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Subversive humor in Spanish stand-up comedy

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore subversive humor in Spanish stand-up comedy by analyzing the work of two well-known Spanish female comedians, Eva Hache and Patricia Sornosa. In order to reach this goal, a corpus of these comedians' performances has been collected, comprising a total of 25 monologues, which have been divided into humorous sequences, which come to a total of 76 in the corpus of Eva Hache and 37 for Patricia Sornosa. The qualitative and quantitative analysis has focused on subversive humorous sequences, which has shown that only 22.38% of the sequences from Eva Hache's comic monologues are mainly built around subverting the status quo, whereas Patricia Sornosa challenges the heteronormative discourse in most of her sequences (87.93%). Further, in this case study, we have examined the main linguistic techniques they use when challenging the heteronormative standards, namely the topics, targets, discourse strategies and linguistic cues used to generate a subversive effect. Findings show that both comics use subversive humor but in different ways because of contextual constraints. Whilst Patricia Sornosa offers an overt critique, Eva Hache disparages in a subtler manner even when teasing and undermining male power.

Keywords: subversive humor, gender, stand-up comedy, discourse strategy, target

1 Introduction

There is an undeniable burgeoning interest in humor discourse from a gender perspective and research on this issue has revealed some fascinating results.¹ However, despite the developing literature on humor and gender, there has been little research into Spanish female stand-up discourse. Thus, in order to

¹ A good example of this could be all the works included in the edited volume by Chiaro and Baccolini (2014).

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bridge this gap, the aim of this paper is to examine the way subversive humor is used in Spanish stand-up comedy and to study the effects achieved through this type of discourse. To this end, we will examine two corpora of subversive sequences performed by the female comedians, Eva Hache and Patricia Sornosa.

It is worth noticing that feminist subversive humor in Spanish did not appear until the 90's, when a wave of misogynist jokes was answered back with a spontaneous movement of subversive humor that started to challenge the status quo. One of the first female comedians who promoted this movement was Eva Hache, who has been one of the highest-profile female comedians on Spanish television for the last twenty years. She is known for presenting the late night shows *Noche Hache*, the *Comedy Club* and for hosting two consecutive Goya Awards ceremonies (2012 and 2013). Similarly, Patricia Sornosa has emerged as the most prominent female voice in alternative Spanish comedy. She identifies herself as an outright feminist and admits inter-weaving the feminist perspective into her stage performance and being aware that her position as a comedian helps her to put forward some of the major problems women are suffering in this day and age.

As an initial hypothesis, we will try to find out if female comedians are aware of their capacity to manipulate and shape their gender identity through discourse strategies that are specific to stand-up comedy. Additionally, as a second general hypothesis, we expect to demonstrate that even though the main aim of humor is to make us laugh, performances with subversive humor can also function as a coping tool, which humorists may use to create an alternative perspective and even to alter normative power structures (Russell 2002: 8; Willis 2005). Finally, in our third hypothesis, we predict that there could be different degrees of subversive humor because of contextual constraints (Yus 2016; Linares-Bernabéu 2019). In this sense, it is worth pointing out that humor – whether by subversion or reinforcement- is highly context dependent. We argue that there are variables that effect the decisions of the comedians on style when performing a monologue in front of an audience. More caution is taken with the issues addressed in stand-up comedy broadcast on television and the discourse strategies selected, because they may have greater impact than a gig at a theatre has. In these situations, comedians, like Eva Hache, seek to satisfy and amuse the broadest audience and the use of subversive humor may be rather risky. Meanwhile, the shorter physical distance between stage and audience in the clubs hosting Patricia Sornosa shows promotes a distinctive feature of the whole social encounter, namely its informality. This informality makes it possible to tackle controversial subjects, personal facts and to use language that is more colloquial in order to achieve certain effects such as challenging the status quo or raising awareness of social problems.

Consequently, in order to fulfill our goals, Section 2 includes some of the most important notions, from previous research, on subversive humor and gender and its connection with stand-up comedy. Afterwards, the methodology and the main characteristics of the corpora will be presented (Section 3). In Section 4 there is an attempt to examine and discuss our findings in order to verify our hypothesis. On the one hand, a quantitative analysis will help us to observe the different subversive styles of both comedians (Section 4.1) as well as an illustration of the effects subversive sequences (Section 4.2) have will be shown. Finally, in Section 5 the main ideas in this paper will be summarized and conclusions will be drawn about subversive humor in Spanish stand-up comedy.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Gender and humor

According to Holmes and Marra (2010: 10), language plays an important role in constructing gender. In different social contexts, and even at different points in the same interaction, participants emphasize specific facets of their social identities and dimensions of social meaning, including their gender identity and gendered meanings (Cameron 2009; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2007; Meyerhoff 1996; Meyerhoff and Niedzielski 1994). In fact, Crawford (2003: 1413) defines gender as “a system of meanings that influences access to power, status, and material sources.” In this regard, we will follow the social constructionist and performativity perspective proposed by Butler (1990), according to which, gender is seen as a dynamic, socially constructed phenomenon we perform through our actions and attitudes, and consequently also through humorous discourse. This idea has been supported by other scholars, such as Coates (2014: 163), who acknowledges that “humor is used by women and men as a gender construction tool,” or Crawford (2003), who suggests gender identity may be constructed, deconstructed or even co-constructed within humorous contexts.

2.1.1 Subversive humor discourse in female stand-up comedy

Until recently, the main body of research in gender-based humor studies mainly dealt with conversational humor (Hay 2000; Holmes and Marra 2002; Kotthoff 2003, Kotthoff 2006; Coates 2014; Alvarado 2013, Alvarado 2016). However, because performance humor entails forms of planned humorous discourse

such as stand-up comedy, humorous literature, TV sitcoms, comic strips, or comedy films (Martin 2014: 123), behind which there has been meticulous planning in order to achieve a certain effect, we find that this type of humor is worth examining in terms of gender construction through humorous language.

