

The Pragmatics of Stereotypes in Trevor Noah's Stand-up Comedy Routines

La pragmática de los estereotipos en los monólogos cómicos de Trevor Noah

Autoría

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Abstract

This paper addresses the intricate task of studying humor considering its dependence on cognition, emotions and even human perception. It focuses on the use of stereotypes within verbal humor, having stand-up comedy as the center of the study. Specifically, it examines how Trevor Noah, a South African comedian, utilizes stereotypes to entertain and produce a comic effect in his stand-up comedy. To carry out this study, we used and analyzed a real corpus based on 11 television-mediated stand-up comedy shows. These routines were performed by Noah between 2009 and 2022. Consequently, the study has been based on a mixed methodology, considering the qualitative and quantitative paradigms for its completion. The quantitative paradigm, particular to corpus linguistics, served to quantify the number of occurrences of the different stereotypes in the TREVOR-UP corpus, whereas the qualitative paradigm helped in describing and analyzing the sequences containing stereotypical views in detail. The study and examination of stereotypes showed that 90.3% of the sequences of TREVOR-UP corpus contained a stereotypical reference being the cultural stereotypical views, the most recurrent in the corpus. In addition, the use of race/ethnicity, political, and language stereotypes are frequent and follow the cultural stereotypical views in aiding the construct of Trevor Noah's humorous discourse. The use of the different stereotypical categories was directly connected to the use of a significant amount of the different rhetorical-pragmatic strategies described, focusing on mitigation and direct speech. Lastly, the application of the *Intersecting Circles Model* (ICM) of humorous communication proposed by Francisco Yus in 2013, evidenced that the collective cultural assumptions based on stereotypical instances which in turn, activates the *cultural frame*, is a common practice by the comedian when performing. Accordingly, this showed that the use of the *make-sense frame* + *cultural frame* in ICM altogether, is employed to manipulate and predict the audience's response to the comedian's particular humorous discourse.

Keywords:

pragmatics; verbal humor; discourse analysis; stand-up comedy; stereotypes; Trevor Noah

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Resumen

Este artículo aborda la compleja tarea de estudiar el humor, teniendo en cuenta su dependencia con los procesos cognitivos, las emociones e incluso la percepción humana. Analiza el uso de estereotipos dentro del humor verbal, y en particular, centrándose en la comedia *stand-up*. En concreto, examina cómo Trevor Noah, comediante sudafricano, utiliza los estereotipos para entretener y producir un efecto cómico en su comedia *stand-up*. Para realizar el estudio, utilizamos y analizamos un corpus real basado en 11 programas de comedia *stand-up* mediados por la televisión e interpretados por Noah entre 2009 y 2022. Consecuentemente, el estudio se basó en una metodología mixta, considerando los paradigmas cualitativo y cuantitativo para su realización. El paradigma cuantitativo, propio de la lingüística de corpus, sirvió para cuantificar el número de ocurrencias de los distintos estereotipos en el corpus TREVOR-UP, mientras que el paradigma cualitativo ayudó a describir y analizar detalladamente las secuencias que contienen intervenciones estereotipadas. El estudio y examen de los estereotipos mostró que el 90,3% de las secuencias del corpus TREVOR-UP contenían un estereotipo, siendo los estereotipos culturales, los más recurrentes en el corpus. Además, el uso de estereotipos raciales/étnicos, políticos y relacionados con los idiomas es frecuente, y ayudan a los estereotipos culturales en la construcción del discurso humorístico de Noah. El uso de los distintos estereotipos estaría directamente vinculado al uso, en cantidades significativas, de las distintas estrategias retórico-pragmáticas descritas, centradas en la atenuación y el discurso directo. Por último, al aplicar el modelo humorístico de círculos que se cruzan (ICM, por sus siglas en inglés) propuesto por Francisco Yus en 2013, se evidenció que las suposiciones culturales colectivas basadas en estereotipos que, a su vez, activan el marco cultural, es una práctica común de Noah al actuar. En consecuencia, esto demostró que el uso conjunto del *marco para dar sentido + marco cultural* dentro de dicho modelo se emplea para manipular y predecir la respuesta del público al discurso humorístico del cómico.

Palabras clave:

pragmática; humor verbal; análisis del discurso; comedia *stand-up*; estereotipos; Trevor Noah

1. INTRODUCTION

This study intends to identify the stereotypes that are used by Trevor Noah to entertain his audiences and produce a comic effect through his stand-up comedy. With this in mind, studying humor is not an easy task, in fact, it entails hard work and an immense dose of seriousness. Therefore, it depends on multiple factors such as emotions, cognition, social interactions, and even human perception. Humor is a daily life reality, present in all communicative contexts, and that penetrates all aspects of social life (Lockyer & Pickering 2005; Martin & Kuiper 2016). Blake (2007) argues that humor is brief but in turn, is nurtured by longer forms such as parody, irony, satire and sarcasm, which refer to different manifestations and attitudes within verbal humor (Larkin-Galiñanes 2017).

Likewise, Rappoport (2005) argues that humor based on racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes and taboos has always been a touchy topic to discuss, especially in this era of political correctness. However, nowadays

we have racial and ethnic humor circulating worldwide via films, TV comedy concerts, stand-up performances, the Internet, and comedy clubs. This aids to the presence of black comedians being the center of these racial and ethnic discussions. That is the case of Trevor Noah, a South African comedian that has found stand-up comedy to be his platform to voice his concerns and points of view of today's touchy subjects such as race/ethnicity, identity, and cultural differences. In that sense, this comedian has been the subject of several studies that have approached his comedy from a variety of angles. There have been studies centered in analyzing his comedy from the racial and ethnic point of view (Blackburn 2018, 2023; Donian 2022; Källstig & Death 2021; Mark 2022; Nwankwo, 2022), however, not exactly focusing on the expression of taboo and stereotypes, and the rhetorical-pragmatic strategies within his comedy.

Moreover, other studies have placed particular attention to the political impact of

Noah's comedy (Al-Mas'udi & Hussein 2021), and the gender and sex themes (Adekunle 2021; Ratheiser 2020) which in turn, are displacing a theme such as race and ethnicity, presumed to be vital in his humorous discourse. In addition, from discussions on race, gender, and politics to candid reflections on personal experiences, stand-up comedians wield their craft to dismantle stereotypes and prompt uncomfortable yet necessary conversations. Although, there has been a solid line of studies considering the comedians, their themes, and their strategies to convey humor (Cook 1994; Double 1997, 2005; Gilbert 1997; Glick 2007; Koziski 1984; Limon 2000; Lockyer & Pickering 2005; Mintz 1985; Rutter 2001; Zoglin 2009), works in which stereotypes are deeply analyzed in conjunction to the rhetorical-pragmatic strategies are not very common. Despite the fact that we are not entering a new line of studies, the proposal of this current research is to widen the linguistic field on verbal humor from the construction of the racial/ethnic perspective.

Presumably, the use of themes like race/ethnicity, identity and cultural differences to convey a relatable humorous discourse is recurrent in Trevor Noah's stand-up comedy shows. In other words, the comedian is able to express his individual points of view, acknowledging them as collective perspectives to produce the laughter of the public. On that account, our attention is placed on the limited linguistic studies about the comedian and his use of race/ethnicity to deal with stereotypes and the strategies used to collectively reach the audience and produce the desired laughter. The above examinations lead me to formulate an important research question that is to be answered by carrying out this study: How does Trevor Noah handle stereotypes for humorous purposes? The answer to this question aims to determine how this comedian constructs his comedy through the use of stereotypes and how these are presented and handled in his humorous discourse.

Ultimately, to carry out this research we have proposed to use and analyze a real corpus based on television-mediated stand-up comedy shows, to understand how Trevor Noah conveys his humorous discourse. In the

same way, we aim at exploring the different stereotypes that help the comedian to construct his humorous discourse and how he navigates these topics.

2. VERBAL HUMOR IN THE STAND-UP COMEDY GENRE

2.1. Approach to the studies of verbal humor

The definition of humor has been a task that still presents some challenges to scholars. Larkin-Galiñanes (2017) stated that the concept of humor is simply a very modern one, with its contemporary origins in the 20th century. Nonetheless, this statement loses its validity because it has been proven that the phenomenon of humor has been theorized since Plato (Attardo 1994; Morreall 1987; Piddington 1933). Therefore, humor is an essential element of people's everyday life and relationships which occurs across all contemporary media, in the majority of the institutional formats. It penetrates every aspect of social life and interaction and stands apart from the concept of comedy. In addition, it cannot be confined to a particular genre, kind of narrative, location or occasion for it to occur (Lockyer & Pickering 2005). Although the term humor is that complex to define, it refers to a pragmatic and semantic phenomenon based in an incongruence, in other words, it is the humorous resolution to a reality that is presented as unexpected and incongruent to the interlocutor (Linares Bernabéu 2021).

