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Spanish and English Verbal Humour: A Comparative Study of Late-night Talk Show Monologues

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to establish a cross-linguistic comparison between Peninsular Spanish and American English verbal humour as displayed in televised humorous monologues in late-night talk shows. While humour research is abundant across different languages, only a small number of studies investigating cross-cultural differences in verbal humour exist. An analysis of verbal humour in monologues from four current late-night TV talk shows in Spain and the United States revealed similar use of linguistic resources such as analogies, colloquialisms, cultural references to deliver humour but with different degrees of preference. Additionally, English monologues were mostly on political satire, while Spanish humour referenced a wider variety of topics including taboo-like themes and language such as sex, drugs, or religion. Spanish monologues were also more conversational and informal in their delivery.

Keywords

humour – monologue – Spanish – English – satire – mocking

1 Introduction

Humour has been assumed to be a universal phenomenon that shares similar mechanisms and characteristics across languages although the rules of when and what to joke about may vary between cultures. While humour may occur in conversation without much planning, much of humour is understood as a type of performance that allows speakers to present an unknown side of their persona to others. Telling jokes or simply being witty are ways that bring us together by exposing the ordinariness of everyday life. Celebrities, for example, like to tell trivial personal anecdotes while being interviewed in public to establish “a frame of friendship” (Smith, 2010: 197) and “facilitate the blurring of the private/public distinction or the performance of the celebrity being ordinary” (Matwick and Matwick, 2017: 35).

Humour surfaces in most genres and contexts. In some cases, humour is expected as in stand-up comedy, sitcoms, cartoons, etc., while in others it is not but it may appear for different reasons such as in political debates, educational settings, institutionalized ceremonies or rituals, etc. Based on shared cultural conventions within a sociocultural community, there are some genres where humour is considered a discursive strategy (Tsakona, 2017), as happens in televised humorous monologues from late-night shows. However, while humour research in different languages is abundant, there does not seem to be much research on how two different languages and cultures deliver verbal humour using a similar genre as in the case of late-night shows. Given the popularity and similarities of these televised programs in Spain and in the United States, we propose a comparison of how comedians deliver humour during their monologues in these shows. This study attempts to illustrate how verbal humour is deeply rooted in the culture of the participants and how different textual markers are exploited in the delivery of humour. This essay is organized in the following way: First, we present and critically discuss the literature on how humour is defined and understood, including the most common used taxonomies of types of humour. We also examine the characteristics of televised monologues in late-night shows to better understand the context in which humour is framed. Then, we present the research questions for this study followed by the methodology and coding scheme used to analyse

humour. After presenting quantitative and qualitative results, we answer our research questions by discussing the data using relevant literature and critical analysis.

2 Literature Review

2.1 *Definition, Theories, and Types of Humour*

Humour is a type of communication that is based on an incongruence used to generate effects. According to the *General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH)* (Attardo, 2001), the successful outcome of any humorous text entails the activation of mental scripts and their opposition according to a particular situation on the basis of a defined target, narrative strategy, and the choice of linguistic tools. The opposition of scripts is achieved through logical mechanisms that result in the resolution of the perceived incongruity. It is at the punchline whether the listener or reader is forced to resolve the incongruity in favour of one of the activated scripts.

Humour utilizes narrative texts or sequences although it also appears in expositive, argumentative or conversational texts (Ruiz Gurillo, 2013a). Linguistic choices in their diversity of forms and functions are chosen, negotiated, and adapted to achieve their basic aim to amuse the audience (Ruiz Gurillo, 2016). Linguistic resources such as hyperbole, metaphors, synonymy, ambiguity, word play, etc., are used in a cleverly way to point to the referents and activate the necessary logical mechanisms to reveal the amusing function of the text.

Humour interpretation is based on the understanding that the principle of cooperation and some of its maxims (Grice, 1989) have been violated. In other words, the deliberate violation of the cooperation principle is the linguistic basis of humour. For example, the case of irony can be explained as flouting the maxim of quality that indicates one should try to be truthful. The humorous intent of an ironic comment such as 'what a beautiful day' when there is a storm with cold winds, thunder, and lightning comes from the understanding that the speaker purposely offers untruthful information to amuse the listener not to estrange the conversation.

Humour only exists if its recipients are able to process it. This means a text is not humorous by itself but rather it is through the process of inferring that listeners determine whether something is humorous or not. According to Relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1995), speakers make an effort to let listeners be aware of the intention beyond the utterance while listeners are left with the task of recognizing and inferring the intention of speakers'

information. However, while it is presumed the speaker is committed, and accountable for, to the meaning they intend to communicate (Haugh, 2013), in the absence of questioning the speaker's intentions, the hearer assumes that the speaker has intended the meaning the former has interpreted (Dynel, 2021).

The issue of intentionality in pragmatics research has gained prevalence in recent research (see *Journal of Pragmatics*, Vol. 179, 2021). In linguistic humour, the possible mismatch between speaker's intentions and hearer's interpretation has been explored in cases of failed humour (Bell and Attardo, 2010, among others), verbal insults (Dynel, 2021), and incidental humour (Chovanec, 2021, 2016). For example, in reviewing several follow-up sports interviews, Chovanec (2021) finds examples of unintended and unexpected humour that he described as "failed seriousness" (p. 210) proving that humour is not just present in a text or achieved by meaning negotiation during interaction, but "a potential effect arising in a specific communicative context even regardless of any humorous intention" (p. 210).

Verbal humour activates differently depending on the setting. Studies have focused on humour in the workplace (Holmes and Marra, 2002), in the classroom (Bell, 2009; Gorham and Christophel, 2009), in political spheres (Tsakona and Popa, 2011), in sitcoms (de Jongste, 2017; Zhang, 2018), etc. In conversational humour, participants work together in constructing humour. One speaker says something funny and often someone else repeats it, elaborates on it, or makes a comment, thereby reinforcing the humour. In doing so, participants acknowledge and support humorous turns. In humorous monologic performances in front of live audiences, as in the case of monologues in late-night shows, that collaboration and acknowledgement appear in the form of laughter, cheer, and/or applause.

Having established how humour is defined and operates, we now consider how verbal humour can be dissected and analysed. While many different types of humour exist, we focus only on those phenomena that helps us examine verbal humour in the televised monologues under study. Nonetheless, it is difficult to provide a taxonomy of different types of humour because scopes of the different phenomena often overlap. In addition, linguistic concepts are often defined from 'emic' (language users') and 'etic' (researchers') views (Dynel, 2017). In other words, language users or insiders isolate and name linguistic units differently than academic or outsiders (Pike, 1967). The mismatch between an emic and an etic definition is more pronounced in some concepts than in others, as in the case of irony and sarcasm. From an 'emic' perspective, *irony* and *sarcasm* are often used interchangeably but while sarcasm is viewed as a linguistic device that someone uses in communication, irony is attached to

describe unfortunate or unexpected events that happen to people (Creusere, 2000). For example, someone who walks very carefully on a snowy road and when they step into their house they slip, and fall could be described as an ironic situation. In fact, the term irony is used so much in everyday life that often it is used to refer to something as humorous while not being ironic at all.

Irony as a literary device refers to two contradicting meanings reflecting the difference between expectations and reality. Pragmatically speaking, irony is often understood as a rhetorical figure involving an overt untruthfulness with an implicit negative evaluation which may be nonthreatening and supply politeness (Dynel, 2014). Sarcasm, on the other hand, is often described as the aggressive form of irony and thus, it is used to criticize, insult, mock, and/or ridicule someone (Glenwright and Pexman, 2010; Reyes et al., 2013). It is the aggressive nature of sarcasm that explains why the recipient may not perceive it as humorous, although the speaker may have intended it that way and other present interlocutors may also find it amusing (Dynel, 2017).

