideas to solve his medical puzzles (Gibson 2008) during differential diagnosis (also known as DDX in the series) and treating his patients with mysterious illnesses.

*House M.D.* is a TV drama that offers benefits in multiple dimensions. Firstly, it is written with creativity and language quality very much worth exploring and exploiting. Gale Tattersall, director of photography of *House M.D.* and the series’ twice-nominee of the American Society of Cinematographers Award’s Outstanding Achievement in Cinematography in Regular Series in 2007 and 2009<sup>3</sup>, commented in an interview (Olson 2010):

I think the writing is so superior to a lot of other television shows and also more to the point I think the scriptwriting is usually much more polished than anything you see in 70% of the movies these days, the writing is fantastic!... It has been a constant challenge and I absolutely loved it! (9:20-9:52).

Such comment is in line with Richardson’s (2010a: 194):

On the formal side, a possibility exists that dramatic dialogue, approached in the right way, might provide access to patterns of language behavior not (yet) discovered or fully explored in naturally occurring spontaneous interaction – might, indeed, be manifesting its creativity by expressively displaying those patterns. The fake banter exchanges in House [...] are an instance of this.

These comments from professional cinematographer and linguist suggest that *House M.D.* is indeed a valuable resource for the study of linguistic creativity.

Secondly, the main character Dr. Gregory House has been an inspiration for many publications from medical science (Sanders 2009; Holtz 2006, 2011), medical humanities (Goodier and Arrington 2007), philosophy (Jacoby and Irwin

1 “House M.D. - Awards - IMDb.” IMDb. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0412142/awards?ref\\_=tt\\_awd](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0412142/awards?ref_=tt_awd) (last accessed 07-07-14).

2 See also: “House and Holmes parallels - Radio Times, January 2006.” *Radio Times*, January 2006. <http://web.archive.org/web/20100705103940/http://www.radiotimes.com/content/show-features/house/house-and-holmes-parallels/> (last accessed 07-07-14).

3 “House M.D. - Awards - IMDb.” IMDb. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0412142/awards?ref\\_=tt\\_awd](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0412142/awards?ref_=tt_awd) (last accessed 07-07-14).

2008), psychology (Clyman 2009, Jamieson 2011, Cascio and Martin 2011, Whitbourne 2012, Li and Csikszentmihalyi 2014) and media studies (Jackman and Laurie 2010, Holtz 2011, Hockley and Gardner 2011), thereby playing a critical role in the construction of popular memory (Bignell and Lacey 2005) and in academia. This study of *House's* creativity adds to the body of knowledge of *House M.D.*, bridges the existing work on *House* from the aforementioned disciplines, and provides a key reference for future multimodal studies of creative language in telecinematic discourse.

Lastly, *House M.D.* is a unique creative instance in the modern television history of medical dramedy (Li and Csikszentmihalyi 2014) because it takes a completely different approach to conventional medical dramedies such as *ER* (1994-2009) and *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005-) by building the show around one single central character (*House M.D.*, "Swan Song", 8.22A). This provides unity, stability and longitudinality in the creativeness of its repertoire.

### 3. METHODS

Using the Creativity-In-Register Cube Framework (CIRCF) in a quantitative analysis of *House M.D.* dialogues, Law (2021) established a possible correlation between pattern-forming creativity and a high equality of power between characters in the TV drama. The SFMDA of co-constructed multimodal creativity in *House M.D.* adapted in this study is based on the SFL theory by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), multimodal analysis by Bednarek (2010) and Analytical Framework for Creativity in Multimodal Texts (AFCMT) by Law (2020a, 2020b, 2020d). It focuses on interpersonal meaning (i.e., speech function and tenor), mise-en-scène, nonverbal behaviour and performance at moments of pattern-forming creativity production.

The focus on interpersonal meaning was motivated by Tannen (2007: 101), who argues that repetition in conversation – the main form of pattern-forming creativity in this study – contributes to interpersonal meaning-making:

Repetition in conversation can be relatively automatic, and that its automaticity contributes to its functions in production, comprehension, connection, and interaction. These dimensions operate simultaneously to create coherence in discourse and interpersonal involvement in interaction. Repetition is a resource by which conversational-

ists together create a discourse, a relationship, and a world. It is the central linguistic meaning-making strategy, a limitless resource for individual creativity and interpersonal involvement.

The choice of speech function and tenor was suggested by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 34):

When we consider the correlations between tenor values and terms in interpersonal systems, we should really focus on interpersonal semantic systems such as SPEECH FUNCTION in the first instance... Thus combinations of tenor values relating to (a) status and (b) contact correlate with different semantic strategies open to speakers for demanding goods-&-services of their listeners – for commanding their listeners.

