Abstract

I propose a method to study interactional ironic humorous utterances in Spanish. In GRIALE research group consider this method can be applied to humorous ironic utterances in different textual genres, from the violation of conversational principles. Furthermore, we present the General Theory of Verbal Humor proposed by Attardo that it will be taken in our analysis. Therefore, I study irony and humor in examples of conversations from Peninsular Spanish real sample corpuses (COVJA, Corpus de conversaciones coloquiales [Corpus of Colloquial Conversations] and CREA, Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual [Reference Corpus of Present-Day Spanish]). In this article, I will focus on the application of this theory to humorous ironic statements which arise in conversation and examine the effects caused by them, which will additionally verify if irony and humor coexist in the same conversational exchange with a communicative aim and conversational strategies.

Keywords: Irony; humor; politeness; effect and strategies.

1. Introduction

This paper offers a study proposal for the analysis of ironic utterances with a humorous effect in conversation because humor has so far been preferentially studied in the humorous genres strictly speaking, where the listener is predisposed to humor, such as monologues (Ruiz Gurillo 2011a), jokes (Yus 1996), comic strips (Padilla 2010) or humorous texts (Attardo 2001a), whereas non per se humorous genres have been left aside. For that reason, the present paper has as its aim to analyze real colloquial conversation utterances where humor appears in the utterance without the listener expecting it, because it is not a humorous genre. It will become evident in many of these cases that humor becomes a narrative and social strategy, exactly the same as irony and politeness. Our starting hypothesis

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in this paper is consequently that humor –along with other effects such as irony and politeness– is used in conversation for a positive purpose as could be, for instance, strengthening ties between speaker and listener.

Therefore, there are works related to humor develop the idea that humor is a form of aggression –like those of Ritchie (2005), Rogerson-Revell (2007) or Archakis and Tsakona (2005) amongst others– some of them even include the idea that humor can be a way to enhance group cohesion (Norrick 2003: 1342; Alba Juez 2000, 2001). I will try to prove that our starting hypothesis about the existence of a positive humor as a strategy is possible. That is why I take as our reference works which study humor and its effects –since humor and irony very often appear together in the utterance– from a verbal point of view, and which can be applied to utterances form non-specifically humorous genres.

In order to achieve our aim, I will start from the analysis developed by the GRIALE group for the study of irony and humor in Spanish (Ruiz Gurillo and Padilla, eds., 2009) and its relationship to politeness, and from the study carried out within the framework of the General Theory of Verbal Humor (hereinafter GTHV) put forward by Attardo (2001a, 2008) and Attardo and Raskin (1991) for the analysis of humorous utterances, as in our view their proposal is partly in tune with the GRIALE group’s philosophy (Ruiz Gurillo and Padilla, eds., 2009) because it presents a study of these events from a pragmatic and conversational standpoint and can additionally be applied to all sorts of utterances, and not only to those appearing in humor genres strictly speaking (section 2). This examination will be confirmed with examples of humor extracted from the Corpus de conversaciones coloquiales [Corpus of Colloquial Conversations] of Briz and the Val.Es.Co. group (2002) and the Covja (Corpus de la variedad juvenil universitaria del español hablado en Alicante) seeking to verify whether or not the model suggested by the GRIALE group and Attardo’s model provide a new vision for the analysis of these conversational utterances where humor and other phenomena appear as communicative strategies (section 3); and finally, a number of conclusions will be drawn in relation to the study of this pragmatic event (section 4).

2. Humor and Irony in a interactional context

As said above, most of the studies published about the link existing between irony and humor have focused on analyzing the concept of aggression. There are preconceived ideas about irony and humor as forms used in interaction of showing the speaker’s superiority over the listener (Ritchie 2005, Norrick 1993, Kotthoff 2003, Rogerson-Revell 2007, Archakis and Tsakona 2005, Garmendia 2010, amongst others). Nevertheless, I observed in a previous work where I examined ironic-humororous conversational utterances (Alvarado 2012) that irony and humor are pragmatic events which can coexist in interaction without their purpose necessarily being to attack the interlocutor. In these cases, irony and humor are used for instance to obtain complicity between the interlocutors, and even to show politeness; that is, they pursue a positive aim in conversation and are therefore regarded as conversational strategies.