Teasing is widely understood as verbal playing directed to someone present in the conversation. It is considered aggressive and face-threatening if the shared schema and appropriate cues have not been interpreted equally by the joker and the target (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997). However, the degree of aggression and criticism often associated with teasing is gradable and even non-existent (Dynel, 2008). Overall teasing is described as jocular, playful, or non-serious (Sinkevičiute, 2016). For their part, Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) distinguish between teasing that *nips*, that is, a type of teasing that involves pretended aggression but bonds individuals and teasing that *bites* where verbal aggression is genuine while mitigated and thus, it may not lead to bonding. The latter is sometimes referred to as jocular mockery or “a form of teasing where speakers figuratively cut down or diminish the target in some way but do so, within a non-serious or playful frame” (Haugh, 2016: 123). Humour that is genuinely aggressive has also been called *disaffiliative humour* (Dynel, 2013) where the objective is to denigrate the target in front of other participants in the interaction.

In contrast to teasing, *self-denigrating humour* is described as a relatively “safe” way (Schnurr and Chan, 2011: 21) of humour directed to the speaker signalling they are in control of the situation because they are making fun of their own weaknesses but at the same time, showing vulnerability by attacking their own face. In a way, in employing self-denigrating humour, the speaker “has conflicting face needs” (Hay, 2001: 74). Additionally, the listener is placed in a challenging situation as they need to find appropriate ways to respond. This is particularly difficult in asymmetrical relationships when superiors make fun of themselves to their subordinates (Schnurr and Chan, 2011).

Political satire, which is common in late-night shows (Day, 2013), functions as “an outlet for average people to mock and comment on powerful elites” (Martin et al., 2018: 122). Through comedic parody, ordinary people and professional comedians can address social and political issues that are often taboo among powerful groups. TV hosts in late-night shows use political and news media to mock and criticize politics by mimicking political discourse and ridiculing politicians. However, political satire is more than just parody. Political satire comedians invite listeners not only to laugh at politics and politicians but also to “play with politics, to examine it, test it, and question it rather than simply consume it as information or ‘truth’ from authoritative sources” (Gray et al., 2009: 11).

2.2 *The Humorous Monologue in Late-night Talk Shows*

The humorous monologue is characteristic of stand-up comedy and TV late-night talk shows. In the latter, the comedian starts the show with a monologue followed by interviews with celebrities, and some music performances. In both settings, the text of the humorous monologue has been previously planned although some improvisation is also possible. The humorous script or text is dramatised resulting in some sort of interaction between the comedian and the audience. The role of the audience is important since they are the ones who decide whether the humour is effective or not by laughing, cheering and/or applauding. In dramatising the narrative, the comedian uses verbal and non-verbal cues that help in interacting with the audience and adding humour to the script. In late-night shows, comedians dramatise their narrative for a live audience on the set but also for the public watching at home.

The structure of a humorous monologue in late-night TV shows usually revolves around current news. Sometimes the comedian introduces a piece of news and immediately after creates a joke with a punchline. Other times, the comedian presents a piece of news or a serious premise and develops an expository narrative filled with several arguments, that sometimes are humorous in the form of jab lines, to end with a brief summary of the ideas defended in the monologue and a final humorous element or punchline (Ruiz Gurillo, 2020).

Humour in monologues derives from an ironic analysis of current events, facts, traditions, or attitudes. The nature of these events or facts is not in itself amusing but the comedian’s analysis or explanation is what people laugh about (Alvarado Ortega, 2013). Comedians rely on their ingenious use of language to offer their own interpretation or view of the topics at hand by employing rhetorical and linguistic resources such as hyperbole, repetition, contrast, word play, etc. These satirical late-night TV programs “expose political hypocrisy, ridiculous antics, congressional absurdity, candidate flubs, and legislative squabbles. They also ridicule media, especially cable television’s coverage of

politics” (Kaye and Johnson, 2016: 139). The audience acknowledges that the humour in these monologues is funny but serious at the same time. The topics discussed are treated with sarcasm and irony, but they are also informative (Martin et al., 2018) to the point that some of these shows have been described as a form of “alternative journalism” (Baym, 2005: 261).

3 Motivation for This Study and Research Questions

The motivation for this study relies on the fact that cross-cultural studies, as the present one, are particularly informative because they examine the societal norms underlying speakers’ linguistic choices. While humour research is abundant across different languages, studies investigating cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences in verbal humour are limited. This is, therefore, the motivation for this study. Since humour is dependent on specific settings and relationships, we chose the monologues in late-night TV talk shows to facilitate a fair comparison between the two languages and cultures. An examination of how certain comedians use language to produce humorous discourse may offer some insights into how Peninsular Spanish and American English culture use humour in communication. This study aims at answering the following questions.

- Do Peninsular Spanish and American English comedians use similar language mechanisms to add humour to their monologues?
- How does Peninsular Spanish and American English verbal humour compare in late-night talk shows’ monologues?

4 Methodology

4.1 Data Collection

The data from this study come from four prominent comedians, two Americans, Jimmy Kimmel and Jimmy Fallon, and two Spaniards, Andreu Buenafuente and David Broncano. All these comedians are host of late-night TV talk shows with comparable formats. Late-night talk shows originated in the United States and were popularized by Johnny Carson with his *The Tonight Show* first aired in October 1962. Jimmy Kimmel and Jimmy Fallon host two shows in two different well-known public TV channels. *Jimmy Kimmel Live* has been on air in ABC channel since 2003 every night from Monday to Thursday. *The Tonight Show* by Jimmy Fallon has been on air since 2014 from Monday to Thursday on the NBC channel. Late night talk shows are relatively new in Spanish TV although they are all modelled after American shows. *Late Motiv* by Andreu Buanfuente

has been on air since 2016 from Monday to Thursday on the subscription TV channel Movistar+. David Broncano's show, *La Resistencia*, started in 2018, and meets from Monday to Thursday in the same Movistar+ TV channel.

Our corpus comes from eighteen different monologues selected on free availability in the internet and within a similar time span. The total data amounts to 170 minutes:

1. Jimmy Kimmel: 4 shows, 39 minutes, May–November 2019.
2. Jimmy Fallon: 6 shows, 42 minutes, July–August 2019.
3. Andreu Buenafuente: 4 shows, 45 minutes, June 2019.
4. David Broncano: 4 shows, 44 minutes, February–August 2018.

4.2 *Data Analysis*

Verbal humour was identified from the time the comedian walked on the set until the end of the monologue. We used a humour episode as the unit of analysis. A humour episode was a section of the comedian's monologue ended or interrupted by audience laughter. The audience laughter was used as the marker of the beginning and end of a humour episode, except in the case of the first humour episode for each monologue where no audience laughter appears at the beginning. For example, in (1) we see two humour episodes separated by audience laughter and comedian's pause belonging to an expository narrative about the state of the economy in the United States.

- (1) Let's get some news, the big story is the economy, yesterday the stock market dropped 800 points and it suffered its worst loss of the year, I'm not saying the economy is in trouble but right now giving money to John Hickenlooper's presidential campaign is better investment (Audience laughter and pause).

The stock market plummeted 800 points, the graph was intense, it looked like a heart monitor, before you buy Olive Garden's Lifetime Pasta Pass (speaker gestures with one arm going up and down) and after you buy Olive Garden's Lifetime Pasta Pass (Audience laughter and pause).

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Cases of failed humour where the audience did not laugh were not considered for the purposes of this study. The humour analysed comes from the comedian's own speech, that is, those cases where laughter arose solely from the use of visual aids such as videos or photos were discarded. However, episodes where the visual aid contributes to the oral delivery of humour were codified.

