

# Exploring Canarian humour in the first locally produced sitcom in *RTVC*

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## Abstract

*Between December 2011 and May 2012, the public television channel (RTVC) in the Canary Islands (Spain) aired, in prime time, the first locally produced situation comedy. Titled La Revoltosa (henceforth LR), it was the most ambitious production in the channel's more than 14 years of existence. This series was said to display a humorous interpretation of Canarian society. Indeed, according to the executive producer, the characters reflected ordinary Canarian families. One of the attractions of the series was the inclusion of popular Canarian comedian Manolo Vieira as the main protagonist. In this paper, I briefly outline the strategies typically used by this important figure of Canarian humour before I discuss two episodes of LR to explore the resources they employ to provoke humour. Particularly, I study the role played by language, and analyse how characters and situations are portrayed, thus examining universal humour in contrast to regional or ethnic humour. This comparison between the humour strategies used by Manolo Vieira and the ones employed in LR will enable us to determine to what extent this sitcom favours the Canarian (ethnic) humour traditionally represented by Vieira or rather resorts to more general (universal) humour strategies and stereotypes.*

*Keywords: Canarian humour; sitcoms; linguistic humour; stereotypes; Canarian Spanish.*

## 1. Introduction

It is widely recognised that humour has a high profile in our contemporary society. If we have a look at most TV guides we will observe how sitcoms and comedy shows are on prime time television almost every evening (Ross 1998: ix). As Billig (2005: 13)

explains, “we belong to a society in which fun has become an imperative and humour is seen as a necessary quality for being fully human”. This author adds that “the entertainment industry invest mightily to ensure the regular amusement of all”, while “the TV companies compete with each other to offer the most laugh-filled entertainment”. This proves the importance of humour and jokes in our societies, since they constitute “a favourite pastime of many people and a great source of enjoyment and creativity” (Davies 1990: 9). But there is more to humour and jokes than merely fun; they can also “provide us with insights about the societies in which we live”, as Davies (1990: 9) notes.

The complexities of humour and laughter have been widely discussed by scholars who admit that “[h]umour might be universal but humans do not find the same things funny. There are cultural and historical differences” (Billig 2005: 185–186). This explains why humour can also serve as “a unique window for cultural insight”, and justifies the need for scholars around the world to inquire how the members of their cultures use humour and how ethnic humour operates (Hill & Fitzgerald 2002: 101).

In the Canaries most of the TV sitcoms that people have access to are either foreign or from the Spanish Peninsula. Peninsular TV programmes usually do not have Canarian characters or actors, and when they do, they have minor roles and tend to speak standard Spanish. Since 1999 the islands have their own local public channel, *Radio Televisión Canaria* (henceforth *RTVC*), which proudly markets itself as “La nuestra, la TV con acento canario” (‘our own television channel, the Canarian-accented TV’). Among the variety of locally produced programmes it broadcasts, there is a regional humorous programme that started in 2008 and has been shown since then with considerable success, under the title *En clave de Já*. Between December 2011 and May 2012, there was a change: the Canarian public television channel (*RTVC*) also aired, for the first time in prime time, a locally produced sitcom called *La Revoltosa* (henceforth *LR*), which the local press proudly announced as “Una teleserie con acento canario” (‘A TV series with a Canarian accent’) (Saleh 2010). The protagonists included part of the cast of *En clave de Já* and, most importantly, the show relied on the outstanding presence of the most loved and famous comedian in the islands, Manolo Vieira, one of the best representatives of what we may call ‘Canarian-ness’ in humour.

In this paper, we try to compare the humorous strategies typically employed by Manolo Vieira with the ones used in *LR*. Our main purpose is to ascertain the extent to which the series draws from regional (Canarian) humour, or rather favours a more general kind of humour. We start off with a brief description of the resources used by this important figure of Canarian humour in his performances. For this we need to know the basics of Canarian Spanish, a variety with a number of distinctive features. Then we discuss two of the episodes of *LR*, the first for each of the series’ two seasons (for convenience I will refer to each as “episode 1.1” and “episode 2.1”). In both cases our aims are as follows: Firstly, to study the role played by language to provoke humour, thus examining universal humour in contrast to regional humour. Secondly, we will analyse how characters and situations are portrayed in order to investigate which groups or types of people, if any, are the butts of humour, as well as to determine whether there are stereotypes. Finally, I will offer some concluding remarks regarding the extent to which *LR* favours the Canarian humour traditionally represented by Vieira or rather resorts to more general humour strategies and stereotypes.