Stand-up comedy is an illustrative example of performance humor used by female humorists to tackle gender issues. Despite the fact that stand-up comedy is still a male-dominated genre in this day and age, women in stand-up comedy and the way in which they stand up to the existing norms in their performances on stage has been of interest to some scholars. For instance, Gilbert (2004) and Cullen (2015) have shown that female stand-up comedians use the set as a space to explore, perform and subvert normative gender and, consequently, to challenge patriarchal ideas and stereotypes.

This headstrong attitude “invites the audience to question the status quo and perhaps to perform their own authority” (Bing and Scheibman 2014: 29). However, comedians may instead of questioning the status quo, support it. In this regard, Holmes and Marra (2002: 72) draw a distinction between humor that maintains the status quo, which they called *Reinforcing humor*, and humor that challenges or subverts the status quo, labeled as *Subversive*. According to Holmes and Marra (2002: 73):

Subversive humor challenges existing power relationships, whether informal or formal, explicit or implicit; it subverts the status quo. Furthermore, this type of humor tends to be conveyed through discourse strategies which create social distance with the target of the humor and may strengthen bonds with the public.

2.2 Key pragmatic features present in subversive stand-up comedy

In light of the main body of research on subversive humor and stand-up comedy discourse, we have proposed several criteria to analyze and discuss subversive humor in stand-up comedy, which we will do in Section 4. To be specific, we argue that the different topics used by stand-up comedians, their main targets, the discourse strategies used to transmit their message effectively and the linguistic cues chosen contribute towards prompting different subversive effects in a humorous context.

1. Topics: Apart from prompting the audience to laugh and clapping, taboos and deviant topics are also decisive to subverting the status quo (Mintz 1985). According to Sunday and Filani (2018), the subjects they tackle promote the negotiation of the comedians’ interactional and background identities, and also help enhance the common ground between the comedian and the audience. In their resistance to the hegemonic system, both monologists

under analysis use certain topics that have been divided into three main themes: sex and relationships, physical appearance and social issues.

2. Target: Even if there is not always an easily identifiable butt of a joke, most sequences attack or criticize the social hierarchy; in this regard, they focus on an individual (another or themselves), a group or an organization, or society as a whole.
3. Discourse strategies: The humorists use some discursive techniques to transmit their message effectively. Following Rutter (1997, 2001) ideas about the openings, middles and closings of standup routines and in accordance with the works of Hay (1995), Holmes and Marra (2002), Veale et al. (2006), we have examined these strategies that are likely to be appear in the corpus analysis:
 1. Quip: It could be defined as a short, witty, and often ironic, comment about an ongoing action or the topic under discussion.
 2. Wordplay: It is said to be any humorous statement in which humor is derived from word meanings, by the ambiguity created when two different words sound the same or when two words are written the same way. The most typical instance of this would be a pun.
 3. Role-play: This is what Rutter (2001) calls character footing, a stand-up technique in which the comedian quotes another person, typically by using direct speech and paralinguistic signals to parody their speech style. According to Holmes and Marra (2002:79), it is “a discourse strategy which distances the speaker from the person whose words are ‘quoted’, thus emphasizing boundaries between the speaker and the butt of the parody.”
 4. Insult: It is jocular abuse which involves a remark aimed at someone to put them down. According to Holmes and Marra (2002), the aim of this technique is to depict a belligerent stage persona with a non-normative gender identity.
 5. Trumping: This discursive technique could be described as “a form of multi-agent language game that generates its humorous effects through subversion of the linguistic forms of the exchange” (Veale et al. 2006: 306).
 6. Self-deprecation: It is a self-inflicted insult. This is a defense strategy, since if the comedian is the first to point her flaws out, any insults to her will be much less effective.²

² As we will try to demonstrate, with this self-deprecating style there are some remarks that reveal the underlying self-confidence of the comedian (Walker 1988). In fact, when a comedian uses herself as the target of the joke, exposing her weaknesses, she is challenging the existing power structure (Gilbert 2004:167).

7. Anecdote: True or made up amusing stories about the experiences or actions of either the speaker or someone they are acquainted with.
 8. Canned jokes: They are commonly considered to be the prototypical form of verbal humor, produced orally in conversations or published in collections (Attardo 2001; Dynel 2009).
 9. Fantasy: it is the construction of humorous imaginary scenarios or events. This is usually a collaborative activity, in which the participants jointly construct a possible or impossible series of events.
 10. Callbacks: they consist in introducing a subject that was already mentioned earlier in the show at a later point, (Rutter 2001; Chauvin 2017: 175).
 11. Terms of address: When using this strategy, the speaker deliberately chooses a proper name or a pronoun. This has the effect of creating distance from the target (Holmes and Marra 2002).
 12. Taboo: Toilet humor and sexual humor are typical instances of taboos in western culture (Legman 2007). Humor in both cases is derived from the fact that the comedians break some sort of taboo. In our view, the offensiveness shown by females in stand-up comedy can be considered to be a feature of their empowering style.
4. Linguistic cues: The previous discourse strategies are effective due to the use of some linguistic and extralinguistic cues. In the light of previous research (Ruiz-Gurillo 2012, 2014), some elements, referred to as humor markers and indicators, help the monologist reach her goals, which are mainly to trigger laughter and applause, and consequently, to close the jab or punch line. Conceptually, a marker can be described as an element that contributes towards inferring humor, such as intonation, pauses, gestures, discourse markers and evidentials, etc. Likewise, an indicator is an element that could turn into a humorous cue in a specific context (e. g. polysemy, phraseology, hyperbole, simile, etc.). In this regard, we will argue that comedians use some humor markers and indicators not only to amuse, but also to challenge the status quo.
 5. Effects: Apart from making the audience laugh, subversive humor may have other effects. In light of the research of Bing (2004: 22), we have analyzed instances of subversive humor that could be used for different purposes. This include building rapport with the female in-group, increasing their individual status, teasing, undermining masculine power, challenging the status quo, promoting normalization of taboos or even fostering awareness of social problems and helping cope with them.