Our coding scheme to analyse each humour episode in the corpus comes from the present data and previous research. All humour episodes were classified according to the following categories: Narrative structure, thematic sequence, target, humour types, topics, and resources used in the delivery of humour.

1. Narrative structure. Each monologue was structured according to two different types of narrative forms: A canned joke, comprising of an isolated tale on a specific topic that includes a build-up and a punch line as in (2), and a shaggy-dog story, which is a lengthy tale on a specific topic filled with jab lines and/or jokes¹ as in (3). Therefore, while the shaggy-dog story had several humour episodes within the same general theme (e.g., example (3) has four humour episodes), each canned joke was comprised of one humour episode on one specific topic.

(2) Listen to this, I read about a new trend where people have started adding Bitmojis to their resumes. It's actually pretty helpful, now the person interviewing you knows exactly why you're unemployed.

FALLON

(3) Speaking of writing, Donald Trump Jr. is writing a book. He says the book will cover a number of topics including his father's accomplishments in the White House, lies from the liberal media and tips for greasing your hair with a mixture of varnish and lard (audience laughter).

DJTJ has not yet announced the title, but I have a few ideas if he he's interested. For instance, "Are you there, dad? It's me the dumb one." (Audience laughter)

Or maybe he could call it "Mopey Dick," or perhaps instructional "How to glue on a fake beard" (audience laughter).

Of course, with siblings rivalries being what they are, his brother Eric is now writing a book too, he's writing a children book called "Eric shot an *elphalant*" (audience laughter).

KIMMEL

1 In some cases, jokes within a shaggy-dog story could be identified as canned jokes, as defined in this paper, because they consisted of a build-up leading towards a punchline. However, because these jokes were part of a lengthy tale on a specific theme, for the purpose of the analysis, they were considered belonging to the structure of a shaggy-dog story.

2. Thematic sequence. As used in the literature (Ruiz Gurillo and Linares Bernabéu, 2020; Val.Es.Co., 2014), sequence is defined as a “conversational structure with a structural and topical unit in which the monologist develops a continuous intervention ... that is disrupted by the laughter and applause of the audience” (Ruiz Gurillo and Linares Bernabéu, 2020: 36). The sequence is delimited by its thematic content and structure. Therefore, our two narrative forms (e.g., canned jokes and shaggy-dog stories) were categorized according to the following thematic sequences:
 - a. Introductions: comedian’s introductory greetings to the audience
 - b. National news (e.g., In a shaggy-dog story, Kimmel talked about Donald Trump’s visit to Japan)
 - c. International news (e.g., In a canned joke, Fallon talked about tennis player Novak Djokovic’s performance at Wimbledon competition)
 - d. Life events and general facts (e.g., In a shaggy-dog story, Buenafuente talked about the beginning of summer and the effect it has on people).
3. Humour types. Each humorous episode was classified according to its intended effect and the specificity of the target as follows:
 - a. Teasing: A playful and sometimes provoking remark to an interlocutor present (e.g., audience, band member, etc.).

(4) You guys, this is fun. ‘Shark Week’ is officially here [...] and if you’re really excited about that, you’re either a marine biologist or really high.

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b. Mocking: Humour directed to a third person or persons, with the intention to ridicule them on appearance, personality, general behaviour, etc.

(5) President Trump is travelling this weekend, he’s making a state visit to Japan, I don’t like when he leaves the country, it makes me nervous, it’s like, it’s like being at your wedding and watching your drunken uncle hit on your friends.

KIMMEL

c. Amuse: A funny remark to simply entertain the audience, without any specific target.

(6) *Ir en bicicleta pues es un deporte muy saludable excepto si eres ciclista profesional a veces porque puedes caer en el dopaje y eso es negativo,*

aunque ellos lo llaman dar positivo, de ahí la confusión que a veces se ha producido.

Cycling is then a very healthy sport except if you are a professional cyclist because sometimes you can fall into doping and that is negative, although, they call it being positive, from there the confusion that sometimes happens.

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d. Self-denigratory: A comedian's self-directed humorous remark with the intention of making fun of themselves.

(7) John Travolta, guys, a legend, I am huge fan of his, every movie he has even been in I've watched, he can sing, he can dance, he can act, he's here promoting his film 'The Fanatic,' which after saying all that, it's probably about me.

FALLON

e. Political satire: Humour directed to expose and criticize politics, politicians, political parties, and government in general.

(8) Democrats need another choice like Starbucks needs another location.

KIMMEL

f. Social satire: Humour directed to expose and criticize the behaviour of a society or social group (e.g., millennials)

(9) *Hoy es el día mundial de la bicicleta [...] Para los milenials la bicicleta es el patinete de siglo 20, eh?*

Today is world bicycle day [...] For millennials the bicycle is the scooter of the 20th century, eh?

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4. Target. The recipient of the humour.
 - a. Individual
 - b. Organization (e.g., Netflix)
 - c. Society
 - d. Audience

- e. Government and political parties
 - f. Other (e.g., church)
 - g. None
5. Humour topics. What a comedian makes fun of. Here appears a list of most common topics.
- a. Appearance
 - b. Behaviour and personality traits (e.g., intelligence, maturity, etc.)
 - c. Politics
 - d. Entertainment (e.g., social media, videogames, etc.)
 - e. Relationships
 - f. Controversial topics (e.g., drugs, religion, sexual, ethnic)
 - g. Other
6. Linguistic resources. Rhetorical strategies employed in the delivery of humour.
- a. Parody: The use of multiple voices to mimic the way of speaking of the target of the humour.
 - b. Direct speech: The insertion of direct quotes from different individuals but without mimicking them.
 - c. Irony: A literary tool where one says something different from what they really mean or the way they really feel.
 - d. Word play: The playful use of words or puns for an intended humorous effect.
 - e. Analogy: A comparison between two elements whose connection leads to humour.
 - f. Contrast repetition: The use of a phrase or syntactic structure that is repeated with some different elements resulting in a humorous contrast.
 - g. Hyperbole: A humorous exaggeration.
 - h. Colloquialism: Words, phrases and fixed expressions regarded as informal and often associated with specific contexts and social groups.
 - i. Codeswitching: The use of a language different from the language of comedian and audience.
 - j. Audience appeal: Comments or questions directed to the audience intended to search for confirmation.
 - k. Cultural references: References based on shared cultural knowledge between the comedian and the audience.

Every humour episode identified in the data was analysed using all listed categories, as summarised in Table 1. For example, in (10) this humour episode was coded as follows. Narrative structure: Canned joke; Thematic sequence: National news; Target: Individual (Sanders); Topic: Personality; Humour Type:

TABLE 1 Summary of coding scheme

Narrative Structure	Thematic sequences	Humour types	Target	Topics	Rhetorical strategies
Canned joke	Introduction	Teasing	Individual	Appearance	Parody
Shaggy-dog-story	National news	Mocking	Organization	Behaviour & personality	Direct speech
	International news	Amuse	Society	Politics	Irony
	Life events & general facts	Self-denigratory Political satire	Audience	Entertainment	Word play
			Government & political parties	Relationships	Analogy
			Other	Controversial topics	Contrast repetition
None	Other	Hyperbole Colloquialisms Codeswitching Audience appeal Cultural references			

Mocking; Resources: Word play (jam), cultural references (Sanders, Andrew Yang, Smucker's marmalade, Spotify), parody.

- (10) Speaking of long shots, another Democrat, Andrew Yang, just released a Spotify playlist of his quote 'favourite jams' and when they asked other candidates for their favourite jams, Bernie Sanders was like 'Strawberry Smucker's Marmalade' (shouts and mimics Sanders).

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Each researcher first identified and classified all cases of humour episodes individually. Then, results were compared, and in case of disagreement, a consensus was reached. All the numerical data was analysed using descriptive and whenever possible, inferential statistics (i.e. chi-square tests).

