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# Stereotyping Scotland: Groundskeeper Willie's illocutionary acts in *The Simpsons*<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract.** This article explores the Scottish character of Groundskeeper Willie in the American animated sitcom *The Simpsons* with a pragmatic and social-psychological approach. It firstly introduces Willie's linguistic and visual features, the sample of three episodes the analysis is based on, Scottish stereotypes in Lindsay's (1997) sociological research, and Searle's (1976) taxonomy of illocutionary acts (representatives or assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations). Secondly, the turns uttered by the groundskeeper in the sample are classified by applying Searle's taxonomy, and his illocutionary acts are examined in their contexts and compared with the list of national-ethnic Scottish stereotypes compiled by Lindsay. This study demonstrates that Willie's illocutionary acts and the stereotypes they convey depict him as a figure characterised by positive traits; nevertheless, the responses his illocutionary acts are met with not only counter his pleasant aspects, but also ultimately represent the Scottish groundskeeper as a ludicrous victim of his American fellow townspeople.

**Keywords:** Groundskeeper Willie; *The Simpsons*; Lindsay's (1997) list of national-ethnic Scottish stereotypes; stereotypes; Searle's (1976) taxonomy of illocutionary acts; pragmatics.

## 1. Scottish Groundskeeper Willie and national-ethnic stereotypes in *The Simpsons*

Groundskeeper Willie is one of the recurring figures in the American animated sitcom *The Simpsons*, broadcast by Fox Broadcasting Company from 1989 to the present. Willie is the head groundskeeper at the elementary school of the fictional town of Springfield, in an unidentified state of the United States, which is the main setting of this humorous sitcom (Weinstein 1998; Cantor 1999; Alberti 2003; Brown-Logan 2006 discuss the sitcom in general and, more concisely, the character of the groundskeeper). Willie is

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a hot-tempered middle-aged man, with a nearly savage aspect and demeanour; he has his origins in Scotland, as unmistakably conveyed by his flaming red beard, eyebrows and hair, and by his pronounced rhotic Scottish regional accent (in the Italian dubbed version of the sitcom, Willie speaks with an equally broad Sardinian accent: see Fusari 2007; Tomaiuolo 2007; Barra 2008; Ferrari 2009; Puddu & Viridis 2014).

Willie has been met with an enthusiastic public response, and his figure has had a significant cultural influence on the English-speaking world, so much so that *The Sunday Times* (Turpin 2005) praisingly called him “Scotland’s most famous character”, “an international icon of Scottishness” and “the most instantly recognisable Scot in the world: better known than Billy Connolly or Ewan McGregor, even Sean Connery”. Moreover, in 2002 and in the first months of 2003, one of Willie’s turns, dating back to 1995, became vastly popular in the Anglophone world. In those days, the United States was gearing up to invade Iraq, but France wanted to stop war; therefore, the American media widely employed the groundskeeper’s turn including a negatively evaluative expression referring to the French, namely “*Bonjourrrr, yah cheese-eatin’ surrender monkeys!*” (from the episode “Round Springfield”, code 2F32; see Turner 2005: 54, 327 for further information).

Despite his fame, Willie has a supporting role in the sitcom; given his comparatively small number of appearances and the comic text he features in, his portrayal as a Scot is inevitably stereotypical (see Stangor 2000 for stereotypes and stereotypical representations). As stated by Turner (2005: 327), the groundskeeper “is about as unrestrained as a parody can get. [...] The parody is so over-the-top, in fact, that Willie’s nationality becomes incidental: he’s much more cartoon than Scot”. Gray argues that stereotypes or, more precisely, national-ethnic hyper-stereotypes play a tactical part in the sitcom:

in a rather high risk strategy, *The Simpsons* employs what we could call *hyper-stereotypes*. From Scottish Groundskeeper Willie and Quick E Mart [sic] owner Apu, to the show’s depictions of Japan, Australia, East Africa, Canada, and Brazil in family trip episodes, the show rounds up multiple stereotypes and jams them into one character or episode. The result, although admittedly this is a strategy that passes many by, and hence risks backfiring on itself, is to make the *process* of stereotyping the target, rather than the people themselves. (Gray 2006: 64; original emphasis)

As a result, Gray and other scholars regard the process of stereotyping as one of the essential features characterising the ironic discourse of the sitcom. According to Rodaway,

Diversity is evident within the community of Springfield, yet critical debates about ethnicity are a largely neglected. Two characters particularly stand out here — Willie, the school groundskeeper from Scotland with his absurd hyper-Scottishness, and Apu, the South Asian owner of the Kwick-E-Mart mini-supermarket in downtown Springfield. Each are ironically

constructed as an exotic other but with a critical purchase on mainstream American society and values. (Rodaway 2003: 163)

In this comic sitcom, the American town of Springfield is typified by high ethnic diversity, and the “exotic other” is described as linguistically and visually dissimilar from the other inhabitants. The primary function of diversity and dissimilarity is to criticise the hegemonic worldview and its prevailing tenets, that is to say to analyse and make fun of suburban and small-town America and Americans. In actual fact, it is not only Scotland or South Asia to be depicted as the “exotic other”, but also the United States (see also Beard 2003 for national-ethnic stereotypes in the sitcom).

