FACTORES DE INFLUENCIA EN LA COMPRENSIÓN Y APRECIACIÓN DEL HUMOR EN LAS VIÑETAS CÓMICAS

EL CASO DE DOSIS DIARIAS

TESIS DOCTORAL

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FACTORS OF INFLUENCE IN THE COMPREHENSION AND APPRECIATION OF HUMOUR IN CARTOONS

THE CASE OF DOSIS DIARIAS
INTRODUCTION

The present research starts from a need to deeply understand the factors that involved in processing humoristic texts, since their lack of comprehension and/or appreciation are an obstacle to the success of the humoristic message. Until the moment, humour has been explored from different approaches, however, in order to achieve a better knowledge of the factors involved in humour comprehension and appreciation in cartoons by native and non-native speakers, this research suggests and integrative approach.

Humour is a potent tool to manage social interaction. In fact, there is a social pressure to possess the good sense of humour that is showed in appreciation. Actually, in response to humour it is common to laugh first and then to follow that laughter by “Wait a sec…What was the joke again?”. Hence the common saying: “One laughs at a joke twice: firstly, with everyone else and, secondly, when you get it”.

The challenge of processing humour is increased when humour is produced in a non-native language. In my professional experience teaching Spanish as a second language, I have observed the need to adapt humoristic texts to the students’ idiomatic level and sociocultural context. Both the idiomatic level and the familiarization of speakers with a sociocultural level impact on understanding references as well as on appreciation. For example, humoristic twists of phraseological units present obstacles to both processes because they imply a linguistic and sociocultural mastery. That’s why as a teacher, I pay special attention to the teaching materials that I include in my lessons, bearing in mind that humour understanding and appreciation is an index of the speakers’ sociocultural competence.
On the other hand, in my personal experience learning foreign languages I have observed the need to appeal to strategies to identify, process and answer to humour in intercultural communication. Even possessing a good idiomatic competence, this has proved not to be enough to process the contextual elements present in humour. This is the reason why despite appealing to strategies to manage humour in my native language, these strategies are more necessary and, therefore, more frequent when I communicate in a different language.

Among humoristic texts, cartoons are especially interesting, due to both their high contextual content and their combination of images and words. Given their high contextual content, cartoons contain non explicit references and, hence, processing them is more complex than processing low contextual texts. The inability to identify or process contextual references may lead to an incomplete reading of the text. However, would this lack of information prevent the cartoon appreciation? Which features would define the level of difficulty of a cartoon? These questions are the origin of the objectives set by this study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This project aims to examine how the textual configuration of cartoons impacts on the way they are processed as well as on the responses they elicit. Furthermore, this research is a comparative study about the responses to humour in cartoons by Spanish native speakers and non-native speakers. In order to precisely define the purposes of this study, these have been articulated in the following research questions:
a) What factors contribute to humour comprehension and appreciation?

b) Is cartoon appreciation possible despite a lack of comprehension? Does this phenomenon impact equally on Spanish native and non-native speakers?

In order to answer to these questions, the humour concept adopted by this study is defined. Moreover, theories of humour from the classical ones to the contemporary ones are applied to cartoons. As a complement of the factors involved in understanding and appreciating humour collected in the literature review, a model to examine in particular graphic humour configuration is proposed. With regards to giving answer to the first question, what factors contribute to understanding and appreciating cartoons?, a questionnaire addressed to native and no native speakers that includes cartoons as stimulus and whose aim is to collect information about the participants’ responses to humour has been designed.

In turn, given the pragmatic orientation of the present study, the analysis model proposed here is used in order to examine responses to humour by both groups of participants. Among the speaker’s competences to process graphic humour, the concepts of humour competence, sociocultural competence and strategic competence are explored. Revising the speakers’ competences and testing them in the questionnaire serve to answer:

b) Is cartoon appreciation possible despite coexisting with failed humour due to lack of comprehension? Does this phenomenon impact equally on Spanish native and non-native speakers?

The object of this study, thus, is both descriptive and instrumental. On the one hand, it is intended to offer a complete model of the characteristics that define humour in cartoons. On the other hand, from a practical perspective, the conclusions drew by this study will
contribute to future studies and set new guidelines to better understand the comprehension and appreciation of graphic humour. In particular, the results collected in this thesis bring an interdisciplinary approach to humour studies, they include multimodality among the studies of pragmatics and they offer a description of the knowledge and strategies that are activated when reading cartoons applied to teaching second languages.