5 Results

Using audience laughter as an indicator of a humour episode, we found 269 humour episodes in the Spanish monologues and 224 episodes in the English monologues, resulting in a database of 493 episodes. The Spanish monologues were structured with 35 shaggy-dog stories, while the English monologues included 35 canned jokes and 25 shaggy-dog stories.² National and international news were the two main thematic sequences under which shaggy-dog stories and canned jokes were embedded.³ As seen in Figure 1, whereas the English monologues were mainly built around national news (96.7%), the Spanish monologues covered national (71.4%) and international news (31.4%). These differences are statistically significant, ($\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 16.87, p < .01$).

In order to look closer at the subject of the humour in the monologues, we consider now the topics of each humour episode. Due to the large number of topics observed in the data and to facilitate the interpretation of results, some topics were collapsed into major categories. As shown in Figure 2, almost half of the humour episodes observed in the English data were about politics (40.6%, $N = 91$) followed by jokes about the personal behaviour and/or

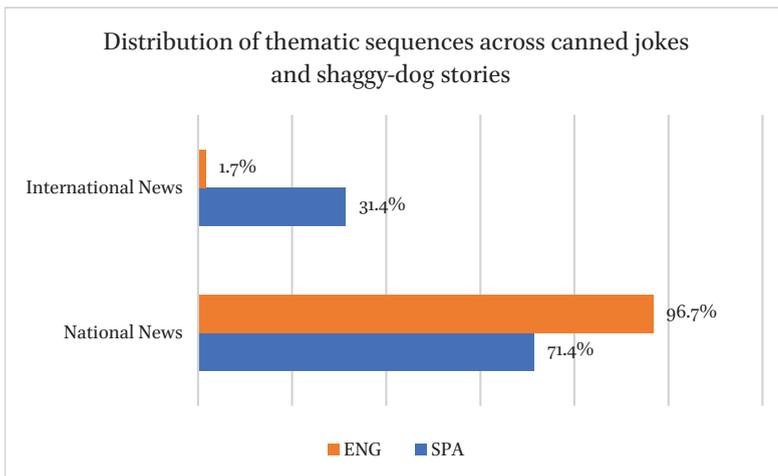


FIGURE 1 Distribution of thematic sequences across canned jokes and shaggy-dog stories

2 It is worth mentioning that all canned jokes in the English monologues belonged to Jimmy Fallon who only had 11 shaggy-dog stories. Jimmy Kimmel, on the other hand, structured all his monologues in shaggy-dog stories.

3 There were only 7 cases of introduction as a thematic sequence and just 2 cases of life events and/or general facts. No statistical analyses were conducted for these two categories.

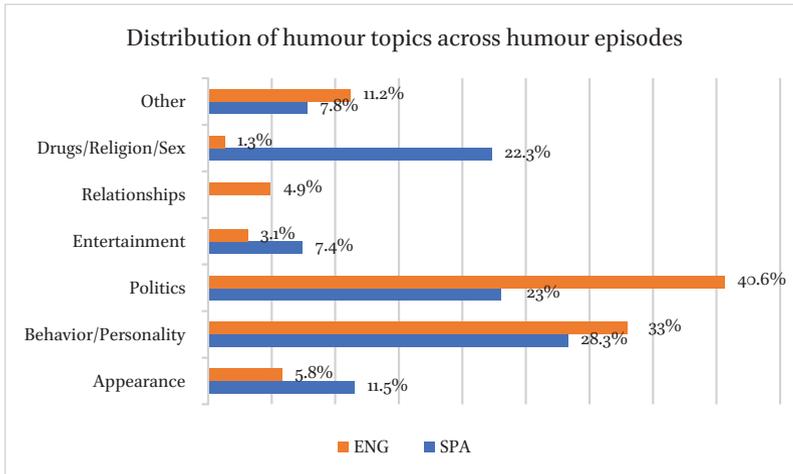


FIGURE 2 Distribution of humour topics across humour episodes

personality of individuals (33%, $N = 74$). In comparison, in the Spanish data besides talking about politics (23%, $N = 61$) and personal behaviour (28.3%, $N = 76$), comedians made many humorous remarks on more sensitive topics such as sex, ethnicity, drugs or religion (22.3%, $N = 60$). No statistical analyses were conducted due to the large number of categories listed and the low occurrence of humour in some of these categories.

Given the preference for national news in the English monologues, it was not surprising to see that the focus of the political humour was American politics. Kimmel's monologues were comprised of 14 shaggy-dog stories and 13 of them were devoted to American politics resulting in 107 humour episodes (97% of all his humour episodes). Some of his shaggy-dog stories were very lengthy, such as the one about the whistle blower complaint over then President Donald Trump's call with the Ukrainian president in 2019. In this story, Kimmel included many humour episodes making fun of politics as in (11) but also of the personality and/or general behaviour of politicians, in this case, Donald Trump, as in (12) or their appearance as in (13).

- (11) The President spent much of the afternoon complaining about the complaint, again calling it a witch-hunt and he also came up with a title for his autobiography today (a tweet from Donald Trump on screen) it will be called "The biggest scandal in the history of American politics."

- (12) Trump claims he only watched a little bit of the testimony this morning; yeah, right, just like he only eats a little bit of cake.
- (13) He really spinning out, he's getting increasingly sloppy. You'd think the guy with the world's most famous combover would be better with a coverup.

Buenafuente also used politics as the topic of his humour but contrary to Kimmel, he amused the audience talking not only about national news as in (14) but also international news. In discussing Donald Trump's meeting of the Queen of England and Boris Johnson in his trip to that country, Buenafuente, similarly to Kimmel, chose to make fun of Trump's general behavior as in (15) and Trump and Johnson's appearance as in (16).

- (14) (Comedian is talking about the difficulty of the winning party in the last Spanish elections to form government).

Se ve que Sánchez ha ofrecido a Iglesias un gobierno de cooperación, nadie sabe lo que significa, no?, eh qué es un gobierno de cooperación? yo os lo voy a contar; significa que los dos partidos cooperarán para crear políticas sociales que mejoren la vida de la gente y luego el PSOE va a hacer lo que le dé la gana; vale, esto es un poquito la cooperación.

It seems that Sánchez has offered Iglesias a cooperation government, nobody knows what that means, right? What is a cooperation government? I am going to tell you; it means that the two parties will cooperate to create social policies to improve people's lives and then PSOE will do whatever they feel like doing; OK, this is somehow cooperation.

BUENAFUENTE

- (15) (An edited videoclip is shown of both Queen Elizabeth and Donald Trump engaging into a thumb war after they have met).

Mira, están ahí, uy, uy, ay, están con los pulgarcitos, bueno, ganó, ganó la reina, eh, ganó la reina. Eso que Trump tiene abdominales en el pulgar de tanto tuitear, claro está ahí (mimicking tweeting).

Look, there they are, uy, uy, ay, they are there with their thumbs, well, won, won the Queen, eh, the Queen won. Even though Trump has abs on his thumb from tweeting so much, of course, of course, he is there.

BUENAFUENTE

- (16) (Showing Donald Trump and Boris Johnson).

Son de la misma tribu, los pelolocas, pelolookers y jamón de york, todo junto, un jamón de york con pelo encima, hostia, qué cosa eh?, pa' encontrártelo al salir de la ducha a las ocho de la mañana, eh?, te imaginas, 'que te has equivocado de habitación,' agh, agh.

They are from the same tribe, the crazyhairs, 'pelolookers,' and deli ham, everything together, a piece of deli ham with hair on top, damn it, what a thing, eh?, imagine bumping into him when you get out of the shower at eight in the morning, eh?, can you imagine, 'you have the wrong room,' agh, agh.