All these ideas have been summarized in Figure (1):

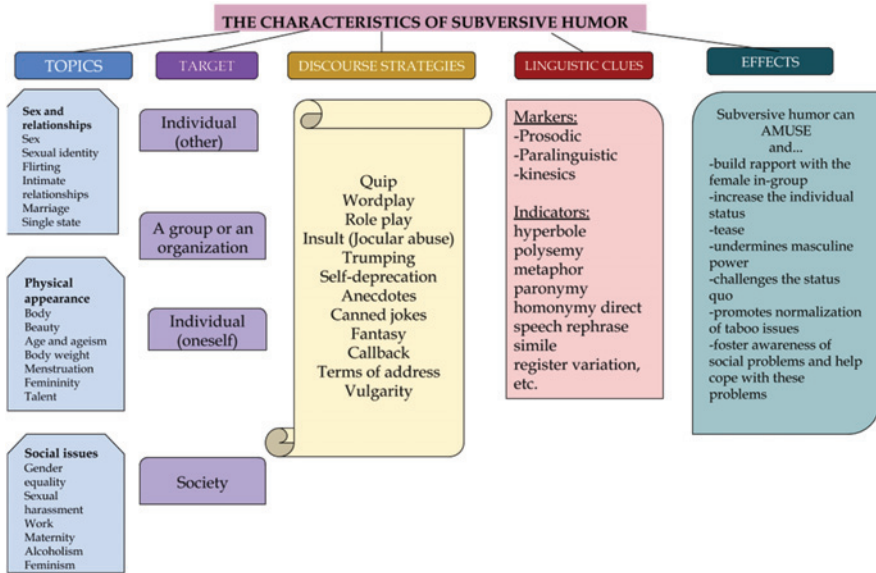


Figure 1: Important features of subversive humor in stand-up comedy.

In short, keeping in mind the main principles that the research literature on performance humor and gender has considered, our own proposal to examine subversive humor in stand-up comedy is as shown below:

3 Methodology

In order to provide a comparative study of subversive humor in female stand-up comedy in Spanish, two different corpora of stand-up comedy discourse, performed by Eva Hache and Patricia Sornosa, have been selected. The fundamental reason why humorous monologues were chosen is that they are samples of subversive gendered humor that make up two corpora of similar length, as they last approximately the same amount of time, which is 96 minutes for the corpus of Eva Hache and 80 minutes for that of Patricia Sornosa. To put it more precisely, the core data for the analysis is made up of 76 humorous sequences from Eva Hache and 37 from Patricia Sornosa, which comes to a total of 24 monologues in the first corpus and only 1 monologue in the second one. This is due to the contextual constraints of the performances of both comedians. The first corpus has been taken from live televised shows recorded between 2011 and 2013, when

Eva Hache was the presenter of *El Club de la Comedia (The Comedy Club)*, a popular TV program in Spain. She used to introduce each guest monologist with a short (4-to-5-minute-long)³ monologue. However, the second corpus has been recorded on a live show at the theatre in 2017. Thus, these contextual constraints explain the difference in the number of monologues analyzed.

In order to make our qualitative analysis more comparable and objective, each monologue was transcribed according to the Val.Es.Co. system,⁴ after which, we divided them into humorous sequences. A humorous sequence is defined as a conversational structure with a structural and topical unit in which the monologist develops a discontinuous intervention (Val.Es.Co 2014: 22–23; Pons 2014) that is disrupted by the laughter and applause of the audience. The sequence ends up with a *jab line* or the final *punch line* of the monologue. Accordingly, a *jab line* appears as a humorous element which is integrated into the humorous plot that makes it easier to understand incongruity, whereas a *punch line* is also a humorous utterance at the close of a monologue (Attardo 2001: 82–83). The analysis of humorous sequences can provide information about the most frequent discourse strategies used in jab- or punch lines.

As pointed out before, this segmentation came to a total of 76 sequences for the Eva Hache corpus and 37 for that of Patricia Sornosa. However, our study, here, will just focus on subversive humorous sequences in which the gender identity of the speakers shapes their speech. In fact, in all the examples selected, gender is salient and this was reflected as a result of the topics, the language used and the target addressed. Thus, as we can see in Table 1, the corpora under analysis consists in 17 sequences out of 76 in the first corpus and 30 out of 37 in the second one.

Table 1: Main data of the corpora.

comedienne	length	monologues	sequences	subversive sequences
Eva Hache	96 minutes	24	76	17
Patricia Sornosa	80 minutes	1	37	30

³ Some aspects of Eva Hache's monologues were previously analyzed in Ruiz-Gurillo (2019a).

⁴ The transcription keys used by Val.Es.Co. (Briz, grupo Val.Es.Co 2002) can be consulted at the website <http://www.valesco.es/sistema.pdf>, some of which are reproduced here: short pause < 0.5 sec (/), average pause [0.5, 1] sec (//), long pause > 1 sec (///), continuation of turn (=), overlaps [], falling intonation (↓), rising intonation (↑), suspended intonation (→), language uttered with lower intensity ^o(^o), no pause between interventions (§), direct speech (italic letters). However, the original Spanish version of all the examples is available for consultation on the website <http://griale.dfelg.ua.es/>.