HYPOTHESIS

In relation to the first research question of this study, what factors contribute to humour comprehension and appreciation?, the following hypothesis have been formulated:

(1) Cartoon’s structure impacts on the identification of the humoristic intention.

(2) Linguistic information together with sociocultural information impacts negatively on the comprehension of graphic humour by Spanish non-native speakers.

(3) The social norm impacts on humour appreciation.

The first hypothesis is based on the concepts of contextualization index (Padilla & Gironzetti, 2012) and textual frame recognition (Carrell, 1997). Contextualization indexes are understood as elements present in the prototypical structure of texts that serve to indentify the textual genre. Thus, when reading cartoons, contextualization indexes such as caricature and the autograph trigger text recognition. In turn, the expectation for a humour intention may condition humour appreciation.
On its part, the second hypothesis is based on the gradual difficulty of the information contained in humoristic texts (Attardo, 1993; Schmitz, 2002). In particular, quite often cartoons contain linguistic information about a phraseme which must not be literally interpreted. Furthermore, phrasemes belonging to a speaker’s community sociocultural background, such as proverbs, add sociocultural information to the linguistic information, since their knowledge is restricted to that sphere of speakers and, therefore, these phrasemes hinder comprehension for interlocutors outside this sphere.

In regards to the third hypotheses, it relies on the idiosyncratic aspect of humour, which depends on the way that discrepancy is faced (Wiseman, 2007). This explains the impossibility to find a joke which can please everyone. In fact, cartoons can articulate their secondary critic intention through different degrees of risk in their release against the social norm, in line with the concept of communication styles formulated by Spitzberg (2000). When the release is too risky, the present study argues that it can influence on humour appreciation.

On the other hand, concerning the second research question, b) cartoon appreciation possible despite a lack of comprehension? Does this phenomenon impact equally on Spanish native and non-native speakers?, a fourth question has been formulated:

(4) Cartoon appreciation despite a lack of comprehension is possible, both among Spanish native speakers and non-native speakers.

This last hypothesis relies on the concept of partial resolution in humoristic texts (Hempelmann y Ruch, 2005) as well as secondary incongruity (Ritchie, 2013). According to this position, the discrepancy among two contradictory ideas present in a joke is resolved only in a partial way, since part of this clash of ideas is irreconcilable. To this idea, Ritchie
(2013) adds that jokes feature a central incongruity and secondary incongruities. In the absence of an ability to resolve the central incongruity, the speaker tends to focus on secondary incongruities. Thus, based on the assumption that the central information of a cartoon is unknown, it could still be appreciated by the reader.

**OBJECT OF STUDY**

Given the reasons provided in the introduction, this research is interested in humour and, in particular, its materialization in cartoons. Specifically, in the theoretical frame about humour is applied to the work of Chilean cartoonist Alberto Montt (Quito, 1972) published in http://dosisdiarias.com: *Alberto Montt en Dosis diarias*.

Interest on these cartoons is justified by their wide repertory of humoristic resources, including various content types (more or less accessible) and structures (more or less common). The large number of variables to consider in the comprehension and appreciation of humour back the decision of choosing the work of an author with an ample stylistic variety to assess different forms of humour. Given that Montt’s cartoons are complete in their inclusion of various structures and contents, this advantage has been taken in consideration by this study in order to build the corpus of reference from his work. Thus, on the one hand, the representativeness of the sample provides diversity to the project while, on the other hand, the focus on a single author provides coherence and uniformity.

Among the various contents in *Dosis Diarias*, references to encyclopaedic knowledge and sociocultural background must be highlighted. This inclusion is important,
since the references to encyclopaedic knowledge can constitute an obstacle to the readers’ comprehension in general. Furthermore, as indicated in the hypotheses, references to the sociocultural background are hard to access for non-native speakers and, as such, they constitute an obstacle to their comprehension.

In addition, the world-wide resonance of the cartoons object of study should be noted. The author’s ability to use a graphic medium in order convey ideas has led to their viral broadcasting in social media, tumblrs, blogs and other virtual platforms. The success of Dosis Diarias has been recognized by various awards. Specifically, the magazine Time recognized its (Guerrero, 2012). Also, in 2011 the blog was recognized as the “Best weblog in Spanish” in the BOB awards (Deutsche Welle, 2011). All in all, the success, broadcasting and appreciation of Montt’s cartoons published in http://dosisdiarias.com/, justify their election as texts-stimuli in the present study, which aims to analyse the factors involved in understanding and appreciating graphic humour.