BUENAFUENTE

A clear difference between Spanish and English monologues is the treatment of taboo topics such as sex, religion, and drugs among Spanish comedians. The data clearly shows that American audiences in these late-night shows may not be so open to humour on these sensitive topics while Spanish comedians speak about them frequently, freely, and without shame. For example, both Broncano and Buenafuente made very explicit jokes on sexual topics or used language playfully with sexual connotations as in (17).

- (17) *El partido de Berlusconi va segundo en las encuestas, pero podría gobernar haciendo coalición con los ultras, ojo, eh, una ayudita, una ayudita de más, lo que Berlusconi llama la Viagra Nazi, para estar más firme en las posiciones.*

Berlusconi's party is in second place in polls, but it could govern by making a coalition with the ultras, watch out, eh, a little help, a little extra help, what Berlusconi calls the Nazi Viagra to be firmer in the positions.

BRONCANO

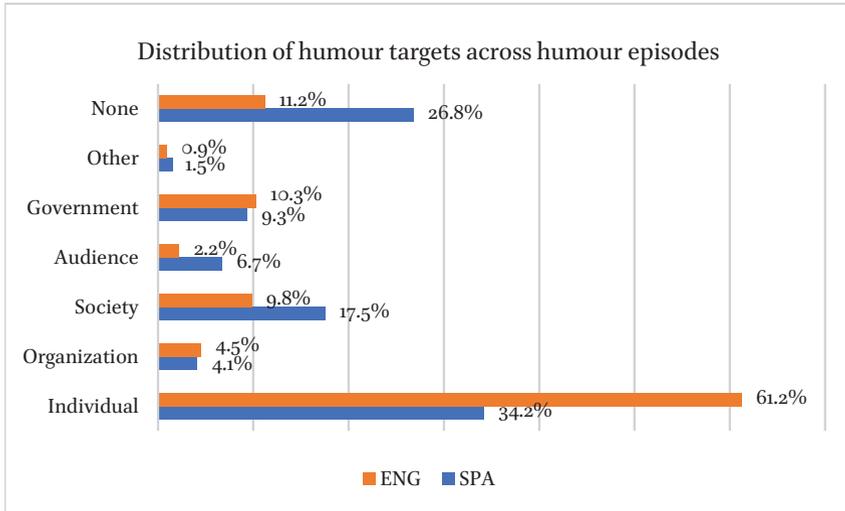


FIGURE 3 Distribution of humour targets across humour episodes

An examination of humour targets indicated that a specific individual was the preferred choice in both languages (Figure 3). Specifically, 93.4% ($N = 128$) of individual targets in the American data were American politicians, with 76 cases directed to Donald Trump, whereas in the Spanish monologues only 52.2% ($N = 48$) of the targets were politicians. Both sets of comedians equally targeted the government (SPA: 9.3%, $N = 25$, ENG: 10.3%, $N = 23$) and specific organizations (SPA 4.1%, $N = 11$, ENG 4.5%, $N = 10$). These results support the claim that politics is the focus of these monologues, especially in the case of the English comedians. However, cross-linguistic differences are also evident as Spanish humour in the monologues was directed to society (SPA 17.5%, $N = 47$, ENG: 9.8%, $N = 22$), audience (SPA 6.7%, $N = 18$; ENG 2.2%, $N = 5$) or non-specific targets (SPA 26.8%, $N = 72$; ENG 11.2%, $N = 25$) more frequently than English humour. In a statistical analysis,⁴ the relationship between the targets of individual, society, audience and non-specific targets was significant across both languages, ($\chi^2(3, N = 418) = 44.60, p < .01$).

Targeting society by the two Spanish comedians included not only making fun of Spanish society but also of foreign societies, even with very sensitive issues such as the mass shooting at a high school in Florida as we see in

4 A Chi-square analysis was performed only with the targets of individual, society, audience, and none because these categories displayed relevant numerical differences between Spanish and English.

(18). Kimmel and Fallon, on the other hand, only targeted American society in their jokes.

- (18) *La cosa es que ya van 18 tiroteos en escuelas en lo que va de año y estamos en febrero, ojo, allí el tiroteo cuenta como actividad extraescolar. En plan, joder, mamá es que no tengo ninguna tarde libre, entre el judo, el piano, el fútbol y matar con el AK-47, y así no puedo.*

The thing is, there have been 18 school shootings so far this year and we are already in February; listen, there the shooting counts as an extracurricular activity. For example, dammit, mom, I have no free afternoon between judo, piano, soccer, and killing with the AK-47, and I cannot go on this way.

BRONCANO

All four comedians filled their monologues with similar humour types although with different frequencies (Figure 4). The differences between Spanish and English humour types were statistically significant, ($\chi^2(4, N = 488) = 38.99, p < .01$).⁵ American comedians preferred political satire (40.2%, $N = 90$) (as exemplified in (11) above where Kimmel criticizes the American government on the handling of the whistle blower complaint) and mocking (35.3%, $N = 79$) (as

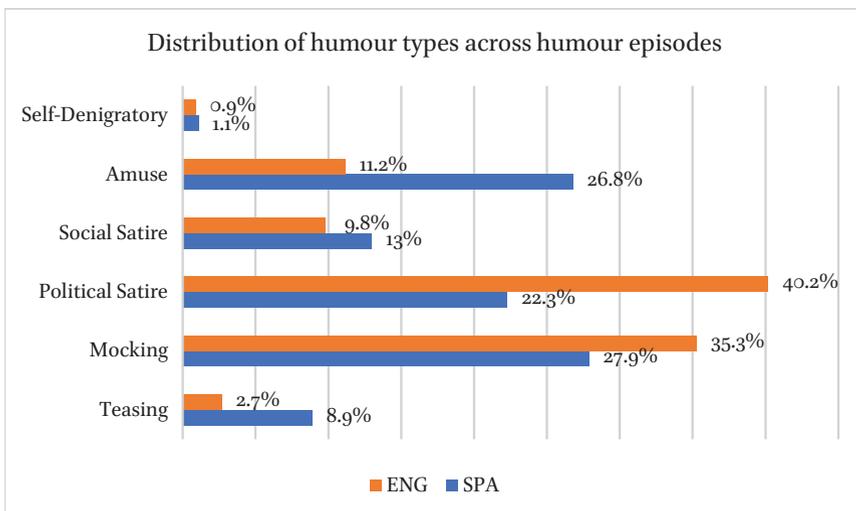


FIGURE 4 Distribution of humour types across humour episodes

5 For statistical purposes, we removed the lowest category, self-denigratory, from the analysis.

seen in (12) above as Kimmel makes fun of Donald Trump's eating behaviour). Spanish monologues, on the other hand offer a more balanced distribution between mocking (27.9%, N = 75), amuse (26.8%, N = 72) and political satire (22.3%, N = 60).

Using humour to simply amuse the audience was very typical in Spanish monologues, especially Broncano's, where he particularly liked to amuse the audience with jokes on taboo topics such as sex and drug use. For example, in one of the monologues, Broncano introduces a news report about a driver who tested positive for drugs. Instead of mocking the driver and his circumstances, Broncano delivered several jokes where the seriousness of drug addiction is treated playfully by making absurd and exaggerated comments on drug consumption. For example, in (19), the script opposition relies on the incongruous comparison between the need to have a full tank of high-octane gas to finish the Dakar car race and the amount of drugs in the blood system of the driver.

- (19) *Después del test, la Guardia Civil le pidió una muestra de orina, pero no para analizar, para llenar el depósito del coche, que joder, con eso te haces el Dakar sin repostar.*

After the test, the Civil Guard asked him for a urine sample, but not to analyse it, to fill the car's tank, dammit, with that you do the Dakar without refueling.