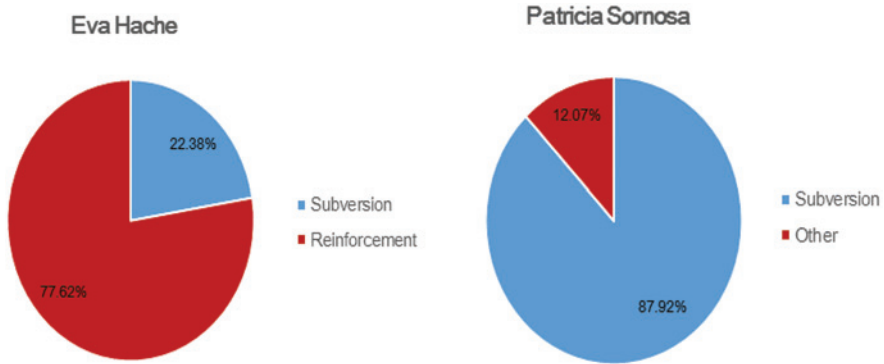


Figure 2: Subversion and reinforcement of the sequences.

Figure 2 shows that, Whereas the sequences of Eva Hache are mainly built around maintaining the status quo (77.62% of the sequences) and subverts it now and then (22.38%), Patricia Sornosa challenges heteronormative discourse mostly (87.93% of the sequences) and the other times she criticizes social groups such as the Government, Catholic Church, etc. These results show how the different ideological stance of these two comedians, as well as the gender identity they perform, influence on the type of sequence.

A good example of these results could be found in the next fragments. In the first one (A), we can observe how Eva Hache reinforces some gender stereotypes in language style; meanwhile, in the second one (B), Patricia Sornosa shows a subversive style and jokes about the short time it takes men to reach orgasm:

(A)

Eva: it is true that other differences exist between a female boss and a male boss↓ such as/ for instance/ that male bosses give ORDERS and female bosses give suggestions

Audience: LAUGHTER

Eva: what is a suggestion? thanks for the question↓ an order↑/ but using er- a soft voice↓ diminutives/ and finishing with *okey boys*?

Audience: LAUGHTER

Eva: yes↓ yes↓ where a guy would say er- nobody will leave until ten today↑ a girl would say⁵ *mm we might leave a little bit more latish today/ okey boys*?

Audience: LAUGHTER

5 With falsetto voice.

(B)

Patricia: women don't like sex less than men/ we want it better

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: better than you usually do it/ bastards

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: maybe I've had bad luck but to me this is usually a man fucking/
look *aah aah aah ah ah*

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: done

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: two minutes later↓ huh? and two minutes after setting about the
matter in hand/ he's telling you *I'm coming/ I'm coming*

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: *where? you're shitting me you had the whole afternoon to run errands*

Audience: LAUGHTER

4 Findings and discussion

4.1 Quantitative analysis

The results found enable us to compare the subversive humor style of both monologists and hence, to study the main techniques they use when challenging the heteronormative standards. Consequently, the following figures show descriptive statistics for the criteria that were taken into account.

Regarding the topics discussed in these sequences, Eva Hache and Patricia Sornosa comment on their observations of sexism in the world, and refer to issues such as intimate relationships, marriage, maternity, sex or feminism. This could be explained by the fact that using humor allows the speaker to deal with controversial issues without sounding offensive (Douglas 1968; Brown and Levinson 1978; Linares-Bernabéu 2018).

However, there is an acute difference between both humorists, as we can see in Figure 3. Indeed, Eva Hache calls cultural values into question by mocking female body stereotypes and sex roles, which explains why most of her sequences deal with everyday social issues such as intimate relationships (25%) and aspects of physical femininity -either the body, beauty, body weight or age and ageism- (32.8%). Patricia Sornosa, however, goes a step further and sex is the topic she addresses mostly (20.5%). Some other issues such as gender equality, sexual identity or feminism are also commented on in the

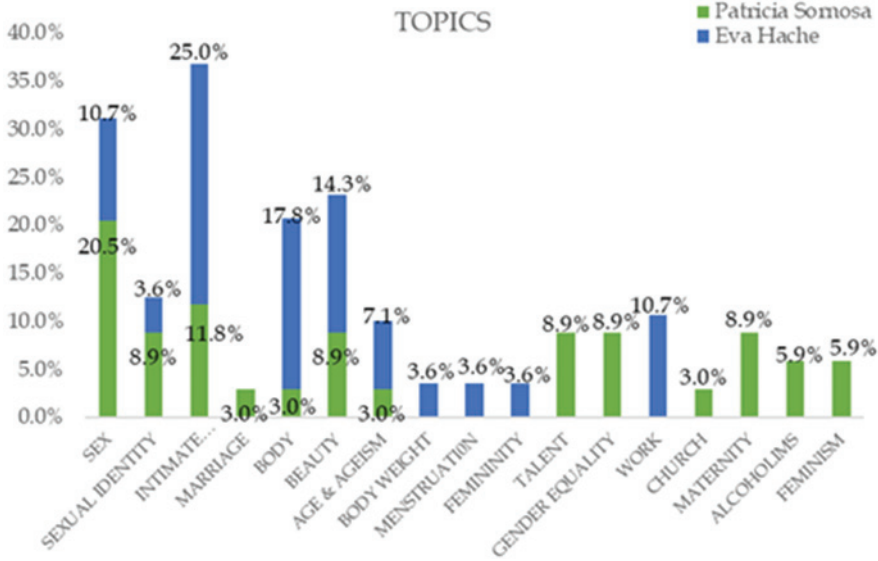


Figure 3: Topics of the sequences.