In SFL, any context can be characterised under three domains: tenor, field and mode (Halliday 1978, Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, Matthiessen and Halliday 1997). Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 33-4) define tenor as:

[...] who is taking part in the situation: (i) the roles played by those taking part in the socio-semiotic activity – (1) institutional roles, (2) status roles (power, either equal or unequal), (3) contact roles (familiarity, ranging from strangers to intimates) and (4) sociometric roles (affect[ive involvement], either neutral or charged, positively or negatively); and (ii) the values that the interactants imbue the domain with (either neutral or loaded, positively or negatively).

Another important dimension is the metafunction (see Fig. 1). Metafunction refers to the different modes of meaning construed by the grammar (Matthiessen and Halliday 1997). There are three *metafunctions* – interpersonal, ideational, and textual, which are "three kinds of meaning that are embodied in human language as a whole, forming the basis of the semantic organization of all natural languages" (Halliday 1985: 53) operating "simultaneously in the semantics of every language" (Joret and Remael 1998: 159). The interpersonal metafunction is defined as the resource for "meaning as a form of action: the speaker or writer doing something to the listener or reader by means of language" (Halliday 1985: 53). It is "both interactive and personal"

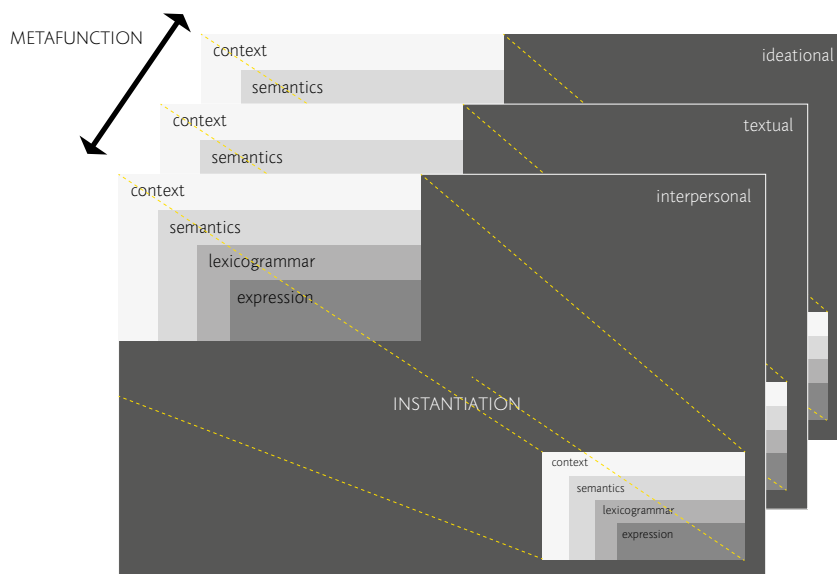


FIG. 1. METAFUNCTION (ADAPTED FROM HALLIDAY & MATTHIESSEN 2014: 31)

(Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 30). Speech function is an interpersonal semantic system (i.e., tenor-related) that focuses on exchange patterns.

Within the semantic system of speech function, there are two roles in exchange and two types of commodity exchanged. The two roles in exchange are *giving* and *demanding*. The two types of commodity exchanged are *goods-&-services* and *information*. These two roles in exchange and two types of commodity exchanged produce four combinations of initiations: giving goods-&-services functions as an offer, giving information functions as a statement; demanding goods-&-services functions as a command, demanding information functions as a question, as shown in Table 1.

role in exchange	Commodity exchanged	
	(a) Goods-&-services	(b) Information
(i) giving	'offer'	'statement'
(ii) demanding	'command'	'question'

TABLE 1. GIVING OR DEMANDING, GOODS-&-SERVICES OR INFORMATION (HALLIDAY AND MATTHIESSEN 2014: 136)

Bednarek’s (2010) approach to multimodal analysis was adopted because of its ease of application and comprehensibility of results. Salient video frames from two selected scenes, namely ‘Treating patients’ and ‘Little part’, were analysed in terms of i) the *mise-en-scène*, and ii) the actors’ nonverbal behaviour and performance. The benefit of this approach is that each telecinematic element of the *mise-en-scène* (e.g., settings, props, costumes, codes of dress, movement, spatial relations, placement of objects and sound), and the actors’ nonverbal behaviour and performance (e.g., appearance, gestures, facial expressions, postures, proxemics) can be analysed independently and then formatively. Bednarek (2010: 141) demonstrates the multimodal analysis to show expressive character identities using the unannotated video source from TV drama *Gilmore Girls*, and argues that “a manual study of one scene... enables in-depth analysis of a large number of selected expressive resources in a small amount of data”. The approach is also relatively straightforward and therefore accessible to audience who are not in the field of linguistics.