**APPROACH**

The delimitation of the object of analysis to *Dosis Diarias* conditions its configuration as a case study. This approach allows observing a manifestation of graphic humour from different angles. As a case study, this research avoids generalizations opting, instead, for describing tendencies that could potentially be recreated in other graphic humourists. In fact, the most interesting contribution of this casuistic approximation is its ability to offer a detailed description of the object of study, as well as various analytic perspectives. With this aim, the combination of different theories of humour applied to a
single object of study constitutes the theoretical framework of this research. Therefore, the investigation of the comprehension and appreciation of humour in *Dosis Diarias* cartoons is undertaken from an integrative approach centred in the pragmatic perspective and favoured by the interdisciplinary essence of humour.

Even though it has been decided to adopt an integrative approach in processing humour, the pragmatic perspective serves as a basis which incorporated contributions from other disciplines. On this basis, the contributions of complementary disciplines allow overcoming the limitations that a single approach, such as Pragmatics on its own, can offer when analysing humoristic communication in context.

This research, in turn, adopts a mix methodology in the analysis of responses by the participants. The exam of responses collected in the research questionnaire combines quantitative and qualitative discourse analysis. Nevertheless, the qualitative analysis is predominantly relevant over the quantitative one given the fact that key words have been extracted from the open responses in order to conclude which factors favour and hinder, respectively, the comprehension and appreciation of humour. Guided by the idea that this approach does not pursue to establish generalizations, a quantitative analysis based on statistics has been discarded. Instead, the participants’ perceptions about each of the texts selected as stimulus have been explored in detail. Given the idiosyncratic characterization of humour, establishing generalizations about the most appreciated factors can be less productive than identifying tendencies of what is socially admissible.
DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In order to advance progress towards the objectives proposed by this thesis, a study composed of eight chapters has been designed. The study has been divided in two main sections: Humoristic discourse in cartoons and Humoristic discourse in Dosis Diarias. Case study.

In the investigation of humoristic discourse in cartoons, the starting point is a critical revision of the theoretical perspectives that have examined the phenomenon of humour from the classical times to nowadays. This literature review is presented in Chapter 2 and it encompasses three vertebral perspectives according to their origin: a) a superiority feeling in the reader with regards to the characters, b) a relief valve to social restrictions or, c) a clash between two contradictory and yet compatible ideas. Besides these three central perspectives, a bibliographic revision includes approximations to humour from Structuralist Linguistics, Pragmatics and Cognitive Semantics. Furthermore, the cognitive mechanisms of comprehension and appreciation are discussed from the discipline of Neurolinguistics.

Chapter 3 integrates the different notions of humour and the concept of humour which has been adopted by the present study. In this chapter terminological questions are addressed, the essential elements to define humour are introduced and the most salient functions are presented. In addition, the focus of study is specified, cartoons. In this chapter the concept of cartoon is also defined, its components are discussed and the typologies relevant to this investigation are presented.

After specifying the focus of study, chapter 4 introduces the methodology used in the design of this project. To this end, a set of sub-research questions are developed taking
the research questions as a starting point. These preliminaries are the basis for differentiating two variables of interest in humoristic discourse: failed humour and comic twists on phrasemes. In fact, the latter humoristic instance was identified in the results as one of the potential causes of failed humour among Spanish non-native speakers. In order to examine the interpretation of cartoons, a questionnaire based on the literature review has been used. This questionnaire is designed to point the most significative factors to identify the comprehension and appreciation of humour. The exam of the responses to the questionnaire is carried out from the disciplines of Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis, supported by a number of research tools that constitute the theoretical framework.

In order to complete the introspection on the humour of cartoons, in Chapter 5 the role of humoristic competence and intercultural competence in processing humour is discussed. In particular, the difficulty implied in processing humour in an intercultural context is justified and associated to the activation of strategic competence by non-native speakers.

The case study on the humoristic discourse of *Dosis Diarias* is developed in chapters 6 and 7. Specifically, chapter 6 suggests the tools that are used in the identification of factors of impact on the comprehension and appreciation of Dosis Diarias. Applying these tools to the focus of study allows for a presentation and discussion of the results in Chapter 7.