In this article, I explore Willie’s representation as a Scottish *dramatis persona* and his use of language in the parodistic discourse of the sitcom. My research purpose is to demonstrate that his stereotypical Scottish national identity is constructed not only visually by means of his hair, kilt and bagpipes, but also linguistically and pragmatically by means of his conversational behaviour towards the people living in Springfield (Levinson 1983; Grundy 2008; Verschueren-Östman 2009). To this end, I firstly detect all the groundskeeper’s turns and the illocutionary acts he performs (Searle 1976) in three episodes of the sitcom (“Principal Charming”, code 7F15; “Treehouse of Horror V”, code 2F03; “Treehouse of Horror VI”, code 3F04). Secondly, I match those illocutionary acts with the compatible national-ethnic Scottish stereotypes recognised by Lindsay (1997) in her sociological research. Finally, I prove that these illocutionary acts and the stereotypes they relay contribute to shaping the character of Willie as conventionally Scottish and non-American, consequently as a soft target of ridicule.

## 2. Willie’s linguistic and visual features and data for analysis

The figure of Willie has not been examined thoroughly in the research articles and books on the sitcom which have appeared so far, including the academic papers at *The Simpsons Archive*<sup>3</sup>; several observations made by scholars, yet, are pertinent to the aims and scope of this article. With regard to the phonological level and the groundskeeper’s Scottish regional accent, Armstrong comments on the phonological features of the protagonists of the sitcom, and contends that

Dan Castellanata [sic] voices such disparate characters as Homer Simpson, Mayor Quimby and Groundskeeper Willie. Despite the astonishing versatility and virtuosity of the voicing artists

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<sup>3</sup> *The Simpsons Archive* (<http://www.simpsonsarchive.com/>, last accessed December 2020) is a website containing a copious quantity of materials about the sitcom, among which a selection of book excerpts and papers (<http://www.simpsonsarchive.com/misc.html>).

in their mimicry of social-regional accents, it remains true that some accents are produced in a stereotypical way, by exaggerating certain of their most salient features. (Armstrong 2004: 104)

Willie's phonology is hence among those uttered in a talented but preconceived and standardised way; as such, it strengthens his stereotypical portrayal as a Scot. Actually, one of the "felicity conditions" (Austin 1962) of the sitcom and of the performance of its humorous discourse is the fact that the representation of the groundskeeper in particular and of the "exotic other" in general is effective but not realistic.

With regard to the morphological and syntactic levels, the variety of Scottish English spoken by Willie does not show any of the linguistic characteristics distinguished and studied by researchers (to name just a few, Aitken-McArthur 1979; Dossena 2005; Hughes et al. 2005). The lexical level of his regional variety incorporates very few instances of Scotticisms, in line with McCrum et al.'s findings: "the majority of the Scots speak Standard English with a Scottish accent, and write Standard English occasionally flavoured with a word like *loch*, *burn* or *brae*" (McCrums et al. 1987: 151; quoted in Mazzoni 1994: 68). The two lexical Scotticisms *wee* (adjective "small, little") and *haggis* (noun "a dish of Scottish origin") occur in the sample of the groundskeeper's turns cited in the Appendix and investigated in Section 4, to be more exact at turn 2.2. Both Scotticisms are widely-known words in the Anglophone world, and are reckoned to be typical examples of Scottish English. On the one hand, in McCrum et al.'s terms, their presence in the sample flavours Willie's Standard English; on the other hand, they indirectly communicate that his language is not authentic and could be easily imitated, particularly by a skilled voice actor. The two Scotticisms therefore reinforce the argument that the groundskeeper is depicted by the sitcom authors in a stereotypical way and seen by his audience accordingly<sup>4</sup>.