## 2. Manolo Vieira's humour: An overview

As already mentioned, the main protagonist in *LR* is the well-known Canarian comic star Manolo Vieira, whose professional career started more than 20 years ago. His work comprises a considerable number of live performances, many of which have been recorded in cassette, LP, CD and DVD format. Throughout his career, apart from giving shows in Madrid and in his own club in Las Palmas, *Chistera*, he has worked for both national and Canarian radio and TV programmes. In the last decades, the New Year's Eve Special programme shown on *RTVC* always features Manolo Vieira, who has thus consolidated as a favourite regional star that guarantees a much higher audience share than the other national TV channels (*La Gaceta de Canarias* 2008; *RTVC.es/noticias* 2013).

His success is based on a very personal style that draws mainly from everyday life anecdotes and situations, i.e. from a humorous description of ordinary things that may just happen to anyone. In this respect, Vieira fits into Hill & Fitzgerald's (2002: 103) description of a successful stand-up comedian, since he proves to be an unusually perceptive observer of the social and cultural scene as he hilariously describes "the unique and distinct ways we develop and use the norms and symbols of our culture." Besides, he occasionally provides "some critical commentary about the ridiculousness, incongruity, or absurdity of these governing features of our lives".

In one of his recorded performances he states that, although many jokes exploit and mock the varied regionally stereotyped characters, by presenting funny stories with Catalan, Andalusian or Basque protagonists, he does not believe in regionalisms in humour. For him, humour is always based on the fact that two people target and laugh at a third person or a social group that gets to be the butt of the joke. This idea fits into the well-known disparagement theories of humour, also called the *superiority*, *hostility* or *aggressiveness theories*, for which humour consists of "mocking a victim", as Ermida (2009: 94-95) explains in her attempt to show "the dually unifying and divisive role of humour". Notwithstanding, the functions humour can serve in discourse are numerous and different taxonomies have been used in the literature. Thus, among the broad functions that have been identified in humour, Hay (2000) mentions controlling others, conflict, exploration and coping, as well as a solidarity-oriented function. Authors such as Davies (1982) and Linstead (1985) also suggest that humour can perform a boundary function, which, at the same time, highlights the vital role the audience plays in the construction of humorous discourse (Hay 2001: 56). Similarly, Hay (2000: 716) observes:

Every attempt at humour is an attempt to both express solidarity with the audience and construct a position of respect and status within the group. [...] Whenever you attempt humour and you succeed and it succeeds, your status within the group is positively affected. You have amused the audience and so illustrated that you share with them a common idea of what is funny. This serves to create or maintain solidarity.

This boundary function is achieved not only through Vieira's usual resorting to situational humour, drawing mostly from the islands' context. Probably, the most distinctive feature of his comic style is related to the features of his speech: strong accent and usage of words and expressions which are typical of the Canarian dialect. Both factors crucially characterise his humorous discourse which, in parallel with any other communicative act, "comes from a source, entails a message," and most importantly, "is managed through verbal and/or non-verbal channels." Besides, his jokes and stories are "adapted to receivers... in some context" and obviously have

“some effect on the parties involved” (Hill & Fitzgerald 2002: 101). Following this line of thought, we argue that Vieira’s humour appeals to the audience’s common background and shared knowledge about the islands, including their language variety. With his pronunciation, intonation and dialectal terms he contributes to the audience’s identification with him as the joke-teller. The reason is that language is recognised as “the primary index, or symbol, or register of identity” (Crystal 2000: 40), this concept of identity being defined as “what makes the members of a community recognisably the same. It is a summation of the characteristics which make it what it is and not something else – of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’” (Crystal 2000: 39). Besides, as many sociolinguists have claimed, lexical choices can establish in-group solidarity. As Childs & Mallinson (2006: 3) explain, “lexical items may serve a significant indexical function in the social construction of ethnicity”, since they work as “symbolic vehicles through which speakers assert and negotiate their ethnic identity”.

Therefore Vieira’s use of language seems to provide his humour with a sort of affective side as long as it sets the boundaries between the in-groups (Canarian people) and the out-groups (Peninsular Spanish speakers and foreigners), thus “establishing that both the speaker and the audience belong to the in-group” (Hart 1998: 27). He is indeed a genuine Canarian Spanish speaker as well as an excellent representative of Canarian humour, two apparently interrelated aspects that will be approached below.