To close this examination of the response to humour in cartoons, Chater 8 collects the conclusions that are expected to contribute to future applications of the present study. These conclusions are complemented by a series of appendixes that include primary sources.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to design a theoretical framework that would answer the research questions, firstly, a literature review was carried out. In particular, a generic concept of humour, meaning the comical, has been adopted and it has been defined in essence by the confluence of superiority, release an incongruity in a single text. In fact, this study has coined the denomination “the pillars of humour” in reference to these three elements, given their necessary coexistence in humoristic texts.

Assuming the existence of humoristic genres, cartoons have been defined as a humoristic subgenre, which is characterized by a concurrence of constant and prototypical features within its structure. Specifically, the prototypical features of the cartoons analysed in this study include the frame, the caricature, the (sub)title and the autograph.

The analysis of the multimodal configuration of cartoons has motivated an integrative approach to the visual and linguistic aspects of the object of study. The critical review carried out has served, on the one hand, to set the fundaments about the three vertebral theories of humour (superiority theory, release theory and incongruity theory) and, on the other hand, to prove the need for an interdisciplinary approach to the humoristic phenomenon in cartoons. Among them and, despite their complementary role, the element of incongruity should be highlighted, given its direct correlation with the cognitive processes that affect humour comprehension and appreciation. As explained in Chapter 2, the incongruity resolution conditions the comprehension of humour (Suls, 1972). As it has
also been noted in Chapter 2, it is also necessary to bear in mind that the incongruity element is compatible with the Relevance theory (Sperber y Wilson, 1986). This compatibility underlines the relevance of a balance in the cognitive effort in order to understand and appreciate humour.

However, the original notion of the vertebral theories of humour has proved to be too abstract to answer the questions raised by this study. Thus, contributions to the comprehension and appreciation of humour from fields such as Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology, Pragmatics, Cognitive-Semantics, etc. have been considered. All of these disciplines have contributed to the interdisciplinary approach of this study. This theoretical framework, in turn, has allowed a holistic approximation to graphic humour since, as argued by this study, humour is a dynamic and multidimensional process that, therefore, needs to be analysed from an interdisciplinary perspective.

In particular, linguistic theories have been used to observe the role of the different parts of a text while it is being processed. Likewise, semantic-cognitive theories have been useful to identify the knowledge resources that are necessary in order to understand humour. In turn, Pragmatics has contributed with the notions of the speakers’ competence (humor competence, sociocultural competence and sociolinguistic competence). It should also be noted that Neurolinguistics has contributed with the identification of the various processes that are involved in the response to humour.

The pillars of humour provide information about three aspects of the textual configuration that impact on humour appreciation. This, the trigger of appreciation can be a target which is regarded as inferior than the speaker, a taboo situation or an unexpected
clash among two concepts. This premise has been useful to highlight the importance of the humoristic text’s configuration in the response to humour.

In this sense, the theories from structuralist Linguistics have been useful to observe the role of each of the parts of the text in the processing. For instance, an analogy can be drawn between the set-up phase of SIR theory (Attardo, 1994) and the recognition phase (Carrell, 1997), likewise, incongruity resolution can be identified with the phases of comprehension and appreciation (Hay, 2001). Starting from the analogy between text structure and recognition of the text type pointed by Todorov (1978) and Nash (1985), This study has adopted the notion of orientative markers developed by Genette (2001) and applied to cartoons by Padilla y Gironzetti (2012).

Likewise, Cognitive-Semantic theories have been useful in this study in order to identify the knowledge resources necessary for humour comprehension. In particular, the script opposition, the logical mechanism, the situation, the narrative strategy, the target and the language have been selected from the General Theory of Verbal Humour (Attardo y Raskin, 1991) as factors that impact on verbal humour comprehension. In addition to the relevant knowledge resources introduced by GTVH, the resource of meta-knowledge (Canestrari, 2010) is important for this study in order to identify and classify the cartoons textual subgenre within the humoristic genre.

In order to define the humoristic structure of cartoons, the benefits of starting from a simple or complex structure of the communicative intention have been noted (Grice, 1975). Among the functions of humour, a primary humoristic function and a secondary critic function have been highlighted. In particular, the primary humoristic function pursues
appreciation. Therefore, failed humour has been identified as humour that is not successful achieving its primary function. In turn, the secondary critical function has been associated to the release element within the social norm and to the agreement phase (Hay, 2001), understood by this study as a confirmation of appreciation.