Before starting with the development of our hypothesis, I dedicate two subsections to clarify what I understand by irony and humor and to specify the theories that will be used to explain my work.

2.1. Verbal irony: Nowadays

The most outstanding explanations about irony refer to various theories among those which state that irony is an indirect speech act (Searle 1980), a transgression of the ‘maxim of manner’ (Grice 1991[1975]), a phenomenon which entails an interpretative use of language, which is explained as an echo or as a pretense (Sperber and Wilson 1994: 274, Wilson and Sperber 2004: 265), or even as an argumentative resource or polyphony (Anscombe and Ducrot 1994).

However, in the Spanish context, the explanations of irony are basically confined to the works by Haverkate (1985), (1990) and (1994), Reyes (1984), (1994), Reyes et al. (2000), Torres Sánchez (1999), Garmendia (2010), and the GRIALE group (Ruiz Gurillo and Padilla García 2009). I will focus on this last reference, the GRIALE group, because it offers a systematic explanation of verbal irony and is supported on the pragmatics of S. C. Levinson (Rodríguez Rosique 2009). Without denying the particularized nature of irony, it is considered essential to resort to those generalizable inferences which imply coding some indicators and marks as ironic.
Irony is thus explained by the GRIALE Group through the inversion of the Levinsonian conversational principles (Rodríguez Rosique 2009: 120). It is worth remembering that Levinson (2000) starts from the fact that the Quality requirement (offering a true utterance) represents a previous condition which must be fulfilled in every communicative exchange. When this does not happen, it is because some participant in the communicative act has violated one of Levinson’s conversational principles (2000).

For GRIALE, the inversion of different principles in ironic contexts gives rise to different types of irony. Thus, when the Principle of Quantity (Q) –the one suggesting that we give exact information– is violated, we would find ourselves before the prototypical irony (saying the opposite), as inferences are obtained through utterance denial. Instead, irony is not prototypical in those cases where we invert the Principle of Informativity (I) –the one which suggests giving sufficient information– and the Principle of Manner (M) –which recommends not to use ambiguous expressions– since irony is inferred by the multiplicity of referents, in the first case, or by the appearance of marked expressions, in the second (Ruiz Gurillo, 2011a). The utterance consequently offers a figurative meaning where marked expressions are utilized to refer to reality. In other words, the theory put forward by GRIALE finds its main driving force in inversion, that is, the particularized conversational implicatures generated by the utterance would be inverted and, therefore, the conversational principles are in turn inverted. This fact prevails over other conversational principles which might appear in the same utterance, such as the Manner or Quality Principles. This explanation allows us to find certain recurrent patterns in the behavior of irony –beyond what is essentially contextual– in utterances. Furthermore, the marks and indicators appearing in the utterance help to create an ironic context that the addressee must understand as such.

Irony is consequently conceived as a pragmatic phenomenon supported on indicators and marks, which is why it is possible to offer an explanation that goes beyond the particular contexts where irony arises. Therefore, this model allows us to explain a greater number of humorous ironic examples with an inferred meaning.

2.2. Verbal humor: Nowadays

As for humor, it has been treated from different points of view, e.g. sociolinguistics, ethnography, etc., although our focus of interest in this paper is the pragmatic perspective.

Attardo (1994: 47) highlights the aggression theories (for which every humorous experience arises as an expression of a superiority feeling of a human being towards another human being), the release theories (for which humor is the effect resulting from a release of accumulated energy) and the incongruity theories (according to which humor is based on the discovery of a reality or a thought that turns out to be inconsistent with what was expected) within the schools of thought that have dealt with humor. Of all these approaches, it is the incongruity theories that we are interested in because they adopt a pragmatic vision, even though we can also find different perspectives inside them, among which stand out relevance and the GTVH –as they can be applied to specific contextual utterances and, in turn, to establish generalizations.