In addition, instances of pattern-forming creativity are categorised using the AFCMT (Law 2020a, 2020b, 2020d). The AFCMT groups pattern-forming creativity in terms of the explicitness of the formula of creativity construction and the way references are made.

Types of creativity	Formula of creativity construction	Reference style	
		Exo-referenced	Endo-referenced
Pattern-forming	Implicit	An external reference is used but not explicitly cited; the target audience is not explicitly informed how the repetition is co-constructed. The target's knowledge of the creative process is thus assumed. (Assumed)	A reference is taken from preceding 'text' and reused; the target audience is not explicitly informed how the repetition is co-constructed. The target's knowledge of the creative process is thus assumed. (Assumed)
	Explicit	An external reference is used and is explicitly cited; the target audience is explicitly informed how the repetition is co-constructed. The creative process is thus made known to the target. (Known)	A reference is taken from preceding 'text' and reused; the target audience is explicitly informed how the repetition is co-constructed. The creative process is thus made known to the target. (Known)

TABLE 2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CREATIVITY IN MULTIMODAL TEXTS (AFCMT), ADAPTED FROM LAW (2020A, 2020B, 2020D)

Because this study is interested in the correlation between co-constructed multimodal creativity and power (status role), the qualitative analysis of multimodality in two selected scenes of *House M.D.* focuses on tenor (i.e., contact/familiarity, and affective involvement), and speech function of the interpersonal metafunction (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, Lam and Webster 2009).

#### 4. SFMDA

The selected examples involve conversations between House and supporting characters who are both new to House (such as Foreman in example 1) and familiar with House (such as

Cameron and Chase in example 1 and Cuddy in example 2) at the time the respective episodes were aired. This allows contact and affective involvement to be measurable while keeping the effect of power on pattern-forming creativity in the picture. Example 1 is taken from a 54-second scene in “Pilot: Everybody Lies” (1.01) between 05:33 and 06:27, hereafter referred as the ‘Treating patients’ scene, in which House has huge power difference over three other doctors in his team, namely Cameron, Chase and Foreman. Example 2 is the ‘Little part’ scene taken from a 57-second scene in “Ugly” (4.07) between 04:10 and 05:07, in which Cuddy has a higher power than House in terms of job ranking, but House and Cuddy are also friends since med schools “Known Unknowns” (6.07), which may be translated to high contact and high affective involvement.

#### 4.1.Example 1 ‘Treating patients’ scene







FIG. 2. SCREENSHOTS OF A PART OF THE 'TREATING PATIENTS' SCENE

Shot No.	Turn	Speaker	Script	Speech function	Pattern-forming creativity type (in bold text)
<i>[Cut to House looking through an MRI of Rebecca's head.]</i>					
0a to 0b	1	Foreman	<i>It's a lesion.</i>	Statement (give info)	
0b to 2a	2	House	<i>And the big green thing in the middle of the bigger blue thing on a map is an island. I was hoping for something a bit more creative.</i>	Statement (give info) Statement (give info)	
2b to 2c	3	Foreman	<i>Shouldn't we be speaking to the patient before we start diagnosing?</i>	Question (demand info)	
3a to 3b	4	House	<i>Is she a doctor?</i>	Question (demand info)	
4	5	Foreman	<i>No, but...</i>	Statement (give info)	
4 to 5	6	House	<i>Everybody lies.</i>	Statement (give info)	
6a to 6b	7	Cameron	<i>Dr. House doesn't like dealing with patients.</i>	Statement (give info)	
6b to 6c	8	Foreman	<i>Isn't treating patients why we became doctors?</i>	Question (demand info)	
7a to 7c	9	House	<i>No, <b>treating illnesses is why we became doctors, treating patients is what makes most doctors miserable.</b></i>	Statement (give info)	Explicit and endo-referenced
7c to 9a	10	Foreman	<i>So you're trying to eliminate the humanity from the practice of medicine.</i>	Statement (give info)	
9a to 11	11	House	<i>If we don't talk to them they can't lie to us, and we can't lie to them. Humanity is overrated. I don't think it's a tumor.</i>	Statement (give info) Statement (give info) Statement (give info)	
11 to 12b	12	Foreman	<i><b>First year of medical school</b> if you hear hoof beats you think 'horses' not 'zebras'?</i>	Statement (give info)	
13 to 18	13	House	<i>Are you in <b>first year of medical school</b>? No. First of all, there's nothing on the CAT scan. Second of all, if this is <b>a horse</b> then the kindly family doctor in Trenton makes the obvious diagnosis and it never gets near this office...</i>	Question (demand info) Statement (give info) Statement (give info)	Explicit and endo-referenced