With regard to the discourse level, academic research often refers to Willie's actions in the episode "Homer Badman" (code 2F06) (Cohen 1998; Horowitz 1999; Mullin 1999; Waltonen 2000; Turner 2005). The eponymous *dramatis persona* of the episode and the entire sitcom, Homer Simpson, is unjustly charged with sexual harassment, but is cleared of all suspicion by the groundskeeper. In fact, Willie recorded Homer's supposed harassment for his own entertainment or, as he put it, "My hobby is secretly videotaping couples in cars. I dinna come forward because in this country it makes you look like a pervert. But every single Scottish person does it!". The articles quoted above mostly scrutinise Homer's dependence on television; however, the groundskeeper's hidden spare-time

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4 While Willie does not speak actual Scottish English, he utilises a colloquial variety of Standard English. Among other instances, see the informal expressions "Go easy on the wee one" (turn 2.2), "your Da goes gaga" (2.6), "I'm coming to rescue the lot of you!" (2.7 and 2.9); see also the puns "Glad to rake your acquaintance" (3.1), "You've mastered a dead tongue, but can you handle a live one?" (3.5), and "When I'm done with you, they'll have to do a compost-mortem!" (3.13).

activity is also worth commenting on. Firstly, he constantly breaks the law and does not seem to be fully aware of it. Secondly, he maintains that his “hobby” is shared by all Scots and, as such, is characteristic of his country; he thereby mentions a self-stereotype to Homer and the viewers and deploys it to justify his unlawful entertainment.

Finally, with regard to the visual level, for the benefit of those international audiences who might be unacquainted with the Scottish accent and vocabulary, the portrayal of Willie is realised through non-linguistic tools: these include his red hair, eyebrows and beard, and the fact that he often wears a kilt and plays bagpipes. In the hyperbolic discourse of “Treehouse of Horror VI”, one of the three episodes under examination in this article, these visual Scottish qualities are driven to humorous extremes: the groundskeeper is transformed into a number of diverse shapes wearing a tartan pattern, even into a tartan bagpipe attempting to murder Bart and Lisa Simpson while playing Scottish music.

The Scottish character of Groundskeeper Willie figures for the first time in the episode “Principal Charming” (code 7F15, the fourteenth of the second season); the first two episodes focusing on him, though, are “Treehouse of Horror V” (code 2F03, the sixth of the sixth season) and “Treehouse of Horror VI” (code 3F04, the sixth of the seventh season) (Groening 2001-2010). These two episodes are a part of *The Treehouse of Horror Series*, also called *The Simpsons Halloween Specials*: the series is typified by horror, science fiction and supernatural scenes, and parodies these genres. Willie appears in the first segment of “Treehouse of Horror V” and in the second segment of “Treehouse of Horror VI”: the former is based on S. Kubrick’s film *The Shining* (1980), while underlying the latter are W. Craven’s film *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), the other six films in the series and their main figure Freddy Krueger. “Principal Charming” fleetingly introduces the groundskeeper into the sitcom, but he first takes a leading role and his character evolves only in the two “Treehouse of Horror” episodes and segments just named. Consequently, and notably, Willie, a character looking a stereotypical Scot and speaking a stereotypical Scottish English, is portrayed as a grotesque horror figure practically from his first appearance in the sitcom.

### 3. Background and methodology

#### 3.1. Lindsay’s (1997) list of national-ethnic Scottish stereotypes

An article by the sociologist Lindsay (1997) presents her research on English stereotypes and Scottish self-stereotypes; it hence lists and explores what Scots themselves perceive as their most broadly shared national-ethnic characteristics. In order to collect her data, this author asked her 220 Scottish respondents to set down what they thought to be the specific characteristics of the English on the one hand, and their own on the other hand. Table 1 shows the characteristics of Scots reported by the respondents and, in descending order, the percentage of respondents reporting each characteristic:

Table 1. Proportion of respondents listing particular characteristics of Scots (adapted from Lindsay 1997: 8)

No.	Characteristics of Scots	Percentage of respondents listing
1	Friendly/Warm/Kind-hearted	63
2	Patriotic/Nationalistic/Proud	29
3	Humorous/Good Fun	17
4	Direct/Down to Earth	12
5	Low Self-Esteem	11
6	Aggressive/Paranoid	10
7	Honest/Unpretentious	7
8	Political/Socialist/Anti-Tory	6
9	Rough/Brash	6

The results emerging from Lindsay’s research suggest that the characteristics of Scots listed by the respondents were both agreeable and disagreeable: “The Scots seemed fairly comfortable and positive about their identity as friendly, warm, down to earth, patriotic, humourous [sic] people. The negative in their self-image was a perceived element of paranoia and low self-esteem, but these were not dominant” (Lindsay 1997: 11) (see Hopkins-Reicher 1997 and Lamont 1997 for further details about Scottish stereotypes). In Section 4, I identify which of these appealing and non-appealing national-ethnic characteristics are expressed by Willie’s turns in the three episodes under examination.

### 3.2. Searle’s (1976) taxonomy of illocutionary acts

The groundskeeper’s speech acts in the episodes “Principal Charming” (henceforth PC), “Treehouse of Horror V” (THH V) and “Treehouse of Horror VI” (THH VI) (see Appendix) are classified and investigated in accordance with Searle’s (1976) taxonomy of illocutionary acts and the five fundamental classes representatives or assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations; the subclasses of illocutionary acts employed in the analytical Section 4 are mine. A number of scholars (to name just one, Levinson 1983: 240) have occasionally found fault with this taxonomy; nevertheless, as asserted by Sbisà (2009: 237), “Searle’s classification of illocutionary acts has been by far the most influential one and has often been taken as a basis for the further investigations of particular areas”.