Thus, Yus (1996: 502) states from a relevantist approach that humor takes place as a strategy that he calls incongruity-resolution. This strategy consists firstly in the production of invalid cognitive expectations by the listener and, secondly, in the resolution by the speaker of the cognitive dilemma, where the listener recognizes that he has been deceived since he has not taken other possible interpretations into account. This deceit recognition on the part of the listener gives rise to the humorous effect. The breaking of expectations becomes consolidated in terms of relevance (Yus 1996: 504), that is, the listener interprets the utterance according to the degree of pertinence that it has in its opinion and rules out the information which is not relevant to interpret the utterance correctly. This exclusively relevantist approach does not help us to carry out generalizations in conversational exchanges; hence our decision to analyze Attardo’s proposal for a General Theory of Verbal Humor (2001a).

Two stages exist in humor according to Attardo (2001a: 167), namely: humor competence and humor performance. The first phase is the ability that the speaker and the listener have to make and recognize humor within a specific context, whereas the second one has to do with the desire as well as the willingness to appreciate it. Therefore, both the speaker and the listener take part in the communicative exchange from a series of linguistic mechanisms in the utterance that help the interlocutor to interpret that utterance properly (Alvarado 2006). This is the idea which connects Attardo’s GTVH with GRIALE’s proposal, according to which every communicative
exchange places at the listener’s disposal indicators or marks –i.e. linguistic mechanisms using Attardo’s terminology– which serve as a clue to interpret the utterance in that particular way –in ironic-humorous terms– and not otherwise. For this reason, we are now going to develop the GTVH of Attardo and Raskin (1991) that will later be applied to the utterances examined in this paper.

The General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) was born in 1991, when Attardo and Raskin carried out a joint revision of Raskin’s 1985 proposal about the Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor (Attardo 2008: 107). In the initial theory, Raskin (1985) proposed an exclusively semantic theory where he stated that humor was based on the opposition of two different semantic scripts. This theory did not permit to draw a clear-cut distinction between the semantic information and the pragmatic information caused by humor, which made explicit its explanatory deficiencies. Moreover, it is only applicable to the analysis of jokes, a prototypical and very simple humorous form in its structure.

In that moment of debate between Attardo and Raskin, both authors put forward a theory which differs from the previous one because, apart from extending the semantic perspective to other perspectives like that of pragmatics, permits to analyze more complex forms of humor, for instance, humor in interaction or in monologues.

In accordance with the GTVH (Attardo, 2001a: 22; 2008: 108) six types of knowledge sources exist which make it possible to detect whether a text is humorous or not and show a hierarchical relationship between them. These sources of knowledge –namely, script opposition; the logical mechanism; the situation; the target; the narrative strategies; and, finally, the language– are described below:

- **Script opposition** is the only knowledge source which has been inherited from Raskin’s initial theory. The opposition of semantic frameworks or scripts when it comes to interpret a humor utterance generates a number of incongruities that the listener has to resolve in his final interpretation.
- **The logical mechanism** is the most problematic parameter in the GTVH, since it is the one that surrounds the incongruity-resolution process, and the resolution is optional in some cases of humor (Attardo 2001a: 25); therefore, we are not always going to have this knowledge source at our disposal.
- **The situation** is everything that surrounds humor, i.e. the context which evokes and generates the framework in the humor discourse.
- **The target** shows the person humor is addressed to. Attardo (2001a: 24) equally considers that this knowledge source may be optional, because there is a type of humor which does not ridicule anyone and does not have a personal target either. This idea is closely linked to humor with a positive effect and humor with a negative effect that we will examine in more depth later on in this paper.
- **The narrative strategy** has to do with the genre being used to express humor; in other words, if it is a joke, the strategy can adopt a question-answer or riddle format, for instance, although it might also be much more complex and be based on logical mechanisms and reasoning.
- **Finally, the language** contains all the information required in order to be able to verbalize a humorous text, that is, the speaker has available all the instruments needed for a text to contain the suitable words which lead to an opposition of senses and a double interpretation (polysemy, ambiguity, polyphony, hyperbole, etc.).