The categorization of the theories of humor has largely relied on interdisciplinarity. Numerous fields such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, and linguistics have contributed to the study of humor from their unique perspectives. The present paper is interested in analyzing and studying humor from its linguistic point of view. With that in mind, in the conceptualization of the main theories of humor, authors such as Attardo (1994), Larkin-Galiñanes (2017), Raskin (1985), and Ruiz Gurillo (2012) distinguished three main approaches that have tried to explain humor from the linguistic point of view, aligned to the intersectionality of other disciplines



like philosophy and psychology. These three theories are known as: *Superiority Theory*, *Release Theory* and *Incongruity Theory*.

On the one hand, the *Superiority Theory* suggests that humor is a way of expressing feelings of superiority over others. It advises that when laughing at someone else's misfortune or weakness, there is an affirmation of our own superiority and power. On the other hand, the *Release Theory* proposes that humor provides a release or catharsis for pent-up emotions or tension. In addition, this laughter helps release negative emotions and feel more relaxed and calm. In the words of Attardo (1994, p. 50), "[r]elease theories maintain that humor releases tensions, psychic energy, or that humor releases one from inhibitions, conventions and laws." Finally, the *Incongruity Theory* affirms that humor arises from the unexpected or incongruous aspects of a situation or event. When something is not quite as we expect it to be, it can create a moment of surprise and laughter (Suls, 1972).

To apply the theories to the present study, Trevor Noah presents an incongruent reality when trying to explain to the spectators the situation while raising their awareness, with a disguised absurdity. This is in tune with the *Incongruity Theory*, which has an argumentative character aiming to persuade and create awareness through humorous texts. The comedian often pokes fun at himself, his life experiences, and his cultural background in his comedy. He uses his personal flaws and vulnerabilities to create a relatable and endearing comic persona. This is often understood as self-deprecation to create humorous situations, for example, when the comedian jokes about his own accent or his struggles with learning new languages. He becomes the target of the jokes in relation to the *Superiority Theory*, while giving him an empowerment and superior sense of self-criticism. In addition, Noah's humor has a tension-releasing effect, as his feelings and worries are not individual, especially when focusing on issues like race, politics, and interculturality. This latter is proportionally related to the *Release Theory* and its principles.

Although there is a good amount of theories that have tried to explain humor from a

linguistic point of view, they all are missing the commitment to complete or enhance previous proposals. Therefore, there is little to zero intention in creating a global model that helps explain humor in all its manifestations (Ritchie 2018, as cited in Linares Bernabéu 2021, p. 31). Nevertheless, the following four theories exist to explain verbal humor: the *Semantic-Script Theory of Humor*, the *General Theory of Verbal Humor*, *Relevance Theory*, and *Cognitive Linguistics Theory*.

The *Semantic-Script Theory of Humor* (henceforth SSTH) was the precursor of linguistic humor theories. The proposal by Raskin (1985, p. 99, as cited in Attardo, 1994, pp. 197-198) stated that for a text to be considered humoristic it had to be compatible with two different scripts and these scripts have to oppose each other. Therefore, the vision of the theory is mainly semantic, where a binary phenomenon of serious script-humorous script occurs. With that in mind, it is valid to say that the *General Theory of Verbal Humor* (henceforth GTVH) differs with the semantic proposal of SSTH. GTVH encompasses pragmatic, morphological, and phonetic information. This theory's main claim is that jokes may resemble each other and even though GTVH has been contested and revised on several occasions by Ruiz Gurillo (2012, 2014) and Tsakona (2013), the incongruity-resolution proposal of it is vital for the humor studies framework. Moreover, *Cognitive Linguistics Theory* (henceforth CL) has its central interest in the relationship between language and cognitive linguistic concepts in the humor studies framework (Brône 2017). It has its origins in SSTH, endorsed by the script characterization of it. CL takes place in a dynamic mental space, where the hearer is in charge of building cognitive structures that help interpret the humorous discourse or text. Additionally, CL portrays humor as a creative use of language that reflects our experiences and expertise of the world (Veale *et al.* 2006). Although this theory is effortlessly valid for the current paper, there is another model that adjusts better to the research needs and intentionality.

Finally, there is *Relevance Theory* (henceforth RT) that proposes to identify the

“underlying mechanisms, rooted in human psychology, [...] explain[ing] how humans communicate with one another” (Sperber & Wilson 1986, p. 32). It focuses on the inferences that the hearer (audience/public in a stand-up comedy show) makes as they try to identify the communicative intentions of the speaker (the comedian) (Yus 2017, p. 189). Furthermore, RT focuses on understanding the explicit information being communicated (*explicature*) and the information communicated implicitly (*implicature*) together with the access to contextual information (Yus 2017).

Consequently, RT is highly influential in stand-up comedy and in that sense, Yus (2017 p. 195) argues that “[standups] base their effectiveness not so much on manipulations of discourse-specific inferential strategies (though they are also used), but rather on a strategy regarding the *personal* vs. *collective* status of the audience’s mental representations.” This in turn, aligned with the types of jokes described and means that stand-up comedians dismantle, stir, and shake the audience’s beliefs (that are symbolically a synonym of stereotypes and taboos) and the mental representation of particular situations. Accordingly, RT becomes the targeted theory to analyze and conceptualize stand-up comedy, as comedians are constantly reminding the audience that some beliefs (stereotypical or not, and taboo) regarded as personal are actually collective. Inevitably, in the realization of the collectiveness shift from the personal stance rests the audience’s entertainment and amusement that on that account, does not find it offensive but relatable.

2.2. The stand-up comedy genre within verbal humor

Stand-up comedy is a form of comedy in which the performance of the comedian is carried out with few or no props to entertain the audience (Yus 2002). In more detail, as described by Brodie (2014, pp.5-6) “stand-up comedy is a form of talk. It implies a context that allows for reaction, participation, and engagement on the part of those to whom the stand-up comedian is speaking.” As the purpose of this form of talk is to entertain,

the aim is laughter through verbal play and by using humor. Therefore, humor in stand-up comedy is an obligatory feature of the genre. Stand-up comedy has been described as the purest form of comic performance, due to the simplicity of the process between the comic and the audience. The format of the genre encourages critical thinking and analysis of the meanings and messages received.

2.2.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF STAND-UP COMEDY

Stand-up comedy responds to a narrative or argumentative structure (Ruiz Gurillo 2019). All the monologues in the corpus are filmed shows and/or short youtube videos, therefore, the structure of them vary to those presented in live venues or as live performances. According to Ruiz Gurillo (2013a), the stand-up comedy performed in a televised setting has a defined structure which includes an introduction, a body of the show, and a closing. The shows in the TREVOR-UP corpus were first live performances. However, access to them was through an audio-visual medium (Netflix/youtube platform). Therefore, the analysis of the corpus is done considering film stand-up comedy structure.

According to Almaula (2015) the film medium showcases professional stand-up comics whilst television shows work with amateur stand-up comedians who are still learning and trying to reach a wider audience and potential fans. Nonetheless, despite the particularization of the shows contained in the corpus, their structure follows that outlined by Ruiz Gurillo (2019).

In the introductory part of the stand-up show, as Rutter (1997) refers to, the comedian is presented, and the audience applauds to welcome them. In the case of Trevor Noah’s shows, he presents himself. The usual welcoming has its typical phrases and it does not usually include the comedian addressing himself as the audience knows him already. Following the introductory section of the show, we can find the body of the show which is composed of several sequences. Linares Bernabéu (2021) refers to humorous sequences as a series of interventions which discuss a



particular theme and that are interrupted by the audience's laughter and applause. The sequences are composed by a *setup* and *punchline*. The *setup* is the first part of the jokes, having the function to set up the laugh for the audience. In this part the comedian explains the context of their sequence to the audience and it is not funny, essentially, not to laugh, therefore, giving the audience the idea of the comedy material that is being presented. On the other hand, the *punchline* is in charge of the laughing effect within the joke. With the *setup* the comedian tells the story that creates certain expectations, whereas the *punchline* is the surprise that makes the audience laugh (Dean, 2000). Finally, Rutter (1997) identifies a last section referred to as closing, in which the comedian ends his/her monologue, thanks the audience for their attendance and eventually leaves the stage. For the audience, this is the moment to assess the performance through the applause and the cheering to the performer.