TABLE 3. TRANSCRIPT OF A PART OF THE 'TREATING PATIENTS' SCENE

Table 3 shows a 54-second transcript of the ‘Treating patients’ scene with a selection of salient frames (Fig. 2). Prior to the ‘Treating patients’ scene, the episode begins with a 29-year-old female kindergarten teacher suddenly losing the ability to speak and seizing while teaching. A month had past since the seizure, Dr. James Wilson (Robert Sean Leonard) – House’s one true friend/head of the Department of Oncology who shares the same initials “Dr. J. W., M.D.” as Holmes’s confidant, Dr. John Watson (“Swan Song”; Abrams 2009) – attempted to persuade House to take the case. He told House that the patient was his cousin and she had been suffering from progressive deterioration of mental status. Protein markers of the three most prevalent brain cancers were tested negative, and unresponsive to radiation treatment. House suspected that Wilson was lying about the patient being his cousin but took the case anyway because Wilson said that the “three overqualified doctors” working for House were “getting bored”. These three doctors were Chase, Cameron and Foreman.

#### 4.1.1. Tenor relations and speech function

As the boss of three doctors, House has a higher power granted by his job status than Chase, Cameron and Foreman. Affective involvement and contact are difficult to measure but can be estimated via the speakers’ attitude in conversation and the amount of time each doctor has been working for House prior to this scene respectively. Chase has worked for House for around two years and Cameron for about six months whereas Foreman is very new to the team prior to this episode.

‘Treating patients’ is a scene at House’s office in which he states his belief and shares his work philosophy mainly with Foreman, the new doctor. The conversation mainly involves their exchange of information (i.e., six turns each) using two speech functions: statement (give information) and questions (demand information). The abundance of declarative statements and interrogatives, and the absence of imperatives reveal a high equality of power between the two. Also, despite the original difference in job positions and thus the difference in power between House and Foreman by default, Foreman has not used modal Finite (modal verb such as *could* or *would*) to convey politeness. His use of yes/no-interrogatives in turns 3, 8 and 12 are evidence of verbal challenges to House’s work philosophy. This suggests a high equality of power between them despite the low affective involvement and low contact.

Because the pair does not see a high power difference between one another, the discourse is able to proceed with near equal opportunity. Although House’s pattern-forming creativity – both instances explicit and endo-referenced in turns 9 and 13 – seems to put him in a more powerful position, this is only made possible because House chooses to permit such exchange of information during DDX. This argument is supported by Cuddy, who told House that, “You need someone to bounce ideas off of. You need a team” (“Alone”, 4.01). House does not fear the development of conflict in his office, as he believes that “[c]onflict breeds creativity” (“Unfaithful”, 5.15). This example shows that the driving force behind House’s pattern-forming creativity is not the difference in power, but rather the equality of power. This also suggests that a high equality of power between interlocutors is a likely trigger for House’s pattern-forming creativity.

#### 4.1.2. Multimodality: *Mise-en-scène*

The scene begins with an MRI image of the sagittal view of Rebecca’s head (Shot 0a) before the shot took a long focal point to reveal the frontal view of House’s face (Shot 0b). When House turns to his left (Shot 0c) House is revealed to be in his office (Shot 1a). In Shot 8, a rectangular glass desk can be seen in front of Foreman and Cameron placed perpendicular to the wall on the left of House’s desk (Shot 16a). Two visitor’s chairs are placed in front of House’s desk and one for House’s himself. Having three doctors working for House discussing a medical case in his office construes power and status.

This episode is shot using an orange lens filter and therefore it is difficult to see actual colours of the character’s costumes. A 45-years old stubble-bearded, short curly-haired House wears a dark colour shirt, a pair of dark trousers and an even darker blazer. He walks with a cane in his right hand. Chase, Cameron, and Foreman all wear staff name tags on the left pocket of their blazers but only Chase does not wear a white coat.