Furthermore, Attardo (2001a: 62) points out that humor is different depending on whether it takes place in narrative texts or in conversation. The essential difference lies in the lack of planning which exists in the latter and in the importance that the context has for a correct utterance interpretation. However, the method applied to the analysis of the different humor texts is the same (Attardo 2001a: 82), as it has to do with the identification of the humorous linguistic texts appearing in it, that is, depending on whether they are situated in the plot (jab lines) or at the end (punch lines) of the text. They are identical elements semantically speaking, and the only difference they present is their textual position and their pragmatic function. Therefore, it they appear in the center of the conversation, they help to provide the listener with clues about their humorous intention; i.e. they are used as a jab line, whereas they represent a humorous punch line when they appear at the end.

In those cases where a punch line appears, the speaker forces the listener to activate a new semantic framework or script to ensure a correct utterance interpretation, which contrasts with the one appearing at the beginning of the text. All this is perfectly complementary to the explanation suggested by GRIALE for ironic-humorous utterances,
since the listener can interpret the communicative exchange as ironic and humorous from indicators and marks (the last knowledge source described by Attardo) (Alvarado 2006).

Moreover, because our paper focuses on conversational exchanges and we are not in front of a starting humorous genre, as could be the monologue or the joke, the listener has to implement his pragmatic ability to understand humor (humor performance).

From the interactional point of view, Hay (2000) argues that humor assumes three main functions in conversation: solidarity, power and psychological needs. Each one of these functions has its own strategies, thus, firstly, the strategies used by the speaker to show solidarity with humor are: sharing life experiences; highlighting similarities; cooperating in jokes; and joking (Hay 2000: 718). In this respect, Holmes and Marra (2002) carry out a study of humor as a social strategy that helps to strengthen interpersonal relationships in the work context.

To summarize all these ideas “Irony may contribute to the perception of humor in a text” (Attardo 2001a:122), we consider that irony and humor can coexist in a conversational utterance, because irony is a resource of humor, and humor is an effect of irony, as we will see in the examples.

3. Irony and humor: Analysis

The previous section had as its aim to explain what is understood by ‘irony’ and ‘verbal humor’ from the theoretical model proposed by GRIALE (Ruiz Gurillo and Padilla, eds. 2009) for irony in Spanish and from the General Theory of Verbal Humor (2001a).

Concerning humor performance, Attardo (2001a: 120) relates irony and humor in interaction and points out that both elements are basically used as social management strategies. Among its most outstanding qualities, he highlights the –inclusive as well as exclusive– membership in a group; sophistication, which has to do with the speaker’s mental skill; evaluation, understood as an attitude towards the utterance or its assessment; and politeness, which serves to protect the speaker’s social image in communicative exchanges.

As we can see, the effects that humor can cause on conversation quite often have to do with those likely to be produced by irony. After all, humor and irony are two pragmatic events that have been linked from traditional rhetoric, as is explained by Hidalgo and Iglesias (2009: 424). Furthermore, humor has been treated as an essential future which helps to evaluate negative irony, i.e. the speaker who satirizes, ridicules his victim with the ironic utterance, the victim being made to look silly before his interlocutors and consequently producing humor.

Starting from that idea, we can observe that irony and humor are in turn positively related to politeness, that is, their use helps both to highlight the interlocutor’s positive image and to strengthen ties (Alvarado 2012). As for politeness, Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987: 13) define it stating that it is based on the concept of public image, which needs to be protected and, to that end, an effort must be made to avoid damaging other people’s public image:

Central to our model is a highly abstract notion of face which consists of two specific kinds of desire (face-wants) attributed by interactants to one another: the desire to be unimpeded in one’s actions (negative face), and the desire (in some respects) to be approved of (positive face).

The positive image is the one that the individual has about himself, for which he aspires to obtain recognition by the other group members; in other words, the individual would like the others to accept his personality and behavior in some of their manifestations. Instead, the negative image refers to each individual’s hope that his acts will not be treated disrespectfully by the others, i.e. that his actions will not be impeded and that his right to privacy will be reinforced. In this way, the speaker can develop communication strategies that help him both to maintain his positive image and to defend his negative image before the listener.