It has not always been uncomplicated to apply Searle’s taxonomy to Willie’s turns. Firstly, according to this researcher (Searle 1976: 23), “Often, we do more than one of these [basic acts] at once in the same utterance”. Accordingly, all the groundskeeper’s longer utterances have been split up into two or more parts; each of them has

subsequently been attributed the most salient illocutionary act or the one most appropriate to the context. Secondly, and more importantly, the sample utterances included and scrutinised in Searle’s article are explicit performatives and direct speech acts with the syntactic structure “I hereby Vp S”: Vp is the performative verb in the main clause and S is the embedded sentence indicating the propositional content of the utterance. On the contrary, Willie’s turns are usually realised by implicit performatives or indirect speech acts, with no fixed and recognisable syntactic structure or performative verb explicitly mentioned; therefore, the illocutionary acts in the groundskeeper’s turns have been classified and explored, not the syntax conveying them. Finally, Searle’s taxonomy was developed in the mid-1970s to examine spontaneous oral discourse; yet, as far as this is concerned, it has not been problematic to adopt the taxonomy to study the fictional discourse of the contemporary sitcom.

## 4. Analysis: Groundskeeper Willie’s illocutionary acts

### 4.1. Declarations

In the three episodes under investigation in this article, Willie utters 18 turns overall, which consist of 49 illocutionary acts; more precisely, as given in Tables 2-6, his turns are constituted by no declarations, 7 commissives, 12 representatives, 14 expressives and 16 directives.

Table 2. Illocutionary act: declaration

No.	Declaration subclass	Description	Turn
1	N/A	N/A	N/A

Of the five basic classes of illocutionary acts distinguished by Searle, declaration is the only one not present in the sample of Willie’s turns (see Table 2). Declaration was defined as follows: “the successful performance of one of its members brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality, successful performance guarantees that the propositional content corresponds to the world” (Searle 1976: 13). Entailed by declaration are an extra-linguistic system of constitutive rules and an extra-linguistic institution — such as the state, private property, the law, the church — where the speaker and the hearer have a special position (Searle 1976: 14). This state of matters does not apparently relate to any *dramatis personae* in any of the three episodes; as a result, the lack of declarations in the groundskeeper’s turns is not prominent from a pragmatic viewpoint, nor does it require interpretation from a conversational perspective.

## 4.2. Commissives

Table 3. Illocutionary act: commissive

No.	Commissive subclass	Description	Turn
1	Threat	Attempts to kill Bart	3.1
2		Attempts to kill Martin	3.3
3		Threatens parents with killing their children	3.9
4		Threatens parents with killing their children in their dreams	3.11
5	Promise	Promises to rescue Bart and his family	2.6
6		Promises to rescue the Simpson children	2.9
7	Offer	Offers to take Homer home	2.8

The least recurrent illocutionary acts in the sample are commissives (see Table 3), in other words, “those illocutionary acts whose point is to commit the speaker (again in varying degrees) to some future course of action” (Searle 1976: 11). Consequently, in the episodes, their communicative function is to relay what courses of action Willie binds himself to; his commissives can be divided into desirable and undesirable actions for his hearers. Desirable commissives are uttered in THH V (the episode parodying *The Shining*), consist of promises to save the other characters’ lives and offers to help them (5-7), and communicate national-ethnic Scottish stereotype 1 “friendly/warm/kind-hearted”. Undesirable commissives are said in THH VI (the parody of the *Nightmare* series), are realised by threats to kill those very characters the groundskeeper wanted to save in THH V (1-4), and express national-ethnic Scottish stereotype 6 “aggressive/paranoid”. The opposite classes of commissives Willie utters and narrative roles he undertakes in THH V and THH VI are accounted for by the distinct plots and activities in the two episodes; however, both desirable and undesirable commissives represent him as a bold and dynamic protagonist putting his life at risk and devoting himself wholeheartedly to a cause, be it worthy or unworthy (see also stereotype 9 “rough/brash”).

In addition, although THH VI is comically founded on the *Nightmare* series, the personality of Freddy Krueger, the *Nightmare* main figure, could not be more dissimilar from Willie’s. On the one hand, in the series the former is a serial killer of children who murdered at least twenty of them and was burnt to death by their angry parents in his



hideout, a boiler room. On the other hand, the sitcom episode describes the grounds-keeper as a quiet worker playing his bagpipes in the school boiler room (national-ethnic Scottish stereotypes 2 “patriotic/nationalistic/proud” and 7 “honest/unpretentious”). When Homer Simpson thoughtlessly makes the boiler explode, Willie also explodes into flame before the schoolchildren’s parents’ disregarding eyes; the parents’ dour carelessness will lead him to take his revenge by killing their children. Although this cannot be held a worthy cause to dedicate oneself to, the circumstances bringing about the murders can in part excuse his wrongdoings and his daring and vigorous manners, finally winning him the affection of the public.