## **2.1 Canarian humour and Canarian Spanish: Language, identity and humour**

Many scholars have suggested that humour can have a positive effect on the process of collective identity formation, and that it actually plays a significant role in the generation of a sense of common identification and solidarity (Flesher-Fominaya 2007). In the context of the Canaries, humour has traditionally been associated with the concept of Canarian identity. In fact, when describing this Canarian identity, many scholars tend to use two main adjectives, namely “cunning and perceptive”, two features that lead to a sly sort of humour (*Congreso Autonómico sobre Progreso e Identidad Canaria* 2002: 225). This image of the Canarian identity was consolidated in the 1940s with popular characters such as Pepe Monagas and Cho Juaá, who stand as great milestones in the history of Canarian humour and have been recognised as symbols of Canarian identity. They are “clear representatives of the romantic concept of being a Canarian” (Vera-Cazorla 2013: 225). Initially conceived as archetypes of the country bumpkin, they soon evolved into the emblem of the “common man” and came to embody Canarian identity. Later on, in the 1960s, Cho Juaá, who became a backbone of the islands’ graphic humour, was even considered to be a mythical symbol of cultural resistance, when mass tourism, Spanish television and mainland workers began to arrive in the islands, as Vera-Cazorla (2013: 225) notes. Of course, irony and sarcasm are present in Monagas’ and Cho Juaá’s gags. However, what undoubtedly contributes to their creation of humour is the peculiar way these two Canarian characters use language, with a strong accent and plenty of local expressions and vocabulary. Therefore, it is mainly because of the effect of language that their humour is categorised as Canarian humour.

It might be useful for the reader to know the basics about the Canarian dialect, a non-standard variety of Spanish. Authors such as Trujillo (1981: 19), Déniz (1996: 330-331) and Morgenthaler (2008: 217) have underlined the fact that there is not a local prestigious standard variety of Canarian Spanish which could be institutionalised and used as the norm, given its internal variation. However, drawing on Almeida & Díaz-

Alayón (1988) and Morera (1990), we can briefly outline the main features of this variety as follows:

- a) At the phonetic level, the main distinguishing features of Canarian Spanish are the reduction of some oppositions and the relaxation of some consonants in implosive position, which produces the following phenomena:
  - *Seseo*: loss of the contrast between the sounds /s/ and /θ/ which always results in /s/ and produces homophones like *casa* ‘house’ and *caza* ‘hunting’, e.g. [‘kasa].
  - Aspiration or loss of /s/ in final or implosive position, e.g. *estas casas* ‘these houses’ [‘ehtah ‘kasah].
  - Substitution of /h/ for the more tense /x/, e.g. *jamón* ‘ham’: [ha’món] instead of [xa’món].
  - *Yeísmo*: reduction of the opposition between the sounds /k/ and /y/ which always results in /y/, e.g. *pollo* vs. *poyo* [‘poyo] ‘chicken vs. stone bench’.
  
- b) As regards grammar, Canarian Spanish is characterised by:
  - Use of the third person plural pronouns (*ustedes, les, los, se*) and the third person plural verbal morphemes, where the Castilian standard rule uses the second person pronouns (*vosotros, os, vuestro*) and the second person plural morphemes, e.g. *¿A ustedes les gusta el té?* (Canarian Spanish) versus *¿A vosotros os gusta el té?* (Castilian Spanish) ‘Do you (plural) like tea?’
  - Preference for the simple past tense forms, meaning both recent and remote past, and usage of the periphrastic or perfect form “*haber* + participle” with the sense of past action that has not finished yet, e.g. *Ya comí* (Canarian Spanish) ‘I already ate’ versus *Ya he comido* (Castilian Spanish) ‘I have already eaten’; but usage of the periphrastic forms in sentences such as  *Todavía no he terminado* and *Este año ha llovido mucho* (Canarian & Castilian Spanish) ‘I haven’t finished yet’; ‘it’s rained a lot this year’.
  - Absence of *leísmo, laísmo* and *loísmo* (i.e. incorrect usage of the object pronouns *le, la, lo*) which is quite frequent in some regions where Castilian Spanish is spoken.
  - Polite *leísmo* to emphasize deference and respect towards the hearer, e.g. *Le llaman por teléfono* ‘Someone is calling you on the phone’ or *Mucho gusto en conocerle* ‘Pleased to meet you’ (coinciding with Castilian Spanish).
  
- c) Canarian Spanish vocabulary includes:
  - A number of archaisms from the Castilian Spanish that was used at the time of the conquest.
  - Considerably higher number of loanwords from Portuguese or Galician-Portuguese, Latin American Spanish, and English than in Castilian Spanish.
  - Some words remaining from the Guanche language spoken by the Guanche aborigines.

