

LET'S LAUGH, I'M GAY (THE RISK OF JOKING)

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RESUMEN. Reír es algo muy saludable, especialmente cuando la risa se produce al escuchar un chiste. Es normal reírse de todo, incluso aunque se pueda ofender a alguien o a algún grupo determinado; todo se perdona por el humor conseguido. La realidad «sólo estoy bromeando» permite a todo el mundo ser tan políticamente incorrecto como desee. De este modo y a través de discursos «humorísticos e inofensivos» una gran cantidad de prejuicios (que lejos de ser reales no son más que un método para atacar y burlarse de lo que es diferente) son aceptados, naturalizados e incorporados en la sociedad.

PALABRAS CLAVE. Humor, chiste, prejuicio, ideología, homosexualidad, naturalización, Norman Fairclough, Utah Quasthoff, Delia Chiaro

ABSTRACT. Laughing is a very healthy thing, especially when the laugh comes after a joke. It is normal to laugh at everything even if somebody or some group can feel offended; it is all for the sake of the joke. The «I'm only joking» fact allows everyone to be as politically incorrect as they desire. In this way and through «inoffensive humorous» pieces of discourse a lot of prejudices (that far from being real are only a way of attacking and mocking what is different) are accepted, naturalized, and incorporated into society.

KEY WORDS. Humour, joke, prejudice, ideology, homosexuality, naturalization, Norman Fairclough, Utah Quasthoff, Delia Chiaro.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. DEFINING HUMOUR

«The faculty of expressing or appreciating the comic or amusing», this is the definition given by The New Penguin English Dictionary regarding the word 'humour'. In this way humour is defined as a way of communication: 1) involving two participants: a teller who expresses and a hearer who appreciates the comic; and 2) with a clear intention: a laughter provoking effect.

Finding out which is the mechanism working in the human brain that allows us to create (or express) and comprehend (or appreciate) humour has occupied the interest of many people, especially linguists. Thus some theories trying to explain the humour issue have emerged. As J. MARÍN (1998: 67) states «theories of humour tend to attribute the motivating force behind humour appreciation to either affective or cognitive factors».

Taking into account affective factors two theories could be highlighted: the ‘arousal-relief’ theory and the ‘disparagement’ one. The former considers humour as an outlet for mental and psychic energy. It is a mechanism that, as well as laughter, «dispel the tension that is associated with hostility, anxiety, conflict, or sexuality» (A. GRAESSER *et al.* 1989: 149). Freud was one of the first in speaking about it making a distinction between tendentious jokes (which deal with a clear target and where there is a discharge of aggressiveness) and innocuous jokes (based on word plays and popularly known as ‘Freudian slips’). The latter is going to treat humour as a civilized form of aggression in which a target is attacked. There emerges a clear separation line between the target and the teller, who situates him/herself in a position of superiority with respect of the target. The discharge of aggressiveness makes it possible a sense of self-assertion to appear that increases the differentiation between teller and target.

Turning now to the cognitive factors that are related with the expression and comprehension of humour it is necessary to speak about the ‘incongruity-resolution’ theory: when a piece of humorous discourse is posed the brain begins working and activating our established schemata containing our knowledge of the world. Guided by specific words the comprehender builds up a setting according with what s/he expects the issue to be, basing everything on his/her background knowledge. The fact is that the humorous discourse does not fix with the mental expectations of the hearer an incongruity appearing in this way. At this point the listener has to reorganize the information just given by reinterpreting it, taking into account the incongruity, and trying to find a solution to the problem posed. As J. MARÍN (1998: 68) states «there is pleasure to be found in the experience of solving the puzzle». This theory was reformulated by Raskin who established the Semantic Script Theory of Humour. In their discussion of this Theory of Humour A. GRAESSER *et al.* (1989: 151) state that,

According to Raskin, a joke activates two packages of world knowledge, which he refers to as ‘scripts’. Each script is accessed either by a specific word in the text or by a combination of words (...) The beginning part of the joke leads the comprehender to construe the text from the stand point of one script. When the punchline arrives, there are words and ideas that do not fall within the umbrella of the original script. This incompatible information triggers the second script and presents an entirely different perspective [...] Raskin offers some strong claims about what kind of scripts can be paired up. In particular, the scripts must involve some form of opposition.