### 4.3. Representatives

Table 4. Illocutionary act: representative

No.	Representative subclass	Description	Turn
1	Assertion	Asserts that Bart has the supernatural power of “shinning” <sup>5</sup>	2.4
2		Asserts that Homer has not reached his own world yet	2.8
3		Asserts that he is effortlessly axed	2.9
4		Asserts that Martin has mastered the Latin language	3.5
5	Prediction	Predicts that Bart will return to re-sod the field	1.4
6		Predicts that Bart will see him again soon	1.4
7		Predicts that Homer will go mad and kill his family	2.2
8		Predicts that he will kill Martin	3.5
9		Predicts that he will kill Bart	3.13

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<sup>5</sup> In stylistic terms, “shinning” is a lexical deviation (or neologism) ironically invented by Willie so that the authors of *The Simpsons* will not “get sued” by the authors of *The Shining* (see turn 2.6).

No.	Representative subclass	Description	Turn
10	Description	Describes what he is doing (rescuing the Simpson family)	2.7
11		Describes what he is doing (rescuing the Simpson children)	2.9
12	Explanation	Explains that he has private moments	2.6

Searle (1976: 10) claims that “The point or purpose of the members of the representative class is to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something’s being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition”. In the three episodes (see Table 4), representatives carry out the communicative function of depicting reality as Willie assumes it is – by means of assertions (1-4), descriptions (10-11) and explanations (12) – or as he assumes it will be – by means of predictions (5-9). Assertions 1-2 and predictions 5-8 are among the groundskeeper’s most noteworthy representatives. Through assertion 1, he shows to be the only *dramatis persona* to have realised that Bart Simpson has the supernatural power of “shinning”; through assertion 2, while Homer is journeying back and forward in time and diverse parallel universes, Willie is the first to let him know that he has not arrived in his own reality yet. With regard to predictions, he utters five in the sample, four of which (5-8) are realised. Three of them (5-7) are important, since they are not fulfilled by him, but by unexpected chains of events; prediction 7 is especially interesting, because it takes place without warning<sup>6</sup>.

Accordingly, in contrast to the other figures in the sitcom, the groundskeeper is represented as significantly connected with the supernatural, or at least as significantly familiar with supernatural and weird circumstances. This trait is not one of the national-ethnic Scottish stereotypes set down in Table 1; it apparently originates from the hyperbolic discourse of the sitcom in general and *The Treehouse of Horror Series* in particular, and is described as a pleasant aspect within the same scripted discourse.

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<sup>6</sup>Prediction 9 – Willie will murder Bart – is the only one not to be realised. This is most likely on the grounds that the boy is one of the best-known protagonists of the sitcom and a great favourite with the audience; hence, killing him, although in a parodistic episode, would have made the viewers dislike his murderer.

#### 4.4. Expressives

Table 5. Illocutionary act: expressive

No.	Expressive subclass	Description	Turn
1	Conveying pain	Axed to death when trying to rescue the Simpson family	2.7
2		Axed to death when trying to rescue Homer	2.8
3		Axed to death when trying to rescue the Simpson children	2.9
4		Burning after the boiler has exploded	3.6
5		Burnt to a mere skeleton	3.9
6	Conveying concern	The bus is leaving	3.15
7		Has left his gun on the bus seat	3.15
8		Has lost his shoe	3.15
9	Conveying surprise	Realises that Bart has the supernatural power of “shinning”	2.4
10		Realises that Bart is employing his “shinning” to call him	2.7
11	Conveying satisfaction	Bart has returned to re-sod the field	1.6
12	Conveying anger	Bart has chainsawed part of his hedge maze	2.1
13	Conveying scorn	Disdains the fact that Homer has axed him	2.7
14	Conveying fear	Sinking into the sand	3.14

As far as expressives are concerned, “the illocutionary point of this class is to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content” (Searle 1976: 12). Their communicative function is therefore to signal the emotions and sensations Willie experiences (see Table 5): they range from the positive feeling of satisfaction (11), to the negative feelings of pain (1-5), concern (6-8), anger (12) and fear (14), to feelings of surprise (9-10) and scorn (8). The

different subclasses of expressives and their distribution in the three episodes can be accounted for by the narratives of those same episodes, as is the case with commissives scrutinised in Section 4.2. The groundskeeper's sole agreeable emotion (11) is comprised in PC, whereas all his disagreeable sensations occur in THH V and THH VI: they are the consequences of, among other things, being axed to death in all the three segments composing THH V, burnt to a mere skeleton, compelled to pursue a bus, transformed into a lawnmower eventually sinking into the sand, and obliged to handle Homer's madness and Bart's "shinning".

