

Functions and strategies of male humour in cross-gender interactions

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Abstract

In this paper I will present an analysis of the functions and strategies of male humour in an interaction among the members of a mixed group of young people. The data were obtained in the informal context of an hour and a half of real conversation, recorded and transcribed, within a group of male and female friends. The analysis is based on tools derived from conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics, and examines the functions of male humour: on one hand, to obtain and maintain control and monopolisation of the interaction, and, on the other hand, to forge male camaraderie. In general terms, our results demonstrate that humour becomes an important organizing factor in the interaction, which may take the form of a verbal attack, competitive word games, teasing, jokes and anecdotes. This humour, habitual among the group analysed, can have a bonding function among the male speakers, but produces an asymmetrical situation from the moment that the women become the object of their jokes or take the permanent role of audience.

Key words: gender, humour, discourse analysis, conversational style.

Resumo

Neste traballo presento unha análise das funcións e estratexias do humor masculino nunha interacción mixta dun grupo de xente nova. Os datos obtivéronse nun contexto informal de hora e media de conversa real, gravada e transcrita, nunha pandilla de amigos e amigas. A análise baséase en ferramentas derivadas da análise da conversa e a sociolingüística interaccional, e examina dúas funcións do humor masculino: por unha parte, conseguir e manter o control e a monopolización da interacción e, por outra, forxar a camaradería masculina. En termos xerais, os nosos resultados mostran que o humor chega a ser un factor organizativo importante na interacción, que pode tomar forma de ataque verbal, xogos de palabras competitivos, vaciles, chistes e anécdotas. Este humor, habitual no grupo analizado, pode ter unha función de vinculación entre os locutores masculinos, pero produce unha situación asimétrica desde o momento en que as mulleres son o obxecto das súas bromas ou toman o papel permanente de audiencia.

Palabras clave: xénero, humor, análise do discurso, estilo conversacional.

1. Introduction

In the past thirty years studies of gender and discourse have increased significantly, attempting to address certain aspects that were ignored in the earlier linguistic tradition. Thanks to these works, it has been determined that significant differences exist between male and female conversational styles. These varieties are evident in the use that men and women make of verbal and non-verbal communication systems (Zimmerman & West, 1975; Fishman, 1978; Houdebine, 1979; Lakoff, 1981; Kramarae, 1981; Aebischer, 1985; Coates, 1986, 1998; Tannen, 1992, 1994; Hirschman, 1994; Aries, 1996; Wodak, 1997; West, Lazar & Kramarae, 1997; among others).

These studies base their explanations of cross-gender discursive differences on two categories: the “dominance” approach and the “cultural difference” approach. From the point of view of the former, the situation of social inequality, consisting of the historical situation of man’s domination over woman, is the reason for which each sex adopts its particular way of speaking (Lakoff, 1981; Thorne & Henley, 1975). On the other hand, from the difference perspective, the two sexes are considered to belong to different subcultures and to possess psychological peculiarities, for which reason they have developed different styles (Tannen, 1992; Maltz & Borker, 1998).

The characteristic traits that differentiate female and male conversational styles exist at all levels of linguistic analysis and also affect conversational mechanics. Various studies speak of the differences at the lexical and morphological level. In this sense, it is usually noted that, despite a common vocabulary, there is a certain differentiating lexical specialisation among women and men, conditioned by the topics, activities, and predominant interests of each group (Lakoff, 1981; Pearson et al, 1993). It has also been observed that women employ a more appreciative and affective vocabulary, including diminutives, pet names, adjectives that express affection, hyperbolic expressions, and evaluative exclamations (Kramarae, 1977; Lakoff, 1981); while men possess a more extensive lexicon related to insults, swear words and curses (Fillmer & Haswell, 1977; Lakoff, 1981; Fitzpatrick & Bochner, 1981; Beinhauer, 1958; Pearson et al, 1993; Lozano Domingo, 1995).

From a morphosyntactic point of view, women often employ more *tag questions*, those questions that are placed after an affirmative phrase, for example *right?*, *no?*, *isn't it?* and *don't you?* These *tag questions* can be employed with different intentions, such as to confirm specific information, to persuade someone to share our own beliefs and opinions, to get information from a person, and to establish a conversation (Lakoff, 1981; Coates, 1986; Holmes, 1986; Mulac & Lundell, 1986; Tannen, 1992; Pearson et al, 1993; Hirschman, 1994).

With respect to the discursive level, it is usually cited, among many other traits, that women pose more questions, tend to utilise more positive minimal responses (such as *mm* *hmm*, *ahá*, etc.) throughout the entire interaction, and produce more utterances to mitigate tension and demonstrate agreement or solidarity (Zimmerman

& West, 1975; Fishman, 1978; Coates, 1989; Hirschman, 1994; West, Lazar & Kramarae, 1997). Men, on the other hand, tend to interrupt more, to cast doubt upon or dispute the utterances of their conversational partners, to usually ignore the comments of others and to utilise more mechanisms for controlling the topic of conversation than women (Zimmerman & West, 1975; Fishman, 1978; Maltz & Borker, 1998).

These two conversational styles have led to the characterisation of female discourse as cooperative and of male discourse as competitive (Coates, 1986; Maltz & Borker, 1998; Aries, 1996). Thus, female overlaps (two people who speak at the same time) and interruptions are interpreted as cooperative (to demonstrate comprehension, to complete the previous contribution, etc.), as opposed to male overlaps and interruptions, which tend to be competitive (to obtain space for talking, to demonstrate disagreement, to discredit, etc.). From this perspective, women, in their role as listeners, take on a much more active and participatory role, which is expressed through the minimal responses, head movements, and visual contact.

Nevertheless, models of language use are not conditioned exclusively by the speaker's sex but also by other factors, such as age, geographic origin or ethnicity, education level, economic level and sociocultural environment or social status, which define the profile of each individual in the speech act and in the place he or she occupies with respect to the others. These attributes do not remain static in the speaker, but rather in any given interaction some of these are highlighted and activated in such a way that what Goffman (1971) calls a particular "public image" is constructed and maintained. In the same way, it is important to clarify that the differences between the two conversational styles are not exclusive to either sex, but rather involve tendencies that appear with greater frequency among women or among men.

The expectations and roles associated with gender may be in play at any moment and in any social framework, depending on the group composition, the relation of the sex variable within the group, and many other factors (Crawford, 1997: 133).

This article analyses another trait that differentiates the female and male conversational styles: humour (Kramarae, 1981; Tannen 1992, 1994; Lampert, 1996; Crawford, 1997; Hay, 2000). To this end, we will look at the functions and discursive mechanisms of humour, especially male, in a cross-gender interaction. The analytical methodology corresponds with that of interactional sociolinguistics and conversation analysis (Goffman, 1974; Gumperz, 1982; Tannen, 1991).

Gender has rarely been the central focus of research on humour. Although some studies have used male and female participants, the majority of the studies based solely on one sex have employed only males (Crawford, 1997: 137).

My research is based on an hour and a half of recorded and transcribed conversation among the members of a group of male and female friends between twenty and twenty-six years of age. The objective was to obtain a sample that I

consider to be representative of female and male conversational styles among young people. The procedure of approaching the participants was the concealed recording of a discursive event, in which I played the role of participant-observer.

2. A gathering of friends: Description and considerations

The data in this work were collected in August of 1999, during a birthday party of one of the speakers (*Antonio*). There are nine participants in all, of whom seven were young women and two were young men. Despite this numerical imbalance, we must note that it is the young men who monopolise and control the greater part of the conversation; based on this we have decided to analyse almost exclusive the male use of humour.

The tape recorder was concealed, nobody knew that the conversation was being recorded, and strategically situated to be able to keep everyone in reach of the microphone.

The interaction took place in Vigo (Galiza), in the dining room of a privately-owned apartment while the nine friends dined together and celebrate the birthday party.

The participants are almost all members of my own group of friends at the time of the recording. Their names have been changed to assure confidentiality. The only piece of data consistent with reality is my own name (Sonia).

Following is a brief introduction to each of the participants in the interaction:

Antonio: owner, along with his girlfriend *Rocío*, of the apartment where the interaction takes place. He is 25 years old at the time of the recording. He studied a module of computer science and is a marketing representative for a company. He is of urban, lower-middle class background.

Rocío: 24 years old with an associate's degree in Labour Relations, although at the time she is unemployed. She is also of urban, lower-middle class background.

Doli: *María*'s cousin and childhood friend of *Rocío*. She is 24 years old and is in her fourth year of Hispanic Philology. She is of urban, lower-middle class background.

María: 23 years old, abandoned her Philology studies in her third year and works for *Telepizza*. She is of an urban, lower-middle class background. Her relationship with *Rocío* also originated in childhood.

Marcos: *María*'s boyfriend, 26 years old and recently abandoned his Engineering studies, at the moment works part-time as a shop assistant. He has an urban (born in Madrid) upper-middle class background.

Noelia: *Antonio*'s cousin. She is 20 years old and in her first year studying Architecture. Her place of residence (and origin) is Valencia, but at the moment is on holiday visiting her family in Vigo. She is of upper-middle class background.

Marga: has a friendship relationship basically with *María*, *Doli*, *Virxinia* and *Sonia*; the five of them studied the same career. She is 24 years old and holds a title in Hispanic Philology. Rural and lower-middle class background.