1.2. CREATING HUMOUR

The creation of a joke is not a simple issue and it requires fulfilling a set of conditions for the joke to be considered well-formed. It was R. GIORA (1991) who, speaking about the joke well-formedness, identified as components of it: a) the surprise effect and b) the violation of expectations that results from the reinterpretation. Thus she proposed some conditions for a joke to be well-formed. First it must follow a general text well-formedness features. R. GIORA (1991: 466-467) establishes that,

A text is well-formed if and only if: a) it begins with the least informative message in the given text or text-segment. This least informative message (is) termed Discourse Topic (DT). b) It proceeds gradually along the informative axis whereby each message is more informative than the one it follows (the ‘Graded Informativeness Requirement’ of Giora 1988).

Taking into consideration this definition R. GIORA (1991: 470) continues pointing out that,

Given the conditions for a text well-formedness and assuming that interlocutors observe the Cooperative Principle (Grice 1975), (the text of) a joke is well-formed if and only if it: a) obeys the Relevance Requirement and b) violates the graded Informativeness Requirement in that it ends in a markedly informative message (the Marked Informativeness Requirement) and c) causes the reader to perform a linear shift: the reader is made to cancel the first unmarked interpretation upon processing the second marked interpretation.

Going on with the creation of jokes, A. KOESTLER (1979) established some techniques when creating humour that constitute the source for a joke to be considered humorous or not: originality, emphasis, and economy. Originality mainly deals with the surprise element which cut across our expectations and forces the comprehender to cancel the first script (keeping Raskin's terminology) and to activate the second one. When speaking about emphasis, A. KOESTLER (1979) explained it as a technique with the intention of increasing the tension of the audience. One example could be found in the repetition of a phrase, situation, etc., which will diminish the surprise effect but which will create a 'tension-accumulating effect'. In the same way the exaggeration or simplification of ethnic or local features also constitutes a useful way to provide emphasis. Finally the economy feature is taken into account. Contrary to the definition of the word 'economy', this term does not deal with the fact of brevity but with all the implicational procedure required for solving the problem of the semantic ambiguity (posed by the humorous discourse) by means of 'an imaginative effort'. This effort will have as consequence a feel of pleasure when the riddle is solved. But solving the puzzle is not the only way for obtaining pleasure; A. GRAESSER *et al.* (1989: 151) establishes that,

There certainly are multiple sources of pleasure when a joke is told or comprehend. Pleasure is derived from (a) the attacker putting down the target, (b) the attacker's release of psychic energy or tension, (c) the joke teller sharing a jovial moment with the audience and affiliating with a high status group, (d) the joke teller or joke comprehender scoring status points, and (e) condensing many thoughts in a succinct and cleverly constructed text. There may also be negative emotions when there is self-deprecation, empathy for the target, or a misfire.

1.3. ANALYSING HUMOUR

One of the cognitive devices frequently used in the creation of jokes, which reinforces the economy mechanism, is the blend. This concept was introduced by Fauconnier and Turner who use the term conceptual space to refer to the structured domains of experience (or ICMs) that constitute human thought. This model establishes the existence of two (or more) input spaces (that may be related to each other as source and target) between which there will be established a mapping that will connect the input spaces. There is also present a generic space which contains all the background knowledge and reflects the schematic structure and organization shared by all the input spaces. Finally the input spaces will be projected onto a new space that is built up 'on-line': the blended space. Two important features characterize this blended space: composition, by which a new set of relationships is

created; and completion, by which structures are completed by our knowledge of the world. As Z. KÖVECSES (2002: 228) points out «the blend is a matter of our imagination».

It has been shown that the joke is not always a source of pleasure (A. GRAESSER *et al.*, 1989); this can be so as a joke can constitute a face-threatening act. The term 'face' will be defined following J. THOMAS (1995: 169) as follows,

Within politeness theory 'face' is best understood as every individual's feeling of self-worth or self-image; this image can be damaged, maintained or enhanced through interaction with others. Face has two aspects - 'positive' and 'negative'. An individual's positive face is reflected in his or her desire to be liked, approved of, respected and appreciated by others. An individual's negative face is reflected in the desire not to be impeded or put upon, to have freedom to act as one chooses.