There are limited spatial movements in this scene. House walks with his cane from the lightbox (Shot 1a) to standing in front of the cabinet behind his desk (Shot 9b). Cameron and Foreman move from standing behind the visitor’s chairs (Shot 2a) to sitting down on those chairs (Shot 8). Chase moves from standing near House’s table (Shot 3a) to standing in front of the film lightbox (Shot 18). These spatial movements are highly mobile, suggesting a high degree of freedom for employees at the employer’s office, a venue of status and



authority. This freedom suggests high equality of power in the tenor relation between House and his team members (see Gailits et al. 2019, Gottman 1984, Guarneros 2017, Sheller 2018 on the relations between freedom of movement and power).

A suspenseful background music with watch-ticking sounds begins in turn 11 when House is saying: “I don’t think it is a tumor”. The music continues past turn 13 which marks the end of the debate on work philosophy and into DDX about the patient’s illness. The music appears to mark the change of topic as well as to build up the excitements for the DDX. It does not appear to have any correlations with tenor values such as power, contact and affective involvement.

Overall, the ownership of a personal office like House and the absence of one for his team create a difference in status and power, yet the three employees have the freedom of movement within House’s office. Therefore, despite the power possessed by House over his three subordinates, he promotes power equality among his staff. This adds support to the argument that the equality of power is a major force driving behind House’s pattern-forming creativity production. Interpersonal meaning, specifically the equality of power, is construed by spatial movement in this scene.

4.1.3. *Multimodality: Nonverbal behaviour and performance*

Hand, arm and leg gestural movements are noticeable in this example despite having shots captured at eye-level using close-up and medium shots. Apart from House’s walking with cane (Shot 1b), Chase and Foreman use hand and arm gestures to construe the degree of freedom they enjoy inside House’s office. During the DDX, Chase crosses his arms while thinking in Shot 7a and puts his hands in trouser pockets in Shot 18, while Foreman crosses his legs with his hands over his right kneecap in Shot 8. These postures construe a high level of comfort from Chase and Foreman, which in turn construes a high equality of power before House. It is worth noting that gestural movements by the creator are absent at the moments of pattern-forming creativity production, indicating that gestural movement is not the main semiotic resource for construing meanings in pattern-forming creativity.

Because pattern-forming creativity has a relatively long duration of production, there is time for more than one facial expression and/or head movement to appear on screen. This makes correlating a specific motion to the production of pattern-forming creativity more complex and less reliable.

Turn	Speaker	Speech	Facial expression	Head movement	Body movement
9	House	No,	Eyes close, eyebrows raise		
		<i>treating illnesses</i>			Leans forward
		<i>is why we became doctors,</i>	Frowns, looks down to the floor	Head tilts downwards	
		<i>treating patients is</i>			Returns to up-right position
		<i>what makes most doctors</i>	Eyebrows raises		
11	House	<i>Miserable.</i>	(Supposedly) looks at Foreman at eye-level, lips shut tightly	Head raises	
		<i>If we don't talk</i>	Looks down to the floor	Head tilts downwards, slightly to the right	
		<i>they can't lie to us,</i>	(Supposedly) looks at Foreman at eye-level	Short and quick headshakes	Stationary
13	House	<i>and we can't lie to them.</i>	Looks slightly upwards, presumably at the MRI films	Head turns to right	
		<i>Are you in</i>	Looks at Foreman	Head maintains 45° from central position, three small successive nods matching the words in speech	Stationary
		<i>first year medical school?</i>		Head maintains 45° from central position	

TABLE 4. NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR OF HOUSE AT MOMENTS OF PATTERN-FORMING CREATIVITY PRODUCTION

The multimodal transcription in Table 4 reveals no visible correlation between pattern-forming creativity and nonverbal behaviour such as facial expression, head movement and body movement. Instead, the nonverbal behaviour often corresponds directly to the content of the speech, such as House’s ‘lips shut tightly’ when saying “miserable”, or House (the Reactor) performing three small successive nods when saying “Are you in” while looking at Foreman (the Phenomenon) – establishing a vector of reactional process between the two (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). In other words, the paralinguage converges with linguistic meaning

in this example (see Martin et al. 2013, Painter et al. 2013 on the notion of ‘convergent coupling’) which is construed via the use of pattern-forming creativity.

Overall, in this example of House conversing with his subordinates, the equality of power is construed verbally using pattern-forming creativity, which in turn is construed nonverbally through various paralinguistic combinations of facial expression, head movement and body movement. In the next example, the use of pattern-forming creativity by House as a subordinate in a conversation with his boss Cuddy is analysed.