Virxinia (the groups generally calls her by this nickname, but also on one occasion uses her name: *Sofía*): is 25 years old, studies Hispanic Philology, and, at the same time, works for the company O.R.A. She is of urban, lower-middle class background.

Sonia: (investigator) 23 years old and titled in Hispanic Philology. She met one part of the group (*Doli*, *Virxinia*, *Marga* and *María*) at university, and the rest through *Doli*, who acted as point of connection with the rest of the group.

The following chart shows the linguistic repertoire of the speakers and is designed to guide the reader in the reading of the transcripts:

Chart 1. *Habitual language of participants in the interaction.*

YOUNG MEN	YOUNG WOMEN	
Habitual Spanish-speakers	Habitual Galician-speakers	Habitual Spanish-speakers
<i>Antonio</i>	<i>Doli</i>	<i>María</i>
<i>Marcos</i>	<i>Marga</i>	<i>Noelia</i>
	<i>Sonia</i>	<i>Rocío</i>
		<i>Virxinia</i>

3. General theories about verbal humour

The use of language for purely recreational purposes is one more expression of our daily interaction. Humour can be qualified as an important and universal human faculty. At the same time, it is a flexible and powerful conversational strategy. With humour, we can introduce taboo topics, create solidarity, express hostility and politeness, save face, win someone over and express fondness for others (Norrick, 1993; Attardo, 1994; Vigara Tauste, 1994; Torres Sánchez, 1999). Furthermore, it can be employed as a cooperative as well as a competitive interactional strategy (Tannen, 1992; Norrick, 1993).

It would be difficult to arrive at a completely satisfactory definition of what humour is. Avner Ziv (1988: 9-10) defines it as a social message intended to produce laughter or a smile. Its principal elements are incongruity, surprise, and local logic (that is, something that seems logical in a particular context).

Humour, in general, exists when something unexpected happens that produces an entertaining effect. It is, in some sense, the other side of fear or shock. "Humour called 'linguistic', specifically, arises when expectations created through linguistic-discursive procedures are broken or transgressed. Of course, it is necessary to share

certain norms and conventions, certain understandings of the world, even a certain ideology, to be able to break these expectations and achieve the effect of surprise” (Calsamiglia & Tusón, 1999: 213-14).

In an attempt to understand humour, psychologists and philosophers have tried to identify the principal traits of humoristic expressions. These theories are grouped into a triple classification: *incongruity theories*, *release theories* and *hostility/disparagement theories*. On one hand, *incongruity theories* consider that all humour is based on the discovery of a reality that is incongruent with what was expected (Torres Sánchez, 1999: 10-11). This theory derives from the juxtaposition of two incompatible situations in which the joke offers an unexpected link:

The notion of congruity and incongruity refer to the relationships between components of an object, event, idea, social expectation, and so forth. When the arrangement of the constituent elements of an event is incompatible with the normal or expected pattern, the event is perceived as incongruous.

(McGhee, 1976: 6-7, cited in Attardo, 1994: 48)

The notion of *play* in humour is closely linked with the *incongruity theory*. *Play* is a behaviour in which the participants recognize that what they are doing is for fun, although it does not mean what it normally means. There is a type of metacommunication that indicates that the behaviour is play and not a real situation. For example, it would be quite difficult for an outsider to tell whether two boys are fighting or playing, but smiling or laughter might be a good indication that they are playing. Here the incongruity is that the usually negative behaviour (fighting) has positive associations (fun). *Play* is an important factor in the humorous teasing found in so-called *joking relationships*. In general, the negative behaviour is insulting someone; the positive associations are laughter and intimacy. The type of metacommunication that indicates to us that this is playing, and not a real situation, is a switch to another code (Siegel, 1995: 103-4).

On the other hand, *release theories* maintain that humour releases tensions or psychic energy, or that it liberates us from inhibitions, conventions, and rules. Freud is the most widely-known author in this theoretical line, and for him the human being accumulates psychic energy due to the repression of feelings and thoughts of a sexual nature, and that, having accumulated a great quantity of this kind of energy, it is necessary to discharge it. Humour, in general, is the ideal medium for provoking this discharge.

Finally, *hostility/disparagement theories* consider that laughter is associated with self-glorification, normally at the expense of someone else. These theories explain laughter as a moment of “sudden glory” in which we laugh at the shortcomings and errors of others to increase our sense of superiority (Attardo, 1994: 49; Norrick, 1993: 8). Among these theories, Bergson (1964) proposes a general theory of the comic. This author considers laughter to be an essential characteristic of the human

condition that, further, always has a social nature; it always involves a reaction that seeks to be shared. Bergson argues that we laugh at forms of behaviour that run counter to those that are socially accepted and expected, feeling therefore, as persons who know how to behave ourselves, superior to those who do not. For Ziv (1988: 11), humour is also a defence mechanism against that which we fear, and that which makes us laugh at ourselves, seen as the victim of the humour. According to him, some see the essence of humour in the capacity to see the ridiculous in our own behaviour.

From our point of view, and based on the fragments that we have analysed, male humour follows, in many cases, the same model of communication used by men to occupy a central position in the interaction (Tannen, 1992: 226), or in terms of the *hostility/disparagement theories* the function of humour as a mechanism of power over those that are listening is evident. Making fun of or ridiculing the person to whom one is speaking, even to the point of challenge or insult, which is never understood literally in friendly conversations, implies maintaining oneself as the centre of attention and showing the ability to keep the speech turn. LeMasters describes how English men in a working class pub relate to one another and notes that “status at the Oasis is related to the ability to “dish it out” in the rapid-fire exchange called “joshing”: you have to have a quick retort, and preferably one that puts you “one up” on your opponent. People who can’t compete in the game lose status” (LeMasters, 1975: 140, cited in Maltz &orker, 1998: 429).

Linguists, psychologists, and anthropologists have taken humour to be a category that encompasses everything, including any event or object that produces laughter, entertains, or is felt to be fun (Attardo, 1994: 4). One aspect underlying the different basic definitions of humour is laughter. This relationship leads to the identification of a mental phenomenon (humour) with a complex physiological expression (laughter) (Attardo, 1994: 10). Nevertheless, not all scholars in this area agree with this connection: “humour is not laughter”, laughter is a social tribunal that judges and condemns the ridiculous ones, comparing them to the accepted truth that is made law (Pawlowski, cited in Fernández de la Vega, 1983: 35).

From another perspective, discourse analysis has provided an interesting vision of the linguistic and interactional resources linked with humour and of humour itself as a strategy in the conversational context. From this point of view, humour in the interaction allows us to manipulate the discourse and the participants in various senses. Humorous utterances may serve to conquer or maintain territory in favour of the speaker, facilitate topic changes, fill silences, break the ice or close a conversation (Norrick, 1993: 27). At the same time, they may help us to establish rapport and foster involvement with others (1993: 5). It is better to analyse the resources of humour as pragmatic rather than grammatical resources, which acquire their meaning in the communicative context.

It is difficult to establish an exhaustive classification the mechanisms involved in the production and comprehension of humour. In this study we are going to

analyse just a few of these, including spontaneous funny comments, teasing among the speakers, and jokes and word/voice games. The category that we call “teasing” takes on a great deal of importance in the recorded interaction. The most usual definition of this popular term is that of “ironic humour, leg-pulling” (*Diccionario General de la Lengua Española*, 1997), to say absurd or funny things in an apparently serious tone with the intention of making fun of a person (*Diccionario Salamanca de la Lengua Española*, 1996). Teasing just like sarcasm, can express aggression and solidarity at the same time; aggression in the message, attacking others for their foibles and errors, and solidarity in the metamessage, including others in a playful relationship where we don’t have to stand on formality (Norrick, 1993: 80).

In any case, these forms of humour can only be understood if we can explain their integration and function in daily interaction. In this sense, from a pragmatic-discursive perspective, our study aims to investigate the diverse forms and functions of the humour between men and women in their conversational context.

4. Gender and verbal humour

The existing literature concerning this topic presents various differences between men’s and women’s expression of humour. Robin Lakoff, with her book *Language and Woman’s Place*, published in 1975, was one of the pioneers in the study of the correlation between linguistic and sexual, or gender, diversity, legitimising the study of the language of women within sociolinguistics. She describes in this book several characteristics of the “female language” in American society and confirms the cultural perception that women don’t have a sense of humour, since they don’t tell or “understand” jokes (Lakoff, 1981: 89-90). Humour, especially those forms of humour that put down individuals or groups, is not considered “correct”, and according to Lakoff women avoid any trace of discourtesy.

Later studies, such as that of Kramarae (1981), note that men and women have different concepts of “humour” and, as a consequence, probably have different interests when it comes to joking. Kramarae believes that it is easier for women to recognise the social symbols of the dominant group, for which reason it is more usual that women recognise the humoristic interests of men than the other way around. According to the author, this is the basis of the common claim that women lack a sense of humour: women have to understand male humour, but the reverse is not so.

Along general lines, it is noted that women tend to tell fewer jokes than men, especially if they are in large groups and, especially, if these groups include men. In contrast, men prefer to tell jokes when they have an audience. As a consequence, men in mixed groups tend to joke more, while the women become the audience (Tannen, 1992: 83; Lampert, 1996: 580).

Crawford (1997: 143-48) points out that men usually use a hostile type of humour and that this may be used for silencing and maintaining conversational

control. Female humour usually has a goal of great intimacy, given its function of solidarity, while male humour reinforces the accomplishment of competitive goals, the creation of hierarchical relations, and self-aggrandisement.