If P. BROWN and S.C. LEVINSON (1987) theory on politeness is taken into account, some illocutionary acts can be seen to have the potential of damaging the hearer's face. This linguistic attack is what takes place when joking. As A. ZADJMAN (1995: 332) states «any joking activity presents a potential FTA to S (speaker) in that it contains the risk of his joke falling flat» and also «any joking activity presents a potential FTA to H (hearer) in that it involves the risk of him/her 'not getting the joke'».

But, as A. ZADJMAN (1995) has noted, the fact of telling a joke may be in itself a FTA independently of the expression and/or comprehension of it. The joke can be hiding a specific ideology or might be denigrating an ethnic group, etc. Therefore, the linguistic study of humour is also inside the scope of Discourse Analysis. As well, N. FAIRCLOUGH's (1995: 35) asseverations should be kept in mind,

(a) that ideologies and ideological practices may become dissociated to a greater or lesser extent from the particular social base, and the particular interests, which generated them – that is, they may become to a greater or lesser extent 'naturalized', and hence be seen to be commonsensical and based in the nature of things or people, rather than in the interests of classes or other groupings; (b) that such naturalized ideologies and practices thereby become part of the 'knowledge base' which is activated in interaction, and hence the 'orderliness' of interaction may depend upon them, and (c) that in this way the orderliness of interactions as 'local', 'micro' events comes to be dependent upon a higher 'orderliness', i.e. an achieved consensus in respect of ideological positions and practices.

It can be appreciated that the humorous discourse is an important source of study for critical discourse analysts who, as ÖSTMAN and VIRTANEM (1995: 248) point out, «attempt to describe the persuasive and manipulative functions of language» and who «go behind the superficial meanings and look for attitudes and ideologies that messages implicitly carry with them».

The existence of the previously mentioned FTAs is connected with the fact that the joke could contain certain ideology contrary or opposed to those held by the comprehender. Another reason for the appearance of a FTA is stereotyping which has been more or less dealt with when giving A. KOESTLER's (1979) definition of emphasis, in this way overgeneralization or oversimplification may give a non-desirable image of the target of the joke.

2. HYPOTHESES

2.1. MAIN HYPOTHESES

Having discussed both the creation of jokes and the possibility for them to carry in a subtle way a particular ideology, it would be possible to hypothesize that:

- (1) As joking is a cultural fact different cultures are going to create jokes in very different ways: making use of different strategies, focusing on different themes, etc.
- (2) Very much offensive prejudices against minority groups are kept and spread within the frame of a joke thanks to the 'I'm only joking' fact which allows everyone to be as politically incorrect as they desire.
- (3) Regarding the 'homosexual reality' humour dealing with homosexuality is going to create a specific image about how homosexuals are conceived depending on the culture where the joke is created.

2.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In order to demonstrate the hypotheses just outlined, the following research objectives have been set:

- (1) To analyse externally jokes dealing with homosexuality: how are they constructed, which is the mechanism used to obtain the audience laugh, how are they marked as a joke, etc.
- (2) To analyse internally the same jokes: the political incorrectness of the jokes, by which words the target is referred to, etc.

3- METHODOLOGY

The ideas that are developed in this paper are the result of a study taking into account a corpus compounded by 40 jokes. It is precisely the fact of being only 40 jokes what conforms the limitations of this paper, which constitutes a sample about what is going on nowadays. The jokes are subdivided into two groups: 20 of them treat homosexual humour in English and the other 20 do the same but concerning the Spanish language. However in each of the two groups are going to be present the same quantity of jokes dealing with both gay men and lesbian women. All the jokes were downloaded from the Internet and were selected by myself completely at random.

The study will be two-stepped: first, jokes will be analysed from the point of view of their formation taking into account D. CHIARO's (1992) article; secondly the analysis of jokes will bear in mind what is really being transmitted under the 'disguise' of jokes, using Discourse Analysis from a critical point of view and focusing on U. QUASTHOFF's (1989) theories about stereotyping.