2.2.2. FEATURES OF STAND-UP COMEDY DISCOURSE: RHETORICAL-PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES

One of the premises guiding the study is that stand-up comedians use rhetorical-pragmatic strategies to mitigate or intensify the humorous discourse, considering their interaction and relation with the audience. In that sense, this paper pretends to analyze some of the rhetorical-pragmatic strategies that are key for the comedian to deliver his humorous discourse effectively.

We first briefly analyze irony. Verbal irony is the linguistic creation of a speaker expressing in some way an attitude, proposition, stance or description with regard to objective reality, which somehow results being the contrary of that reality (Colston, 2017). Humor and irony are connected (Alvarado Ortega 2009; Attardo 2001b; Dynel 2018; Colston 2017; Yus 2000) for which we center our research on humorous irony. Dynel (2018) states that irony is humorous when there is the intention in creating a comic effect and there exists a sincere assessment.

The second strategy with an immense validity for the research is role play. By using

this strategy the comedian is able to imitate and perform using different voices, accents, and languages. This is, in turn, the catalyst for the comedian to stand in and defend different ideological positions, and points of view from a voice change. These voice changes defined by Rutter¹ (2001) help to understand and recognize different characters within the stand-up but also aid in successfully delivering the humorous discourse. This strategy has an explicit relation with direct speech and it is used as an underlying strategy in stand-up. As Ruiz Gurillo (2013b, 2019) states, direct speech is influenced by linguistic and prosodic elements that help unfold the comic effect.

On the other hand, there is mitigation and its pragmatic connotation which has been widely studied (Zadeh 1965; Lakoff 1973; Holmes 1984; Fraser 1980; Briz Gómez 1995, 2007; Bravo 1993; Albelda Marco 2008, 2010; Albelda Marco & Cestero Mancera 2011). Mitigation refers to the argumentative strategic activity which weakens the illocutionary force and the role of the participants in communication to successfully achieve a goal (Briz Gómez & Albelda Marco 2013). In addition, mitigation is a linguistic mechanism related to efficiency, as it provides the speaker (comedian) with the listener's (audience) acceptance of the comedian's arguments (Briz Gómez 2007). Mitigation is crucial for comedians, since the use of taboo topics and stereotypes is a constant in their humorous discourse. In that sense, Albelda Marco (2010) affirms that messages with difficult and conflictive topics favor the application of mitigation strategies. This strategy benefits from three fundamental functions: self-protection, prevention, and repairing, which as their names indicate are employed to gain or avoid losing the speaker's image, to protect the speaker's image, and to correct or emend what has been said and repair the image respectively (Bravo 2002; Fuentes Rodríguez 2016; Zimmermann

1 Rutter (2001) distinguishes two voice changes (1) *voice as a costume* and (2) *voice as a prop*. The first one is an intrinsic characteristic of the comedian employed during the entirety of the performance, while the second one is a change in the voice utilized only in particular sequences when he speaks for other characters in the stand-up.

2003). Consequently, these last functions are implemented through the two main tactics of mitigation which are (1) depersonalization² and (2) attenuation³.

Following the mitigation strategies, intensification strategies are rhetorical tools to aid argumentation and persuasion. Briz Gómez (2017) affirms the speaker uses intensifiers to provide credibility, certainty, and truthfulness to their speech and, consequently, gain the attention and acceptance of the listener. Similar to mitigation, intensification possesses three general functions⁴. In addition, this strategy employs several linguistic elements to create a bond with the listener and encourage truthfulness. Some of these elements are hyperboles and superlatives (Albelda Marco & Briz Gómez 2010, pp. 242-243). Applying intensifiers to the speech in stand-up allows the comedian to increase its illocutionary force, to render a more credible and truthful discourse, and to ensure the message is better accepted by the audience.

Lastly, intertextuality, which is not a rhetorical-pragmatic strategy, is a critical term which is variously defined (Allen 2020). It is most commonly understood to mean the dependency of discourse's meaning on a text which was produced earlier. Intertextuality in humor has been broadly discussed (Attardo 1994, 2001a; Kuipers 2009; Norrick 1989, 1993; Tsakona 2011, 2018). The presence of intertextuality in humor happens, at times, without the speaker's realization of the phenomenon (Tsakona 2018). The functions of intertextuality in humor can be related to both incongruity and superiority/aggression theories (Attardo 1994, 2001a;

Raskin 1985). Tsakona (2018, p. 3) explains that intertextuality connects the text which includes the allusion with previous (con)texts, constructed as expected, conventional, and normal, and helps to identify the differences between them. In addition, it marks group boundaries, first, the group deemed as 'superior' because they can make sense of the intertextual references, and second, the 'inferior' group not capable of recognizing and processing the allusion(s), therefore, excluded. The use of intertextuality provides humorous texts that are to be understood by the audience and that leave the comedian with a sense of self-gratification for being able to come up with the allusion (Hlynka & Knupfer 1997; Mazurek-Przybylska 2016; Norrick 1993; Sacks 1974; Sherzer 1985; Tsakona 2018). It is the listener's task to understand the allusion to get close to the comedian, otherwise this may result in the emergence of a distance between them (Tsakona 2018).

2.3. Contextualizing Stereotypes

Stereotyping has been emphasized as an aspect of human social behavior (Vinacke 1957). Therefore, we often act as social, cultural or political critics in a given context. Hence why using stereotypes in different contexts serves particular functions needed by those same contexts (Hilton & von Hippel 1957). The humorous context is a platform to make use of this social aspect of human behavior. The comedians, in those contexts, act as social and cultural critics which entitle them to address sexual or racial stereotypes, among others, during their performance (Gilbert 2004; Morreall 2009).

Most of the themes contained in TREVOR-UP corpus allude to social, racial, and political issues, which definitely help dismantle taboos and harmful stigmas held by society. That is also the case of stereotypes, which Noah uses to humanize, sensibilize and educate his audiences when performing. For Trevor Noah, stereotype dismantlement heavily shapes his comedy, for what since he steps onto the stage his comic persona breaks down South African stereotypes for United States (U.S.) audiences. This performative strategy can be reversed

2 Depersonalization is effective by using generalizations, direct speech, grammatical impersonalization, and agent omission (Albelda Marco & Cestero Mancera 2011; and Briz Gómez & Albelda Marco 2013).

3 Attenuation is effective by using euphemisms, irony, metaphors, apologies, foreign words, etc. (Albelda Marco & Cestero Mancera 2011; and Briz Gómez & Albelda Marco 2013).

4 The three functions proposed in the model (Briz Gómez 2017) of intensification are:

(1) *auto-reafirmación* (self-reaffirmation), (2) *alo-reafirmación* (allo-reaffirmation), and (3) *contra-reafirmación* (counter-reaffirmation).



as he also challenges stereotypes that South Africans hold for the U.S. (Blackburn 2023).

To aid and continue the analysis of the stereotypes, it is paramount to use the Intersecting Circles Model (ICM) proposed by Yus (2013a). Therefore, by using this model, it is implied that “[...] all jokes involve the speaker’s prediction (and /or manipulation) of certain interpretive steps and context accessibility” (Yus, 2013a, p. 9), bringing context to the play one more time. There are three areas in the ICM presented as *Circles*: (a) *make-sense frame*, (b) *cultural frame*, and (c) *utterance interpretation*. In the case of the *make-sense frame* circle, Yus (2013a) refers to the general interpretation of the joke in terms of the scenario portrayed in it. In addition, the *cultural frame* circle presents collective representations on cultural and social stereotypes like sex roles, religion, celebrities, and others. Lastly, the *utterance interpretation* circle conveys the steps followed to give meaningful interpretations to the words in the joke. For the purpose of the study, I focus on the *cultural frame* to make sense of the different stereotypical forms used in the corpus TREVOR-UP. In the following figure are shown the three circles and their respective interactions. The union of the different circles derived in 7⁵ different types of jokes.