From our point of view, the characteristics of male and female humour are connected to the cross-gender discursive differences. Given that the conversational goals of women differ from those of men, it is logical that female humour serves different purposes and takes different forms (Crawford, 1997: 133, 148).

For the development of this study we will present various transcribed conversational fragments, by means of which we will attempt to analyse some of the functions and mechanisms of male humour.

4.1. Functions of male humour in interactions

In this section we will address two functions of male humour: to achieve and maintain control and monopolisation of the conversation and to reinforce male camaraderie.

As we have mentioned, humour can be used as a conversational control strategy. In this sense, the recorded conversation constitutes a good example of an interaction basically directed and controlled by the two male participants of the group.

Various investigations confirm that in mixed conversations men interrupt and talk over the others more than women, tend more towards aggression and challenge, jump from one topic to another, compete to tell anecdotes, rarely talk about their feelings and their personal problems and, further, usually adopt a competitive style, which may manifest itself in an attempt to grab the speaking turn and keep it from the others (Zimmerman & West, 1975; Fishman, 1978; Maltz & Borker, 1998; Tannen, 1992, 1994; Pearson et al., 1993). Thus, the discourse is a means of personal affirmation, which gives rise to jokes, insults, boasting, verbal aggression, etc. (Tannen, 1992; Coates, 1997; Cameron, 1997; Fabius, 1997).

The topic of humour appears to be directly related to the male competitive style. In male conversations the ability to tell stories and jokes is especially valued, "especially if they are seasoned with a certain dramatisation, as if addressing an audience" (Lozano Domingo, 1995: 182). In these cases humour serves as a mechanism for exercising power over those who are listening. It is equally friendly among men to make fun of or ridicule one who is speaking, even to the point of challenge or insult, which is never understood literally in friendly conversations. In these exchanges, rapid response has the mission not only of attacking the other but also of defending one's self, since those who are slow to respond to the aggression usually receive much more (1995: 184). This last phenomenon is what happens to many women who imagine the interaction to be a participatory act.

Along general lines, all of the interaction recorded is a consistent example of male monopolisation. Next we will present a fragment of our corpus that aims to reflect male control by means of humour. In this excerpt we present one of the few

moments in which one of the young women, Virxinia, takes a relatively prolonged speaking turn and tries to tell an anecdote without the humoristic end that seems to be inherent in the conversation as a whole. This narrative intent, as we will see, is going to encounter serious difficulties in its development. Through a succession of contributions that start out with overlaps and interruptions, Antonio and Marcos (the two male participants in the group) finally manage to redirect the interpretive framework (initially serious) toward the humorous:

Fragment 1. Male monopolisation and control.

1 Virxinia:	{[p] mi primo}	1 Virxinia:	{[p] my (male) cousin}
2	.. tiene cuatro años y me preguntó	2	.. is four years old and he asked me
3	<>	3	<>
4 Marcos:	tu prima tiene cuatro años?	4 Marcos:	your (female) cousin is four years old?
5 Virxinia:	.. mi primo de cuatro años me=	5 Virxinia:	.. my four-year-old (male) cousin me=
6 Marcos:	=primo?	6 Marcos:	=(male) cousin?
7 Virxinia:	una conversación tío (XX)	7 Virxinia:	a conversation, man (XX)
8	.. es que mi hermana le robaron en el comercio no te conté	8	.. is that they robbed my sister in the business didn't I tell you
9 Doli:	(XX)=	9 Doli:	(XX)=
10 Marga:	=i estaba ela?	10 Marga:	=and it was her?
11 Virxinia:	.. no no estaba ella fue a las siete y cuarto de la mañana	11 Virxinia:	.. no no it wasn't her it was quarter past seven in the morning
12	le tiraron un rollo destes de:- de (XX)	12	they threw something, one of these things :- de (XX) made of stone
13	(XX) y le entraron y le- la- lo llevaron (XX)	13	(XX) and they entered and they le- la- lo took (XX)
14 Rocío:	.. camisetas?	14 Rocío:	.. tee-shirts?
15 Virxinia:	bañadores (XX)	15 Virxinia:	bathing suits (XX)
16 Marga:	(XX) bueno nada	16 Marga:	(XX) well nothing
17	<> [risas generalizadas]	17	<> [general laughter]
18 Marcos	(XX) bañado::res es lo que vende eh?	18 Marcos	(XX)bathing sui::tes is what they sell eh?
19	[risa]	19	[laughter]
20	no vende coches	20	it doesn't sell cars
21	.. ni vende=	21	.. nor does it sell=
22 Marga:	=pero quero decir que a ela que lle importa tío	22 Marga:	=but she wants to tell what was important to her, man
23	que- que lle leven	23	that- that they took
24	<> le van a pagar igual	24	<> they're going to pay her the same
25	<>	25	<>
26 Virxinia:	{[p](XX)}	26 Virxinia:	{[p](XX)}
27	.. bueno y el rollo es que mi primo se enteró tiene cuatro años	27	.. but the thing is that my cousin found out he is four years old
28	.. y me preguntó que por qué- por qué robaban	28	.. and he asked me why- why they stole

29	<>	29	<>
30 Marga:	jobá que pregunta	30 Marga:	jeez what a question
31 Virxinia:	la pregunta fue por qué robaban por qué habían robado	31 Virxinia:	the question was why they stole, why they had stolen
32	<> y luego	32	<> and then
33	<>	33	<>
34 Marga:	porque no tienen dinero=	34 Marga:	because they didn't have money=
35 Virxinia:	=(XX) dinero .. es gente pobre	35 Virxinia:	=(XX) money .. they're poor people
36 Antonio:	(XX)	36 Antonio:	(XX)
37 Marcos:	ya te digo	37 Marcos:	I'm telling you
38	<> yo no sabía que decirle	38	<> I didn't know what to tell him
39 Antonio:	(XX)	39 Antonio:	(XX)
40 Marcos:	yo como dijo eso digo le preguntó cómo nacen los bebés ..	40 Marcos:	and I like he said that I mean he asked how babies are born..
41	le preguntó (XX) cosas así=	41	he asked (XX) things like that=
42 Antonio:	[musical]-[uuu]	42 Antonio:	[musical]-[uuu]
43 Virxinia:	[y le dije que- que- que era gente pobre]	43 Virxinia:	[(and I told him that- that- that they were poor people)]
44	y que no tenía:n (XX) porque no podía decir que eran yonquis y que necesitaban una dosis	44	and that they didn't ha:ve (XX) because I couldn't say that they were junkies and that they needed a fix
45	<> y entonces me dice=	45	<> and so he tells me=
46 Marcos:	=dile [roban porque quieren camisetas]	46 Marcos:	=tell him [they steal because they want tee-shirts]
47 Virxinia:	[(XX) y entonces y los- y: y:]]=	47 Virxinia:	[(XX) and they and the- and:: and:]]=
48 Marga:	= pois podías decirle eso tía que se va a enfrentando a vida =	48 Marga:	= well, you could say that, girl, that they start confronting life =
49 Virxinia:	=y entonces me pregunta y qué es una dosis?	49 Virxinia:	=and so then he asks me what's a fix?
50	<>	50	<>
51 Marga:	y tú que le dices?	51 Marga:	and you what do you say?
52 Virxinia:	y- y luego me dice- [luego me dice]	52 Virxinia:	and- and then he tells me- [then he tells me]
53 Marcos:	[llamo a marga]	53 Marcos:	[call marga]
	(XX)		(XX)
54 Virxinia:	y los kosovares?	54 Virxinia:	and the people from Kosovo?
55	<>	55	<>
56 Doli:	los kosovares?	56 Doli:	the people from Kosovo?
57 Virxinia:	los kosovares=	57 Virxinia:	the people from Kosovo=
58 Antonio:	=sonaba	58 Antonio:	=dream
59	<>	59	<>
60 Virxinia:	quienes so- qué son más pobres que los kosovares?	60 Virxinia:	who a- that are poorer than the people from Kosovo?
61	<>	61	<>
62 Marga:	(XX)=	62 Marga:	(XX)=
63 Virxinia:	=(XX) lo de los kosovares	63 Virxinia:	=(XX) about the people from Kosovo
64	.. que si no tenían juguetes	64	.. that, yeah, they don't have toys
65	<>	65	<>

66 Maria:	[poniendo voz de vieja] en mil novecientos setenta y cinco me acuerdo [(XX)]	66 Maria:	[affecting an old lady voice] in nineteen hundred seventy-five I remember [(XX)]
67 Antonio:	[DIOS parece] el comando	67 Antonio:	[GOD you seem like] the command
68	<2> [imitando la voz del comienzo de la serie <i>El Equipo A</i> ¹] en el invierno de mil cuatrocientos-	68	<2> [imitating the voice from the beginning of the TV series <i>The A-Team</i>] in the winter of fourteen hundred-
69	de mil novecientos cuarenta y dos	69	of nineteen hundred forty-two
70 Maria:	.. cuatro hombres del ejército americano=	70 Maria:	.. four men of the American army=
71 Marcos:	=[poniendo también la misma voz del <i>Equipo A</i>] cuatro de los mejores hombres del ejército americano	71 Marcos:	=[also affecting the same voice from <i>The A-Team</i>] four of the best men of the American army
72	[risas]<2> fueron arrestados por un crimen que no habían cometido	72	[laughter]<2> were arrested for a crime that they had not committed
73	<2>	73	<2>
74 Antonio:	[imitando la música del <i>Equipo A</i>]	74 Antonio:	[imitating the music from <i>The A-Team</i>]
75	<3> cómo cantaban? <2> ahí	75	<3> how did they sing? <2> there

In this fragment, Virxinia attempts to narrate two events that happened to her (directly or indirectly): one of these refers to a robbery in the shop where her sister works, and the other, related to the first, relates a conversation with her four-year old cousin about this robbery, and leads to a question about the poverty of the people of Kosovo (quite a current topic at the time of the recording). Let's look at this example more thoroughly.