With all this what is finally pursued is to identify in what way the nowadays image of homosexuals is created in both cultures the English and the Spanish.

3.1. EXTERNAL ANALYSIS OF JOKES DEALING WITH HOMOSEXUALITY

This section returns to the question: why do we laugh? A clear distinction is visible among the techniques used to make people laugh. Simplifying the issue in the extreme, it is

possible to observe and state that the humour of jokes in Spanish relies on the basis of a narrative structure while the humour of those in English adopts a 'one-liner' form. What both discourses share is (1) the presence of a 'punchline' or simply 'punch' which D. CHIARO (1992: 48) defines as «the point at which the recipient either hears or sees something which is in some way incongruous with the linguistic or semantic environment in which it occurs but which at first sight had not been apparent»; and (2) the appearance of a target around whom the fun is made. The narrative present, a situation, apparently taken from daily life, which will be developed as if the narrator were telling a story. It is the narration which, little by little, creates an increasing tension that culminates with the arrival of the punchline that consists on a twist from what was expected to be the end of the story. Thus it could be said that the funny of the joke resides on the unexpected twist it is encountered (and which is actually expected by the comprehender). Regarding this latter point D. CHIARO (1992: 49) points out that,

Despite the fact that recipients usually know that a punch is on its way, the joke will still tend to create a certain amount of unexpectedness. Even if the joke is not a particularly good one, the anti-climax of the punch itself will be sufficient to create a feeling of surprise. It is the very mixture of expectancy and surprise that makes up the punchline.

Let us take into consideration the following joke from the Spanish set of jokes (the translation is mine):

(1) «Jaimito was in his room doing his school homework when a pervert comes in and rapes him. When the rapist is getting dressed Jaimito says him:

-You'll see, I'll tell my parents you raped me 7 times.

-But I only raped you once, boy.

And Jaimito, horny, answers back:

-Don't tell me you're already going off, darling».

In this joke, apart from the presence of the narrative structure, the use of the name Jaimito functions as a marker warning that a joke is coming. The joke works in this way due to the fact that Jaimito is the name of a fictitious boy on whom a lot of Spanish jokes are based. Here the narrative structure is appreciable: (1) presentation of the situation and development of it (a man rapes a boy who threatens him with telling his parents the history); (2) arrival of the punchline (the rapist denies having raped Jaimito 7 times but one); (3) development and ending completely opposed to the expected ones (Jaimito insinuating that he would like to be raped 6 more times).

On the other hand, the one-liner is the structure selected to create jokes in English. The difference with the precious way for creating jokes is that one-liners consist of a very short question plus its answer. In the moment that the question is posed, the interrogative structure in itself acts as a humorous discourse marker and in this way, the hearer expects to find an incongruity in the answer. Sometimes as D. CHIARO (1992: 32) states «the absurd question is itself an indicator that we are in the field of humorous discourse». Taking as an example the next joke:

(2) «What's the difference between a vulture and a male-hairdresser?

The vulture won't eat a man until he's dead».

It is observable that actually a vulture and a male-hairdresser have definitely quite a lot of different features; the humorous is created when an unexpected feature taken from one of the members of the comparison is emphasized and extrapolated as the only existing one for the other member. As established at the beginning of the paper, finding the solution will provoke a feeling of pleasure. Quite frequently, the key feature for the understanding of this kind of jokes is a semantic reinterpretation, for example:

- (3) «What did one gay dentist say to the other?
You have the whitest teeth I've ever come across».

Once the joke is told, it is the reinterpretations of the verb 'come across' which a) creates a completely different setting going from the field of odontology to the field of sexuality, and b) provokes a humorous effect.

Another technique frequently used is the so-called metathesis consisting on the transposition of sound. Let us consider the following joke:

- (4) «What do Italian lesbians like to eat?
Puzzi».

The sound play that appears regarding the word 'puzzi' can be observed in relation with 'pizza' and 'pussy'.

But perhaps one of the most effective techniques when creating a joke is blending: with it, the funny of the joke lies not only in solving the incongruity but in the creation of a new reality (the blended space) upon which the joke is created. I will take two examples as exemplification for this phenomenon:

- (5) «How does a gay spell relief?
N-o-a-i-d-s».
- (6) «Have you heard about the faggot patch dolls?
They come with AIDS and a death certificate».