Just as the description of the cartoons’ configuration has set the basis on the textual conditions that impact on the response to humour, the revision of the concepts of humoristic competence and sociocultural competence has been useful to present the participants’ communicative competence in these regards since, as it is explained in Chapter 7, this research compares both groups of speakers due to their different communicative competence. In particular, the humoristic performance has been presented as a realization of the humoristic competence that encompasses the phases of recognition, comprehension, appreciation and agreement (Hay, 2001). Rather than choosing a traditional conception of the phases included in the humoristic performance, this study has opted for its dynamic version. In this dynamic version of the humoristic performance, it is not necessary to overcome all the different phases in lineal order (Bell, 2007, 2015).

In order to explain the humoristic performance, Neurolinguistics has differentiated physical processes (laughter), cognitive processes (judgements) and emotional processes (enjoyment) in the response to humour (Warren y McGraw, 2014). The type of response to humour in cartoons depends on the communicative context where they are inserted. For example, the physical manifestation of appreciation is common in conversational humour genres, such as jokes, although it is not so common in the individual reading of cartoons. In this study, the communicative context of cartoons is online, since responses to graphic humour have been collected through an electronic questionnaire. This questionnaire has
enabled communication between the participants and the researched. Therefore, it is expected that appreciation can be collected in any of the three forms: physical, cognitive and emotional.

Furthermore, the influence of social acceptance in the humoristic performance has been highlighted, since failed humour is socially disapproved but too inappropriate humour is not very popular either. In this regard, a continuum of four communication styles based on a graded progress from inappropriateness to appropriateness has been proposed. This continuum includes the minimizing, maximizing, optimizing and sufficing communication styles (Spitzberg, 2000). In this gradation, the minimizing style is characterised by an extreme inappropriateness, whereas the sufficing style is characterised by an extreme appropriateness. For example, the minimizing style includes black humour, while the sufficing style includes politically correct jokes. Both categories are also characterized by their low popularity. On the other hand, the optimizing and maximizing styles are characterized by their optimal and moderate appropriateness respectively. These latter categories have been highlighted as the more socially accepted.

Social acceptance of the humoristic performance has been linked to the informative nature of humoristic texts (Attardo, 1993) and to its secondary critical function, specifically, the response to humour can show agreement with social taboos (Hay, 2001). Thus, jewish jokes with references to the holocaust have been associated to showing agreement with antisemitism. In this regard, the role of sociocultural competence in the humoristic performance with the purpose of identifying available content scripts and tabooed content scripts in a particular context has been discussed.
Along the same lines, as discussed in Chapter 5, through the study of the impact of sociocultural competence in humour comprehension a sociocultural content has been observed in restricted knowledge scripts and linguistic knowledge, including anti-proverbs (Attardo, 1994). Any existing lacks in this sociocultural competence can be compensated with the use of metacognitive, cognitive and affective strategies. In particular, metacognitive strategies have been associated to a conscious reflection on humoristic texts by non-native speakers (Díaz-Barriga y Hernández, 2002), as well as to the resolution of secondary incongruities in order to facilitate comprehension and appreciation.

Thus, the hypotheses presented in this study assume the possibility of appreciating humour despite the existence of lacks in the comprehension and they also assume that this combination of variables is more likely to happen among non-native speakers, given their use of strategies in order to compensate lacks in common ground.

RESULTS

The textual configuration of cartoons and their readers communicative competence condition the object of analysis of this investigation: the problematic issue of failed humour in the phases of comprehension and appreciation.

In order to analyse the response to humour in cartoons according to their textual configuration, a selection of 14 texts-stimuli from website http://dosisdiarias.com/ has been made. In order to organise this text corpus, tools related to structure and content factors
have been chosen, along the same lines as the conclusions extracted from the literature review. In particular, these tools have their origin in the pioneer distinction made by Freud (1905) between structure (work) and content (tendency), validated by Ruch y Platt (2012), Ruch et al. (1993), Hempelmann y Ruch (2005) and Carretero-Dios et al. (2010).

The factors taken into consideration within cartoon structure are contextualization indexes (Padilla y Gironzetti, 2012) and humoristic structure scripts (Hempelmann y Ruch, 2005). Likewise, the factors considered with regards to content encompass content indexes (Padilla y Gironzetti, 2012) and levels of restriction of the knowledge scripts (Attardo, 1993).