As a result, a foreigner, to be more exact a Scottish immigrant, is depicted as the perfect grotesque and ludicrous victim of the community of Springfield, most of all as a boy's (Bart's) easy target. Willie's identity as a victim is strengthened by the two following facts: 1. Three distinct people, including toddler Maggie Simpson, axe him three distinct times in the same episode, a fact he metadiscursively remarks on (see assertion 3); 2. He first features prominently in *The Treehouse of Horror Series*, where victims are not only acceptable but also required by the horror genre. This portrayal of the groundskeeper as a victim results in the inversion of two national-ethnic Scottish characteristics: stereotype 3 "humorous/good fun", i.e. someone to laugh *with*, is turned into "foolish", i.e. someone to laugh *at*, and stereotype 5 "low self-esteem" is changed into the "low esteem" the Springfield people hold him in.

## 4.5. Directives

Table 6. Illocutionary act: directive

No.	Directive subclass	Description	Turn
1	Order	Orders Bart to re-sod the field	1.2
2		Orders Bart to keep quiet	2.6
3		Orders Bart not to read his mind at a given time	2.6
4		Orders himself to rescue Bart and his family	2.7
5		Orders Homer to fight him	2.7
6		Orders Homer to carry out his instructions	2.8
7		Orders the Simpson children to be frightened of him	3.15
8		Orders the bus driver to stop for the first time	3.15
9		Orders the bus driver to stop for the second time	3.15
10		Orders the Simpson children to wait for him	3.15
11	Suggestion	Suggests that Bart save his strength	1.2
12		Suggests that he not grow angry with Bart	2.2
13		Suggests that Bart call him when Homer goes mad	2.6
14		Suggests that the Simpson children not give way	2.9
15	Request	Requests the schoolchildren's parents to rescue him	3.6
16		Requests rescue from the sandbox	3.14

In the three episodes, directives are the most frequent illocutionary acts (see Table 6); as such, they strongly characterise Willie’s conversational behaviour. The illocutionary point of directives “consists in the fact that they are attempts (of varying degrees, and hence, more precisely, they are determinates of the determinable which includes attempting) by the speaker to get the hearer to do something” (Searle 1976: 11). Accordingly, the communicative function of directives is to indicate unambiguously what the groundskeeper wants his addressees to do; underpinning this class of illocutionary acts is Scottish stereotype 4 “direct/down to earth”.

The sample incorporates two requests only (15 and 16). By means of request 15, Willie asks the schoolchildren’s parents to save his life, but he meets with a refusal, viz. a dispreferred second part in an adjacency pair: it is this declined request which sparks off the whole plot of the second THH VI segment. With regard to suggestions (11-14), they are put forward for the hearers’ benefit and, therefore, recall national-ethnic Scottish stereotype 1 “friendly/warm/kind-hearted”. Conversely, orders (1-10) are given for the speaker’s own benefit, and evoke stereotypes 6 “aggressive/paranoid” and 9 “rough/brash”. Suggestions and orders alike contribute to representing the groundskeeper as a self-assured *dramatis persona*, and orders in particular characterise him as forceful: they actually range from directions to children (1-3, 7, 10) to injunctions to adults (5-6, 8-9) and even, comically, to himself (4). In the three episodes, though, Willie’s assertiveness is commonly thwarted by his younger and older addressees, who unvaryingly refuse to comply with his commands in linguistic and non-linguistic ways: this brings about the conversational pattern consisting of the groundskeeper’s orders plus the other protagonists’ dispreferred refusals of those orders. As a result, the repeated occurrence of this pattern reinforces his description as a grotesque victim and a ludicrous figure in the sitcom.

## 5. Conclusions

This article has presented a pragmatic analysis of Groundskeeper Willie’s turns in the three episodes PC, THH V and THH VI by applying Lindsay’s (1997) list of national-ethnic Scottish stereotypes and Searle’s (1976) taxonomy of illocutionary acts. As demonstrated in Section 2, at the phonological, lexical and visual levels, the stereotypical depiction of Willie’s Scottish national identity and non-American ethnic origins are conveyed by his regional accent, physical appearance and, to a lesser degree, vocabulary. This pragmatic examination has revealed that the groundskeeper’s national-ethnic Scottish characteristics are also directly relayed by his illocutionary acts: in fact, they communicate the personal features of his *dramatis persona* in the ironic discourse of the sitcom. In the representative sample of turns and episodes utilised here, Willie’s illocutionary acts credit him with positively value-laden personality traits, like fearlessness, knowledge of the supernatural and self-awareness — in Lindsay’s words, the Scottish immigrant is

stereotypically friendly, aggressive and rough. Nevertheless, these favourable aspects are countered by the other characters' responses to the groundskeeper's illocutionary acts and by the narratives of the parodistic *Shining* and *Nightmare* episodes he is the protagonist of. These responses and narratives ultimately typify him as a comic and foolish victim of children and adults alike in the American town of Springfield.