The first joke could be easily understood by any English speaker and probably would be effective and cause laughing, but there is a piece of information that the non-native speaker is losing: there exists a brand of bicarbonate called 'Rollaids' of which the slogan is:

- «How do you spell relief?
Rollaids».

Thus the bicarbonate, its slogan, etc., conforms one input space which is going to operate with another including homosexuality, AIDS, etc. creating in this way the blended space in which the joke can be perfectly understood. The same cognitive process operates in the second joke: the patch dolls of which the innovation was the presence of a birth certificate occupy one input space. This feature constitutes the important one for the joke. It is related to the second input space (covering again the field of homosexuality), creating a blended space in which there exist 'homosexual' patch dolls with certificates but of a very different kind.

3.2. INTERNAL ANALYSIS OF JOKES DEALING WITH HOMOSEXUALITY

In the introduction of their book, M. PÜTZ, J. NEFF-VAN AERTSELAER and T. VAN DIJK (2004) state that,

Ideologies are the foundations of these social representations of a group. They are mental structures that provide the fundamental principles, the axioms, of more specific social attitudes and other beliefs ('group knowledge') of groups [...] Ideologies are not innate, but learned. Ideologies may be exhibited in many social practices, as is the case in sexist or racist violence and discrimination. Part of their reproduction is rooted in the imitation of such practices.

However, such ideological social practices seldom come alone, and are often commented upon, legitimated, defended or discussed in discourse.

As any piece of discourse, humorous discourse is not lacking in ideology. When a joke is created, a particular set of features or characteristics of the target are taken in mind and are extremely exaggerated. R. GIORA (1991: 482) states that «what we laugh at is never our own but others' weakness (...) where the victim of the joke is an ingroup with whom we identify, humor appreciation is impaired».

When speaking about homosexuality in jokes the very same takes place: the tendency is to regard this group of people as outsiders; thus, people laugh as they do not recognize themselves nor with this group nor with the features that will be highlighted. The exaggeration of features operates on the basis of stereotypes. For the term stereotype, U. QUASTHOFF's (1989: 182) definition will be taken into account as follows,

Successive research defines stereotypes as beliefs [...] judgments [...] mental images [...] or conceptual systems. [...] Stereotypes are categories which overgeneralize and oversimplify [...] they are contrary to the facts or do not contain more than a 'kernel of truth' [...] they are emotionally evaluative [...] and they are characterized by persistence and rigidity, in other words, they are resistant to change in societies as well as in individuals.

In this way, people create stereotypes of almost everything, people tend to catalogue the rest of them by assigning characteristics or features that generalize what, in principle, is different.

This tendency to categorize fits perfectly with what A. GRAESSER *et al.* (1989: 151), talking about Raskin's Semantic Script Theory of Humour, stated that «each scrip is accessed either by a specific word in the text or by a combination of words»; this word or group of them just refer to a group of people who has been previously stereotyped and, consequently, have been attributed certain features that are expected to be working. The connection between stereotyping and the Semantic Script Theory of Humour will be exemplified by the following joke,

(7) «Why was the queer fired from the bank sperm?
He was caught drinking at job».

Here, what activates our brain to reinterpret the joke is the word 'queer': it is in this moment that the brain brings out all the data about how a queer 'should look like'. When these premises are taken into account, an association is created by which what the queer was caught drinking was sperm and not any kind of liquor (or something with similar

characteristics) as queers are supposed to love drinking sperm. If by any case the word 'queer' were replaced by, for example, 'worker' the joke would lose all its humour as the association 'caught drinking' with 'sperm' will simply not be working.

The problem arises when this stereotypical image is created out of negative attitudes toward social groups, creating in this way a prejudice. U. QUASTHOFF (1989: 184-188) has shown that creating prejudices fulfil three different functions,

(a) The cognitive function of stereotypical thinking acknowledges the fact that the human mind has to simplify to a certain degree in categorizing and forming expectations about the world [...] (b) Innerpsychic functions as an explanation for prejudice are concerned with the affective parts of this complicated phenomenon [...] This concept reveals that prejudice is viewed in terms of a centeredness towards one's own group [...] (c) Social functions: stereotypes are used to mark distance towards outgroups and stress ingroup solidarity. [...] this social function is interrelated with other kinds of functions: a special need for social identity.