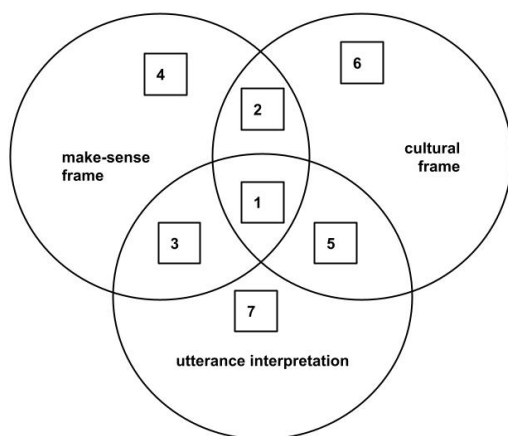


Figure 1. The *Intersecting Circles Model (ICM)* of humorous communication.

5 The 7 types of joke described by Yus (2013a) are as follows: (1) make-sense frame + cultural frame + utterance interpretation; (2) make-sense frame + cultural frame; (3) make-sense frame + utterance interpretation; (4) make-sense frame only; (5) cultural frame + utterance interpretation; (6) cultural frame only; and (7) utterance interpretation only

Following the circle interactional pattern there are 4 types of joke that are of interest for this study to analyze stereotypes and how they are depicted within the joke. Within the taxonomy these are the 4 representational jokes that are part of the circle or intersect with it: (type 1) make-sense frame + cultural frame + utterance interpretation; (type 2) make-sense frame + cultural frame; (type 5) cultural frame + utterance interpretation; (type 6) cultural frame only (Yus 2013a). To exemplify a cultural frame only joke, we have used a joke in which a cultural stereotype about South Africa (S.A.) is being dismantled and challenged.

- (1) TREVOR NOAH: ((normal voice)) You don't understand how many stupid questions I still get (.) people asking me ((American accent)) (.) >Trevor so like coming from Africa is it different for you is it like totally different *have you guys have you guys had like animals in the streets running around*< ((normal voice)) >I'm like guys we don't have animals come on man† what do you take us for< (.) and then a few weeks after I had that fight† (.) South Africa (.) you guys come and hold me back (.) just after I fought with people telling them there's no animals in the streets (.) I see a headline from the Sunday Times (.) zebra blocking traffic on N 1 highway† (.) now I have to go back ((South African accent)) okay you see sometimes (.) but not always (.) sometimes there's a animals (**Sequence GS1**).

This sequence alludes to the stereotypical view that many may hold about Africa as a continent, and consequently, South Africa as a country therein. Once again, it revolves around the ideas of poverty, uncivilized citizens and countries, lack of technology, and of course underdeveloped nations. There is no need to manipulate the joke as it relies on the *cultural frame* to be told and to cause the humorous effect. In addition, he uses the language performative strategies mentioned before, for which he dismantles both stereotypes, the perceptions of Africa held by the U.S., as

well as the perceptions of the U.S. held by the Africans.

It is common the comedian uses personal experiences to soften the stereotypes, that being the case of the next example. Here, he compares sexual intercourse with a typical stand-up comedy performance. This is a next example of a cultural frame only joke⁶.

- (2) TREVOR NOAH: I find comedy is very similar to sex for me (.) um (.) what's exactly like sex when you think about it (.) *with me the comedian playing the role of the man* (.) *and you the audience the role of the woman* ((audience's laughter)) (.) *because it's my job to satisfy you* ((audience's laughter)) (.) *and you just have to sit there* ((laughter and applause from the audience)) (0.5) *and then* (.) *just like sex my success or failure will somehow be determined* (.) *by how much noise you make during my performance* ((laughter from the audience)) (.) which makes it a one-sided affair I feel you know (.) yes yeah I mean maybe you're the quiet type ((making a laughter sound)) (.) I I hope we have magic tonight I hope we create something wonderful (.) I mean for many of us it's our first time together and that means it might be awkward I understand this ((laughter from the audience)) (.) and if that's the case I want you to know that I'll look into your eyes (.) I'll see that I'm freaking you out and I'll stop

⁶ In this example, a particular overlapping of two frames occurs: *make-sense frame* and *cultural frame*. The implied manipulation of how the audience interprets and constructs a situation from what they are being told is only executed for the sake of humor. With the general interpretation of the joke which occurs in the *make-sense frame*, a contradictory remark may be expected (Yus, 2023). Subsequently, the activation of the *make-sense frame* did occur, however the *cultural frame* dominates in the punchline and makes the other (*make-sense*) frame succumbed before its dominance. Yus (2013b) explains that there is a saturation of a particular frame (*make-sense*), that is invalidated at the end of the joke, as we can observe in this example. This is a phenomenon that will require a more adequate space to be analyzed, and it will take dissimilar interpretations.

((laughter from the audience)) (.) I'll stop and I'll flip you back over and we'll go back to the sim(h)plest stuff okay! ((laughter and applause from the audience)) (Sequence AA5b).

In this sequence, not only sexual stereotypes are described but also gender typical stigmas of the role of women and men in life, and in this particular case in sex. Noah restricts the role of women in sex, portraying them as the object that men have to satisfy and please. In this case by dismantling a taboo topic such sex, he then reinforces the stereotypical views of the role of women and men in sex, and in life in general. Nevertheless, the humorous effect is achieved successfully as the stereotype still honors the mentality and reasoning of 21st century society. Because we tend to laugh at our misfortunes and defects, we definitely laugh at what is taboo and stereotypical, even though it may result in being offensive and/or truthful. In this context the function of humor was to perpetuate the sex stereotype.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Methodological approach

This research has been based on a mixed methodology, considering the qualitative and quantitative approaches for its completion. Although verbal humor studies have been largely carried out from a qualitative perspective, the quantitative paradigm has taken a space in recent studies and consequently, suits the present one. On the one hand, the quantitative paradigm, which is particular to corpus linguistics, serves to quantify the number of occurrences of stereotypes on the corpus. In addition, it helps to examine and determine the frequency of use of the linguistic units and discursive strategies to draw objective conclusions about the results. On the other hand, qualitative research helps in describing and analyzing in detail particular humorous sequences of the different stereotypes present in Noah's stand-ups. This qualitative paradigm benefits from the use of different research techniques such as observational and case studies directly applicable to the present research.



3.2. Trevor Noah, the comedian

The figure of the comedian⁷, especially in stand-ups is highly regarded and therefore, respected. Trevor Noah is the son of a black Xhosa mother and a white Swiss-German father which led him to often refer to himself as “born a crime” (Donian & Holm 2021). He was raised during the horrific apartheid, therefore, his life and work as a comedian has been largely influenced by his upbringing and his racial and ethnic circumstances. This in turn, has defined his comedy as charged with a distinctive strain of racial-like issues which often features heavy accents, caricatures, and in-jokes that are typified by racial stereotypes and taboo topics that do not pass the edge of political correctness or offense. The racial theme of Trevor Noah’s comedy is paramount and builds his show and stand-up comedy immensely (Donian 2022; Hafisa & Hanidar 2020; Källstig & Death 2021; Nwankwo 2022). Moreover, they agree with the idea that his upbringing, ability to speak and be fluent in several languages, and family history have influenced the thematic and direction of his humorous discourse, which not only focuses on race accountability but dwells on political, gender, and cultural issues interrelated to race.

3.3. Corpus TREVOR-UP: general characteristics

The current research is a compound of 11 stand-up comedy shows, ranging from the year 2009 to 2022, and available on Netflix (<https://www.netflix.com/>) and Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/>) platforms. First, we converted all the video material into mp3 files to be used with transcription software. Every audio was automatically transcribed using the Descript transcription software (<https://www.descript.com/>). Once the written version was obtained, the researcher manually carried out a spell check and formatted the text. In particular, the transcription guidelines followed and used are under the Jefferson Transcription System developed by Gail Jefferson in 1963.

⁷ The comedian’s concise biography (Trevor Noah’s) can be found in his official website (<https://www.trevornoah.com>) along with the current world tour with dates and time. Also the link to his autobiography book titled *Born a Crime* is available on his website.

Consequently, the monologues were divided into sequences corresponding to each of the mp3 files. The sequences are understood as a series of turns that talk about a particular topic and that have been interrupted or followed by the audience’s laughs or applause (Linares Bernabéu 2021; Ruiz Gurrillo 2019). In this particular case, they were interrupted by a sudden cut of the audio. The length of the sequences is an average of 7 minutes with 15 seconds. A total of 31 sequences were transcribed, which account for 487 minutes and 11 seconds -8 hours and 112 minutes- and 74953 words. Each sequence is labeled with the abbreviated name of the stand-up comedy show, followed by the number assigned within the corpus, for example, **Sequence CN1**. This sequence in turn, responds to the youtube short video titled *Crazy Normal* (2011) - Attention all Passengers.