#### 4.2. Example 2 ‘Little part’ scene





FIG. 3. SCREENSHOTS OF THE 'LITTLE PART' SCENE

Shot No.	Turn	Speaker	Script	Speech function	Pattern-forming creativity type (in bold text)
[CUDDY'S OFFICE - House keeps his back to the door. Cuddy goes on the attack.]					
0a to 1c	1	Cuddy	You think I LIKE the cameras? (stalks across the room) You think I want the whole world watching <b>you check out my ass and question my wardrobe?</b>	Question (demand info) Question (demand info)	
1c to 1f	2	House	(unrepentant) Would it be better if I <b>checked out your wardrobe and questioned your ass?</b>	Question (demand info)	Explicit and endo-referenced
2a	3	Cuddy	(behind her desk) <b>A little part of me...</b>		
3a to 3b	4	House	There is <b>no little part of you.</b>	Statement (give info)	Explicit and endo-referenced
4a to 6	5	Cuddy	(persevering) ...thought that maybe you would see what great PR this could be for the hospital, and not <b>make ME force YOU to act like a human being.</b>	Statement (give info)	
7a to 9b	6	House	<b>You using force on me</b> is... intriguing. (glances outside her office) On the other hand, cameras make people act. <b>Sometimes like human beings, sometimes just weird, sometimes they wear open-tipped bras.</b>	Statement (give info) Statement (give info)	Explicit and endo-referenced Explicit and endo-referenced
10 to 11c	7	Cuddy	It's cold in here.	Statement (give info)	
[House takes a split second to reclaim his brain from his breeches.]					
11d to 11g	8	House	Less obvious point is that I need my team (glances again at the crew) to be unafraid of the metaphorical fart.	Statement (give info)	
12a to 15d	9	Cuddy	That production company is covering all the medical costs for this kid. So, either you let them continue filming... or the kid goes home with the same face.	Statement (give info) Statement (give info)	
[Cuddy sits, triumphant. House glances back at the crew once more, then, having no suitable rejoinder, beats a swift retreat.]					

TABLE 5. TRANSCRIPT OF A PART OF THE 'LITTLE PART' SCENE

Table 5 shows a 57-second transcript of the ‘Little part’ scene in “Ugly” (4.07) with a selection of salient frames (Fig. 3). Prior to the ‘Little part’ scene, the episode begins with a documentary film crew filming a teenage patient named Kenny Cyrus with a major facial deformity called frontonasal encephalocele. He was undergoing a facial surgery led by Chase when Kenny suddenly went into an unexplained cardiac arrest. In the same scene prior to the dialogue in Table 5, Chase explained to Cuddy and House in Cuddy’s office while the documentary crew was filming the entire process in black and white. House tricked the film crew to walk out of the office and then he shut the door from behind, leaving himself and Cuddy in her office.

#### 4.2.1. Tenor relations and speech function

Despite having his paychecks signed by Cuddy (1.01), House does not fear negotiating with his boss, as evident by his claim, “I spent half my life negotiating with that woman.” (“Adverse Events”, 5.03). House’s power granted by his job position may be lower than Cuddy’s, but his friendship with Cuddy over the years [i.e., they went to the college together in Michigan (“Brave Heart”, 6.06) during which House was “already a legend” (“Humpty Dumpty”, 2.03) means their level of contact is very high, and his affective involvement with Cuddy is higher than any normal boss-employee relationship.

Because there is little power difference between House and Cuddy, the discourse proceeds mainly through exchanges of information. Cuddy begins by asking House two yes/no-interrogative rhetorical questions while House picks up the expressions “check out my ass” and “question my wardrobe” and created the first instance of co-constructed/pattern-forming creativity (explicit and endo-referenced) as a response. Since all three interrogatives are rhetorical questions, they are intended to act as statements to express an opinion or to make a point, rather than to demand for information (Burton 2007). They function as arguments “with which an audience can readily identify with, and which are predicated on the values and commonsense understandings shared by a speaker and his/her audience” (Augoustinos et al. 2002:135).

Subsequent instances of pattern-forming creativity (also explicit and endo-referenced) further illustrate the narrow difference in power between House and Cuddy. Even though Cuddy uses rhetorical questions and forceful attitude markers such as “make ME force YOU”, “to act like a human being”, House is able to issue ‘comebacks’ via repeating and building upon her rhetorical questions and word choices (cf. Poynton 1985 on how

power is realised in language through the lack of reciprocity). The difference in power between Cuddy and House still exists, but that is construed to a higher degree through nonverbal behaviour and performance rather than verbal.