The problem emerges when a particular question is posed: which is the borderline between a necessary brain conduct such as stereotyping and the creation of a prejudice?

The fact of stereotyping, as said, is taken into account when creating jokes and in this way the themes covered by these jokes are nothing but the list of 'supposedly shared features' of certain groups. Of course it is in those commonly shared features in which the humour of the joke lies.

Coming back to the homosexual world there is a clear distinction between the themes applied for gay men in contrast with lesbian women. Going even further, there is a different approximation observable in Spanish humour in comparison with the English one, although it is true that there is a shared umbrella covering identical themes for gay men as well as for lesbian women independently of the culture which creates the joke. In this way the expected themes that will appear when dealing with gay men are: AIDS, anal sex, oral sex, likeness of sperm, rape, pederasty, masochism, promiscuity, effemination, etc. When taking into account jokes about lesbians the appearing themes are: oral sex, the masculinity of lesbians, their lack of penis, identification lesbian-feminist, etc. These sets of themes could be found when joking about homosexuals, however there is a clear distinction between the ones focused in English and Spanish when dealing with gay men (not so much with lesbian women, which are conceived more or less in the same way).

3.2.1. *Gay humour*. The predominant themes (although not the only ones) of gay humour in English are AIDS, anal sex and likeness of sperm, while concerning gay humour in Spanish effemination, anal and oral sex are the most highlighted.

These different focuses of attention conform the creation of different realities: the image constructed by English humour shows gay men as people related with illness and death, always thinking on sex as a prior issue, etc. On the other hand the image that emerges from Spanish humour is that of an extremely effeminate man who is only interested on fashion, sex and looking like a woman. All these aspects are developed and quite notable through discourse. Thus the relation gay men –AIDS or gay men– effemination (not macho man) creates a feeling of rejection towards homosexuality which is regarded as an action of depravity and, as a consequence, the image of homosexuals may not be a positive one.

One way of marking this difference is through the words used to refer to gay men; at the head of the list there appears the word 'faggot', followed by others such as 'cocksucker',

'queer', etc., while regarding gay humour in Spanish the most frequent are 'maricón', 'marica', etc. In very few circumstances it is possible to find a non-pejorative term just as 'gay' or 'homosexual'. Specifically from humour in Spanish (due to the fact of its centring on the effemination feature of gay men) is the appearance of typical expressions such as 'cariño' or 'corazón' that are normally associated with women's discourse where they express their feelings more openly. The point is that the latter is a way of remarking that homosexuals are not macho-men (as every heterosexual man is supposed to be). Concerning gender construction via humour, M. CRAWFORD (2003: 1423-1424) states that,

Another important topic was joking and gossip about other (despised) me, whom they called 'gay'. Rather than accurately reflecting sexual orientation, their characterizations of the other men as 'gay' seemed to be a way of displaying their own heterosexual masculinity. [...] these men distinguished themselves from 'unmasculine' men by denigrating them as 'artsy fartsy fags' and 'homos'. Cameron notes that this kind of discursive strategy 'is not only about masculinity, it is a sustained performance of masculinity'."

Actually everything is based on the assumption that inside a homosexual couple (never mind if gay or lesbian) one of them will necessarily acquire a male role while the other will adopt a female role. Far from being true, as J. GENERELO (1999: 11) states, (the translation is mine) «each couple is a different world in which it is possible to agree both tasks and 'roles' on equal terms. It is not true that one of the members of the couple has to assume other gender role».

In any case, when creating humour about homosexuals there exists a marked pattern by which jokes about gay men take as target the gay 'supposedly playing' a female role while jokes dealing with lesbians tend to take as target the lesbian 'supposedly acting' like a man. Let us take into consideration the following joke from the set of humour in Spanish (the translation is mine):

(8) Have you seen the new watch for queers?

No.