In addition, there were 4 particular shows for which the full transcript was available online (<https://scrapsfromtheloft.com/comedy/>). The shows are: (1) *Lost in Translation* (2015), (2) *Afraid of the Dark* (2017), (3) *Son of Patricia* (2018), and (4) *I Wish You Would* (2022). In the case of the full transcript, each is labeled with the abbreviated name of the stand-up comedy show followed by the number 1, for instance, **Sequence AD1**, corresponding to *Afraid of the Dark* (2017). In the case of more than one example within the same sequence, this will be differentiated by common letters as in **Sequence AD1b**.

3.3.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CORPUS

Table 1 shows the time duration, the number of words, and the number of sequences for each of the stand-up comedy shows that are collected in the corpus. The shows slightly differ in the duration of time since some of them were not available online on any other platforms as the ones suggested and used for the present study. For example, *That’s Racist* (2012) only has a duration of 7 minutes and 49 seconds which accounts for a single sequence, while *African American* (2013) has a time length of 51 minutes and 9 seconds, corresponding to 6 sequences.

Table 1. Data of the TREVOR-UP corpus

Stand-up comedy show (year)	Time Length (minutes. seconds)	Number of words	Number of Sequences
<i>The Daywalker</i> (2009)	13.18	1807	1
<i>Crazy Normal</i> (2011)	58.21	5471	5
<i>That's Racist</i> (2012)	7.49	1349	1
<i>African American</i> (2013)	51.09	8818	6
<i>It's my Culture</i> (2013)	43.57	7350	6
<i>Pay Back the Funny</i> (2015)	30.31	5144	4
<i>Lost in Translation</i> (2015)	62	9713	1 (Full transcript)
<i>There's a Gupta on my Stoep</i> (2017)	31.26	4680	4
<i>Afraid of the Dark</i> (2017)	67	9945	1 (Full transcript)
<i>Son of Patricia</i> (2018)	63	10839	1 (Full transcript)
<i>I Wish You Would</i> (2022)	60	9837	1 (Full transcript)
Total	487.11	74953	31

It is vital to highlight that this is a representative sample of Trevor Noah's shows. Some stand-ups and non-stand-up shows are not available on either of the platforms mentioned. The non-availability of other stand-ups is because the comedian is on a worldwide tour at the moment, and the shows will not be available until months after the tour is completed.

stereotypes in the corpus. The 90.3% of the sequences reflect the use of a stereotype, while just 9.7% of them do not contain any references in the use of a stereotype to convey the humorous discourse. Trevor Noah uses storytelling to shed light on stereotypes and challenge them. He frequently employed personal anecdotes to break down stereotypes and dismantle misconceptions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results of the TREVOR-UP Corpus

The construct of stereotypes and their perpetuation frequently occurs within humorous discourse. As stated in section 2 of this study, I will follow the ICM proposed by Yus (2013a, 2023). It is the intention to focus only on the cultural frame and the types of jokes derived from it, as it directly relates to the stereotyping construed of TREVOR-UP corpus.

In analyzing the 31 sequences of the corpus, I found that 28 out of the total of sequences discussed any sort of stereotype. Figure 2 shows the percentage of sequences containing

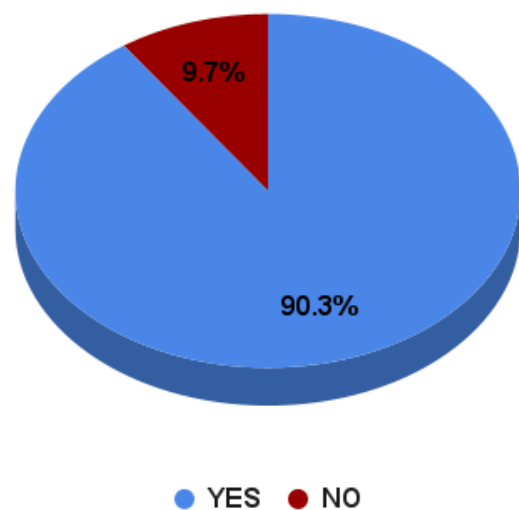


Figure 2. Percentage of sequences containing stereotypes in TREVOR-UP corpus

Rather than simply perpetuating stereotypes, the comedian sought to humanize different cultures, challenge assumptions, and promote understanding. He created a dialogue to foster empathy by humorously addressing critical and sensitive topics and examining the complexities of punctual social issues. In this sense, Noah used 27 types of stereotypes scattered along the 31 sequences of the corpus. The most recurrent stereotypes are cultural (13 times), race/ethnic (11 times), and political (7 times) and language (7 times) with the same amount of recurrences throughout the 31 sequences. These stereotypes are proportional to the main themes of the corpus, in turn evidencing the accentuated use of race/ethnicity as a conductor of the humorous discourse. In addition, there are two more stereotypes of considerable importance for the construction of jokes within the corpus which are nationality (6 times) and accent (6 times) with an equal use in value within the sequences. These last two are linked to cultural and language stereotypes respectively.

In the analysis of the stereotypes found, some of the categorizations share various

common aspects, and therefore, seem to be the same classification or characterization of the type of stereotype. However, as they share some similarities, they also have several differences to better contribute to the analysis of the stereotypes used by the comedian to deliver his humorous discourse. Firstly, *accent* (1) and *language* (2) are connected but used differently. When referring to *accent* we talk about the ability of the comedian to imitate different English accents, therefore, that being the stereotype; while *language* refers to his ability to speak and know several languages (Blackburn 2023) that he uses in his shows, and the stereotypical view held against different languages all over the world. In addition, we determined some differences between *appearance-based* (3) and *body image* (4) categories. *Appearance-based* in the corpus refers to the aesthetically-related looks of an individual and the external factors that influence someone's appearance like trimming your eyebrows to later tattoo them; whereas *body image* alludes to physical characteristics a person was born with, or has developed genetically, for instance,

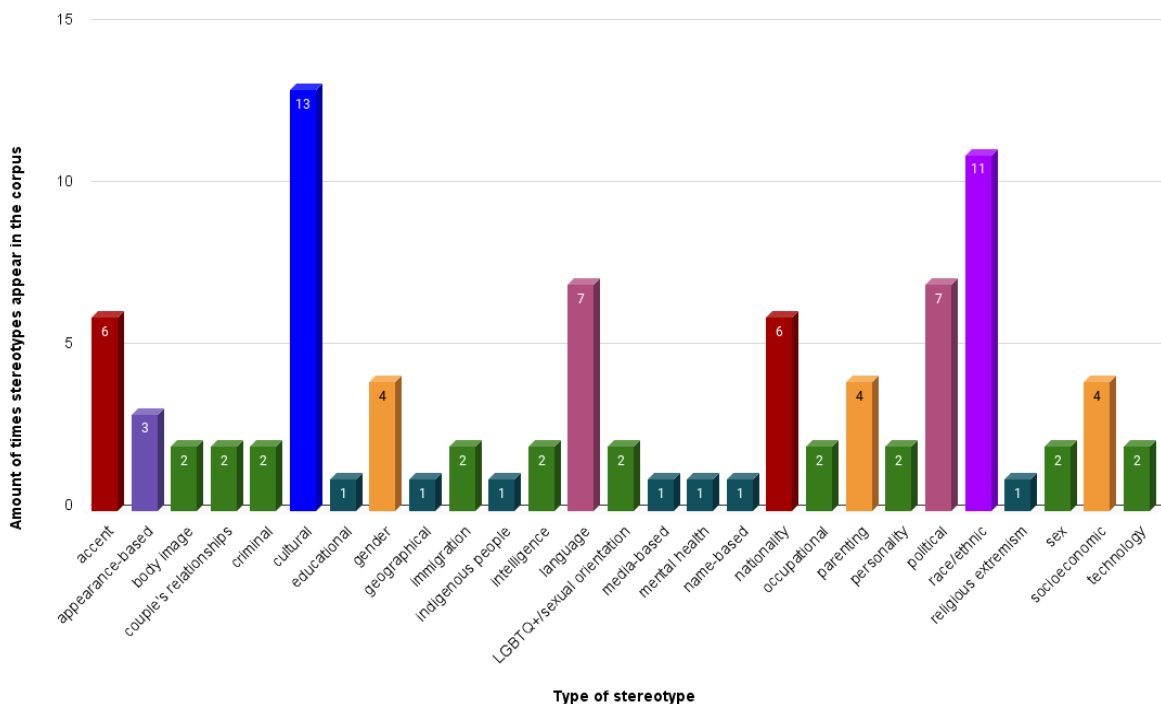


Figure 3. Stereotypes in TREVOR-UP corpus

being overweight or extremely skinny. Furthermore, the difference between the *cultural* (5) stereotype and *indigenous people* (6) is narrow. It mainly relies on *cultural* being a referent to the theme Cultural differences developed in this section, and *indigenous people* refers to the individuals within the culture and not to the culture as an entity. Finally, the stereotypes *occupational* (7) and *socioeconomic* (8), where (7) makes reference to jobs and professions, while socioeconomic only refers to the monetary status of an individual in the sequences.