Patricia Sornosa sequences whilst these are not mentioned at all in the Eva Hache corpus. This can mainly be put down to censorship reasons, regarding the performances of Eva Hache, as her acts were broadcast on TV which means they have huge impact on the general public.

Many female comics use *put down humor*, as the subject or joke-teller receives leverage by sending up their targets (Gilbert 2004). Interestingly, Figure (4) shows both comedians share the same target in the majority of their sequences, namely a group or organization. To put it more precisely, men are the outgroup that is mostly on the receiving end of their jokes. Sometimes, it is only a male individual who is the target, while on other occasions their banter is about patriarchal society. We also find it remarkable that Patricia Sornosa makes use of self-deprecating humor in 16% of sequences out of the whole corpus. This implies that she exposes her main flaws in order to build a rapport with the feminine audience and to prevent others mocking her.

It is undeniable that monologues are discourses that have been carefully planned to trigger laughter and applause. Furthermore, when this genre is thought to be used subversively, we argue that humorists consciously choose certain strategies. For instance, Patricia Sornosa uses different voices and speech styles in order to mock one of the *locutors* (Ducrot 1996; Ruiz-Gurillo

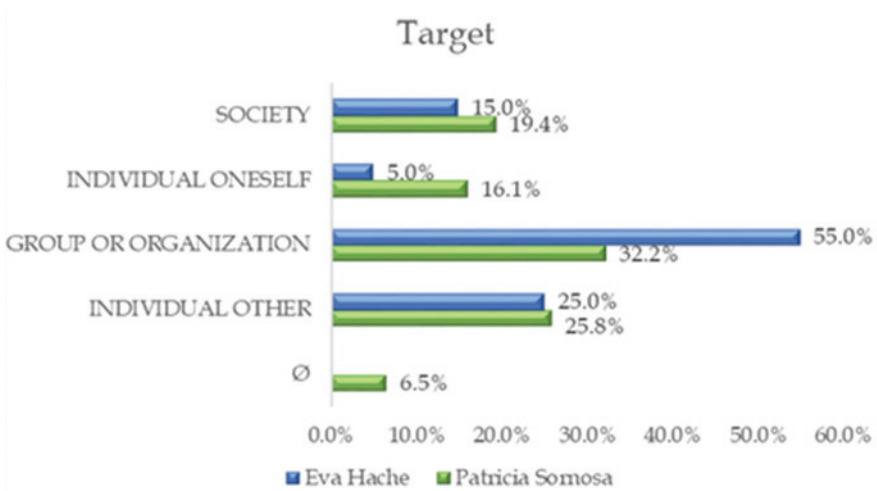


Figure 4: Targets of the sequences.

2019a; Linares-Bernabéu 2020),⁶ that is the target. Her sequences tend to engage the audience through believable stories in which she uses terms of address and role-play to make them more personal. However, Eva Hache also involves the audience while telling true or made up anecdotes and using role-play, though on fewer occasions than Patricia Sornosa. In addition to this, both informants use trumping, quips, wordplay and even vulgarity to reach their goals effectively, as we will see in § 4.2.

4.2 Qualitative analysis of effects in subversive sequences

Considering the above definition of subversive humor and the quantitative analysis of the main comedic routines, our next goal in this section is to explore how performance humor, through discourse, conveys certain subversive effects. Interestingly, most of these effects are closely related to each other. For instance, undermining masculine power may imply, at some point, building a feeling of rapport with the feminine in-group. Likewise, mockery may be connected with undermining male power and with increasing the female individual status.

⁶ In accordance with the polyphonic theory (Ducrot 1996), men are represented as locutors or utterers. As a locutor, a man is responsible of the said when the comedienne uses direct speech. As an utterer, a man is one more voice in the discourse. In fact, there is greater mockery effect when a man acts as a locutor.

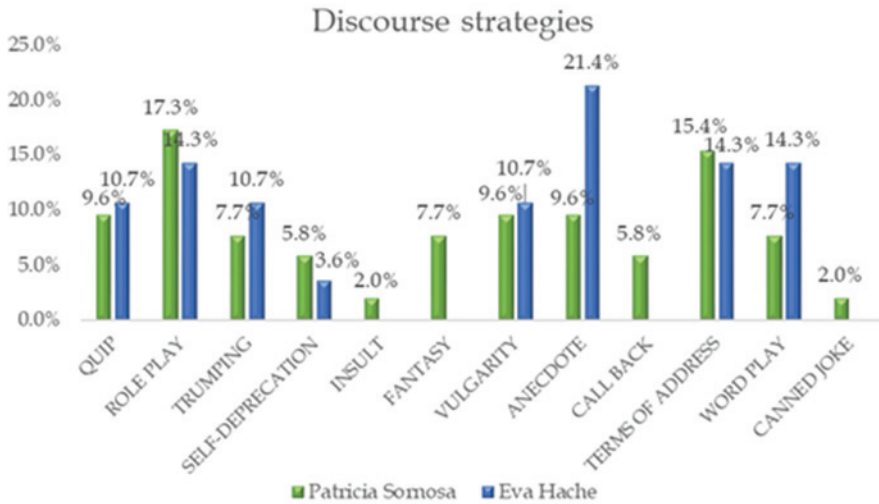


Figure 5: Discourse strategies of the sequences.

Consequently, we will focus on the four main effects that clearly show what subversion means in stand-up comedy, namely, to undermine masculine power, to challenge the status quo, to foster awareness of social problems and help cope with them, and to promote normalization of taboos.