On the other hand, it is also interesting to note that non-standard varieties tend to have covert value or prestige, which stems from their functioning as solidarity markers among their speakers. As Holmes (2001: 348) succinctly but forcefully puts it, if non-standard varieties were not valued, “they would not continue to be used”. Besides, several scholars (Morín & Castellano 1990; Morín 1993; Almeida 1994; Morera 1997, 2003) have maintained that Canarian Spanish speakers – who historically tended to feel

their dialectal forms (mainly those related to lexis and pronunciation) were inferior or inadequate for usage in formal contexts or in the presence of Castilian Spanish speakers – are nowadays beginning to show overt pride in Canarian Spanish and to assert openly that it deserves respect. Some studies (González-Cruz 2006; Hernández 2003) suggest that Canarian Spanish seems to have shifted – or to be in the process of doing so – from low to high status. Elsewhere (González-Cruz & Vera-Cazorla 2011) we gave illustrative examples of widespread and growing positive attitudes towards Canarian Spanish in the Canaries. Amongst the possible reasons contributing to this flux, we mentioned an array of academic publications dealing not only with Canarian history and arts but, most importantly, with Canarian Spanish (cf. Corrales et al.’s 2007[1988] long bibliography of Canarian Spanish). Such academic interest in Canarian Spanish has gone hand in hand with wider social and educational moves to promote various aspects of Canarian culture. Two examples were the creation of *RTVC* in August 1999, and the foundation of a *Canarian Academy of Language* in December 1999.

Contemporary comedians in the islands do not only rely on the features of the Canarian dialect to provoke humour, but very often they tend, and are somehow expected, to resort to it. In the case of Manolo Vieira, apart from his pronunciation and intonation, a considerable part of his humour draws very effectively from the Canarian vocabulary he employs. In fact, in a previous study of Vieira’s work, González-Cruz (2013) provided a list of 50 local terms and expressions he used in a small sample of his recorded performances. This proves the crucial role still played by language in Vieira’s humour, which is clearly illustrated in the very title of his current live 2014 performance<sup>1</sup>: *Tá y cuá, pun pun, esto y lo otro*, a collection of very informal vague expressions, whose English equivalent could be something like ‘this and that, on and on, and on he went’. The first part, *Tá y cuá*, graphically reflects the local colloquial – and somewhat uneducated – pronunciation of *Tal y cuál*. He even makes reference in many of his performances to the differences in the way Canarian people and *peninsulares*, i.e. people from mainland Spain, speak (Vieira 2008a, 2008b).

But apart from Canarianisms and explicit reference to Canarian Spanish, Vieira employs many other linguistic resources to provoke humour, such as wordplay, lexical or syntactic ambiguity, onomatopoeia, imitation of other accents (British tourists, Cuban, Moroccan or native-American speakers), etc. Most of the punchlines are impossible to translate since they depend on the double meaning of certain words, as example (1) illustrates with Spanish *collar*, which can mean both ‘necklace’ and ‘lead’ (for dogs):

(1)

Dos amigos conversando:

A: *Yo a mi mujer la quiero un montón. Le compré un collar.*

B: *Más la quiero yo a la mía, que la llevo suelta.*

Two male friends talking:

A: I really love my wife. I love her so much that I bought her a necklace (*collar*).

B: I guess I love mine much more, I let her off the lead.

The following are a few examples of short gags taken from his wide repertoire that can relatively easily survive translation:

(2)

En la escuela:

Profesora: *Alexis, ve a la pizarra y dibuja un huevo*

(Alexis coge la tiza con la mano derecha y la izquierda se la mete en el bolsillo.)  
Profesora: *Sin copiar!*

At school:

Teacher: Alexis, go to the blackboard and draw a ball.

(Alexis takes a piece of chalk with his right hand and puts his left hand into his pocket.)

Teacher: And no copying!

(3)

El marido llega a casa y le pregunta a la mujer:

Marido: *¿Quién es ese hombre que está desnudo en mi cama?*

Mujer: *El que te da de comer a ti y a tus hijos, paga el agua, la luz, el alquiler...*

Marido: *Ah, entonces dile que se tape que si se enferma pierde el trabajo!*

The husband gets home and asks his wife:

Husband: Who's that man lying naked on my bed?

Wife: He's the one who feeds us and our children, pays the rent and the bills.

Husband: OK, then please tell him to cover himself up and keep warm; don't want him to get cold and lose his job, do we?

(4)

Un calvo, con solo un pelo en la cabeza, entra en la peluquería:

Peluquero: *¿Qué le hago?*

Cliente: *Hazme un nudo.*

A bald man, with just one hair on his head, enters the barber shop:

Attendant: What can I do for you?

Client: Tie a knot in it.

(5)

Dos locos se encuentran en la calle:

A: *¿A dónde vas corriendo?*

B: *A tu casa, a buscarte.*

A: *Pues vete. Yo te espero aquí.*

Two mad men meet in the street:

A: Where are you running to?

B: To your house, to pick you up.

A: OK, go, I'll wait here for you.

(6)

Hijo: *Papá, ¿dónde están los Pirineos?*

Padre: *Yo qué sé, pregúntale a tu madre que lo guarda todo en los cajones.*

Son: Daddy, where are the Pyrenees?

Father: Don't know, dear; ask your mother, she's always putting things away in drawers.