#### 4.2.2. Multimodality: *Mise-en-scène*

This part of the scene happens inside a well-lit office of the Dean of Medicine with Cuddy and House being the only interlocutors in the selected dialogue. The documentary film crew can be seen through the glass on the office doors but they are not involved in this conversation. 48-years-old stubble-bearded, curly-haired House wears a dark purple T-shirt with visible print under an American blue buttoned shirt, a pair of dark trousers and a black blazer. He walks with a cane in his right hand. 42-years-old Cuddy has long wavy hair, wears a pendant and a pair of hoop earrings, black V-neck blouse, a red skirt with a black belt. She clips her staff name tag on her belt in front slightly towards the left.

There are limited spatial movements in this scene. House walks with his cane from the doors towards Cuddy’s desk (Shot 1d) and returns to the doors after the negotiation ends (Shot 15d). Cuddy, on the other hand, moves into House’s private space (see Hall 1963, 1966, for interpersonal distances of man) in Shot 0a and 0b before walking to her seat behind her desk where she does her negotiation with House. The first part of Cuddy’s movement into House’s private space conveys a significant degree of affective involvement, contact and power. It conveys intimacy and familiarity because it is not her norm to be talking to any employees within their private space (see Hall 1963, 1966). The second part of movement to her seat conveys power, because speaking to her employee in her own Dean of Medicine’s office from behind her desk – an area permitted to no one but her – is a statement of authority.

There is an absence of background music in this part of the scene, providing evidence that background music is not a key semiotic resource for construing pattern-forming creativity.

Overall, the *mise-en-scène* suggests that Cuddy has higher power over House and House does not attempt to breach her power. Instead, House makes use of his high contact and affective involvement, as well as verbal pattern-forming creativity and nonverbal behaviour to achieve power equality with Cuddy in his negotiation. Therefore, interpersonal meanings such as power, contact and affective involvement are construed by pattern-forming creativity and spatial movement respectively in this scene.

4.2.3. Multimodality: Nonverbal behaviour and performance

Hand and arm gestural movements are near absent in this scene. This part of the scene is mostly shot using close-up shots, medium-close up shots, medium shots and combinations of the above with over-the-shoulder shots. House is taller than Cuddy, which is likely the reason for the difference in the height of the shots. Shots of House’s face are filmed from Cuddy’s upper arm level while shots of Cuddy’s face are filmed at Cuddy’s eye level, thus eliminating most of the hand and arm movements from below the shoulders.

Cuddy uses her body language to construe her power over House. From standing face-to-face in parallel with House in Shot 0a to standing even closer to House at 45° angle with her left shoulder leaned slightly forward and her head slightly raised while talking to him, Cuddy’s body language construes power despite her inferiority in height. Towards the end of the negotiation in Shot 14c, while House remains standing, Cuddy ends her speech with raised eyebrows and chin, widened eyes looking and smirking at House while sitting down on her chair, resting her back on the backrest and crossing her legs. This conveys a high level of confidence and power, or “triumphant” using the wording from the script.

Turn	Speaker	Speech	Facial expression	Head movement	Body movement
2	House		Downturned mouth corners, eyebrows raise		Upright, Stationary
		<i>Would it be better if I checked out your wardrobe</i>	Frowns, looks down to the floor	Head tilts downwards	
		<i>and questioned</i>	Looks at Cuddy	Head raises	
		<i>your ass?</i>	Chin raises slightly upwards	Head turns slightly to the right	
4	House	<i>There is</i>	Frowns, eyes squint	Head turns to his right and tilts backwards	Upright, Stationary
		<i>no little part of you</i>	Big eye stare at Cuddy	Head turns to look at Cuddy and shakes two times	
		<i>You</i>	Frowns at Cuddy	Head turns and holds slightly to the left	
6	House	<i>using force on me is...</i>	Eyes look upwards to ceiling	Head tilts slightly towards the right	Upright, Stationary
		<i>intriguing.</i>	Left eyebrow raises	Turns to face Cuddy, Soft nod	
		<i>On the other hand, cameras</i>	Big eye stare, eyebrows raise quickly and returns to normal position, eyes close	Head returns to normal position	
		<i>make people act.</i>	(not invisible in shot)	Turn to his right to look behind him	
6	House	<i>Sometimes like human beings, sometimes just weird,</i>	Looks at Cuddy	Returns to original position	Returns to original position with slight lean on his right
		<i>sometimes they wear open-tipped</i>	(not invisible in shot)	(not invisible in shot)	(not invisible in shot)
		<i>bras.</i>	Eyes focused on Cuddy’s chest	Head tilts slightly backwards	
			Eyes focused on Cuddy’s chest, eyebrows raise	Head turns slightly to his right	