It has two faces, one in the front (you just act as if you were looking what time is it) and the other at the back (you just turn the wrist as faggots do).

As can be seen, apart from the scornful words used to refer to gay men, it is supposed that every single gay must be always showing the hand's palm as if this were an innate feature. The explanations given between brackets are denoting how to tell the joke to be funny but also the phrase 'as faggots do' establishes as a truth a fact that is not.

Another mistaken (and very serious) association made with gay men deals with the fact of rape and pederasty. If the joke about 'Jaimito' (presented in the previous section) is taken in mind again, it is observable that the issue of rape appears 4 times: 1) the narration telling that a man rapes Jaimito; 2) naming the man 'rapist'; 3) Jaimito accusing the man of rape; 4) the man admitting the accusation of being a rapist. In the same way, there are posed certain allusions to the fact that Jaimito is a little boy: 1) he's doing his school homework; 2) Jaimito expressing the need for the parent's protection; 3) the rapist calling him 'boy'. All of these bring up to mind the issue of pederasty that is reinforced by naming the man pervert at the very beginning.

Turning to jokes written in English, it can be seen that, as told, humour centres itself on themes as AIDS, anal sex, etc., and it is both rather aggressive and cruel. The next joke can be taken as an example:

- (9) «What does AIDS stand for?
 a) Another infected dick sucker.
 b) Anally injected death syndrome.
 c) Anally inserted death sentence».

Here the references to AIDS, anal and oral sex link all of them with homosexuality. Even in answers b) and c) where there is no evidence of a term referring to the target (as dick sucker in the first one) it is the fact of being speaking about AIDS (as well as the appearance of the word 'anally') which immediately activate our background knowledge about gays.

What is common in both English and Spanish cultures is the thought by which gay men are extremely promiscuous people and that this need of having sex at any time goes beyond the boundaries of professionalism. This can be observed in the previously mentioned joke about the male-hairdresser (which also brings up the issue that certain jobs are always carried out by homosexuals) and the vulture where the necessity of having sex is prior to the fact of being a good professional. The same is observable in the next joke taken from the Spanish repertoire (the translation is mine):

- (10) «How do you know that your doctor is gay?
 When he's carrying you out an anal exploration but his hands are in your shoulders».

3.2.2. *Lesbian humour.* The issue regarding lesbian women (from the point of view of humour) is much more difficult to study as there is little material on this subject. The explanation for this is found in what J. GENERELO (1999: 13) states (the translation is mine),

Historically, female sexuality has been ignored and banished from the mind. Thus lesbians suffered a double discrimination: because of their sexual orientation and because of their gender. If a free and independent female sexuality has scarcely been taken into consideration, lesbian sexuality is hardly to be so.

Despite of this lack of data, a relevant analysis of jokes dealing with female homosexuality has been carried out.

As stated before, humour concerning lesbian women does not differ very much when comparing the English with the Spanish cultures; both of them focus on the lesbian 'playing a male role' or, to call it in a different way, playing the active role (sexually speaking). Let us take into account the following joke from the set of Spanish humour (the translation is mine):

- (11) «One dude enters a bar, sits down next to a woman and openly says her:
 - Hi doll. I bet we both have come here looking for the same thing.
 - Yeah you're right. Let's look for two women and the four of us can go fucking».

Taking into consideration the setting it can be observed that the man is presented as the one looking for a woman and just choosing the one he wants. He just takes for granted that she will accept the proposition. The reaction of the woman is of course an unexpected one (here is where the funny lies in) as she begins speaking in a way that resembles the kind of discourse that is expected among young heterosexual males. This discourse consists on visualizing themselves as hunters searching for their prey. The figure of the macho man is still present even when talking about female homosexuality.

Another difference that emerges when comparing gay versus lesbian humour is the setting of the joke. It has been shown how gay humour is quite aggressive regarding the targets it makes funny of; in contrast with this, lesbian humour settings enhance features as tenderness, love, etc., characteristics that are completely unthinkable when speaking about 'promiscuous' gay men. It can be exemplified with two jokes:

(12) «Why did the lesbian put a candle in her navel?
So her lover could eat by candlelight».