In lines 1-2 we observe Virxinia's first narrative attempt, but already in line 4 we find Marcos' first interruption. This question repeats the previous statement but changes the gender of the subject and, rather than contributing to the development of the anecdote, manages to centre the attention on Marcos and momentarily interrupt Virxinia, at the same time constituting a small discursive aggression. We can corroborate this impression with Marcos' next contribution (line 6), in which he again focuses on the sex of the story's protagonist. It is clear, therefore, that these questions are not produced to solicit information relevant to the continuity or comprehension of the anecdote, but instead attempt to obstruct the narration. In this case Virxinia, probably because she is familiar with his style, ignores the question (line 7) and continues her story (7-8).

On many occasions, the young men seem to respond to the stories that the other members of the group tell not so much with questions about deeper implications or with minimal responses of support (role played by Marga and Doli several times throughout the fragment, lines 10, 30, 51, 56), but rather with marginal comments and provocations. These responses may be intended, in principle, to interrupt, change

¹ Television series from the 80's that is still rerun once in a while. The plot is based on the adventures of four men who belong to the American Army and who, after being condemned to several years in prison for a "crime they didn't commit", escape and earn their living as mercenaries.

the topic, or change the direction of the story, but they may also have the goal of confirming the audience member's identity as an individual (Maltz & Borker, 1998: 427). In the passive role of audience, men tend to ridicule, challenge, and make fun of the one who is speaking as a form of grabbing the authority exhibited by the one who makes use of the word (Lozano Domingo, 1995: 227).

In the next contribution, Virginia changes the drift of her story to make a small parenthetical commentary and tell about the robbery in her sister's store (8). In this case, note the female cooperation by means of Marga's question, in line 10, about whether her sister (known by almost all of the group members) was present at the robbery. We can observe this cooperative role played by Marga in the side comments at various times throughout the recorded interactions, and they tend to appear in the cases where the speaker has some difficulty in continuing the narrative. Tannen (1992: 218) notes that many women in informal situations use so-called *cooperative overlapping*, in which the listener participates together with the speaker to demonstrate interest and support.

The next relevant moment, from a gender-discursive point of view, occurs in lines 16-23. First Marga intervenes with a funny comment that attempts to downplay the robbery incident (16, the funny aspect, in Marga's contribution, resides in attempting to detract importance from the robbery by suggesting that the shop did not sell anything important). After clarifying that they only stole objects like bathing suits (15), Marga says: *bueno nada* ("well nothing") (16), a contribution that elicits the laughter of some participants (17) and the teasing of Marcos (18-21). At this point there is a slight "verbal aggression" toward Marga in humoristic terms (18, 20-21) that is based on grabbing Marga's earlier funny comment (16) to explain, as if dealing with a little girl, that in the shop they did not steal large objects like cars, but rather simple bathing suits. This commentary of Marcos is accompanied by the laughter of some participants (19), and is followed by Marga's defence by means of an interruption (22-24). This type of contribution in the form of male attack / female defence, quite frequent throughout the entire interaction, tends to appear when one of the speakers makes a small joke (as in line 16), and this joke can be interpreted as a form of female exclusion from the male humoristic framework.

Later (lines 27-65), Virginia takes up again the initial thread of the story: the conversation with her four-year-old cousin (27-28). For several turns this discursive continuity is maintained, assisted on two occasions by Marga's cooperation (30 and 34), who through her contributions demonstrates interest and support for the continuation of the anecdote. Nevertheless, a few lines later (36-42) the story pauses again due to the contributions of Marcos and Antonio. Antonio even breaks into song (42), making it understood that he is not excessively interested in Virginia's narrative. Virginia takes the floor again in line 43 by means of an overlap with Antonio's contribution. Later, Marcos attempts to create a funny tone in his contribution in line 46: *dile roban porque quieren camisetas* ("tell him they steal because they

want t-shirts”). Between interruptions and overlaps (46, 48, 53) a good portion of the narrative continues (47, 49, 52), until arriving at the central part of the narrative (line 54): her four-year-old cousin’s question about the people from Kosovo. We observe, again, feminine cooperation in line 56, where Doli repeats the same idea expressed by Virxinia in 54 with the intent of highlighting its contents; we believe, in fact, that at this point the denouement and culminating point of the narrative begins, as suggested at the beginning of the story (between lines 1 and 7 reference is made to this conversation between Virxinia and her cousin). It must be noted that after Virxinia’s contribution in 54 the same idea is repeated up to 5 times with the intention to reemphasise its content (54, 56, 57, 60). Upon arriving at this point, the narrative is reaching the end (lines 63-64).

In line 66 María, taking advantage of Virxinia’s pause and based on what she is telling, tries to be funny by adopting the role of the narrator. Nevertheless, this role is immediately usurped by Antonio (67), who begins to attack María and then initiates a voice game (68-69, 74-75), in this case belonging to a well-known television series. At this point the narrative is permanently interrupted.

In this new situation and with a humoristic goal, María, in line 70, tries to open herself a space by cooperating with Antonio when he pauses briefly, but this attempt is frustrated: her boyfriend Marcos interrupts her in the following line (line 71) to repeat exactly the same thing that she said earlier, but with a slight modification:

70 María: ..cuatro hombres del ejército americano=

71 Marcos: =[poniendo también la voz del *Equipo A*] cuatro de los mejores hombres del ejército americano

70 María: ..four men of the American army=

71 Marcos: =[affecting the voice of *The A-Team*] four of the best men of the American army

Marcos finishes the discursive part of this brief television representation (72) and Antonio supplies the music (74).

In the fragment analysed here we observe, therefore, how through humour the two male participants manage to detain Virxinia’s anecdote at various points, permanently interrupt it, take control of the conversation, and place themselves at the centre of the stage, even acting out a television sequence for their audience. On the other hand, the position of the female speakers is that of full cooperation, by means of laughter, solidarity questions that assist in the continuity of the narrative, and intensifying comments.

The anecdote related by Virxinia comprises one of the most extensive cases, in the entire recording, of the female speech act. Towards the end of the story, it seems that the male participants, little accustomed to this, want to take over control of the conversation to divert the speaker from the course of the topic that she is developing. Tannen (1992: 226) notes that one of the traits of many men’s conversational style is

to carry the conversation to a position that allows them to occupy the centre stage, by means of verbal activities such as telling jokes and anecdotes and demonstrating their knowledge. Through this reductive and manipulative use of humour, the interaction becomes a stage on which the men are the showmen and the women are the silenced audience.

We noted earlier that humour has a second function in this interaction: reinforce male camaraderie². Studies about gender usually accept that the female sequences, in groups that are mixed or formed exclusively of women, are usually organised to demonstrate interest, intimacy, and solidarity (Zimmerman & West, 1975; Fishman, 1978; Tannen, 1992; West, Lazar & Kramarae, 1997; Maltz & Borker, 1998). This is what gives the impression, at times incorrect, that women are usually more affectionate. What many studies do not explain is that the opposite of this does not necessarily imply aggressively or masculine hierarchy. In fact, force, competitiveness, and self-sufficiency are only a few particular options among the many possible male projections. In our data we can find fragments where men may demonstrate intimacy through verbal aggression, or where women may be competitive by adopting an affectionate role (Pujolar, 1997: 56). Women, normally, learn to criticise and argue with other women without seeming openly aggressive, without seeming to be “bossy” or “mean”, terms that women use to evaluate the words or actions of others. Bossiness, ordering other people around, is not legitimate because it denies equality. Although the disputes are common, women learn to present their arguments in terms of group needs or of the situational requirements more than in terms of personal power (Maltz & Borker, 1998: 424-25).

Male camaraderie may be created through mechanisms such as humour, verbal aggression, arguments, insults, and verbal dueling (McDowell, 1989; Tannen, 1994; Pujolar, 1997). One case of male camaraderie through humour appears at the end of the interaction, as demonstrated in the following fragment:

Fragment 2. Male camaraderie.

1 Marcos:	bien atención {[dc]ahora maria me llama como tremendo}	1 Marcos:	Attention, please {[dc]now maria calls me like crazy }
2	.. porque descubrió en mi ombligo un día un pe=	2	.. because one day she discovered in my navel a pe=
3 Maria:	=a nivel profundo	3 Maria:	=down deep
4 Marcos:	eso a nivel profundo	4 Marcos:	right, down deep
5	.. en mi ombligo descubrió un día un pegotón negro	5	.. in my navel she discovered one day a black glob
6	(telesférico) de tamaño familiar	6	(cable car) of a familiar size

2 The objective of this camaraderie is the acknowledged interrelationship. The participants have to express their equality and their reciprocal feelings in a friendly or hostile manner (Tannen, 1994:140).