(7)

En la consulta:

Paciente: *Doctor, ¿me puedo bañar con diarrea?*

Doctor: *Bueno, si es abundante y clarita yo no lo veo el problema.*

At the surgery:

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Patient: Doctor, can I have a bath with diarrhoea?

Doctor: Well, if it is abundant and clear enough I don't see any problem.

In the following section we comment briefly on the other key factors in Vieira's humorous discourse.

## 2.2 Situations and stereotypes in Manolo Vieira's humour

Apart from language use, Vieira's humour is based on two equally important sources, as mentioned above. The first one has to do with the content of the stories he tells, that is, situational humour mainly set in the context of the Canaries. His jokes usually involve funny anecdotes related to everyday life affairs, little things that happen on a daily basis or that may happen to anyone: an appointment with the dentist, a family trip to the country, one day on the beach, or dealing with annoying visiting relatives, a family wedding, children games, etc. As he himself states, what he does is just to chat about *cosas nuestras* ('our things'), ordinary things that he daily observes in the streets and likes to share with the audience.

The other crucial element in Vieira's jokes are the frequently stereotyped characters that appear in his jokes: Carmelo and Maruquita, the typical Canarian country married couple; Alexis, the ordinary naughty Canarian guy; the cunning homosexual; the silly, stupid native of La Gomera (reputed as a remote, backward Canary island); Mohamed, the Moroccan immigrant with his strongly accented speech and poor command of Spanish; the marijuana-smoker; the stammering or snuffling speaker, etc.

Defined by Cardwell (1996) as "a fixed, overgeneralised belief about a particular group or class of people", one advantage of stereotypes is that they enable us to respond rapidly to situations because we may have had a similar experience before. Thus, by using stereotypes we simplify our social world since they reduce the amount of processing (i.e. thinking) we have to do when we meet a new person. This way we can infer that a person has a whole range of characteristics and abilities that we assume are common to all members of that group. Obviously, one disadvantage is that stereotypes make us ignore differences between individuals; therefore, we think things about people that might not be true, i.e. we make generalisations, and this leads to social categorisation, which explains the existence of prejudice attitudes (i.e. 'them' and 'us' mentality), this in turn leading to in-groups and out-groups. Hart (1998: 168) explains humorous stereotypes as follows:

Humour, in all of its multiple variants, produces some degree of defamiliarisation. We know that all Polish, Irish and natives of La Gomera are not idiots as we know that all the other stock stereotypes are not what they are generalised to be. However we accept this partial defamiliarisation with reality. We apply *trivial* logic. [...] We agree to play the game (emphasis in the original).

Although stereotypes may convey a negative impression, the point is that the stereotyped characters created by Vieira do inspire positive feelings and responses, since they appeal to the audience's common background and in-group solidarity. Even when the butts of the jokes are members of targeted groups, they can be seen as "almost like us but not quite the same", as Davies (1990: 41) suggests. Thus, Vieira's humour seems to be built on an inclusive, rather than exclusive, basis of group identity and his jokes are not aggressive and dividing, as long as he does not set those characters that

belong to a certain group aside from those that do not. Instead, Vieira manages to reinforce the power of the group, by making the audience enjoy and strengthen their group cohesion, since they not only share and identify with “the universe the joke implicitly supports” but also confirm “their bonds with the joke-teller” (Ermida 2009: 100-102). This is in line with Davies’ ideas about the relationship between the joke-tellers and the butts of their jokes. As he (Davies 1990: 323) notes, when discussing what jokes about people can tell us about society, “people do not necessarily dislike those whom they disesteem, and the throwers of custard pies do not regard their targets in the same way that those who hurl rocks or grenades do”. One such example can be seen in Vieira’s current 2014 live show, where he pays a small tribute to a real-life homosexual, *Chano el Chucho*, who was very popular and loved in his *barrio* (‘neighbourhood’), *La Isleta*, one of the most picturesque districts in the capital city of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.<sup>2</sup> Before telling the joke, he introduces him saying:

*Yo me acuerdo... y voy a hacerle un homenaje al protagonista de esta historia; era Chano el Chucho, él tenía una orientación sexual distinta... Sí, pero me molesta usar palabras como mariquita, maricón, homosexual, gay... o lesbiana, y todo eso. No, vamos a olvidarnos de esas palabras, vamos a borrarlas de nuestro vocabulario, y vamos a pensar y a decir que son personas, y eso es todo. No hace falta decir más. Era alguien muy querido en el barrio...*

I remember... and I’m going to pay tribute to the protagonist of this story; he was *Chano el Chucho*, he had a different sexual orientation... Yes, but I hate using terms like *mariquita*, *maricón*, *homosexual*, *gay*... or lesbian and all that stuff. No, let’s forget those terms, let’s just erase them from our vocabulary, and let’s just think and say that they are people, persons, and that’s all. You don’t need to say anymore. He was someone very dearly loved by everyone in the *barrio*... (our translation from Vieira, 2013)