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987: 213) list a series of indirect strategies –among them jokes and irony– to produce politeness through language in their work. According to these authors, these strategies would help the speaker to defend his image by means of conversational implicatures; in other words, the speaker would not be clear in his intervention because he violates the maxims of manner and informativity (Rodríguez Rosique 2009: 110), and his listener has to infer in ironic-humorous terms what the speaker is trying to communicate to him in his utterance.
All this allows us to deduce that irony and humor are strategies which can use politeness to reach their ultimate aim, without that meaning that they are indispensable, as will be confirmed by the analysis of examples.

Therefore, it seems that we will be able to deal with humor here applying to it the same scheme that we put forward in a previous paper (Alvarado 2009: 337) to summarize the effects of irony on conversation along with its connection to politeness, as we will have the chance to verify—thanks to the application of the GTVH and to the study carried out by the GRIALE Group—that both phenomena function similarly in conversation:

Table 1. Adapted from Alvarado (2009: 337).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humor with negative effect</th>
<th>Humor with positive effect</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Towards a listener</td>
<td>Humor with positive image</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Towards a listener, an absent person, a situation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Towards an absent person</td>
<td>Humor with negative image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards a situation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can consequently distinguish two humor variables depending on their effects on the conversation. Humor with a negative effect arises in an utterance when we find the presence of damage towards the public image of the listener or an absent person or when a situation is criticized. In these cases, politeness is not present because the context does not admit it, but impoliteness may appear when hearer face is damaged. If there is an absence of damage and criticism in the humorous utterance, we would be in front of humor with a positive effect. This perspective of humor is related to the idea of solidarity which has been mentioned by other authors such as Attardo (2001b: 174), Kotthoff (2007: 264), Holmes and Marra (2002: 1684) or Hay (2000: 716), amongst others. Likewise, this last type of humor with a positive effect may in turn convey a negative image or a positive image, and politeness is likely to appear as a pragmatic strategy. If humor conveys a negative image, the result will be self-humor, where the speaker himself becomes the target of humor (Attardo 2001a: 23, Kotthoff 2007: 271) and has to keep his social image to make sure that the rest of participants in the conversation recognize his personality and behavior. Finally, if it is humor with a positive image, the speaker must integrate into the conversational group and humor can be addressed towards the listener, towards an absent person or towards a situation.

We will prove in this way that humor and irony are two communicative strategies at the service both of the speaker and of politeness which can additionally be used to include or exclude someone from the conversational group; humor and irony coexist in the conversational utterance, as we are going to see in the study of occurrences presented below. I propose 3 examples of the whole corpus of 200 humorous utterances.

In (1) we can observe several interlocutors talking about the time spent abroad by A as a student and about the food he prepared for himself:

(1)
C: perooo un plato combinao
A: ¡coño! platos combinaos me lo hago yo
B: § de tapas ni de coña¿no
A: § tenía una- tapas tampoco ¡qué va!/ plato combinao me lo hago yo/ si tenía allí yoo una cocina/// mis huevos y mis cosas (RISAS)
C: [(RISAS)]
B: [(RISAS)]
D: [sus huevos]
B: = sus huevos y sus-$
D: § mis huevos y yo somos asii §
C: buuut a meal on one plate [e.g. with burgers, eggs and fries]  
A: for goodness sake! I can prepare my own meals on one plate  
B: of tapas [small portions of food] no way, right?  
A: I had one – not tapas either – of course not//I can prepare myself a meal on one plate/I…I… actually had a kitchen there///my eggs and my things  
(LAUGHTER)  
C: [LAUGHTER]  
B: [(LAUGHTER) ={]}  
D: [his eggs]  
B: = his eggs and his  
D: my eggs and I are like that  

We can observe in (1) how humor is triggered by the emission of the utterance *mis huevos y mis cosas* [my eggs and my things] – reproduced by A – in which there is a play on words based on the polysemy of the word *huevos* [eggs]. Thus, listeners D and B interpret the utterance ironically and D builds a sentence *mis huevos y yo somos así* [my eggs and I are like that] in direct speech – emulating A’s words – where the use of *huevos* is interpreted with a sexual meaning as testicles, because their oval shape. That is how laughter is triggered as a direct consequence of verbal humor in this particular case.  