7 María:	.. NO	7 María:	.. NO
8	su ombligo es un pegotón negro	8	his navel is a black glob
	[no es (XX) pegotón]		[it's not (XX) glob]
9 Marcos:	[me:nti::ra]	9 Marcos:	[li:i:e]
10	.. eso es que tiene pelo	10	.. it's that it's hairy
11 María:	tienes el ombligo sucio	11 María:	he has a dirty navel
	[no te lo lavas lo tienes todo negro]		[you don't wash it, you have it all black]
12 Marcos:	[no tengo el ombligo sucio]	12 Marcos:	[I don't have a dirty navel]
13	.. tengo el ombligo peludo	13	.. I have a hairy navel
14 María:	.. no es pelo=	14 María:	.. it's not hair=
15 Marcos:	=como todos los machos	15 Marcos:	=like all males
16	.. es pelo	16	.. it's hair
17 María:	no es pelo	17 María:	it's not hair
18 Marcos:	si me estuve buscando el pegotón que me dijiste que tenia y no lo encontré eh?	18 Marcos:	right, I was looking for the glob that you told me that I had and I didn't find it eh?
19 Antonio:	.. [con voz apenada] (XX) como todos los machos?	19 Antonio:	.. [with ashamed voice] (XX) like all males?
20	[risas generalizadas]	20	[general laughter]
21 Marcos:	an::to::nio que no::	21 Marcos:	an::to::nio no::
22	(XX) no tienes en el ombligo lo tienes en la cabeza eh? yo no	22	(XX) you don't have in your navel what you have on your head eh? not me
23 Antonio:	.. ya	23 Antonio:	.. already

In this example, we encounter two points that are relevant from a discursive point of view: first, the small discussion coded as humoristic between the couple formed by María and Marcos; and second, a male bond is forged between Antonio and Marcos.

In the first lines (1-2, 4-6), Marcos, calling his audience to attention and using decelerated speech, relates that his girlfriend discovered that he had a *black glob in his navel*. Marcos' speech attempts to discredit his girlfriend's claim through exaggeration (6) and, later, declares that this claim is false (9). Marcos defends himself declaring that it was hair and not a *black glob* (10). María continues her attack (11) even adding that Marcos does not bathe. He denies this allegation in 12, reiterating the idea that he has a *ombligo peludo* ("hairy navel") (13), and adding: *como todos los machos.. es pelo* ("like all males.. it's hair") (15-16). This last statement makes Antonio feel excluded since, according to him, he does not have hair in his navel (19). In this part, as in many others throughout the interaction, Antonio's masculinity is called into question, but Marcos, who provoked the situation with his contribution in 15, manages to resolve it in lines 21-22, where in addition to trying to convince Antonio that it's not important, he makes references to his own incipient baldness (22). That is, he not only consoles his friend, but he goes on to discredit himself. Although this fragment is coded as humoristic from the moment that Marcos and María begin their small argument, this alignment of Marcos with Antonio, when he might really have taken advantage of Antonio's statement in line 19 to make fun of him or to place his masculinity in question, is quite curious. Given that the majority

of the conversation is constructed based on joking and making fun of the rest of the participants, it could have been predicted that in this case Marcos would continue with his usual tone of humoristic attacks to attack Antonio's masculinity.

An interpretive analysis of this example leads us to think that from the moment María and Marcos begin their argument, the rest of the fragment must be understood taking this fact into account. Marcos is insulted by his girlfriend and a (conflict) develops between the couple; based on this Marcos delivers a statement that praises his masculinity, but at the same time questions that of his friend Antonio. Marcos' defence of Antonio, from my point of view, is a way of rallying the two men and their masculinity against his girlfriend who has insulted him by saying that he does not bathe (line 11), an activity (that of bathing and of cleanliness in general) that, furthermore, is stereotypically feminine.

It seems, overall, that humour serves, in this case, to defend and bond together the two male participants, without losing the usual tone of the interaction, since in being coded as humour the entire fragment seems to be a performance that compromises no one. At the same time, humour allows certain transgressions, such as the argument between Marcos and María and male camaraderie (which is not very verbally explicit throughout the interaction).

4.2. Discursive strategies with a humoristic aim

Up to this point we have analysed two of the functions of humour in the interaction. At this point we will consider the discursive procedures by means of which male humour is manifested.

Generally, the mechanisms utilised by the two male participants are basically spontaneous funny comments, funny stories, teasing of the participants, jokes, word and voice games, and specific alternation between languages (Spanish/Galician) (Chiaro, 1992; Norrick, 1993; Attardo, 1994; Vigara Tauste, 1994; Siegel, 1995; Torres Sánchez, 1999; Hay, 2000). Due to space limitations we will not analyse each of these, but just those that occur most frequently in this conversation.

The concept of *joke* refers to, as we have mentioned earlier, a sub-genre of intentional humour that moves in the territory of fiction and is defined by comic intentionality, brevity, surprise effect and expected closure (Vigara Tauste, 1994: 24).

The anecdote, in turn, is brief but, in contrast with the joke, is usually established in the realm of reality, its origins are usually identified and comic effect is not always sought (Vigara Tauste, 1994: 26).

Word games have little or nothing to do with experiences or personal evaluations and their goal is to have fun and produce laughter. They consist of using words in the wrong sense, or in a way that deviates from their meanings, or in using two or more words that differ only in a few letters (*Diccionario General de la Lengua Española*, 2000). The regular use of this mechanism aims to present the image of someone willing to suspend the conversational business to make someone

- 13 Antonio: =se ligó=
 14 Maria: =que se ligó a un tío (XX)=
 15 Antonio: =ligó a un macho
 16 ⇔
 17 Marga: bueno eso aún está por ver
 18 Antonio: {[dc]macho ibérico en presentación de la autoridad sobre los ciudadanos del mundo mundial }=
 19
 20 Virginia: =bueno yo (no sabía que era) policía vale?
 21 Sonia: **virxi o día que quedaches con el levaba pendiente?**]
 22 Antonio: [al día siguiente quedó con él?]
 23 ⇔
 24 Doli: lle[vaba un pendiente] el sábado?
 25 Sonia: [**virxina?**]
 26 Marcos: .. A::H
 27 .. AH
 28 Sonia: **levaba o aro?**
 29 Antonio: llevaba el pendiente el domingo?
 30 Doli: .. cállate
 31 <3> no no quedó
 32 tia no digas nada
 33 Marcos: no quedó=
 34 Doli: =todo puede ser utilizado en tu contra
 35 Marcos: .. no quedó?
 36 Rocío: .. no no quedó
 37 Antonio: lo llamó él
 38 .. lo llamó él
 39 Doli: .. (XX) {[f] yo no dije na::da]
 40 Marcos: ahá:: la llamó él
 41 Doli: (XX)
 42 Rocío: cuando te lo dijo (doli)?
 43 Marcos: y cómo (XX) con un extraño
 44 ⇔
 45 Antonio: es que no no=
 46 Marcos: =podía haber sido por la peor coña
 47 .. podía haber sido policía
 48 ⇔
 49 Sonia: bueno vale
 50 Doli: {[f] no digas nada más}
 51 ⇔
 52 Antonio: y qué pasó?
 53 Virginia: {[p]no pasó nada}
 54 ⇔ [silbido con chillidos estridentes por parte de Marcos con la finalidad de torturar auditivamente a las presentes]
 55 Marcos: cuéntanos
- 13 Antonio: =she hooked up with=
 14 Maria: =that she hooked up with a guy (XX)=
 15 Antonio: =hooked up with a male
 16 ⇔
 17 Marga: well, that remains to be seen
 18 Antonio: {[dc]Iberian male in possession of authority over all citizens of the worldwide world }=
 19
 20 Virginia: =well I (I didn't know that he was) the police, OK?
 21 Sonia: **virxi the day that you went out with him was he wearing an earring?**]
 22 Antonio: [the next day she went out with him?]
 23 ⇔
 24 Doli: he[was wearing an earring] saturday?
 25 Sonia: [**virxina?**]
 26 Marcos: .. A::H
 27 .. AH
 28 Sonia: **he was wearing a hoop?**
 29 Antonio: he was wearing an earring sunday?
 30 Doli: .. shut up
 31 <3> no she didn't go out
 32 girl, don't say anything
 33 Marcos: she didn't go out =
 34 Doli: =everything can be used against you
 35 Marcos: .. she didn't go out?
 36 Rocío: .. no, she didn't go out
 37 Antonio: he called her
 38 .. he called her
 39 Doli: .. (XX) {[f] I didn't say any::thing]
 40 Marcos: ahá:: he called her
 41 Doli: (XX)
 42 Rocío: when did she tell you (doli)?
 43 Marcos: and how (XX) with a stranger
 44 ⇔
 45 Antonio: it's that no no=
 46 Marcos: =fuck, it could have been for the worst
 47 .. it could have been police
 48 ⇔
 49 Sonia: well, OK
 50 Doli: {[f] don't say any more}
 51 ⇔
 52 Antonio: and what happened?
 53 Virginia: {[p]nothing happened}
 54 ⇔ [whistle with sharp screeching by Marcos with the goal of auditory torture for all present]
 55 Marcos: tell us