TABLE 6. NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR OF HOUSE AT MOMENTS OF PATTERN-FORMING CREATIVITY PRODUCTION



The multimodal transcription in Table 6 shows no visible correlation between pattern-forming creativity production and nonverbal behaviour such as facial expression, head movement and body movement. Instead, like in example 1, such behaviour corresponds directly to the meanings of words. For example, House looks at Cuddy when House is saying “make people act” in Table 6 with the purpose to include Cuddy into the reference of “people”, or House turns his head to look at Cuddy and shakes his head twice when he is saying “no” in “There is no little part of you.” This convergence of the paralanguage and linguistic meanings is possible because House is not being deceptive in this scene (cf. Ekman and Friesen 1969, Taylor 2014).

All in all, in this example, interpersonal meanings such as power, contact and affective involvement are construed verbally using pattern-forming creativity, and nonverbally through various combinations of facial expression, head movement and body movement. This example further supports the argument that a high equality of power between interlocutors is a likely trigger for House’s pattern-forming creativity (see Law 2021).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The study has aimed to provide qualitative evidence to support a negative correlation between co-constructed/pattern-forming creativity production and power difference among characters of *House M.D.* Using the SFMDA of co-constructed multimodal creativity in two selected scenes of *House M.D.* – ‘Treating patients’ (i.e., DDX scene in House’s office), and ‘Little part’ (i.e., private chat scene in Cuddy’s office), it has found that House’s pattern-forming creativity (of the explicit, endo-referenced type, in the form of interrogatives or statements) appears to be triggered by the high equality of power (i.e., a negative correlation with power) between interlocutors. In other words, power (equality) is construed verbally through the use of pattern-forming creativity, thus confirming Law’s (2021) quantitative findings.

This study has also revealed that interpersonal meanings, denoted by tenor values consisting of power, contact and affective involvement, are construed nonverbally through spatial movement and various combinations of facial expression, head movement and body movement. It has shown that hand/arm gestures are unlikely to be a key semiotic resource to the delivery of pattern-forming creativity. Also, there is no strong evidence for a correlation between the production of pattern-forming creativ-

ity and mise-en-scène elements in *House M.D.* (i.e., set design, lighting, space, costume or auditory soundtrack). This phenomenon has been observed by McElhaney:

While not citing Minnelli’s work, David Bordwell has drawn attention to the general decline in this type of complex ensemble staging in contemporary cinema (especially American). We are now living in a period of “intensified continuity,” dominated by rapid cutting, free-ranging camera movements, and extensive use of close-ups. The nature of how performances are filmed, edited, and ultimately experienced has shifted: The face becomes the ultimate bearer of meaning, with gesture and bodily movements increasingly restricted through the alternation of “stand and deliver” scenes (in which the actors are confined to largely fixed positions) with “walk and talk” scenes (in which a moving camera rapidly follows actors as they “spit out exposition on the fly”) (Bordwell [2002]: 25). While Bordwell does not note this, the shift in terms of how actors are filmed that he is describing has been part of an ongoing process over the last three decades (McElhaney 2009: 328).

One limitation of this study is that the selected examples only include House’s pattern-forming creativity production and not that of other characters. Future studies may compare patterns of creativity production of House with other characters in this or other series. Such research along the line of linguistic-multimodal creativity can further contribute to the body of scientific knowledge in *House M.D.*, which may be applicable to other TV dramas or genres of telecinematics. Analysing phonology of characters’ speech may also unveil other interesting realisational relationships between linguistic/multimodal creativity and power (see Halliday and Greaves 2008; Halliday and Matthiessen 2014 on how meaning is construed phonologically). Furthermore, since the imitation of the reality on television by “convincingly ‘real’ pseudo-human beings” (Pearson 2007: 47) performing “carefully crafted dialogue” (Bubel 2006, Bednarek 2010: 21) may impact viewers’ perception of realism or naturalness over an extended period of time (Perritano 2011),<sup>4</sup> this and future

4 See also: “4 Ways TV Changes How We Talk | What the Stuff?.” *HowStuffWorks*, 20 February 2015. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q\\_M2ejzjLhs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_M2ejzjLhs) (last accessed 28-06-17).

research may be useful for longitudinal comparative studies on similarities/differences in dramatised conversations (e.g. dramatised healthcare; see Matthiessen and Law 2019) and spoken American English in the real world (see Law 2015).

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