Contrary to the mocking in all English monologues where the targets were primarily American politicians, in the Spanish monologues, while comedians also mocked politicians (as exemplified in (17) above) and political parties, they also mocked international and national celebrities and public figures. In (20), Buenafuente makes fun of Melania Trump's appearance and in (21), he mocks Leticia Sabater, a Spanish singer infamous for her multiple plastic surgeries.

- (20) (French President Emmanuel Macron gave American President Donald Trump a tree as a gift but the tree died).

Hubiera sido mejor regalarle un árbol de plástico que seguro que no se muere y además haría juego con Melania, yo que sé, ya, ya, ya, no he exagerado, es una tía muy natural.

It would have been better to give him a plastic tree that certainly won't die and besides it would match with Melania, I don't have a clue, OK, OK, OK, I haven't exaggerated, she is a very natural gal.

BUENAFUENTE

- (21) (BuenaFuente announces a viral challenge to not use plastic for a week).

Vale, aunque la semana ha arrancado con una contradicción muy gorda, mala suerte, el destino no ha querido ayudar en esta semana del no consumo de plástico; saca videoclip Leticia Sabater, sí.

OK, although this week has begun with a big contradiction, bad luck, fate hasn't helped in this 'no plastic consumption' week; Leticia Sabater has released a videoclip, yes.

BUENAFUENTE

Cases of social satire were also present in both languages (SPA: 13%, N = 35, ENG: 9.8%, N = 22). Since the target of social satire is society, the results already presented above about humour targets and society are applicable here. However, the specificity of the target of these jokes differs between Spanish and English monologues. On the one hand, American comedians' social satire was exclusively directed to American society in general as in (22) where Kimmel reacts to a quote from Donald Trump about a call with the president of Ukraine which resulted in Trump's impeachment. In (23), Fallon uses an exaggeration to force viewers to confront an uncomfortable truth.

- (22) He (Trump) really, he really thinks we are idiots and by the way, he is right, we are, we are idiots who elected an idiot to run our country.

KIMMEL

- (23) To compete with Amazon, I saw that Best Buy is holding a big sale, you all know Best Buy, it's where you test out electronics before going home and ordering them off Amazon, sometimes right in the aisle, you go 'yeah, I'm not gonna go home.'

FALLON

In the Spanish monologues, on the contrary, comedians aimed their social satire to three different groups: Spanish society in general, social and/or regional groups within Spain, and non-Spanish societies. In (24), Broncano attacks a regional group from Andalucía, in the south of Spain, who engages in a yearly religious festivity called *El Rocío* that mixes spiritual awakening and partying.⁶

⁶ *Caballo* (horse) in Spanish is a slang word for heroine. In addition, *El Rocío* is a pilgrimage commonly done on horseback.

- (24) *Tampoco es nuevo para los andaluces mezclar, mezclar caballo y cocaína; se ha hecho una prueba piloto durante años en el Rocío, y joder, la verdad es que aquí no ha pasado nada, ya se ha extendido.*

Nor is it new for Andalusians to mix *horse* and cocaine; a pilot test has been done for years in *El Rocío*, and dammit, the truth is nothing has happened here, it has already spread.

BRONCANO

In all, Spanish and English comedians in our data make use of humour to critique aspects of society and/or human nature. Often, they rely on elements of fantasy and absurdism with a clear critical stamp. All comedians exaggerated scenarios and characters to push viewers to face their own inconsistencies. It is worth noting that Broncano's humour was at times quite cruel and harsh. In fact, perhaps due to the prominence in the international media of the school shooting in Florida in 2019 where a teenager killed 17 students, Broncano ridiculed American society quite harshly in several jokes including (18) above. He also liked to use sensitive topics quite openly to attack human behaviour of society and specific groups, as in (24), emphasizing regional stereotypes.

Teasing was more frequent in the Spanish monologues (8.9%, N = 24) than in the English monologues (2.7%, N = 6). In a televised monologue from a late-night show, teasing the audience is common as an attempt to acknowledge their presence and interact with them. All comedians, except Kimmel who did not use this humour type in his monologues, sent playful remarks to the audience. Teasing mainly focused on audience's reaction to a joke as in (25) or their position and/or understanding on a topic as in (26).

- (25) Got a nice slow clap, I appreciate it, thank you. I haven't gotten one all year (smiling), that's a great one.

FALLON

- (26) *Buenas noches, hoy es el Día Mundial de la Bicicleta, ¿lo sabíais?, claro, tengo que estar yo, pa' contarlo todo.*

Good evening, today is World Bicycle Day, did you know that? Of course, I have to be here to tell everything.

BUENAFUENTE

Broncano is the comedian who used the highest number of teases. His teases were not always very playful as we see in (27) where he insults the audience

calling them 'pathetic.' However, his frequent teasing contributed to his highly engaging style in delivering the monologue. In fact, we can safely state that most teasing in a humorous monologue is not scripted as it is prompted by the comedian's reading of audience reaction to the jokes.

- (27) *Tenemos una noticia para empezar bastante jodida; todos los medios han estado hablando del tema de la masacre, la masacre, la masacrita, bueno, la masacre, la masacre del instituto de Florida, no os riáis, joder, ¿esto es un público? Sois unos desgraciaos, hombre.*

We have some pretty fucked up news to start with; all media have been talking about the subject of the massacre, the massacre, the small massacre, well, the massacre, the massacre at the high school in Florida, do not laugh, dammit, is this a public? You are all pathetic, man.

BRONCANO

Finally, an analysis of the types of linguistic resources used to produce humour showed that regardless of language, comedians rely on a similar set of rhetorical strategies (Figure 5)⁷ to aid their humorous comments and jokes. Overall, Spanish comedians used more linguistic tools (N = 790) than American comedians (N = 667), although they all preferred the same type of rhetorical devices such as analogy, irony, and hyperbole, among others.

Analogies are a common strategy to bring humour to the discourse because by nature, humorous analogies are incongruous and therefore, they become instant jokes. The incongruity results in a sense of surprise which triggers laughter. For example, in (12) above, comedian Kimmel establishes a comparison between Trump's habit of compulsive news watching and his eating behaviour. The analogy's intended humour derives from the absurd comparison between 'watching news' and 'eating cake' as well as the repeated blatant understatement of 'a little bit.'

Humorous monologues in late-night TV shows use current news as the basis for their jokes. Therefore, it makes sense that comedians rely on cultural referents to deliver humour. American comedians resorted to cultural references more frequently than their Spanish counterparts (52.8%, N = 352 vs. 39.1%, N = 309). As expected, Spanish and English comedians made many references

⁷ No statistical analyses were conducted due to the large number of categories and low values in some of them.

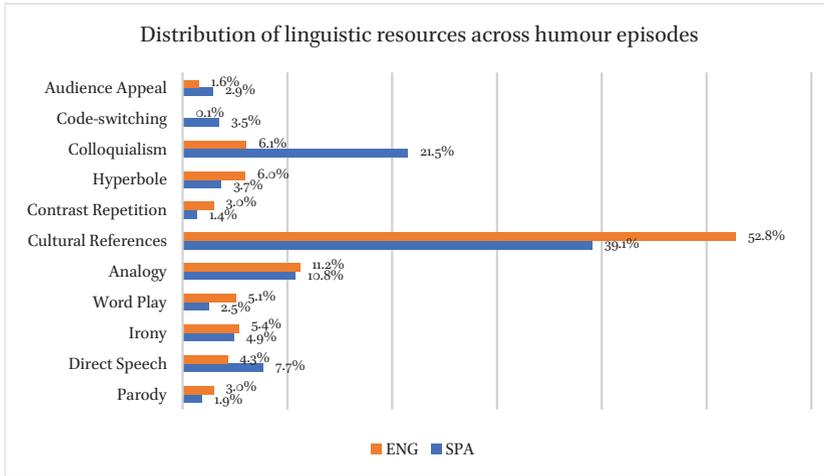


FIGURE 5 Distribution of linguistic resources across humour episodes

to the culture they represent; however, references to a foreign culture were fewer in the English monologues ($N = 69$ vs. $N = 110$). Many of the foreign cultural references in the Spanish monologues were related to American popular culture such as TV shows, movies, actors, social media apps, etc. In the English monologues, the cultural references were rooted in current national events and news, especially political news, in the United States. There were many references to well-known TV-shows, actors and singers (i.e. *Stranger Things*, Kevin McCallister, Lady Gaga, etc), politicians and/or political scandals (i.e. Bernie Sanders, Mike Pence, Stormy Daniels, Monica Lewinski, etc.) or popular products or traditions (i.e., whack-a-mole game, Ranch dressing, etc.). Indeed, many of these cultural references in the English monologues could be defined as international in the sense that anyone following international news and media would be able to recognize them. For example, in (28) Lady Gaga and her songs are internationally known and ‘calling 911’ while being the emergency number in the United States, many may recognize its meaning by having watched American movies.