### 3. Humour resources in *LR*

As already stated, *LR* was the most ambitious production in the channel’s more than 14 years of existence and, in fact, the premiere obtained a record share of almost 40 per cent of the viewing audience. However, this level soon fell to, and stayed at, 20 per cent, while a controversy emerged in the local media as to the cost (a total of almost one million euros) of the series, whose sociological value had been defended from the start by the director, Ramón Rodríguez, arguing that the series was not only an important push for the local audio-visual/film industry but also a mirror of Canarian society. The local press described *LR* as “a cocktail of humour, comedy and local customs and manners whose aim is to catch on the audience of other successful national comedy series like *Aída* or *La que se avecina*” (Saleh 2010).

When *RTVC* publicised this series, they said it aimed at displaying a regional and humorous interpretation of the Canarian society. Indeed, Santi Falcon, the executive producer, had mentioned that the characters reflected ordinary Canarian families, while Guillermo García, *RTVC* director, stated that *LR* was “an excuse to make us all Canarians both aware of and laugh at ourselves”. The main plot of the story, which was developed in 25 episodes organised into two seasons of 13 and 12 chapters respectively, narrates the conflicts and troubles of “a family where there are legitimate and illegitimate members, who are forced to live together under the same roof” (*Canarias* 7, 2010). Among the 16 characters, all ages are represented: children, adolescents, youngsters, adults, and old men and women who are involved in several plots.

The two chapters have been accessed online and at the time of writing this paper they are still available (cf. *La Revoltosa* 1.1 and *La Revoltosa* 2.1). Both episodes follow the typical pattern that has been established for this type of programme, which Spangler (2003: 1) considers to be the “prime-time network television’s most consistently popular genre”. While accepting criticisms such as their lack of literary value, Quaglio (2009: 11-12) highlights “the social relevance that seems to be a priority for the nature of sitcoms”. In fact, as Bernan (1987: 13) notices, the sitcom

is supposed to relate to its audience. It does so in a number of ways, first by creating characters who are supposed to resemble and to represent the audience. Second, it dramatises events or conditions [...] that provide motivation for a plot. Third, the sitcom suggests an attitude towards things, and towards ourselves.

Following Ross’s (1998: 91) definition, we can confirm that *LR* is a typical sitcom, since it offers “a series of weekly shows based around an initial idea of a situation and characters with potential for humour”. As regards the characters, we can also say that they “remain essentially the same, rather than developing as they would in comedy drama”. As for the humour, it tends to come from “playing around with the comic possibilities of those particular character types interacting with each other in that situation”, although occasionally we can also find humour that involves “lines or gags which are funny in isolation”.

Obviously, in order to analyse humour in a sitcom, we must “comment on the humorous potential of the situation itself, as well as examining individual occurrences of humour”, as suggested by Ross (1998: 89). Therefore, we will, first, briefly describe the plots, in an attempt to find out the kind of humorous situations portrayed in each of the two episodes, before we discuss the techniques that seem to have been followed in the construction of humour by providing specific examples to illustrate the nature of the jokes. In addition, this analysis will allow us to determine the extent to which the type of situation perceived as funny reflects or not preoccupations of, in this case, the Canarian culture, as Ross (1998: 91) proposes.

### 3.1 The plots: Situational humour

Episode 1.1 marks the beginning of the sitcom, introducing the main protagonist, Manolo, a widower with a daughter, Ana, and a son, Manolín, both grown-up. Ana has just come back from Germany, where she has taken a Master’s degree. On arrival she reveals to her father that in Germany she met a marvelous Canarian man and they have been engaged for the last 6 months. Luis, Ana’s boyfriend, is a painter who was studying Art in Germany, and whose family happens to live in a big old house within the same area as Manolo and his family’s flat. The house is called *LR*, literally ‘The Unruly One’. The owner of this ancestral home is Edelmira, Luis’s grandmother, an old and very bad-tempered lady with health problems, who shares the house with her daughter Isabel (Luis’ mother), and her son Félix, who is a priest. Apparently the house is also inhabited by the cleaning lady, María (who later on will become involved with the priest) and her two children, Javi and Elenita, two very modern, lively and rather precocious adolescents. Interestingly, the three ladies mentioned (the grandmother, Isabel and María) have all been abandoned by their respective husbands and, in time, Isabel (Luis’s mother) and Manolo will get involved and be about to marry.