56	<2>	56	<2>
57	Virxinia: o sea mi hermana (me dijo lo mismo)	57	Virxinia: in other words my sister (she told me the same)
58	.. [Marcos repite el molesto silbido de	58	.. [Marcos repeats the same irritating
59	antes, cada vez más agudo]	59	whistle as before, sharper and sharper]
60	AY::	60	AY::
	[risas y voces de chillido juntas]		[laughter and screeching voices
61	Marcos:	61	Marcos: together]
62	Antonio: ha::bla::	62	Antonio: spe::ak::
63	Virxinia: .. habla	63	Virxinia: .. speak
64	jobá marcos	64	jeez marcos
65	Marcos: [nuevo silbido agudo]	65	Marcos: [new sharp whistle]
66	Antonio: habla=	66	Antonio: speak=
67	Sonia: =habla	67	Sonia: =speak
	pobre parece al unha torturada		poor thing she seems like a tortured victim
68	[risa de Sonia]	68	[Sonia's laugh]
69	Marcos: que hables	69	Marcos: you better speak
70	Virxinia: imaginaros lo peor	70	Virxinia: imagine the worst
71	Marcos: A::H DIOS	71	Marcos: A::H GOD
72	Antonio: y te lo pensaste	72	Antonio: and you thought to yourself
73	[nuevo silbido de Marcos]	73	[new whistle from Marcos]
74	Maria: tenía [pelos en la] espalda	74	Maria: he had [hair on his] back
75	Marcos: [en serio]	75	Marcos: [really]
76	Antonio: y [lo besaste qué asco]	76	Antonio: and [you kissed it how gross]
77	Maria: [tenía pelos en la espalda]	77	Maria: [he had hairs on his back]
78	Marcos: {[f]dios lo peor	78	Marcos: {[f]god the worst
79	.. le vio los pies]	79	.. he saw her feet]
80	[Antonio y Marcos se lamentan]	80	[Antonio and Marcos set up a lament]
81	Antonio: le vio los pies a virginia	81	Antonio: he saw virginia's feet

In this example, Antonio and Marcos attack Virxinia so that she tells about a date that she had with a guy that she met Saturday night. Antonio begins to narrate to Marcos what he knows about the event starting in line 3 and manages to centre the attention with a slowed-down narrative, filled with repetitions (lines 4 and 9; 13 and 15), shades of meaning (10), metaphorical expressions (18-19) and hyperbolic intensifiers extrapolated from the world of television (mundo mundial, “worldwide world”, line 10). The funniest part of this fragment is produced when Virxinia, after being tortured by shrill whistles on their part (lines 54, 58, 60, 64, 73), says: *imaginaros lo peor* (“imagine the worst”) (70). From this point forward the two young men give their imaginations full rein and emit all kinds of wild ideas accompanied by a theatrical tone: *y lo besaste qué asco* (“and she kissed it how gross”) (76), *le vio los pies a virginia* (“he saw virginia’s feet”) (81). The teasing that Virxinia suffers in this fragment is evident, and probably has to do with the fact that Marcos and Antonio were bothered by the fact that they were not in the know about this story, while the others were.

Furthermore, the whistle in this example (54, 58, 64, 73) is a masculine paralinguistic act that functions as both transgression and aggression (López & Morant, 1991; Pearson et al., 1993). It is an auditory signal similar to the aggressive shout defined by Poyatos (1994: 117), and that may have the goal of physical attack, threat, intimidation, and attack. In this part the two young men use a shrill whistle to torture Virxinia and oblige her to talk. This sound manages to bother all present (59 and 63) and in the end Virxinia ends up confessing an *imaginarios lo peor* (“imagine the worst”) (70) that momentarily calms Marcos and Antonio.

We also observe that the story keeps ascending gradually until it reaches its climax. The whole beginning process of the interrogation leads in the last lines to the success of the male initiative: Virxinia’s confession and her later “punishment” by means of the mocking and teasing of her companions. We attend, therefore, a play that is set based on the stereotyped genre of police interrogations: constant questions (lines 2, 11, 12, 22, 29, 35, 52), tortures (54, 58, 60, 64), denial of the events by the accused (53), even with a mention of the typical phrase from police dramas “don’t say anything, everything can be used against you” (32 and 34), demands to talk (55, 61, 62, 65, 66, 69), complaints of the accused (63), the confession (70) and, finally, her punishment by means of the jokes (76, 78, 79, 81). This performance coded as humour, furthermore, has a clear division of roles between men and women: the men play the role of police torturer, while the women ally with Virxinia to defend her, except in the case of María in 74 and 77. In any case, the success of this fragment is owed to the implicit acceptance on the part of the characters with respect to the distribution, assimilation, and interpretation of each role.

In these cases, the play acting becomes a social act in which the performer (or performers) becomes, in turn, an actor observed and judged by his or her performance and the person upon whom the success of the performance depends; although the public, as occurs in this case, may interrupt at any moment, frustrating the communicative act or completing the playful performance, even reinforcing the comic effect of the joke. Vigara Tauste introduces the concept of “jokes-with-accomplice” (1994: 82) to refer to those cases where the accomplice is the receiver who definitively resolves the joke (double motive for laughter: at the joke and at oneself). In our example Virxinia, with her revelation in 70, enters into the humoristic game of Antonio and Marcos upon offering them a response whose content is suggestive and open to any interpretation. Finally, this response provokes the crowning moment of the fragment: the resolution of the case in humoristic code.

The terminology used by Goffman to refer to the analogies between the normal scenes of interactions lived by their subjects and what happens in the theatrical representations can be applied to the analysis of this and the following segments. Goffman (1967, 1971) refers to face to face interaction as a scenario in which the actors/actresses interpret their roles and project their personalities. Consider that day to day conversations are like theatrical representations in which the role of the actor

and the audience are continually interchanging as a function of the progress of the conversation. The notion of *frame*³ also helps in understanding the difference between an activity conducted seriously and the same activity made into a joke (for example, pretending to argue or that an interrogation is taking place); what marks the difference is precisely setting one frame instead of another (Wolf, 1994: 40). All of these notions (scenario, interpretation, actors, audience) seem to us to be very useful for our analysis, since by means of this theatrical language Goffman notes that the successful staging of a fictitious character implies the use of techniques of reality; it is by means of these same techniques that everyday people sustain their real social situations in their daily life (Goffman, 1971: 271). Further, the successful use of humoristic techniques like those that we analyse in our corpus allows us to understand the complete frame of the interaction. In informal conversations with humoristic goals it is rarely possible to interpret literally what the people say or do (Pujolar, 1997: 27).

Returning to the analysis of our fragment, it must be noted that there is a clear struggle on the part of the young men to obtain information that would place them in conditions of equality with respect to the young women. This is one of the few points in the conversation where on the hierarchical scale, in terms of shared (or not shared) information, the men are clearly at a disadvantage, and they try to obtain this information at any cost.

In this fragment we also observe the attempt of one of the speakers, María, to introduce a joke. When Virxinia pronounces the expression *imaginaros lo peor* (“imagine the worst”) (70), María is the first to give her imagination free rein: *tenía pelos en la espalda* (“he had hair on his back”) (74), but, faced with the relative lack of success met by her comment, she repeats it later (77). Nevertheless, nobody laughs at this joke, which is not the case when Marcos says: *le vio los pies* (“he saw her feet”) (79), accompanied in the following line by Antonio in lamenting (80) as if it were a Greek tragedy and they were the chorus. Immediately following, Antonio repeats Marcos’ idea, but with more grotesque intonation: *le vio los pies a virginia* (“he saw virginia’s feet”) (81). Something similar to this occurred in the first fragment, when María pronounced the popular phrase: “four men of the American army”, but it was taken up by her boyfriend Marcos with a slight modification: “four of the best men of the American army”. It is also important to add that while María is indeed the first to add this new context coded as teasing based on what Virxinia has just declared (74), her offence is directed not at her but at the young man with whom she went out and, curiously, making fun of a trait associated with masculine physical identity (having hair on the back or on the chest). In contrast, the young men take advantage of this context to attack Virxinia directly (78, 79, 81).

3 The *frame* is represented by the social actors’ organizational premises of the activity. The situation is constructed in accordance with the principles of organization that govern the events and our subjective implication in them. The *frame* refers to these basic elements (Goffman, 1974: 10).

The last part of the fragment (71-81) is constructed by means of the parallel participation of Marcos and Antonio. Between 71 and 72 there is an implicit accord to share the same interpretive frame that can be seen in their almost simultaneous responses after Virginia's declaration in line 70. Finally, between 78-79, 80 and 81 they operate as a duo: in 80 they emit a sound of lamentation together, while in 81 Antonio repeats the beginning of Marcos' sentence (in 79) and completes it.

This is one of the traits that characterise the style of Antonio and Marcos and that we call *contrapuntal conversations* (Watson, 1975). With this expression Watson refers to the simultaneous and cooperative verbal routines used by Hawaiian children when they joke around and tell stories. As a part of these routines, turn-taking does not imply an individual performance, but one of co-participation (Watson, 1975: 55). In our corpus, the result of this style emerges on many occasions, as a *conversational duet* (Tannen, 1994: 61) with a choral or echo effect, which may result in a theatrical performance and which may have a humorous goal.

Sometimes this type of participation may give the impression that there is a struggle or competition to obtain the speech turn, but from our point of view this is more than that. Antonio and Marcos construct their discourse, on many occasions, expecting the ingenious and funny contribution of the other, and in these cases the interruptions and superimpositions of the discourse have a cooperative rather than obstructive goal.

Fragment 4. Contrapuntal conversation.