- (28) [...] a man suffered a collapsed lung after a night of intense karaoke; he is doing OK now but just to be safe they are warning people not to even bother trying Lady Gaga’s part in ‘Shallow’ (he starts singing Lady Gaga’s song as he imitates her). Oh my goodness call 911 (he mimics suffering a heart attack or feeling very sick).

FALLON

On the other hand, Spanish cultural references were not so internationally known and often required historical and popular cultural knowledge and memory to decipher. In fact, sometimes these references had an intricate layer behind them that come to the surface only when they were mentioned. For example, in (29) context alone cannot help recognising the cultural reference to 'Ruta del bakalao.' During the 90s, a road along the Mediterranean coast was the main artery of a dance and techno music style known in Spain as *bacalao* (literally 'cod'). Ravers would spend all weekend bouncing from club to club on a set route, dancing, drinking, and doing drugs. On the contrary, Galicia, in northwestern Spain has traditionally been associated to rainy weather and, most notably, the pilgrimage known as *Camino de Santiago* (Way of St. James). Commenting on global warming and its effects on climate change in Galicia, the comedian's joke arises from the contrast between these apparently irreconcilable realities.

- (29) *Esto va a cambiar totalmente Galicia; con clima mediterráneo el camino de Santiago, esto es la nueva ruta del bakalao, sabes? la ruta, sí, sí.*

This is going to change Galicia completely, with a Mediterranean climate the Way to St. James, this is the new 'bakalao' route, you know? The route, yes, yes.

BUENAFUENTE

Similarly, in (30), context alone cannot help recognising the cultural reference to "*hizo muchos pantanos*" ('he built many water reservoirs'). Understanding that this sentence references the former Spanish dictator Franco – who many Spaniards supported because of all the infrastructures built under his command, especially water reservoirs – requires certain degree of knowledge about Spain's history in the 20th century, and it may be a difficult interpretation to make even for younger generations of Spaniards.

- (30) (Comedian comments on a petition to remove a statue of Woody Allen in a northern town of Spain).

Vale, es cierto que le acusan de un crimen muy feo; pero desde cuando ser un criminal ha sido razón para que te quiten una estatua en España? aquí lo subimos a un caballo y a la plaza mayor, palante! No ha pasao nada, hombre pero si hacía pantanos pues ya qué más quieres?

OK, it is true that he is being accused of an ugly crime, but since when to be a criminal has been a reason to have one's statue removed in Spain? Here we put them on a horse and off they go to the Main Square. Everything is OK, man, but if he made water reservoirs then what more do you want?

BRONCANO

The use of colloquialisms was another rhetorical strategy that clearly differentiated Spanish and English monologues. Spanish comedians utilized this strategy more frequently than American comedians (21.5%, N = 170 vs 6.1%, N = 41). A closer look at the nature of these colloquialisms led to a further classification in three different sub-categories: vernacular expressions, profanity, and onomatopoeia. Almost all cases of colloquialisms in the English data were idiomatic or vernacular expressions (N = 40), as in (13) above where Kimmel describes Donald Trump's behaviour as 'spinning out,' a fixed expression meaning 'losing control and going crazy.' However, the Spanish data showed not only frequent use of idiomatic expressions as well (N = 119) but also many instances of profanity (N = 43) as the use of '*joder*' in examples (18), (19), (24), and (27) above or the expression '*se han cagao*' in (31).

- (31) *Bueno, un país del que, bueno, jode, tenemos un conocimiento extremo, Bielorusia, voy a preguntar* (he walks to the audience, but stops and smiles). *Se han cagao, se han cagao, la gente ha dicho, no, no.*

Well, a country about which, well, dammit, we have a profound knowledge, Belarus, I am going to ask (he walks to the audience but stops and smiles). They shit themselves, they shit themselves, people said, no, no.

BUEANAFUENTE

Colloquialisms are also based on shared cultural knowledge which explains why these fixed expressions, idioms, and slang or jargon can impede communication if their metaphorical meaning is evaded. Hence, the higher number of colloquial expressions and idioms in the Spanish monologues can be an alienating factor that in conjunction with the more obscure cultural references used by the comedians may result in a type of ethnocentric verbal humour. For example, in (32), the expression '*pasarlo canutas*' means to have a hard time and '*tío*' is an informal way to refer to a person. While the latter may be easily interpreted by the context, '*pasarlo canutas*' requires a deeper understanding of Spanish culture. While today everyone in Spain knows what this expression

means, its origin is in the required military service that men had to complete in the past which was evidenced by an official letter presented to graduated cadettes in a cylinder or *'canuto'*.

- (32) (A region in Spain cannot have a government because no one wants to serve. Here the comedian is parodying how the town went after a reporter to pressure him to accept a position in the local government).

El tío las pasó canutas, eh? mira 'paradlo, paradlo' y el tío ahí (mimics someone running), 'este está empadronao aquí, paradlo.' Uno dijo, 'mira cómo corre, pa concejal de deportes,' sabes?

The guy had a hard time, eh?, look, 'stop him, stop him' and the guy there (mimics someone running), 'this one is registered here, stop him.' Someone said, 'look how he runs, for sports councillor,' you know?

BUENAFUENTE

6 Discussion

This investigation aimed at exploring possible cross-linguistic differences in the production of humour in Spanish and English as represented in the monologues under study. Our first research question asked whether Spanish and American English comedians use similar language mechanisms to add humour to their monologue. The quantitative results presented show that both set of comedians used similar mechanisms to add humor to their monologues. For example, all monologues in the study are based on current news and with humorous remarks intended to amuse, mock, or provide political and/or social satire often addressed to individual targets. Linguistic resources such as cultural references, analogies, colloquialisms, irony, and hyperboles were also used by all comedians. In all, our results indicate that Spanish and English language rely on similar tools to produce humour in the particular contexts under study here.