In this first episode we are introduced to the main characters and also to some supporting ones, like Pancho, a young guy who seems to be in charge of the household

jobs and plays the role of the typical rogue, a social dropped-out who grows marijuana; and Catalina, the cousin, a very simple-minded, innocent old lady who takes care of Edelmira, the grandmother.

At the beginning of the episode, we witness a silly accident suffered by Luis, who has bought a very expensive ring for Ana, his girlfriend. On his way to Ana and Manolo's flat, in order to be officially introduced to the girl's family, he accidentally drops the ring which is finally swallowed by a dog that was passing by. After several of these mishaps, Manolo develops a strong antipathy for his future son-in-law, who overtly plays the role of a very clumsy and foolish man. Very reluctantly, Manolo accepts the invitation to have lunch with his daughter's boyfriend's family in the old house, where he learns about Luis's little problem with the ring and tries to help with ideas to make the dog defecate. Before the family lunch, Manolo is also introduced to a middle-aged couple, Rosa (who turns out to be the illegitimate daughter of Luis's grandfather, Raimundo, and therefore an illegitimate sister for Isabel (Luis's mother)) and Félix, the priest. Apparently, Isabel had been investigating her father's past and found out about the existence of this sister, Rosa, and invited her home. She came to the house, with her husband Julián, who plays the role of the corrupt town councillor, and their daughter, a very snobbish young girl, Naty. Their purpose is to spread Raimundo's ashes under the avocado tree in the house patio, thus complying with the man's last wishes.

As for the plot of episode 2.1, it begins with Manolo entertaining a group of five Chinese men with the help of a translator. Ana and Luis, now a newly married couple, come to visit and are shocked to find the Chinese group at Manolo's flat. He describes them as his new capitalist business partners for the little transportation company he owns. Then, suddenly, the translator has to leave because his wife is in labour. After several comic situations caused by the communication difficulties, Manolo decides to go and buy some more coffee for his guests in the nearby shop. One of the Chinese men follows him, desperately trying to tell him something, of course unsuccessfully. Then he gives him a card and disappears. Manolo stands still for a while, trying to decipher the Chinese characters on the card, and starts crossing the road, still looking at the card rather absentmindedly, when a van knocks him down.

After 14 months in coma, Manolo wakes up and finds himself alone in one of the rooms in *LR*. He crawls along the corridor and when he reaches the patio he realizes it has been turned into a cafeteria or restaurant where several people are sitting. He learns that Isabel, his fiancé, has remarried her ex-husband and, most importantly, that his Chinese partners have swindled him and kept both his business and his flat, so that Manolo is now broke and living in *LR* with his family and his daughter's in-laws. With the little money he still had left, Ana had opened the restaurant, which is going to be valued by an official inspector that is expected to come that very day. Falín and Naty, the waiter and waitress, mistake him for an ordinary client, whom they serve very carefully while they mistreat the real inspector.

After noticing they have run out of some of the dishes they offer in their menu, they decide to call a Chinese/Japanese restaurant with a delivery-service, and then serve the food to the client who has ordered it. When the delivery guy arrives, Manolo recognises him as the Chinese man who gave him the card before the accident. The man tries to run away and enters the kitchen where he falls down, hitting himself badly on the head, and loses consciousness. Worried and nervous, Manolo, Ana and the waiters decide to hide the body in the freezer. Everyone disappears and the Inspector comes to the kitchen taking notes of all his observations, including finding of the body in the freezer. He then has to escape as he sees the grandmother approaching the kitchen,

holding a big shotgun and threatening to kill the one who has lately been stealing her favourite yoghourts.

The humour potential of these complex situations and the characters described above would seem obvious and quite general, i.e. non-specifically related to the Canarian context. Now we will try to identify specific techniques employed to provoke humour, which are mainly based on linguistic resources such as using Canarian lexicon and Canarian expressions, as well as ambiguity, irony and exaggeration.

### 3.2 Linguistic humour

One common aspect of the two chapters analysed here is the use of the Canarian variety of Spanish as a resource for humour. This is in line with Fuentes-Luque's (2010: 388) idea that humour is always "set in a particular time and place context, and it is highly determined by the cultural parameters of such context".