How do these findings relate to the research on national-ethnic stereotypes in *The Simpsons* outlined in Section 1? As noted by Gray (2006: 64), Willie's Scottishness is represented as hyper-stereotypical, hence as deliberately hyperbolic and humorous; moreover, Rodaway (2003: 163) observes that his major discursive function in the sitcom is to be a foil for his American fellow townspeople. Several heedless or unsophisticated spectators, yet, may not be conscious that the groundskeeper's representation and function are critical discursive strategies. Accordingly, although within the comic discourse of this parodistic sitcom, the equation of an immigrant, constructed as linguistically and visually different from mainstream American identity and culture, with a ridiculous victim, consistently outsmarted not only by adults but also by children, can actually be, in Gray's (2006: 64) terms, "a rather high risk strategy".

## Appendix: Groundskeeper Willie's illocutionary acts in the three episodes

### 1. "Principal Charming" (code 7F15)

*At school. Bart is sodding the playground as punishment.*

[1.1] **Bart.** Stupid Principal Skinner. You gotta be kidding me, bugger.

[1.2] **Willie.** Save your strength, lad [**directive: suggestion**]. Eh, there's a whole field for you to re-sod yet, eh eh eh eh eh [**directive: order**].

[Principal Skinner releases Bart.]

[1.3] **Bart.** Well, Willie, you can take it from here. *Throws a sack of seeds at him. Adiós, dude.*

[1.4] **Willie.** You'll be back [**representative: prediction**]! You haven't seen the last of Willie [**representative: prediction**]!

*Some days later. Bart is sodding the playground again.*

[1.5] **Bart.** *Mumbles a protest.*

[1.6] **Willie.** I told you you'd be back [**expressive: conveying satisfaction**]!

(Groening 2001-2010, Season 2, Episode 14; my transcription)

### 2. "Treehouse of Horror V" (code 2F03)

*First segment. Outside, the camera starts high above a hedge maze and zooms down to Willie watering one part of it. A chainsaw noise is heard.*

[2.1] **Bart.** Hey, I found a shortcut through your hedge maze.

[2.2] **Willie.** Why, you little **[expressive: conveying anger]** — *Thinking.* No, no. Go easy on the wee one **[directive: suggestion]**. His father’s gonna go crazy and chop ‘em all into haggis **[representative: prediction]**.

[2.3] **Bart.** What’s haggis?

[2.4] **Willie.** *Gasps.* Boy, you read my thoughts **[expressive: conveying surprise]**! You’ve got the shinning **[representative: assertion]**.

[2.5] **Bart.** You mean shining.

[2.6] **Willie.** *Sotto voce.* Shh! You wanna get sued **[directive: order]**? Now, look, boy, if your Da goes gaga, you just use that ... shin of yours to call me **[directive: suggestion]** and I’ll come a-running **[commissive: promise]**. But don’t be reading my mind between four and five **[directive: order]**. That’s Willie’s time **[representative: explanation]**! [...] *Willie is watching TV in a little house.*

[2.7] **Willie.** Uh oh **[expressive: conveying surprise]**. The little fat boy and his family are in trouble **[directive: order]**. *Runs outside, throws TV in the snow.* I’m coming to rescue the lot of you **[representative: description]**! *Opens door to lodge.* All right, loony, show me what you got **[directive: order]**. *Homer drives an axe into his back.* Aw **[expressive: conveying pain]**, is that the best you can do **[expressive: conveying scorn]**? *Collapses.* [...]

*Second segment. Homer arrives home again and opens the door to be greeted by Willie.*

[2.8] **Willie.** You’re still not in your own world, Homer **[representative: assertion]**. I can get you home **[commissive: offer]**, but you have to do exactly as I **[directive: order]** — Argh **[expressive: conveying pain]**! *Maggie axes him.* [...]

*Third segment. Lunch lady Doris catches the children escaping and walks towards them slowly with an eggbeater.*

[2.9] **Willie.** Hold on, kids **[directive: suggestion]**! I’m coming to rescue the lot of you **[representative: description]**! I’ll **[commissive: promise]** — *Skinner appears and axes him.* Argh **[expressive: conveying pain]**! Oh, I’m bad at this **[representative: assertion]**. (Groening 2001-2010, Season 6, Episode 6; adapted from *The Simpsons Archive*, available at <http://www.simpsonsarchive.com/episodes/2F03.html>)

### 3. “Treehouse of Horror VI” (code 3F04)

*Second segment. In his dream, Bart spots Willie dressed as Freddy Krueger, brandishing a rake.*

[3.1] **Willie.** Glad to rake your acquaintance **[commissive: threat]**. *Laughs evilly, and swipes at Bart, who wakes up yelling.* [...]