Our second research question asked how Peninsular Spanish and American English verbal humour compare in late-night talk shows' monologues. While similarities exist in the type of mechanisms used to deliver humour, some differences in frequency and manner of use are noticeable. Comedians in the American late-night shows favour a highly satirical treatment of national

political news in comparison with Spanish monologues where political matters were discussed less frequently. This disparity between Spanish and English monologues may be explained by the nature of late-night shows in both countries. Late-night talk shows have sometimes been called infotainment or soft news because of the presence and types of news shown and discussed (Martin et al., 2018). These shows in the United States have had this focus on news from their creation. Traditionally, the job of a late-night comedian was to provide Americans with something to laugh about so they could forget about their workday worries. Politics and daily news were always the target, but it was all in good fun and tended to be non-partisan. However, most current late-night TV shows have become a platform of political satire for liberal America, especially since Trump was elected president in 2016 (Daley, 2020). While social media has become a top source of news among web users in the United States, many still trust late-night comedy to learn about political news (Kaye and Johnson, 2016), although this trust is clearly defined by political ideologies (Mitchel et al., 2014). It is unclear the impact that televised political satire in the United States has on viewers' increased knowledge and/or cynicism on voter participation (Martin et al., 2018) but political satire can influence national politics as it was the case when comedian Stephen Colbert in his late-night show made fun of campaign finance, which resulted in changes in finance laws (Day, 2013). In Spain, the scenario is partially different. As in the United States, many Spaniards use television and social media to get the news (Negredo et al., 2019) but no reports are available on the role of late-night shows as a source of news or their impact on viewers' political views, perhaps due to the more recent history of these shows in Spain. Therefore, the preference for political satire in American monologues may correspond with the shift that these shows have undertaken in the last few years as well as the highly and deep-seated political divide in the country (Dimock and Wike, 2020).

Another clear distinction between Spanish and English monologues was the treatment of international topics. Contrary to their American counterparts, Spanish comedians referenced and discussed international politicians and politics, celebrities, and cultural elements more frequently, and even resorted to codeswitching in English. References to American culture were abundant in the Spanish corpus. America's position in the world has led to a global cultural influence that in the case of Spain it has penetrated its economy, politics, and social customs (Niño, 2012). This may explain why in Spanish humour, the United States is a topic of interest. In addition, as part of the European community, Spain is very interested in news from their neighbouring countries, so it is not surprising that comedians use international news as a source for their humorous monologues. Spain's history of humour has been greatly impacted by

historical and socio-political factors. After a long period of 'soft' humour under the Francoist period where comedy was about representations of Spanish stereotyped typologies that fostered the relation between humour and nationalist ideology, the democratic transition that followed still struggled to break away from the legitimized association between humour and politics (Barros Grela, 2016). It was not until the late 90s that, influenced by American and British comedy, Spanish comedians started to incorporate parodies and caricatures of national and international political figures and other diverse societal groups (Barros Grela, 2016). For years, Spain had to resign to making humour about herself and perhaps, because of this long heritage of self-denigratory humour, comedians today are more motivated to making fun of others.

The lack of interest on international news from American comedians may be attributed, among many others, to the size and diversity of the country where national news become a unifying tool to bring all Americans together regardless of their political views. The geography of the country also shapes American thinking about the world. While in Europe one can experience a different culture, religion, language, and history in a matter of hours, that is not the case in the United States. That mobility and proximity in Europe may explain Europeans' fascination for foreign affairs. In addition, in comparison with many European countries where the state is at the centre of many daily-life activities, in the United States, the public is only interested in public affairs when the state tries to intercede in citizens' private lives (Friedman, 2014). To the audience, late-night shows in the United States are "both funny and serious, hard-hitting and soft, entertaining and educational, and confusing and logical, but through it all they acknowledge that humour is serious business" (Martin et al., 2018: 121).

As an expository/argumentative text, a monologue in late-night TV shows derives its humour from the incongruity of the veracity of the exposition and its humorous interpretation. The comedian delivers a series of jocular affirmations, absurd associations and other strategies intended to distort the veracity of the concepts under scrutiny (Alvarado, 2013). One of the necessary elements for the monologue to be humorous is *la complicidad del auditorio*, 'the mutual understanding with the audience' (Alvarado, 2013: 56). In the case of cultural references and colloquialisms in a monologue, the mutual understanding is key in the success of the joke. Hofstede (2009) defends that cultures vary across different dimensions such as individualism vs. collectivism. The United States is defined as an individualistic society where individuals are expected to take care only of themselves and their immediate family. Collective societies, as in Spain, are formed of well cohesive and integrated groups that protect each other (Hofstede, 2009; Hofstede, 2020). In collective societies, joking

tends to be contextualized and based on implicit knowledge (Mendiburo and Páez, 2011). On the other hand, in individualistic societies, due to the greater number of interactions among different people, it is necessary to explicitly explain things and a canned joke is the prototypical form of humour because they can stand on their own (Mendiburo and Páez, 2011, Hofstede, 2009). Fallon and Kimmel' style of humour in their monologues is characteristic of an individualistic society. Fallon fills his monologues with canned jokes, and Kimmel likes to explain facts and information in detail before the punchline is given. Spanish comedians fill their monologues with numerous cultural references and colloquialisms as evidence of a collective society that shares a lot of knowledge and where joking can occur by simply mentioning a word or a cultural or historical fact that retrieves funny interpretations from the audience. In Spanish humour, as evidenced by the corpus from the monologues, that *complicidad* or mutual understanding between comedian and audience seems much more pronounced than in the English monologues.

While it is true that joking is a universal behaviour, each culture influences the form, topics, and styles of humour (Mendiburo and Páez, 2011). One clear distinction between Spanish and English monologues was the content of their humour. Based on the genre of the text, satirical discussion on political issues was the norm. However, Spanish comedians also felt at ease making jokes about taboo topics such as sex, drugs, or religion filled with explicit and vulgar language. All shows air late at night, so the intended audience is clearly adults. However, while the Spanish shows aired in private subscription channels, the American shows were in public channels. Much research is needed to explain the presence and absence of vulgar language in television, but "Spaniards' use of discourteous language is accepted as a cultural marker by popular circles within Spain's borders" (Barros Grela, 2016: 296). What in other cultures may be considered unacceptable, in Spanish daily conversations it is permitted. The same can be said about taboo-like topics that were not only the motivation of humour in many humour episodes but were also characteristic of several colloquialisms. Talking amusingly about sex, drugs, or even religion does not seem to preoccupy Spanish audiences, although humour on sex better be devoid of chauvinist remarks derogating women (Carranza Márquez, 2010). In fact, it may be said that making explicit or implicit sexual or eschatological references to deliver humour may be an identity marker between comedian and audience, although more research is needed to prove this claim.

Finally, our analysis point to a characterization of Spanish monologues as more conversational than English monologues. As a storyteller, the comedian's job is to keep listeners' attention and interest which can be achieved not only be the presence of humour, as we have seen, but by their engagement with

the audience. Spanish comedians delivered their monologues in the form of shaggy-dog stories. They also incorporated a higher number of direct voices and parodies from story characters creating a more dialogic style and thus, bringing energy and authenticity to the story. Likewise, they also teased the audience and appealed to them by using confirmation and comprehension checks and discourse markers. All these elements help transform these monologues into turn-taking sequences between the monologist and the audience that laugh, clap, or participate (Ruiz Gurillo, 2013b).

7 Conclusion

The objectives of this study were met. Results and analyses show that overall Spanish and English comedians share similar language mechanisms to deliver humour in their monologues. Types of humour, such as mocking, teasing, satire, etc. were used similarly but with different degrees of preference. This study also found that comedians in the American late-night shows use their monologues to satirize national politics and politicians. On the other hand, Spanish comedians covered a wider variety of national and international news, making many humorous remarks on more sensitive topics using intricate and opaque cultural references and profanity. In addition, Spanish monologues seem more dialogic and energetic involving the audience with teases and confirmation checks. In sum, Spanish humour as displayed in the monologues under study seems more provocative, varied, and culturally embedded than English humour.

However, this study is not without limitations. Given the constraints in accessing free late-night show monologues on the internet, each language culture is represented by only a small sample of work (approximately 40 minutes for each comedian). Additionally, our interpretations and explanations of the results from our analysis are limited to the genre under study here, that is, the humorous monologue in late night-TV shows and the comedians examined. Each comedian in our corpus had his own style of humour. However, while no definite claims can be made about what differentiates Peninsular Spanish and American English humour, the results from this study point to some cross-cultural comparisons that need to be further investigated in other types of genres and contexts.

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