This qualitative analysis will enable us to illustrate the subversive humor styles performed by both comedians as well as to draw attention on the topics, targets, discourse strategies (presented in Figure 5), and the linguistic cues the humorists use to bring about these effects.

4.2.1 Humor undermines masculine power

The female comedians under analysis also parody male dominance in order to undermine their presumed supremacy. In example 1a Eva Hache explains that she is the main breadwinner and that her partner is not the person she fell in love with:

Example 1a.

Eva: how many women have ever/ woken up one day next to that man↑
that used to be a lovable hippie↑ when you met him

AUDIENCE: LAUGHTER

Eva: that when you met him↓ he used to wear a T-shirt with something
you couldn't read because written in Basque

- Audience: LAUGHTER
- Eva: and that communist speech he had that was so attractive/ that you soon realized that all he wanted was to get you in a threesome
- Audience: LAUGHTER
- Eva: but hey↓ you wake up and you don't find him so funny anymore/ you say *well*↓ *I might find him funnier if he had a job*
- Audience: LAUGHTER
- Eva: that'd be nice↓ wouldn't it? but the reason why he doesn't have a job is not because he's not looking for one listen/ no↓ it's because he doesn't BELIEVE in work
- Audience: LAUGHTER
- Eva: I also found it funny when he told me/ listen↓ I told him *don't worry darling/ you stay here nice and comfortable playing on the Playstation*↓ *ok?/ I'll just go and work my ass off*↓ *and work like a dog to support this family*
- Audience: LAUGHTER
- Eva: *now*↓ *I want you to know that I don't believe in God either/ but may he take you away soon*
- Audience: LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE (*Gala LaSexta, LaSexta, March 27, 2011*)

This sequence is supported by discourse strategies such as role-play and self-deprecation. While doing so, the comedian uses direct speech and intentional register variation -from colloquial to a formal one -when she uses the religious expression *may he take you away soon* after having mention a threesome (Ruiz-Gurillo 2013, 2019b). Further, the phraseological unit *work like a dog* (*como puta por rastrojo*) to show she is the one who makes most effort at home, though this expression also shows a self-deprecating humor style (Ruiz-Gurillo 2015). In addition to this, discourse markers such as *listen*, and *wouldn't it?* intonation and gestures make the interlocutor pay more attention to her discourse. While stating that she is the one who brings home the bacon, she presents a new identity and goes beyond gender boundaries and undermines masculine power. Thus, while amusing the audience, she also challenges the stereotypes of female subordination. In short, the linguistic and extralinguistic elements selected for the sequence not only help to undermine masculine power, but also build a rapport with the feminine in-group.

On the other hand, in example 1b Patricia Sornosa mocks cyberbullies on social networks. Vapers are the target of this sequence as they looked down on her, but Patricia Sornosa moves past their criticism and uses these to create a humorous sequence:

Example 1b.

Patricia: do you know what people used to tell me back then / about smokers of electronic cigarettes?// they used to put me in videos and wrote me to- to tell me- I was surprised I was told so many times/ I wouldn't even fuck you with somebody else's dick

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: have you ever heard this?

Audience: yes

Patricia: what a relief I thought I was the only one who had been told that

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: t hey told you that too

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: I was told that a lot/ since I kind of hurt their manHOOD a bit↓ I said no one wanted to fuck them↑ and then one of them told me I wouldn't even fuck you/ with someone else's dick// and he sort of told me that to insult me

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: get this/ he was assuming a situation in which there was a guy that I don't even know↑ that I might not like↑ that that guy wouldn't want to fuck me with someone else's dick→ that/ inexplicably/ should have offended me

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: and no↓ nothing was further from the truth – I was just thankful

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: really

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: *thank you really↓ man/ thanks for not fucking me with somebody else's dick*

Audience: LAUGHTER

In 1b, we find sequence where the comedian undermines masculine power by using trumping. In fact, she uses the insults hurled at her to her own benefit. With a pinch of irony, the speaker rephrases the expression *yo a ti no te follaba ni con la polla de otro* (*I wouldn't even fuck you with someone else's dick*) in order to mock the men who tried to insult her. In short, what the comedian does is to empower herself and to ridicule the insult, so as to diminish the presumed power it has.

4.2.2 Humor challenges the status quo

The stand-up comedians use humor as a tool to empower themselves on stage and challenge the patriarchal status quo. Though we can observe different degrees of subversive humor, because of contextual constraints, Eva Hache is not as revolutionary as Patricia Sornosa in her claims. For instance, in 2a Eva Hache talks about beauty (make up) but interestingly enough, she does not refer to female but to male makeup:

Example 2a.

Eva: don't complain↓ you men↓ men also wear make-up/ and for thousands of years the Egyptians for example/ do you remember when you were at high school?

Audience: LAUGHTER

Eva: high school↓ that thing that came after elementary school

Audience: LAUGHTER

Eva: Egyptians↓ Egyptian pharaohs used to put on make-up- they painted their eyes/ they painted an eye line that would make Mario Vaquerizo⁷ look like an amateur

Audience: LAUGHTER

Eva: society's changed and that's good news because any man/ can wear make-up/ and we think that's fine/ no one's surprised to see a man wearing make-up↓ are they? a good anti-reflection foundation cream/ slightly defined cheekbones↑ lined eyebrows mm? is a man less of a man because he wears make-up? is he less of a man? what he might be is a mime artist about to start begging outside the subway

Audience: LAUGHTER (*El Club de la Comedia, La Sexta*, October 26th, 2012).