This example additionally illustrates a violation of the Informativity and Manner Principles, since the use by the speaker of polysemous words which act as indicators of irony activates several referents which the listener interprets suitably; in other words, a script opposition has taken place based on the ambiguity of meaning in the word *huevos* – as food or as a male sexual organ. It must be added to this that the logical interpretation mechanism has been altered by an imperfect reasoning, since the listener has interpreted ‘eggs’ as ‘testicles.’ The situation where the utterance takes place is a colloquial conversation between some friends who have decided to go to the countryside and have lunch there. In his utterance, the speaker does not seek to be humorous from the beginning of the conversation, so the relaxed situation he finds himself in together with the ambiguity of the word he uses leads the listeners to make a humorous interpretation of *mis huevos y mis cosas*, which acts as a jab line in the utterance. That is why his interlocutors continue and reproduce the humorous punch line *mis huevos y yo somos así* in direct speech. Due to all this, A becomes the humorous target of the utterance without that being detrimental to his public image, as it is a group of friends and humor in A causes a positive effect on the conversation – strengthening their camaraderie ties – which is why politeness and group identity are reflected in this example of humor with a positive effect towards the listener. The narrative strategy used in this conversation is irony, which favors the humorous interpretation, as we can see by the appearance of laughter – the mark and the effect of humor.  

In (2), the same interlocutors who appeared in the previous conversation talk about the topic of infidelity:  

(2)  
C: *si no pasa ná* † porque tenemos todos cuernos  † no pasa nada  
A: *a mí no me ha puesto nadie los cuernos*  
B: *se los has puesto él*  
A: *no he tenido ocasión de pon- de que me los pusieran aún*  
B: *se los ha puesto tú a alguien ¿no?*  
A: *tampoco// se los han puesto/// yo no le he puesto a nadie los cuernos*  
B: *ha colaborado activamente*  
A: *por supuesto* [(RISAS) ={]}  
B: *[(RISAS)]*  
A: = *pero yo lo hacía sin- sin conocimien-§ to*  
B: *§ de causa/ y de efecto (RISAS)*  

C: But it’s nuthin’ † because we all have horns [are cuckolds] † nothing happens  
A: nobody has cheated on me [made me a cuckold]
B: he has cheated on him
A: I haven’t had the chance to cheat on you yet
B: you have cheated on someone, haven’t you?
A: I haven’t either//he has been cheated on///I have never cheated on anyone
B: you have actively collaborated
A: of course [[LAUGHTER]=]
B: [LAUGHTER]
A: = but I did it – unknowingly
B: = [without knowledge] of cause/ and of effect [LAUGHTER]

B tries to prove in (2) that A belongs to the group of “cornudos” [cuckolds] like the other group members, as he slept with a girl who was unfaithful to her boyfriend with him. The utterance is interpreted in an ironic way with humorous effect thanks to B’s intervention has colaborado activamente [you have actively collaborated] which shows a diastratic variation because words belonging to the formal register have been used in a colloquial conversation. Then we can observe that A participates in the same utterance and answers his interlocutor using a discourse marker that expresses agreement (por supuesto [of course]), with a straight meaning, and therefore A admits before his friends that he is a cornudo (a cuckold). Added to this is the intervention that he did it sin conocimiento (an adverbial phrase which means ‘unknowingly’) and B adds sin conocimiento de causa y efecto [without knowledge of cause and effect], which turns the colloquial phrase into a technical-looking expression that is typical of a more elaborate variety.