Applied to the present case study, two forms of caricature have been differentiated: personification and dehumanisation. This differentiation has been made given their capacity to create emotional links with the reader. With regards to the humoristic structure scripts, the resolution of the incongruity (INC-RES) and absurd humour (NON) have been selected to assess whether the resolution of the central incongruity is relevant for the response to humour. Regarding content, content indexes and knowledge scripts have been organised in a gradation of universal, cultural and linguistic topics (Schmitz, 2002), since this gradation takes into account the speaker’s humoristic competence, communicative competence and sociocultural competence. In addition, the notion of informative content of humoristic texts (Attardo, 1993) has been resumed in order to propose a complementary categorisation of content according to its external or internal informative load, where internal informative load equals metahumour. In fact, metahumour has been selected by this study because of its susceptibility to be confused with failed humour as well as because of its combination with low and high cognitive challenges.
In answer to the research question “What factors contribute to humour comprehension and appreciation?” the results of the present study has differentiated between facilitating factors (with a positive impact on these phases) and constraining factors (with a negative impact on these phases). In particular, the following factors have been identified in the comprehension and appreciation of graphic humour by both groups of participants, this is, Spanish native and non-native speakers.

Facilitating factors:

- The pillars of humour are identified by participants in their appreciation of cartoons.
- Knowledge resources are identified by participants in their comprehension of cartoons.
- Empathy with the characters is identified by participants in their appreciation of cartoons.
- The artistic aspect of the visual level is identified by participants in their appreciation of cartoons.

Constraining factors:

- Restricted-knowledge scripts are identified by participants in their failure to understand humour in cartoons.
- Linguistic knowledge scripts are identified by non-native participants in their failure to understand cartoons.
- Minimising and sufficing communication styles are identified by participants in their failure to appreciate cartoons.
- Meta-humour, combined with restricted-knowledge scripts is identified by participants in their failure to understand and appreciate cartoons.

- Absurd humoristic structures are identified by participants in their failure to understand humour.

The content analysis of the responses to humour has consistently collected key words related to a primary humoristic intention denoting superiority, release and incongruity. These results support the point argued in this thesis that the three pillars of humour coexist in every humoristic text, including cartoons. In fact, the responses by both groups support the identification of this coexistence.

Furthermore, the qualitative analysis of the responses by both groups of participants proves the relevance of accessing knowledge resources that the GTVH argues necessary for humour comprehension. The presence of words that refer to each of the knowledge resources proves the relevance of the structural level (logical mechanism, narrative structure and language) together with the content level (script opposition, situation and target) in the identification of factors that contribute to the cartoons’ success.

Certainly, the most original contribution among the facilitating factors collected by this study is the identification references to empathy and superiority. Beyond the constitutive elements of humoristic texts, empathy has been associated to the emotional manifestation of appreciation. In this sense, there are various studies of multimodality that have attributed the same empathic function to caricature techniques such as personification (Minahen, 1997; Keen, 2011). Therefore, the results both of this study and of previous studies on multimodal narratives indicate that, just as the contextualization index of
dehumanization can facilitate the success of graphic humour because it implies an element of superiority, personification can achieve appreciation through bonds of empathy.

In the study of multimodal texts, the importance of identifying the central role of empathy as a facilitating factor in the response to humour has been highlighted by various authors, such as Watson Todd (2012), who claims the existence of a positive correlation between the interpersonal function in Gary Larson’s cartoons and their appreciation. In fact, in the field of Neurolinguistics, appreciation has been associated to the identification of attitudes in the characters (Bartolo et al., 2006).

All of the factors mentioned so far have been identified both by the group of native speakers and the group of non-native speakers. However, only the group of non-native speakers registered key words referring the artistic aspect of cartoons. Even though the quality of the illustration in the analysed texts is remarkable, this feature seems to have a greater effect on humour appreciation by non-native speakers. It’s natural that non-native speakers mention this aspect, given their tendency to fill gaps at verbal level (linguistic scripts) through the visual level (general knowledge scripts). Furthermore, according to previous studies (Bonaiuto y Giannini, 2003), caricature and round shapes have a positive impact on appreciation. Thus, the visual level and empathy/superiority are facilitating factors for humour appreciation, especially by Spanish non-native speakers.

With regards to constraining factors to cartoons’ comprehension, both groups of participants have pointed to difficulties processing restricted knowledge scripts, while only non-native speakers present difficulties to understand linguistic knowledge.