In this sequence, Eva Hache raises the point of the fact that men have worn make up since antiquity, and consequently she puts forward a new masculine identity. She uses several quips, which work well thanks to the use of rhetorical questions, hyperbole and simile, as well as the discourse strategy of terms of address when mentioning the Spanish celebrity Mario Vaquerizo. In fact, she plays with the background knowledge the audience has and compares the eyeliners of pharaohs with those of Mario Vaquerizo, who acts as a cultural reference for the Spanish public. Thus, her intention is to make the audience

⁷ Mario Vaquerizo is a famous artist in Spain who always wears make-up.

visualize this in order to challenge the patriarchal believe that men do not make up.

Likewise, in example 2b Patricia Sornosa overtly criticizes the common preconception that it is the duty of all women to give birth and be good housewives and mothers:

Example 2b.

Patricia: well if you're already a woman like me/ you're 40 years old/ that's what I am and you still don't have CHILDREN[↑]// any- any at all[↓] huh? ANYONE believes they have the right to tell you that disgusting expression// *the rice will be overcooked*

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: the rice will be overcooked? you couldn't get any more DISGUSTINGLY SEXIST/ shit! why is it that even that in idioms you have to have us cooking?

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: not only do they make you cook/ but they don't trust you to do it well either and keep tabs on you[↓] huh?/ and they give you instructions[↑] ((and they tell you)) *be careful there- be careful you're overcooking the rice*

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: *I haven't cooked rice IN MY FUCKING LIFE/ but still he knows you're going to overcook it→ do something / DO SOMETHING/stir it/ fuck it/ do something with the rice*

Audience: LAUGHTER

In example 2b, the comedian uses trumping and deconstructs the sexist phraseological unit *se te va a pasar el arroz* (literally 'your rice is going to be overcooked' which could be translated as 'your biological clock is ticking'). She also uses role-play with a stereotypically masculine speech style as a strategy for the banter on men who carry such sexist views. In this way, she presents a new female identity that is not linked to motherhood. Further, when Patricia Sornosa speaks like a man, she uses prosodic markers such as intonation, paralinguistic features such as speaking harshly and non-verbal resources like masculine manners and gestures in order to mock this stereotypical behavior. Furthermore, her body language along with her tone challenge the constraints on female sex roles, as we can appreciate in the last intervention when she mocks the male discourse "*I haven't cooked rice IN MY FUCKING LIFE/ but still he knows you're going to overcook it→ do something/DO SOMETHING/stir it/ fuck it/ do something with the rice.*"

4.2.3 Humor fosters awareness of social problems and helps cope with them

Humor in stand-up comedy serves a variety of functions, such as persuading, entertaining and raising awareness. In example 3a, Eva Hache ironically mentions the Thin Red Line between seduction and sexual harassment:

Example 3a.

Eva: in the game of seduction it's very important to know how to look when to look and HOW MUCH /above all at somebody who is not your partner

Audience: LAUGHTER

Eva: important mm/ if you spot someone who attracts you physically↑ your eyes are naturally drawn to that person/ and that can't be helped↓ neither you↓ nor I↓ nor her↓ nor ANYONE can avoid it because it's human nature to look/ the worst thing is ↑/ if where your eyes go your HANDS follow/ because then it's also human nature for your partner to get very pissed

Audience: LAUGHTER

Eva: and if you can't control your hands/ it's in the nature of the police to arrest you

Audience: LAUGHTER

Eva: there are different levels/ different levels (El Club de la Comedia, LaSexta, November 24th, 2012).

In example 3a, the comedian illustrates the power of eye contact in seduction. However, inappropriate touching is a further step, as it implies sexual harassment and, consequently, men who touch without consent might find themselves under arrest by the Spanish civil guard. The comedian empowers herself and uses trumping with the expression of *it's human nature* as a discourse strategy and a scale between seduction and harassment is the indicators to achieve this effect in a humorous way.

Furthermore, in 3b Patricia Sornosa shows how some Spanish female names are proof of the strong presence of patriarchy in our society:

Example 3b.

Patricia: let's change the subject/ doesn't it seem weird that first names like Pain have been reserved just for women? Isn't it like society wanted to tell us something?

Audience: LAUGHTER

(...)

Patricia: Pain→ don't tell me it's not weird that there are so many women whose name is Pain in this country but there's not EVEN A SINGLE MAN not a single one named- I'm telling you Suffering→

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: but general malaise →

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: or what have you/ it seems I'm getting a cold→

Audience: LAUGHTER

(...)

Patricia: so the dodgy names for them mean cool / Benign things

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: Fruitful

Audience: LAUGHTER

(...)

Patricia: honestly I'd only like a bit of justice/ some equality damn it↓/ I'd like to live in a country where if there are women named Anguish↑ there were also men named Vomit

Audience: LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE

Through an argumentative sequence that targets patriarchal society, the comedian raises awareness of the lack of gender equality in Spanish first names. She makes a point about this sexist reality through the use of role-play, wordplay and, of course, terms of address such as Pain, Benign, or Anguish, which in Spanish are personal names (Dolores, Benigno, or Angustias). These discourse strategies are based on humor linguistic cues, such as synonymy, polysemy, direct speech, intentional register variation, pauses, intonation, and voice intensity. All these linguistic and paralinguistic features also help to evoke laughter and applause in the audience, which are a catharsis process. In other words, the audience laughs to purge its own concerns and anxieties. This sequence is a good example of coping humor, as the humorist suggests imaginary alternatives to oppression and, in this way, she shapes a new female identity and offers women momentary relief and a feeling that others are in the same situation (Hay 2000; Bing 2004).