4.2. Discussion of the relevant stereotypes

4.2.1. CULTURAL STEREOTYPES

Cultural stereotypes are widely held beliefs, assumptions, or generalizations about a particular culture or cultural group. They often oversimplify and categorize a diverse range of people based on their cultural background (Hamilton & Sherman 2014; Hilton & von Hippel 1957). Trevor Noah, when using cultural references, alludes to stereotypical views held in favor of or against a particular group of people, a culture, or an individual. In the following example, the comedian makes reference to Africa as a continent and the assumptions of a life of poverty in the countries of this big continent. The assumptions are compared to starving, malnutrition, homeless people and children being the victims, and at the same time, the face of these representations.

- (3) TREVORNOAH: I'm sitting there enjoying myself (.) watching comedy shows and the next thing you know you just see this horrible village it's just *dirty* and this old rusting buildings and these sad black people and I'm I'm looking I'm like Ooh where's that Cleveland (0.6) when a thing comes up and it's like *Africa* (.) like really WHERE (0.2) and then they show you the starving people and it's always the same they've always got the starving look they always do the pose (0.3) they've always got that like, why-haven't-you-called look. (Sequence AA4).

Trevor Noah shows his amusement with the situation, being surprised by the conditions portrayed and highlighted. His response is to simply wonder where the *horrible village* and *this old rusting building* could have been. In that sense, Noah criticizes Cleveland in the U.S., which has to do with the shared knowledge of the public about the city and its conditions. The most notable insight within the humorous situation is the comparison of Africa to Cleveland in the U.S. By doing so, he removed the power of the media in displaying and characterizing Africa as a continent. It is very common, as he himself explained further on in the sequence, for the media to show a picture of a continent in disarray. Another pragmatic element is the interaction with the audience using rhetorical questions like *where*, which in turn, shields him from critiques and helps to minimize the illocutionary force of the speech act. Furthermore, he employs another strategy to involve the audience by using the shared knowledge of the public to recreate the image that the following statement dictates: *they always got the starving look they always do the pose*. This means that the held beliefs about Africa are overgeneralized.

To take away the weight of the stereotype, he acted in disbelief that the images could be a portrayal of Africa and its people. The last phrase of the sequence described the cultural stereotypical view of the continent by sounding desperate. He employed the dysphemistic phrase *why-haven't-you-called look* to reinforce the assumptions made of a continent in need.

Applying ICM to this sequence, joke type 2 (make-sense frame + cultural frame) is implemented. The activation of both frames helps in creating a better humorous effect. The audience makes sense of the scenario of the joke concluding in the deconstruction of a cultural stereotypical view of the African continent. The cultural frame is precisely the aforementioned which is dismantled by the comedian, however, at the end of the joke gets reinforced by reminding the public those images of the characteristic portrayal of Africa. The comedian invaded the cognitive space of the public by sharing a collective vision of certain reality.



The following example is an allusion to sports and commentators in the U.S. The cultural stereotypical view of U.S. commentators behaving as know-it-alls and practical and deep into games.

- (4) TREVOR NOAH: ((with a foreign male accent)) The players look great (.) it's wonderful (.) what do you think is gonna happen today Martin† ((with a next foreign male accent)) oh nobody knows (0.2) ((laughter)) I can't even remember the last time I saw a game this good Americans will remember:ber Americans will go back to the finest statistic ((with a male American accent)) the last time† a black man scored using his left hand jumping over a mixed race half Indian was in 1967 when the () ((normal voice)) like what† this is madness. (**Sequence AA6**).

By comparing the style in which other sports commentators might talk about the sports events, Noah sends a message of what to expect from U.S. commentators. The pragmatic strategies are vital in the construction of the humorous discourse. We are well aware of the function of direct speech in this sequence, which serves to depersonalize the comedian and in that way, to protect his image in front of the public. This as well, protects the audience as the speaker in the joke could be any one. A next feature is the reiterated use of Noah's performative strategy of imitating all kinds of accents, as role play strategy. In this instance, he changes his accent three times, which helps the audience to create mental images of the imitated speakers, conveying different points of views in the act. With that, he helps mitigate the message of the joke and makes it more relatable while achieving a positive humorous outcome. To avoid falling with his humorous discourse, Noah declares the situation as *madness*. Additionally, with the phrase *Americans will remember*, he reassures the listener that this is a typical trait of U.S. commentators. In this way, the comedian perpetuates this cultural stereotype.

The application of joke type 2 of the ICM is recurrent in this sequence. Therefore,

the audience starts making sense of the scene by contextualizing the situation to later strengthen a stereotype. The U.S. commentators are fact-driven and detail-oriented, when it comes to sports, and that shows in the punchline of the joke.

4.2.2. RACE/ETHNIC STEREOTYPES

The race/ethnic theme which has been recurrent in stereotypes is a common denominator in Trevor Noah's comedy. With this particular stereotype, there occur oversimplified and inaccurate instances that can perpetuate harmful biases and discrimination. In the following two examples attributions made of consistent behaviors of two groups serve to confirm and validate the stereotype. In conclusion, the effect of group stereotypes is that they color our perceptions of individual group members (Wyer & Srull 2014); which in turn is the outcome delivered by the next sequences.

Example 5 depicts a cultural group that is constantly portrayed through biased assumptions. Asian cultures are often the target of harmful stereotypes. The comedian softened the situation by declaring it to be *madness*, in consequence of serving the function of his humorous discourse.

- (5) TREVOR NOAH: He's like ((American accent)) yeah you can't you can't say she's Asian (.) I said ((normal voice)) why not† He's like ((American accent)) yeah cuz that's that's racist (.) I said ((normal voice)) what (.) that she's Asian (.) He's like ((American accent)) nah nah If she's a bad driver and you say she's Asian that's racist I said ((normal voice)) so let me get this straight (.) Asians are not allowed to be called bad drivers (.) it's just not racism in itself (.) everyone else has allowed the world of bad drivers but if I'm driving on the freeway behind an Asian person and they're swerving around and I go this is BAD DRIVER YOU DRIVE LIKE CRAP and I pull up next to them I'm like oh no sorry ((laughter)) (0.2) you're not a bad driver you're just Asian I'm sorry

(.) ((laughter from the public)) Racism in itself (.) it's madness↓(Sequence AA2).

In this sequence, the relation between the taboo and the stereotype is evident, since Noah talks about the ethnic roots of the taboo becoming a stereotype. Pragmatically, the sequence is interesting and of great value for the study. For example, mitigation occurs in several instances and starts with the intensification of the expression *bad driver you drive like crap*. This statement within the joke is the catalyst of the humorous outcome, plagued with a dysphemistic communicative intentionality by using the word *crap*. It possesses a colloquial register that is more amusing for the audience and allows the comedian to be near it. The use of swear words, which is not a common Noah's performative strategy, helps in the mitigation process. This happens since the contextual situation would lead to the use of these words and consequently, the comedian utilizes them to fully engage the audience in context. Moreover, the direct speech does involve the comedian, for what on this occasion he cannot protect his image as he himself is part of the dialogue, and he continues to role play in the sequence. Therefore, the function is not to mitigate but to strengthen the stereotype and intensify the humorous discourse. In fact, the use of the word racism accompanied by *Asian* in the excerpt reinforced the racist discourse. However, by employing and saying that the situation is *madness*, Noah diminishes the impact of the discriminatory stereotype. This last resource is employed in other sequences, meaning it is a performative strategy that aids in protecting himself declaring that any of what has been said could be taken seriously.

In terms of the ICM, the joke follows 6 (cultural frame only) typology. In this sequence, the individual assumptions are held since the stereotype is not totally deconstructed, instead is reinforced. Noah shares his point of view while avoiding the collectivist assumptions made about race and ethnicity. The fact that Asians are bad drivers is not unsaid, it is just redirected and covered up with a fake positive politeness consequence of their race/ethnicity.