1 Antonio:	.. [variando la voz] la mousse de chocola:te ⁴	1 Antonio:	.. [changing his voice] the chocola:te mousse
2 Marcos:	.. [imitando también la voz de Antonio] la mousse de chocolate-	2 Marcos:	.. [also imitating Antonio's voice] the chocolate mousse-
3	<2> que luego no era chocolate parecía aque:llo=	3	<2> that later wasn't chocolate it seemed like th:at=
4 Rocío:	=(XX) eh?	4 Rocío:	=(XX) eh?
5 Marcos:	después fue aquel PUDin	5 Marcos:	afterwards it was that PUDding
6	<2> pudinto	6	<2> pudinto
7 Antonio:	NOU .. el pudito NOU=	7 Antonio:	NOU .. the pudito NOU=
8 Doli:	=o pudin estaba hue::o- estaba ho eh?	8 Doli:	=the pudding was goo::o- it was good eh?
9 Marcos:	.. co:n .. (pulmois) de chocolatoín	9 Marcos:	.. wi:th .. (lu:nks) of chocolatoín
10 Antonio:	sí:	10 Antonio:	yes:
11	[risas] [imitando el acento francés] le pu::dé .. cagar al día siguiente	11	[laughter] [imitating French accent] the pu::dé .. shit the next day
12	[risas] <2> el del (doble .. el doble)=	12	[laughter] <2> the of the (double .. the double)=
13 Marcos:	=nuestro nivel de sangre bajó seis litros después de ese pudin	13 Marcos:	=our blood level lowered six litres after that pudding

4 This fragment makes reference to a series of strange desserts that had been prepared for other recent dinners by some female members of the group.

14	<> (XX) se condensó no le funcionaba un brazo	14	<> (XX) it condensed and his ar:m wasn't working
15	a otro no le funcionaba una pierna	15	another one's leg wasn't working
16	[había un grupo de:-]	16	[it was a group of:-]
17 Antonio:	[lumbo:::]]	17 Antonio:	[lumbo:::]]
18	<>	18	<>
19 Marcos:	de pudín (XX)=	19 Marcos:	of pudding (XX)=
20 Antonio:	=esa semana que siguió:::	20 Antonio:	=the next week:::
21	<> a ese fechado día	21	<> on this very day
22 Doli:	.. [hablando con Virxinia]si que estabas	22 Doli:	.. [talking to Virxinia if you were
23 Marcos:	y (XX)	23 Marcos:	and (XX)
24 Antonio:	.. tuve que cambia::r	24 Antonio:	.. I had to chan::ge
25	.. tres veces la tapa del báter	25	.. the toilet lid three times
26	<> porque cagaba auténticos ladrillos de chocolate	26	<> because I was sitting authentic chocolate bricks
27	<> piu:::m [pssss]	27	<> piu:::m [pssss]
28 Maria:	[ofendida porque fue ella la que hizo el pudín](XX) de chocolate]no el pudín=	28 Maria:	[offended because she was the one who had made the pudding](XX) of chocolate]not the pudding=
29 Doli:	=foi o- é verdade que estaba malo	29 Doli:	=it was- and its true that it was bad

I interpret this type of conversation between the two young men as a way for each of them to demonstrate to the other his ingenuity (in a ritual manner and as a verbal challenge), constructing his discourse as a function of the other's; in fact the sequence is constructed and advances by the alternating contributions of the two. Marcos and Antonio operate as a duo. This exchange between the two speakers is marked by several interruptions, superimpositions, and closures (turn changes without a perceptible pause), but with no indication from the speakers that they are bothered by this.

In his first contribution Antonio begins his performance, as he has on many other occasions, by altering his voice (voice game). Later (line 2), Marcos takes up Antonio's contribution, also modifying his voice. He repeats the beginning of Antonio's sentence and finishes it in the following lines, appropriating the speech turn (lines 3, 5 and 6). Immediately following (line 7), Antonio again takes up the focal element of the contribution coming from Marcos después fue aquel PUDIN <2> pudinto ("afterwards it was that PUDding <2> pudinto"). We also see that in this contribution there is neither overlap nor interruption. Antonio continues with the word game: NOU.. el pudito NOU ("NOU.. the pudito NOU"), interrupted shortly thereafter by Doli (8). But this small interruption proceeds unperceived by Marcos (9). We can see that this line completes line 7, even able to corroborate with it by through the internal rhyme of the two: NOU.. el pudito NOU (...) (line 7), co::n.. (pulmois) de chocolatoín ("wi::th .. (lu::ngs) of chocolatoín") (line 9). Both expressions are a deviation of the language. The first seems to imitate English ("nou") and the second French, and idea that can be corroborate in line 11, where Antonio, after affirming what Marcos said earlier: sí ("yes:") (10), continues with the word and voice games,

again in this case through the phonetic imitation of a stereotypical French accent: le pu::dé.. cagar al día siguiente (“the pu::dé .. shit the next day”) (11). Between lines 13 and 16, it is Marcos who takes the speech turn. In line 17 Antonio produces an overlap in order to emit an onomatopoeic sound: umbo:::, that seems to be intended to provide a musical chorus to accompany Marcos’ contribution. Further, we can see that while Marcos is still speaking (19), Antonio does not continue with his narration (20-21, 24-27).

We can compare this fragment with the following case:

Fragment 5. Contrapuntal conversation.

1 Antonio:	{[dc]tú aunque hagas una zapata	1 Antonio	{[dc]you although you make a shoe
2	[gruñido de Marcos]	2	[growling of Marcos]
3	que es una base de hormigón	3	that is a base of concrete
4	.. sobre un [firme]	4	.. on top of a [firm]
5 Marcos:	[o sea] una hormiga la	5 Marcos:	[that is] a fucking
	hostia de tocha=		huge ant=
6 Antonio:	= {[dc]ese firme va a ceder	6 Antonio:	= {[dc]this ground is going to give
			way
7	.. eso se llama (repisar)	7	.. this is called (retread)
8	.. {[dc] si tú edificas encima de ese	8	.. {[dc] if you build on top of that
	firme)		surface)
9 Marcos:	.. que no es firme	9 Marcos:	.. that is not firm
10 Antonio:	.. REpisa	10 Antonio:	.. you RETread
11	.. { [ac] pero puede que aquí	11	.. { [ac] but maybe here
	ha[ya (XX)]		{(XX) }
12 Marcos:	[o sea] pizza y pizza de pizza=	12 Marcos:	[that is] pizza and pizza of pizza=

Here something happens that is similar to the previous case, with the exception that Antonio begins with a half-serious and didactic contribution (lines 1-4, 6-8, 10-11) and Marcos brings out the humorous aspect of his words (5, 9, 12). This type of interaction might remind us of comedy duos where one person plays the serious role and the other manipulates the speech of the first to find the humour in it. These contributions achieve their comic success as a result of the complementary roles taken by the participants. This division of roles is a classic in the circus world (a serious clown and a comic one). They comprise, then, humoristic rituals that have become authentic discursive genres. In the case of this type of contrapuntal conversation, the male duo constitutes a humoristic genre with a clear division and exchange of roles, and whose understanding and definition as this genre assists the listener to limit the interpretative possibilities of the utterances, as they understand them as a specific genre (Calsamiglia & Tusón, 1999: 263).

Tannen (1994: 62) calls this type of simultaneous speech *cooperative overlapping supportive*, demonstrating not domination or power but rather participation, and relating to solidarity. In these contrapuntal fragments, the interruptions and superimpositions are not perceived as violations of the negative

appearance of the speakers, but rather as an exaltation of their positive appearance, making it understood that the others involve themselves with them. This constitutes an exercise of solidarity resulting from the contact of styles. Tannen calls “high involvement” those practices in which “speakers who left little or no inter-turn pause, and frequently began speaking while another speaker was already speaking, [...] because the strategies of these speakers place relative priority on the need for positive face, to show involvement” (Tannen, 1994: 63).

This type of contrapuntal practice is similar to *regueifas*, studied by Gabriela Prego (2000: 107-14), playful aggression rituals belonging to the Galician tradition that take place in festival contexts. According to this author, *regueifas* are symbolic forms of expulsion of the tensions produced in daily life. Through them, the *regueifeiros* and the public collectively “exorcize” the aggression accumulated in the festival setting to mitigate the force of the verbal attacks. The *regueifeiros*, from the performance arena of the festival and situated across from each other, they address the public around them. The audience members are listener-addressees who listen and evaluate the performance of the *regueifeiros* with applause or protests. Cultural expressions of the discursive universe of playful verbal confrontation are social mechanisms for improving and reinforcing the social relations among the individuals in the community. “In the *regueifa*, it is expected that the *regueifeiro* criticise, be aggressive, and even be mercilessly insulting. In these playful contexts, the insult is transformed into a joke, by which nobody can feel “seriously attacked”. Criticism, insults, and prying into the personal lives of others are permitted, behaviours that normally are not socially well-considered” (Prego, 2000: 110). Just like in contrapuntal conversations, the structure of the *regueifa* is characterised by the alternate distribution of the contributions and by respect for the opponent’s turn, interrupting is not allowed. In contrast to everyday argument in which insults are exchanged, the participants in the *regueifas* do not continually interrupt each other and there is a sharing of time in the contributions.

Finally, we will analyse the mechanism that we have called voice game, extensively used throughout the entire interaction by the male participants. These games ensure that the conversation often achieves a dimension of staging, in which different characters, public as well as those derived from their own daily life, animals, various sounds, songs, etc. are continually being performed. All of these elements provide a polyphonic aspect to the interaction: other voices are introduced into the same discourse, in such a way that the utterances depend on each other (Calsamiglia & Tusón, 1999: 149).