The identification of restricted knowledge scripts and linguistics knowledge scripts as constraining obstacles to cartoons comprehension connects to the General Theory of
Verbal Humour (GTVH) at the same time that it validates the application of this theory to graphic humour. Specifically, restricted knowledge scripts refer to the most important resource of the GTVH, as explained in Chapter 2: script opposition (SO). On the other hand, linguistic knowledge scripts refer to the language resource (LA). This study notes that the manifestation of this resource is significant despite been discarded by previous applications of the GTVH to graphic humour (Hempelmann y Ruch, 2005). Thus, the lack of knowledge of the language used in a humoristic text is regarded by this study as a constraining factor that impacts on non-native speakers, even though it may not affect to native speakers.

In addition, the three pillars of humour have been identified in the results of the present study among the facilitating factors of appreciation. Nevertheless, in this study it is concluded that the presence of these three constitutive elements does not guarantee appreciation. Other factors, such as, an excess of lack of release have been identified in previous studies as obstacles to appreciation. In this study it has been noted that both the minimizing and the sufficing communication styles have acted as an obstacle to appreciation, namely, the minimizing communication style present an excessive release or inappropriateness and the sufficing communication style present an excessive appropriateness that invalidates the necessary release.

On the other hand, metahumour (internal informative load) has been a focus of this study because of a general tendency to mistake it with failed humour. In particular, this mistake can take place when metahumour is combined with a low cognitive challenge. According to Zigler, Levine and Gould (1967), the best levels of appreciation are achieved in combination with an optimal cognitive challenge, namely, a stimulus which can be resolved. This is the reason why this study has analysed texts-stimuli with of an internal
informative load and low cognitive challenge or high cognitive challenge. In the results collected by this study, speakers have identified an obstacle in understanding and appreciating the combination of internal informative load and restricted knowledge scripts.

Finally, the absurd humoristic structure (NON) has prevailed in the cartoons that achieved the higher levels of lack of comprehension in both groups. Among the knowledge resources necessary to understand verbal humour, the GTVH argues that the logical mechanism is the most relevant knowledge resource after script opposition. Therefore, when this script opposition cannot be resolved according to logical rules or when it creates new incongruities, it is natural that it may impact negatively in the comprehension of cartoons.

In answer to the research question “is cartoon appreciation possible despite a lack of comprehension?” Does this phenomenon impact equally on Spanish native and non-native speakers? It has been confirmed that it is possible to appreciate humour despite the existence of lacks in its comprehension among non-native speakers.

Failed humour due to a lack of comprehension is explained on the basis of the reader’s inability to resolve the central incongruity derived from script opposition, as previously discussed in answer to the first research question. However, this study assumes the coexistence of the central incongruity with secondary incongruities, according to Ritchie (2013). In fact, the results of this study have confirmed that resolution of secondary incongruities allows the appreciation of failed humour due to a lack of comprehension. These results suggest that activation of this strategy is especially frequent among non-native speakers, along the same lines of the study conducted by Shultzy Horibe (1974). The reason for this may be the fact that this strategy is used to compensate lacks in
communicative competence. This may be reason why the present study has documented this performance only among the non-native speakers. Even though this investigation is a case study and, thus, generalization must be limited, the high index of this data seems to indicate that, this is a decisive factor in appreciation among non-native speakers. On the other hand, this data is not indicative that the same behaviour cannot be reproduced among native speakers, but rather a reinforcement of the idea that the resolution of secondary incongruities is a common strategy among non-native speakers and it is used to compensate the lack of common grounds.

**CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study contributes to the existing literature on humour studies by challenging approaches to humour exclusively from one of the three vertebral theories of humour. To begin with, the collected data support the coexistence of three pillars of humour in the appreciation of cartoons (Martin, 2003; Milner Davis, 2015). Furthermore, the results support the relevance of all the knowledge resources of the GTVH (Attardo y Raskin, 1991) in graphic humour. In turn, it has been discussed how these resources impact on the application of the GTVH to graphic humour by Hempelmann y Ruch (2005), who discard language (LA) and situation (SI) as non-significant elements to appreciation.