Moreover, the Principles of Informativity and Manner are violated, since the use of phraseology activates referents from the script opposition between poner los cuernos [cheating on someone] and que le pongan a alguien los cuernos [someone being cheated on] because the speaker draws a distinction between these two frameworks, not seeing himself as the agent of the action. An alteration of the logical mechanism is also introduced by the listener, since the reasoning made by the speaker is correct, but the listener interprets it differently seeking to produce irony and humor. The indicators used in this case –change of register and phraseology– act as a clue or jab line, has colaborado activamente, to trigger the punch line, sin conocimiento de causa y efecto. Moreover, the communicative situation takes place in a relaxed context with friends who are spending a day in the countryside. That is why the target of humor, although it is again A, does not have as its aim to damage his public image but to show group identity; in other words, it is a humor with a positive effect towards the listener. The irony which appears in the utterance is used as a narrative strategy at the service of humor in conversation.

The interlocutors in (3) are the same ones who appeared in example (1). In this case, they have dropped the bottle stopper and do not clean it before putting it in its place again:

(3)
A: [sí sí] CÓGELÓ
C: pásame una poca/ bueno me pongo yo cocacol- y lo cojo
B: limpiarlo un poco¡coño!
D: [(RISAS)]
B: [(RISAS)] desde luego tío →
D: (RISAS) es NAaturaleza (RISAS) ¡hostia! esto estamos → een la jungla/ (RISAS) §
B: § si la jungla ≠de asfalto ¿no te jode! ¡me cagüen la puta!

A: [yes yes] TAKE IT!!
C: pass me a bit/ well I’ll serve myself some Coca Col- and I’ll take it
B: you clean it a bit, for goodness sake[Damn it!]
D: [(LAUGHTER)]
B: [(LAUGHTER)] of course, dude→
D: (LAUGHTER) it is NAture (LAUGHTER) jeez! I mean we are erm…→ iiin the jungle/ (LAUGHTER) §
B: § yes the jungle of asphalt what do you take me for! what the fuck!
In (3) D has taken the Coke bottle stopper which had fallen on the ground, but he has not cleaned it before placing it again in the bottle, as shown by B’s use of the subjective routine formula desde luego tío [Oh my god, dude!] which generates a script opposition that produces humor, as everybody expects D to clean the stopper and he does not. The logical mechanism is based on a correct reasoning, as he was supposed to have cleaned it. The narrative strategy used is irony. Thus, D finds himself in a communicative situation with friends which is appropriate not to clean the stopper, as shown by its subsequent ironic intervention es Naturaleza (RISAS) ¡hostia! esto estamos → eeen la jungla [it is Nature (LAUGHTER) jeez! erm... we are → iiin the jungle].

In this way, D becomes the target of humor without that having been his intention at the beginning of his intervention—as we can see with laughter and B’s intervention—and is then forced to protect his negative image which has been damaged as a result of his acts. In this case, we have a humor with a positive effect in the group to save his negative face, since it is an example of unintentional self-humor to protect bad image that had already been generated by himself.

4. Conclusions

After doing the analysis of colloquial conversation utterance examples and applied the theories on which that analysis is based, we can conclude the following.

First of all, we are in front of utterances which contain non-prototypical irony and humor; in other words, they do not say the opposite of what appears, they say something else that is different and, therefore, the aim is to strengthen ties with the interlocutor, even if that implies attacking the public image of others.

Secondly, the examples confirm that irony and humor are mostly utilized to show solidarity, which I call positive effect, an idea that authors such as Attardo (2001b: 174), Kotthoff (2007: 264), Holmes and Marra (2002: 1684) or Hay (2000: 716), among others, often linked exclusively to humor. I have proved in (1), (2) and (3) that irony and humor coexist and may cause a positive effect, thus following the scheme proposed in Alvarado (2009). In other words, they are conversational strategies at the service of interlocutors and politeness and can consequently be used to include or exclude someone from the conversational group. This means that the traditional belief according to which only and exclusively negative irony was linked to humor is no longer valid.

To sum up, we have had the chance to check that GRIALE’s theoretical model and Attardo’s GTVH model complement each other to explain ironic-humorous utterances emerging from the violation and inversion of conversational principles, which are followed by a series of generalizable inferences and knowledge sources which the listener has to interpret in that way. Therefore, humor with a positive effect is one of the values which the ironic utterance can convey in conversation after breaking the listener’s expectations.

References