The voice games that are most commonly used are those that imitate the voice or the meta-language of one of the young women present in the interaction, especially Virxinia and Doli. The selection of these two participants may be related to the fact that they represent for the group two very different female stereotypes. Virxinia, as has already been noted, stands out because of her refinement and good manners (in

clothing, in the way she expresses herself, her eating habits, etc.) and Doli is just the opposite, since she usually exhibits some inappropriate behaviour when we dine together. The distribution of roles made by the male participants obeys the necessity to convert some of the listeners into victims of their jokes through stereotypes or stigmatised traits. See the following brief example:

Fragment 6. Voice game.

1 Antonio:	.. por qué te crees que virginia dijo [imitando su voz] al lado de marcos no::	1 Antonio:	..why don't you believe that Virginia said [imitating her voice] next to marcos no::
2 Doli:	.. e::h oye	2 Doli:	.. e::h oye
3 Noelia:	(yo quería estar) al lado de ella	3 Noelia:	(I wanted to be) next to her
4	[risa] <2>	4	[laughter] <2>
5 Virginia:	[habla y come al mismo tiempo](XX) ahí no me ponía ni de coña	5 Virginia:	[speaks and talks at same time](XX) I'm not sitting there no fucking way
6	.. (XX) ni de coña	6	.. (XX) no fucking way
7	prefiero comer debajo de la mesa [refiriéndose a comer cerca de Antonio]	7	I'd rather eat under the table [referring to eating near Antonio]
8 Antonio:	.. [imitando la voz de Virginia al comer] (XX) (no me ponía)=	8 Antonio:	.. [imitating Virginia voice while eating] (XX) (I'm not sitting)=
9 Marcos:	=e::h tío no no	9 Marcos:	=e::h man no no
10	.. (XX)	10	.. (XX)
11	<2> [imitando la voz de Virginia al comer] (XX) ni de coña	11	<2> [imitating Virginia voice while eating] (XX) no fucking way
12 Antonio:	.. ni de coña eh?	12 Antonio:	.. no fucking way, eh?
13 Marcos:	.. es una postura (central)	13 Marcos:	.. it's a (central) stance
14 Antonio:	.. (XX) echando los cuernos	14 Antonio:	.. (XX) fooling around
15	y que la virginia (XX)	15	and that virginia (XX)
16	<8> (XX)	16	<8> (XX)
17	[a Doli le entra hipo. Antonio empieza a imitarla]	17	[Doli gets the hiccoughs. Antonio begins to imitate her]
18 Doli:	{[f] (XX)}	18 Doli:	{[f] (XX)}
19	<4>	19	<4>
20 Noelia:	(XX) me da igual porque como esto huele a huevo	20 Noelia:	(XX) I don't care because since this one smells like eggs
21	<2> [risa de Doli]	21	<2> [Doli's laugh]
22 Doli:	antonio .. dios (como te odio)	22 Doli:	antonio .. god (how I hate you)
23	<4> [Antonio imita exageradamente el hipo de Doli] <5>	23	<4> [Antonio exaggeratedly imitates Doli's hiccoughs] <5>
24	por favor déjame comer	24	please let me eat
25	[Antonio continúa imitándola] <4>	25	[Antonio keeps imitating her] <4>
26 Antonio:	I::A:::	26 Antonio:	I::A:::
27	<2> el sacacorchos?	27	<2> the corkscrew?
28	trae (el desatasador)	28	bring it (the plunger)

First Antonio imitates the voice of Virxinia (voice game) in 1: to this end he emits an excessively high tone to imitate the voice of the women, together with the segment *n::* (in *n::o*), marked by a nasal elongation. Afterwards, Virxinia defends herself from Antonio's jokes (5-7) by claiming that she prefers eating under the table to being next to him. But she makes this comment with her mouth full, breaking the stereotype assigned to her, which provokes the jokes in the next turns (8-12). In 8 Antonio imitates her voice and reproduces Virxinia's comments; interrupted in 9 by Marcos. Marcos allows himself to correct Antonio: *e::h tío no no* ("e::h man no no") (9) and he begins the voice game as he imitates Virxinia eating (11). A few lines later (17-28) it is Doli who becomes the object of this mild teasing, in this case by means of meta-language. Doli gets the hiccoughs (17) and Antonio takes advantage of this to imitate her (23). This game, so bothersome to Doli (*antonio.. dios (cómo te odio)*, "*antonio .. god (how I hate you)*", line 22; *por favor déjame comer, "please let me eat"*, line 23), places Marcos and Antonio at the centre of attention for a few minutes. From our point of view, for the young men these verbal and meta-verbal games constitute a way of making their ingenuity known, while for the young women they constitute an aggression. This is due to the fact that without wanting to, these women also become the centre of attention, but as victims. These games mark a clear hierarchy between the aggressor and the victim, where the men (aggressors) occupy a superior status and the women, in contrast, are sentenced to the role of recipients of the jokes.

The fact that men and women possess different cultural rules for friendly conversation places these rules in conflict when men and women attempt to speak among themselves as friends and equals in an informal conversation. In the social world of the young men, speech is used in three principal ways: to assert their own position of dominance, to attract and maintain the audience and to assert the self when other speakers have the floor (Maltz & Borker, 1998: 426). In this sense, the male humour throughout the interaction serves as an instrument to attain these objectives. The women, in turn, perceiving the conversation as a cooperative dynamics of elaboration and continuity, feel out of place in these practices that have a humoristic goal. As a result they usually adopt the role of the audience, or, as in this case, are also the object of the jokes of the male participants. It is usually noted that those participants who do not respond or are slow in responding to the aggressions, in the form of jokes or teasing, usually receive much more (Lozano Domingo, 1995: 184).

5. Conclusion

Throughout this article we have examined some questions related to humour and gender. Thus, we have analysed two of the functions of the masculine style of humour: on one hand as a strategy for conversational control, and on the other hand as a mechanism to reinforce the bonds among the male participants.

Generally, it is the men who initiate humoristic behaviour in mixed groups, and this humour is usually characterised by jokes that express aggression and hostility. In the interaction recorded we have analysed some of the characteristically male discursive procedures employed in seeking humour, such as teasing, word and voice games and meta-language.

The concept of *joke-telling sessions* (Watson, 1975; Norrick, 1993) serves to define the nature of the interaction recorded. In these sessions, humour ends up being the primary organizational factor, and it frequently assumes the character of a competition in which each succeeding teller tries to outdo the former one (Norrick, 1993: 37). At the same time, many groups develop what Norrick (1993) refers to as *customary joking relationships*, in which making fun and joking are frequent and competitive. These “histories of joking” are very relevant to the relationships among the people involved (Norrick, 1993: 6). Norrick relates this concept to what Tannen (1992) calls *ritual combat strategy*, which she identifies as a characteristic of male style. In these relationships the jokes take the form of verbal attack, competitive word games, mocking, etc. This habitual form of humour in the group may have the function of rapport among the participants, which would explain the apparently positive role of the mocking and sarcasm in their talk exchanges (Norrick, 1993: 44).

Some humoristic sequences can become authentic discursive genres: this is the case in the argument in the second fragment, the police interrogation in the third and the comic duo in the fifth, and may exclusively be understood in the ritual humoristic framework of the group.

In this study, and along another line of analysis, we also observe through several fragments that the women are usually blocked when they try to tell a joke, a funny story, or tease one of the male participants. This is achieved by means of overlaps, interruptions, absence of laughter, and topic changes.

In any case, it is probable that women do not employ male forms of humour simply because they are not the best tool for expressing their communicative goals. Telling jokes is a form of communication perceived as male and, in general, women are reluctant to transgress the perceptions about what is socially appropriate in women’s linguistic behaviour. Male humour has been associated with other traditionally male behaviours, including aggression and domination. In taking on a joking role, a woman would have to violate the model of behaviour normally reserved for her. Further, several studies (Crawford, 1997; Hay, 2000) illustrate that women tend to use humour for the specific function of creating and maintaining solidarity. More precisely, women usually use humour to share personal information among themselves; revealing this information allows the participants in the conversation to get to know the speaker better and to maintain a bond of confidence (Hay, 2000: 738). There is even a type of humour, called “of the harem”, which is produced when women joke among themselves without male presence.

The situation of telling stories demonstrates that status and affective bonds are usually interconnected. Entertaining others is a way of establishing contact with

them and, specifically, telling jokes or joking around can be understood as a form of lavishing attention upon and providing fun for others. The key question, from a gender point of view, is the asymmetry that may be produced when, in mixed groups, women take on the permanent role of audience and never that of narrator (Tannen, 1992: 84-85).

Appendix: Transcription conventions

Normal type	Spanish
Bold	Galician
<u>Underlined</u>	<u>English</u>
<i>Italics</i>	<i>Unidentifiable segments</i>
□	
⌋	Voices overlapping
=	Latching
..	Pause of less than one second
◊	Pause of more than one second
?	Segment ending with interrogative intonation
{[a]}	Higher pitch register
{[b]}	Lower pitch register
{[f]}	<i>Forte</i> , louder volume
{[p]}	<i>Piano</i> , softer volume
{[ac]}	Accelerated, faster tempo
{[dc]}	Decelerated, slower tempo
CAPITALS	Enhanced volume of certain sounds
*	Contrastive phrase accent
:	Sound lengthening
-	Sound or word interrupted or truncated
()	Syllable, word, or segment reconstructed
(XX)	Syllable, word, or segment unintelligible
[]	Various comments of the investigator

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