*In his dream, Martin is dressed as a wizard.*

[3.2] **Martin.** I am the wondrous wizard of Latin! I am a dervish of declension and a conjurer of conjugation, with a million hit points and maximum charisma. *Spots a blackboard with verbs written all over it.* Aha! “Morire”: to die. “Morit”: he, she, or it dies. *Willie morphs out of the blackboard; Martin gasps.*



**[3.3] Willie.** “Moris”: *you die* [**commissive: threat**].

**[3.4] Martin.** *Aah! Runs off.*

**[3.5] Willie.** *Laughs.* You’ve mastered a dead tongue [**representative: assertion**], but can you handle a live one [**representative: prediction**]? *His tongue shoots out of his mouth, wraps around Martin, and squeezes him. In class, Martin twists and screams, then collapses on the floor. [...]*

*Flashback. At school, the flames in the boiler flare up. Willie stops playing his bagpipes to check it out, but the boiler explodes, engulfing him in flames. Willie, burning and shouting, tries to escape, but the doorknob falls off. He then tries to use the fire extinguisher, but it is empty. He breaks out of the boiler room and runs into the classroom, where Principal Skinner and some parents are in a meeting.*

**[3.6] Willie.** *Argh* [**expressive: conveying pain**]! *Help! Please help me* [**directive: request**]!

**[3.7] Skinner.** *Reproachful.* Willie, please! Mr. Van Houten has the floor.

**[3.8] Mr. Van Houten.** *Er, I, for one, would like to see the cafeteria menus in advance so parents can adjust their dinner menus accordingly. Burning Willie sits down and waits. I don’t like the idea of Milhouse having two spaghetti meals in one day.*

*Willie explodes into flame and screams for a few seconds. The parents turn to watch.*

**[3.9] Willie.** *Aaarrggghhh* [**expressive: conveying pain**]!!! *A mere skeleton.* You’ll pay for this ... with your children’s blood [**commissive: threat**]!

**[3.10] Wiggum.** *Oh, right. How are you going to get them? Skeleton power?*

**[3.11] Willie.** *I’ll strike where you canna protect them – in their dreams* [**commissive: threat**]!

*His skeleton collapses into ashes, which are magically swept up into a dustpan and deposited in the garbage. [...]*

*In Bart’s dream, Willie, his giant head atop a fierce tartan lawn-mowing machine, plows through the hedge behind Bart. Bart cries out and runs off while Willie laughs. Seeing the sandbox gives Bart an idea. While Willie looks around for him, Bart takes some clippings of grass lying in garbage bags nearby and sprinkles them over the sandbox, waters them with a hose, then stands with the sandbox in front of him and calls out to Willie.*

**[3.12] Bart.** *Hey, Lawn Boy! You missed a spot! Motions to sandbox.*

**[3.13] Willie.** *When I’m done with you, they’ll have to do a compost-mortem* [**representative: prediction**]!

*Willie shifts himself into high gear and tromps the gas, flying toward Bart and growling. When he hits the sandbox, though, his wheels turn uselessly.*

**[3.14] Willie.** *Argh! Sinky sand* [**expressive: conveying fear**]! *Help me! Help Willie* [**directive: request**]! *Morphs into several different tartan shapes before turning into himself and sinking into the sand. [...]*

Soon afterwards, behind Bart, a giant tartan spiderlike bagpipe with Willie's head on it rises from the sandbox. Both Bart and Lisa get grabbed by Willie, who is playing and sinking into the sand. All seems lost until Maggie appears and blocks Willie's exit hole with her pacifier. Willie tries vainly to pull it out, but he expands gradually until he explodes, raining scraps of tartan all over the place. [...]

The three of them walk out the front door the next morning. A bus pulls up; Willie gets off.

**[3.15] Willie.** Boo! Hello! Here I am. *Laughs and makes some faces and noises.* **[directive: order]** The bus leaves. No **[expressive: conveying concern]**! Stop **[directive: order]**! I left my gun on the seat **[expressive: conveying concern]**. Hey **[directive: order]**! He starts chasing it, then turns back. Wait here, please **[directive: order]**. He runs off, losing his shoe. Oh, jeez **[expressive: conveying concern]**. A saxophone plays the theme song.

(Groening 2001-2010, Season 7, Episode 6; adapted from *The Simpsons Archive*, available at <http://www.simpsonsarchive.com/episodes/3F04.html>)

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