Contrary to example 5, the following sequence sought to reinforce the stereotype by the strong negation and emphasis made on the current circumstances. In this example the targeted group are Indians, coincidentally from the same continent of the previous group. At the end of the sequence, Trevor Noah mitigated the impact of the stereotype by getting the target group to make fun of themselves and the stereotypical trait that is being discussed.

- (6) TREVOR NOAH: And the people I dreaded meeting when I had no voice (.) was Indians ((big laughter from the public)) (0.2) no no no Indians are the worst human beings you will ever meet (.) if you're trying to have short conversations (0.2) cause I don't know what it is about Indians but they're the most inquisitive people you will ever come across in your life (.) question after question after question after it's just like a thing in their culture (.) they've just gotta ask questions questions questions questions questions that's why there's no Indian GPS↑ (.) you wouldn't get anywhere (0.2) you would not get anywhere (.) you be fighting with your car ((imitating Indian accent)) take me to Woolworths please why you wanna go to Woolworths here boss ↑ just take me to Woolworths DAMMIT. (Sequence MC3).

The comedian proposes the idea of how talkative Indians might be perceived by others. By using personal experiences and himself as part of the humorous instance, he eases up the tense situation. Nevertheless, the use of phrases like *they're the most inquisitive people you will ever come across in your life*, perpetuates the stereotype and makes the listeners partakers of the situation. From the pragmatic perspective, superlatives are expressing the higher degree of Indians, highlighting and perpetuating a rooted feature of their character. This supports the strengthening of the stereotype, and in turn, exposes the comedian who categorically expresses his discomfort with Indians. The next superlative example adds to the position of the comedian: *they're the most inquisitive*



people you will ever come across in your life. This last instance, underpins Noah's position while intensifying the non-mitigation scenario. Furthermore, there is a repetition of the word *questions*, which makes the audience feel what the comedian means for *most inquisitive* and *worst human beings* to refer to Indians. Pragmatically, this is a strategy to mitigate his humorous discourse which may sound hard and disrespectful. Noah resorts to portraying how Indians will sound by imitating their accent when speaking in English, to be able to deliver direct criticism to the public.

Additionally, the comedian blames the group for the inability of getting a GPS due to the annoyance of the trait or stereotype described, which strengthens the characteristic attribute of the group. Although the use of stereotypical instances by the comedian has been plagued by strong messages, they never fell short at delivering an accurate humorous discourse. The humorous outcome is achieved by comparing Indians with a GPS and then using personification to attribute rational thinking to it.

ICM echoes joke type 6 and reinforces the stereotype. Culturally it serves to blend other stereotypical views as it is language and linguistics with race/ethnicity. The setup serves to contextualize the audience and therefore, prepare them to understand why the stereotype is reinforced and not dismantle on this occasion. The search for humorous effect is activated in the setup, which is later achieved in the punchline along with the activated cultural frame.

4.2.3. LANGUAGE STEREOTYPES

Language is often measured up to an individual or group's intelligence, education, social status, or cultural background based on their manner of speaking. Language is a diverse and multifaceted aspect of human identity, for what individuals should be evaluated based on their merits and character rather than stereotypes. Noah's constant use of this particular stereotype is associated with the themes contained in the corpus. Rather than simplifying the importance of learning languages and language barriers, the

comedian used the platform to sensitize and educate audiences on how not to discriminate against individuals or groups because of their language or language use.

In sequence 7, the comedian plays with the idea of the fear that a particular language may instill in others. Language as a stereotype allows the development of other assumptions such as racism or criminal associations, meaning it is a powerful tool to send different messages, as the following example will show.

- (7) TREVOR NOAH: That's that's half of terror for me (.) is the fact that you don't understand what the person says (.) the guy's speaking Arabic (.) Arabic (.) it puts fear in the hearts of all men ((imitating Arabic)) you never think good things when you hear Arabic↑ (.) yeah we watch we watch too many movies and TV shows (.) like you whenever you hear Arabic (.) then some bad shit happens immediately (.) that's always what happens ((imitating Arabic)) ((imitates explosion)) it's never something cool or sexy it's never like ((imitating sexy Arabic)) ((whooshes)) it's never that↓ (0.2) and so it makes you think it makes you think a certain way I know I know I'm not any different_ (**Sequence LT1b**).

The comedian uses the assumptions that come with Arabic, as a language, to deliver a humorous discourse without losing perspective of the discriminatory aspect of the stereotype. In the quest to mitigate his proposed discourse, he resorts to generalizations such as *you never think good things when you hear Arabic* and *then some bad shit happens immediately* that helps in hiding his own beliefs and persona. These generalizations then reinforce the views held by the collective about Arabic which come along with racist and xenophobic charges. From the pragmatic point of view, swearing, which is not a common trait of this comedian, as said early on, works in favor of reducing the argumentative strength of the statement, however, it does not completely dismantle the stereotype. Additionally, he continues to make use of his best performative strategy -role playing-, which reinforces the language

stereotype and makes the audience feel a certain way.

At the end of the sequence, Noah shakes off the blame of himself and the social pressure of the statements when employing the phrase *I know I know I'm not any different*, which is an apology to mitigate the impact of this stereotype, and reiterate there is not much that can be done about it. To add more, on this occasion he alludes to the public to seek approval and hide behind the collective thinking. Therefore, this sequence serves to toughen the view of the Arabic language and its use, and as a consequence, helps to achieve the humorous effect.

The implementation of ICM results is very interesting in this case, as we observe how the comedian's individual beliefs are collective. Although that is the base of the cultural frame, we encounter the comedian looking for approval of that collective belief. The joke follows type 2 classification, in which the audience makes sense of the context to immediately activate the cultural frame. The audience, influenced by the comedian, concludes that Arabic language continues to be the face of fear and threats.

For the next example, assumptions about an individual or a group based on their use of the language such as their level of intelligence, education, or social status are key to understanding the sequence. In this opportunity, race and ethnicity continue to play a vital role in the humorous discourse and in the construction of the humorous message.

- (8) TREVOR NOAH: ((in an "black" American accent)) You know what I MEAN:† ((laughter and applause from the public)) (0.8) and I was like ((normal voice)) no I don't (0.3) but I love it (.) it's the most amazing use of English I've ever come across in my life just that one word alone (.) just the strength of that (.) nah mean (.) do you know (.) what I mean (.) you nah:: mean: it just (.) it sums it all up (.) doesn't it (.) it's just you know neither question nor statement, (**Sequence AA1**).

The use of this stereotype by the comedian suggests a rooted misconception of African American or black people in the U.S. This type of stereotype in which race/ethnicity and language are combined resorts to the "aural Blackness" concept⁸ (Carpenter 2014) to influence the perceptions of the audience. Consequently, the public forms particular assumptions of the speaker that are hard to change. Additionally, this use comes with the supposition that all black people speak the same, and make poor use of the language. For what, black people are perceived as illiterate, lacking educational means, less intelligent, and a lower social and economic class. Pragmatically, by employing the hyperbole *it's the most amazing use of English I've ever come across in my life*, helps us infer the rhetorical-pragmatic strategy of irony utilized in the phrase. This, in turn, alleviates the semantic charge of the phrase while attaining the humorous effect this early in the joke. Moreover, we are able to understand the comedian's point of view.

In addition, the colloquial nature of the phrase *nah mean* emphasizes the stigma created not only by the use of language of this group, but the accent and intonation of the phrase. The stereotype lost the ability to become a discriminatory instance when Trevor Noah made use of the phrase *no I don't but I love it* in response to *nah mean*. Direct speech then works as a mitigation resource, however, there is no depersonalization as the comedian himself answers the question. In fact, the use of direct speech in role playing as well, does

8 The terms "aural whiteness" and "aural Blackness" proposed by Faedra Chatard Carpenter are a construct for the racial/ethnicity theme. They refer to technical elements of the speech that could indicate racial associations and perceptions. The differences are based on aspects like word choice and dialect that may guide the listener to draw conclusions on the race and/or ethnicity of the speaker (2014, p. 198). This means, there is not a biological factor that influences how a black or white person speaks. Therefore, "aural whiteness" and "aural Blackness" do not depend on the speaker (the comedian in this situation) but on the perceptions and conditioned associations of the listener(s) (audience). As a consequence, the way in which race is culturally constructed by the audience is not Trevor Noah's responsibility, but one of his strategies when performing.



not shield him but exposes his particular view of the situation.