4.2.4 Humor promotes the normalization of taboo issues

With humor, a specific attitude or viewpoint is always shown, which is aimed at eliciting certain effects from an audience whose social knowledge, in turn, specifies values and topics ripe for ridicule (Meier and Schmitt 2016). The analysis of

our data confirms findings in previous studies in which it is argued that humor is a means to promote the normalization of taboos (Minz 1985; Gilbert 1997). Both female comedians tend to gravitate towards controversial, and sometimes unpopular, topics in the subversive sequences analyzed. However, they are well-known stand-ups, so the audience who attend their shows knows what to expect from them. In example 4a Eva Hache comments on the intersectionality of gender and sexual orientation by overlapping two identities:

Example 4a.

- Eva: it may not seem like it↓ but for me/ going for a bicycle ride was actually a wonderful idea/ however what was not a good idea was to do it with my friend the bicyclist
- Audience: LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE
- Eva: did I say bicyclist?
- Audience: LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE
- Eva: ah! well I said it properly/ bi from bi[sexual and=]
- Audience: [LAUGHTER]
- Eva: = she likes cycling a lot
- Audience: LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE (El Club de la Comedia, LaSexta, January 8th, 2012)

This sequence is worth commenting on because it tackles sexual orientation issues on a TV comedy show and this could help normalize this type of taboos. The comedian uses the strategy of wordplay and plays with the prefix “bi” to create a new word, which combines the meaning of ‘bisexual’ and ‘bicyclist’ and triggers laughter in the audience. Furthermore, the use of terms of reference, alluding her *bicyclist*’ friend, makes the comic speech more personal and acceptable, and therefore this discourse helps the normalization of a taboo issue as bisexuality.

In example 4b, Patricia Sornosa explains what it means to be a single childless woman in today’s society and one of the related taboos, alcoholism:

Example 4b.

- Patricia: well↓ I told you already that I don’t want to have children↑/ but unfortunately↑/ I’m experiencing the most traumatic event of pregnancy (2”) I gave up drinking
- Audience: LAUGHTER
- Patricia: yes↓ this beer is non-alcoholic zero huh? beer↓ in a manner of speaking
- Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: well it's not that bad- it's not that bad/ but I did give up drinking/
why? (2'') because I used to drink

Audience: LAUGHTER

Audience: a small sachet of sugar

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: Patricia/ from Manises

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: (()) I gave up drinking because I used to drink/ jackass

Audience: LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE

Patricia: I used to drink / otherwise you can't give it up↓ huh?

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: I used to drink a lot and kept on drinking more and more and/
because addictions are like that↓ by their very nature↑ they keep
growing↓ okay? I say it because there are a lot of liars that say *I've
been drinking less and less/* that's a lie↓ then *I've been smoking less
and less* so that's lie↓ then *I've been fucking less and less/* well that's
true

Audience: LAUGHTER

Patricia: one day I went to a haberdashery and I told the shop *assistant
listen*↓ *I want a bra/ what colour? black*↓ *what size? ninety*↓ *cup?* I
said *yes*↓ *please a cup of gin and tonic*

Audience: LAUGHTER

Example 4b is a storytelling sequence in which Patricia Sornosa admits being an alcoholic. At the beginning of the sequence, she uses callback to refer to a joke told at the start of her monologue and as she has talked about pregnancy, she says she has experienced the most traumatic feeling of being pregnant, that is to quit drinking. She also makes use of role-play when exposing some of the lies spoken by people in society quips and plays with the polysemy of *copa* (*cup*) as part of a bra and as a container for an alcoholic drink. Consequently, she speaks loud and clear about this taboo while makes the audience laugh. In this respect, both comics tackle several taboo topics in order to deconstruct identities imposed by patriarchal society and reconstructs an alternative one using humor.

5 Concluding remarks

In this paper, we have attempted to show that humor could be used as a sociopragmatic device available to be harnessed for challenging expectations

about feminine behavior and labels in planned discourse. We have explored different types of subversive humor in stand-up comedians, specifically by looking at the performances of Eva Hache and Patricia Sornosa. After reviewing the latest ideas on subversive humor, the corpus has been analyzed quantitatively as well as qualitatively. Subversive humor is understood to be a challenge to the status quo, in which the main topics developed by the comedians, the target, the discourse strategies they use and the effects that this type of humor triggers, orchestrates how the sequences are performed.

Our findings show that we are dealing with two very different type of stand-up comedians. Notwithstanding the fact that amusing is the main and foremost effect for them both, they use subversive humor to achieve other results as well. With Eva Hache, her subversive sequences send up and undermine masculine power in most samples while she hardly hints at challenging the status quo or normalizing taboos. In contrast to this, in the Patricia Sornosa corpus, she prompts the status quo to be challenged as well as building rapport with other females. This fact corroborates our second and third hypothesis, that is, Eva Hache and Patricia Sornosa perform different types of subversive humor and hence they promote two different alternative frameworks to break with the normative system.

In addition, the female comedians under analysis deal with a wide range of different topics such as intimate relationships, sex, body and beauty, although there are differences between them: Eva Hache prefers to talk about intimate relationships and physic feminine aspects, whereas Patricia Sornosa fosters greater subversion by choosing topics that are mainly related to sexual issues. This may confirm our third hypothesis regarding the caution taken with the issues addressed in stand-up comedy broadcast on television.

All in all, the comedians we have discussed in this paper have shown that stand-up comedy has great potential to subvert the heteronormative social norms and shape new gender identities. On concluding this study, we can state emphatically that humorous discourse in Spanish is a great vehicle for challenging gender norms. However, the data analyzed in this study are not too extensive. If more data were collected based on more recordings, future studies could possibly show further differences about the subversive humor styles. In this sense, further research on other female comedians is needed to broaden the scope of knowledge we have on subversive humor in Spanish.

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