(13) «Why do lesbians suck tits before going down?
They have to bring milk to pussy».

The first joke constructs a framework of tenderness by recreating a scene of love remarking the word 'lover' as well as 'candlelight' which immediately is associated with romanticism. In the second joke, a similar setting is constructed due to the appearance of the word 'pussy' with its double meaning. It is the image of a little cat, a defenceless kitten, which just awakes up tenderness and a feeling of instinctive protection.

The relaxation of aggressiveness is also evidenced in the words used to refer to female homosexuality that are quite neutral. Words such as lesbian or homosexual woman appear around 90 per cent of times. In any case, this kind of humour is not absent from prejudices against women. If the following joke is taken into account:

(14) «The definition of a lesbian?
Just another damn woman trying to do a man's job».

The scorn contained under the word 'damn' is obvious. Furthermore women are presented as (1) trying to do something that is not their responsibility; (2) not being able to do it properly. Here again the image of the macho man capable of doing everything is present.

Another example containing ideological charge is the following taken from the Spanish set of jokes (the translation is mine):

(15) «Why did God create lesbians?
So that feminists can't reproduce themselves».

This joke is particularly offensive not only regarding lesbians but also regarding women in general. Through presuppositions it can be established that (a) all feminist are lesbians; and (b) God deliberately wants to stop feminism, that is to say feminism is something so wicked that the 'Good Lord' has to do personally something in order to finish with it.

4. RESULTS

After having carried out the analysis of jokes related with the homosexual world and taking into account the hypotheses posed at the beginning of the paper it could be stated that:

- a) Joking follows a particular set of rules or mechanisms in order to obtain the laugh of the comprehender but, as a cultural reality, it can be observed that different cultures focus on different structures and/or techniques. Besides, as the conception of the world and the background knowledge that people have in their brains differs from culture to culture the themes that are highlighted are different as well.
- b) When a joke is created some of the target's features are maximized, minimized or even invented to make the joke funnier. These characteristics are taken for granted and constitute the origin of prejudices which, in lots of cases, are based upon the rejection of the target (who is nothing but a representation of a whole group or community).
- c) As a joke can constitute in itself an insult to certain people or groups, humour potentially contains FTAs towards the members of the attacked group as well as towards the people who sympathise them. The comprehender can feel threatened as s/he listen, for example, any of the pejorative words normally used to refer to the target.
- d) The joke is the only structure that allows people to say the unsayable being able to offer the prototypical image living in most of the community's thought. Thus, different cultures create different images about what in principle is the very same is a fact. Spanish jokes show an image which highlights the effemination of gay men, constructing the idea that gay men want actually to be women; English humour offers an image of homosexual guys deeply interconnected with illness, thus constructing the necessity for rejecting and separating from these groups. Regarding women the image created by both cultures is quite similar as the themes the jokes deal with are almost identical. In this way the image offered by humour about lesbians emphasizes their lack of penis for sexual intercourses and their 'supposed' masculinity, constructing the idea that lesbians are women who want to be as men are.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The framework of the joke allows people to be politically incorrect and say whatever they want because it is all for the sake of the joke. Thus a lot of ideas (which are quite distant from reality) are established and/or reinforced in our brains, integrating themselves as part of our background knowledge of the world. N. FAIRCLOUGH (1995: 42) defined this process stating,

Naturalization gives to particular ideological representations the status of common sense, and thereby, makes them opaque, i.e. no longer visible as ideologies. [...] since any set of discursive norms entails a certain knowledge base, and since any knowledge base includes an ideological component, in acquiring the discursive norms one simultaneously acquires the associated ideological norms.

But naturalization of ideologies is not only in relation with humour but with every single discursive structure. Speaking about AIDS, O. GUASH (1992: 137) stated that «means of communication spread the term 'gay cancer'». This association provoked (among the heterosexual population) a feeling of security that was responsible for the decrease of safer sex. This feeling is still present due to the rigidity of prejudices and one of the consequences is the quick spread of the illness among population, being actually the percentage of infected

heterosexuals almost double than the one of homosexuals. Thus there emerges a necessity for finding the sources that create, keep and spread prejudices in order to be able to deconstruct these falsified images.

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