Finally, the application of ICM with joke type 6 (cultural frame only) is the only source of humor of the sequence. There is no need for *make-sense frame* or *utterance interpretation* to reach positive humorous outcomes. This represents an instance in which race/ethnicity as stereotype is essential to convey Trevor Noah's humor.

4.2.4. POLITICAL STEREOTYPES

It's worth noting that comedy is subjective, and individuals may have different interpretations and reactions to the humorous material presented. Political stereotypes focus on the generalizations or assumptions made about individuals or groups based on their political beliefs, affiliations, or ideologies. However, they also focus on the center of political debate and politicians themselves. Trevor Noah uses politicians and the political thematic to bring stereotypical views to discussion, without the need of perpetuating or downsizing the role of politics and politicians in life. The next two examples are a disguised critique of politicians and political institutions at their core.

- (9) TREVOR NOAH: The easiest stuff to write (.) I find is political stuff in South Africa (.) it's too easy now (.) it's become (.) you know (.) like you (.) you give comedians credit you go (.) oh he's so funny he said but we are not we are not we're not geniuses we really aren't like the guys the guys in in Power they do it all for us, (**Sequence CN2**).

In this sequence Trevor Noah strongly criticizes South African politicians and blames them for stealing comedians' jobs by suggesting that politics was the easiest topic to write about in his country. Noah employs direct speech (*oh he's so funny he said*) to shield himself from praising his own profession and therefore, depersonalizing the voices in the audience to mitigate the humorous discourse. Another pragmatic element he resorts to is irony, when admitting that politicians are

taking and doing comedians jobs. Additionally, there is an instance of intertextuality in the phrase *the guys in Power*, which refers to South African politicians. These elements work in favor of mitigating the discourse in the joke and therefore, protecting the audience and the comedian.

These remarks reinforced the stereotypical vision that politicians are not doing their job in a proper manner and consequently, have become the joke, the meme, the humorous discourse themselves. Therefore, when applying the ICM to the sequence, it is a type 5 (cultural frame + utterance interpretation) joke. The cultural frame is quickly activated, which aids in getting the audience into the proper context, to later activate the utterance interpretation frame. In this last frame, the implicit information being communicated is a strong critique to politicians who are taking over the comedians' jobs. Consequently, there is a collective assumption that all politicians are the same, which can be extended to non-South African politicians as well. The stereotype is validated at the end with the ironic statement of the comedian: *they do it all for us*.

- (10) TREVOR NOAH: ((imitating Jacob Zuma's⁹ voice and accent)) Will (0.3) have and (0.2) always will be (.) proud members (.) of the A (0.2) N C¹⁰ (0.3) and as such (.) we are proud supporters (.) of the devil (.) lopment ((laughter from the public)) (0.3) of (.) rural areas (.) and as such it is of utmost impotence (.) to note that 2011 is the year for us all to party (0.2) ((yelling in a celebratory manner in normal voice)) yes ((imitating Jacob Zuma's voice and accent)) cipate (.) and so forth let it not

9 Jacob Zuma is a political figure who served as president of South Africa from 2009 until he resigned under pressure in 2018. He also served as the country's deputy president (1999–2005) and as deputy president (1997–2007) and president (2007–17) of the country's ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC). <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jacob-Zuma>

10 African National Congress (ANC) is a South African political party and black nationalist organization. Founded in 1912 (as the South African Native National Congress), the ANC was long dedicated to the elimination of apartheid. <https://www.britannica.com/summary/African-National-Congress>

be a blame game (.) let us understand that I (.) Jacob Zuma am not a *cunt* (.) try on my own ((laughter and applause from the public)). (Sequence CN3).

This last example shows a stereotypical view of politicians as manipulators by using language and discourse. The speech delivered by Jacob Zuma hints on how politicians deceive with words and take no action. The change of accent and voice by the comedian, as a performative strategy, aids in delivering an accurate representation of this South African politician. From the pragmatic point of view, direct speech is constantly in use, although the depersonalization strategy is not applied. Accordingly, mitigation is not attained but the humorous outcome is still positive and welcome.

Noah uses 4 crucial word plays in this sequence, in which constantly attacks the addresser of the speech. First, he uses *devil-lopment* in conjunction with its previous statement (*proud supporters of*) to portray politicians as bad people. This is a case of a blending in which two words are joined together to serve a more colloquial use of the language with a double intentionality (Blake, 2007). This alludes to politicians' morality and when using the first part of the blend as *devil*. Secondly, he employs the word *impotence* in substitution of the word *importance*. This change has two readings: Zuma's manhood is questioned, as he could be referring to his sexual abilities or that he is not in accordance with certain policies. Thirdly, *party-cipate*, is also a blending used by Noah to mitigate the weight of the speech. This particular instance is interrupted by the comedian in a celebratory manner due to the first reading of the word. Finally, the pronunciation of the first syllable of the word *country* is utilized to question the integrity of the mandatary. In sum, all these puns are performative strategies that are used to mitigate the stereotype and ultimately attain the desired humorous effect.

Resorting to ICM (see figure 1) to further enhance the interpretation of the sequence, deems joke type 5. The collective assumption of politicians being dishonest and manipulators is quickly activated through the cultural frame.

The use of the joke fortifies the stereotype with the aid of disambiguation to highlight some negative aspects attributed to politicians. The utterance interpretation frame is recognizable with the different readings of the word plays used in the sequence. The similarities in pronunciation and the distinguishable pauses in between words are two elements that activate the previous frame, and render two or even more interpretations of the utterances.

Concluding this analytical section and following the ICM cultural frame and its interrelation with the make-sense frame and the utterance interpretation, it has been discovered there is an equal prevalence of stereotypical jokes of type 2 (make-sense frame + cultural frame) and type 6 (cultural frame only) which 3 instances each. In the case of joke type 5 (Cultural frame + utterance interpretation), there are 2 examples corresponding to this type of joke, which are under the political stereotypes.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the use of stereotypes in Trevor Noah's stand-up comedy routines to deliver his humorous discourse. We have evidenced that in the use of stereotypes, cultural stereotypical views are the most recurrent in the corpus, and therefore, the most analyzed categorizations within Noah's discourse. The use of the aforementioned categories was followed by race/ethnic, language and political stereotypes respectively. With the use of cultural stereotypes we evidenced that the rhetorical-pragmatic strategies were scarce with instances of allusion, mitigation and direct speech in connection with a constant use of role playing. When resorting to the race/ethnicity stereotypes, there is a repetitive pattern on the use of the strategies with an emphasis on mitigation. Nevertheless, we saw a use of intensification strategies aided by the linguistic elements of hyperboles and superlatives which created a bond with the audience. Lastly, the language and political stereotypes reinforced the use of allusions, mitigation, intensification and direct speech with an added element of irony and intertextuality not disclosed in the other categories. More



specifically, irony is completely connected to the political stereotypes, which is expected as the topic is more volatile and difficult to address. In turn, irony is used to masquerade instances of reality and crude truths, as well as intertextuality to hide and mitigate some instances of the speech.

Moreover, the performative strategies used by the comedian are among others, the use of accents and dialects to construct his humorous discourse. In this sense, the comedian is constantly role playing to defend different ideological positions, and points of view and in turn, using direct speech as a way to depersonalize his speech to protect his image and that of the audience, and to prevent misunderstandings, and ultimately, to repair his image and the audience's in the case of a setback (refer to sequences AA6, AA2, MC3, LT1b, AA1, CN3).

In applying ICM, we evidenced that the use of collective cultural assumptions based on stereotypical instances is a common practice performed by the comedian, which validates the use of the *cultural frame only* type of joke. Therefore, with the help of rhetorical-pragmatic strategies and the mentioned features of stand-up comedy, the cultural frame became essential in delivering a humorous discourse charged with the use of stereotypes. This is in accordance with the use of the *make-sense frame + cultural frame* combination, employed to manipulate and predict the audience's response to the comedian's particular humorous discourse. First the audience was able to interpret and make sense of the context, to later be presented with information or subjects that were demanding when addressed but vital to highlight.

This study is not completed as the comedian continues to work and perform in scenarios all over the world, and he is currently on a worldwide tour presenting a new stand-up comedy show. This, in turn, opens opportunities to develop new lines of research with different variables to be studied. In fact, his standup can be compared and examined from other colleagues' point of view that construct their humorous discourse on Race/Ethnicity mainly. Moreover, a deep analysis of the relationship

between the public/audience and the comedian could be explored in contributing to enhance his routines and humorous discourse.

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