On the other hand, the results of this study support the existence of a correlation between connecting with the characters of a humour stimulus and appreciating it (Freud, 1905; Mead, 1934; Roberts y Johnson, 1957; La Fave, 1972). This remark points to the relevance of the emotional dimension when processing humoristic texts. In addition, the
content analysis carried out in this study supports the existence of a positive correlation between the figurative distortion featured in caricature and appreciation, given the reader’s identification of the artistic visual aspect. In fact, studies on caricature have argued that personification allows empathizing with cartoon characters, whereas dehumanization puts the reader in a superior perspective. In the responses by both groups of participants in this case study, appreciation has been indicated through key words related to the quotidian and the real aspects that, in turn, point towards the central role of empathy. Such empathy is understood as the speakers’ ability to establish an emotional connection with the text. Accordingly, it has been confirmed that participants of both groups value the superiority element in their appreciation of cartoons.

This research examines in depth the pragmatic concept of contextualization/content index (Padilla y Gironzetti, 2012; Gironzetti, 2013). Thus, this research has identified caricature as a relevant contextualization index, given its prominence in the cartoons studied. In relation to the role of caricature, the results of the present case study add to their textual frame orientating function: a) a distinction among two forms of caricature: personification and dehumanization, b) an empathic/deprecating function and, c) a secondary incongruity (Ritchie, 2013) or background script function (Viana, 2010), which enables appreciation despite the existence of lacks in the comprehension process.

In this research it has been argued that the distinction between personification and dehumanization is directly related to empathy and deprecation, since personification can trigger the reader’s empathy and dehumanization can place the reader in a virtually superior position. In addition, secondary incongruity is inherent to caricature, given that this representation implies a distorted representation of reality.
It can be asserted that each of these three functional paradigms (a, b and c) impact on one of the stages of humour processing: recognition, comprehension and appreciation. Thus, the textual frame orientating function operates in the recognition phase by identifying caricature as one of the prototypical features of cartoons. Also, the secondary incongruity function provides the resolution of one of the background pieces of the puzzle. Lastly, empathy with a humanised character or disdain for inhuman characters facilitate appreciation. With regards to appreciation, in Chapter 6 it is discussed how the pillars of humour convey in caricature, given its ridicule of characters, its critical release as well as the latent incongruities existing in figurative distortion. Specifically, the present study has related dehumanisation to the superiority element and personification to empathy and, in turn, to the ability to canalise the release. For these reasons, this research has demonstrated the main role of caricature, not just in the recognition phase, but also in the phases of comprehension and appreciation of the humoristic performance.

The tendencies collected in the results of this investigation suggest, as well, a positive correlation between the optimizing/maximizing communication styles (Spitzberg, 2000) and humour appreciation. The data also suggest a negative correlation between the optimal cognitive challenge and absurd humour, especially when combined with meta-humour, given that expectations are not met with regards to the resolution of the incongruity (absurd humour) but also given the general tendency of humoristic texts to include an external informative load (vs. meta-humor).

Concerning language learning, the results support an application of the concept of knowledge resources (Attardo, 1993) to cartoon reading by non-native speakers. Along the same lines as the concept of knowledge scripts, the results of the present study are
compatible with the study conducted by Schmitz (2002). Furthermore, the data collected point to qualitative differences in the comparison of responses to humour by native speakers and non-native speakers given the impact of the conscious, controlled and intentional nature of learning strategies (Díaz-Barriga y Hernández, 2002) and, most particularly, meta-cognitive strategies (O’Malley y Chamot, 1990) in the reflexive response to humour. The appreciation of humour despite lacks in comprehension by non-native speakers suggests a greater pressure of social acceptance among these participants because they feature a greater need to be included in the group (Kramsch, 1997) than native speakers.

Finally, appreciation of humour despite lacks in the comprehension by non-native speakers supports Bell’s (2007) dynamic model of humoristic competence, while it challenges its lineal version by Hall (2001).

**CONCLUSIONS**

Starting from the results of the present study, different research paths for the analysis of cartoon comprehension and appreciation have been suggested. Among them, it has been suggested that the sample should be expanded, the proposed analytical model should be validated by replicating studies as well as complemented by other analytical methodologies and this paradigm should be applied to a pedagogical context.

To conclude, it should be noted that the study of humour requires an interdisciplinary approach and it implies a researcher’s introspection specialized in a single
area in unknown areas. Given the complexity of the humour phenomenon, not only it is important to explore in depth the theories offered by the disciplines of Pragmatics and Cognitive Semantics but also to take some distance and approach the research questions from different angles. In this thesis the advantages of an interdisciplinary approach have been demonstrated. The combination of knowledge from different disciplines has serve to complement limited visions of humour and, at the same time, to offer a holistic analysis of humour. Nevertheless, given the elusive essence of humour, this is an endless source of study for future investigations.