As expected, part of the humour in the series is effectively provoked by Vieira's pronunciation, intonation, and, most importantly, by his usage of Canarian words and expressions, which sometimes contrasts with the more careful pronunciation and standardised language most of the other actors in the series tend to use. In particular, in the two episodes analysed here, we have found a total of 17 instances of gags which are based on the specific use of Canarian lexicon; ten (10) of those occurrences appeared in episode 1.1 and seven (7) in episode 2.1. Of course the humour in many of these jokes is essentially untranslatable as it is impossible to find exact equivalents for the different connotations that certain words, especially dialectal words, may have in different languages. Thus, certain words also provoke laughter probably because their usage is often associated with particular social groups and their dialects. The following chart (Table 1) collects the specific Canarian vocabulary items used in the two episodes, and their equivalents in both standard general Spanish and standard English, whenever possible:

**Table 1.** Canarian vocabulary items used in the two episodes

Canarian expression	Spanish term or	General equivalent	Spanish	English equivalent	Episode
Este muchacho		Este chico, chaval		Lad	1.1
Fíjate tu!		Pues mira		Just imagine!	1.1, 2.1
Me jeringo, te jeringas		Me fastidio, te fastidias		I'm/you're pissed off	1.1
Manilla de plátanos		Racimo, mano de plátanos		A bunch of bananas	1.1
... el coño! / Oh coño!		Jolines!		Damn it all! (literally: <i>cunt</i> )	1.1
Baifa		cabra		Goat	1.1
Pescuezo		cuello		Neck	1.1
Simplón		tonto		Fool	1.1
Estar <i>privao</i>		Estar contento		Be happy	1.1
Niño chico		chico		Kid	1.1
Perinqué		lagartija		Wall gecko	2.1
Hocico filúo		Hocico afilado		Sharp beak	2.1
Machangazo		golpe		Strike	2.1
Mi niña		----		My little girl	2.1
Culo veo, culo quiero		----		(lit.) I see it, I want it	2.1
El Peteta		----		(untranslatable nickname)	2.1

These words are not intrinsically funny. It is their interaction with the context that provokes humour. In Torres-Sánchez's (1999: 99; our translation) words:

In communicative interactions, the linguistic elements of the message do not possess a humorous meaning in themselves; it is their usage in communication that provides them with that humorous sense, as a result of the ludic attitude of the speaker and the interaction between the explicit linguistic information, the implicit information and the contextual elements in the process of interpretation. This means that the humorous aspect of language goes beyond the level of words and covers the whole process of communication.

There are also cases of jokes that are linguistically based, although not related to the Canarian variety in particular but to other general linguistic phenomena, such as lexical or syntactic ambiguity, wordplay, connotations, irony, contradiction, exaggeration, etc. Some of them survive translation, others do not. The following exchange illustrates a case of lexical ambiguity that also works in English:

(8)

*Manolo entra en la cocina y se encuentra a Isabel sentada junto a la mesa, con unas cuantas velas encendidas:*

Manolo: *¿Qué pasa? ¿Se fue la luz?*

Isabel: *Oh, no. Es aromaterapia. Verás, los olores son como las personas, cada uno tiene sus propiedades, unos relajan, otros estimulan. ¿Qué propiedades tienes tú?*

Manolo: *¿Yo? Un piso en el Puerto.*

Manolo enters the kitchen and finds Isabel sitting next to a table with a few candles alight on it:

Manolo: What happened? An electricity cut?

Isabel: Oh no, it's aroma-therapy. You know fragrances are just like people, each one has its own *properties*, some are relaxing, others are stimulating. What properties do you have, Manolo?

Manolo: Me? Just a flat near the Port.

As we can see, the Spanish word *propiedades* (properties), with its two meanings 'characteristic' and 'possessions', is the source of humour, as Manolo interprets Isabel's question, and more precisely the word *property*, with its wrong meaning.

Linguistic humour also appears with wordplays, as in joke (9) below (from episode 1.1), which is based on the double meaning of the Spanish expression *hacer una comida*, i.e. 'to eat, to have a meal', and also 'to organise a meal and to invite people to it':

(9)

Luis: *¿Tienen hambre?*

Manolo: *Oh, no te preocupes, ya nos íbamos.*

Ana: *No, papá. Hoy comemos todos aquí.*

Luis: *Mi familia hace una comida todas las semanas.*

Manolo: *La mía, tres al día.*

Luis: *No, me refiero a que nos reunimos todos los domingos a comer.*

Luis: Are you hungry?

Manolo: Oh, don't worry, we're just leaving.

Ana: No, Daddy. We will all have lunch here today.

Luis: My family has a meal every week.

Manolo: Mine has three a day.

Luis: Well, I mean we get together every Sunday for lunch.

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Wordplay actually explains many jokes in the two episodes. They are obviously untranslatable as they are based on the double meaning of many Spanish terms and expressions.<sup>3</sup> The exchange in (10) is an example:

(10)

Manolo: *Disculpe que no le de la mano, la tengo lesionada.*

Julián: *Es del golf?*

Manolo: *No es la mía.*

Julián: *Yo me refería a la lesión.*

Manolo: Sorry I cannot shake hands with you. My hand is injured.

Julián: Is it because of golf? (literally, 'Is it the golf's hand?')

Manolo: No, it's my hand.

Julián: I meant the injury. (Episode 1.1)

Another linguistic gag, which cannot survive translation, emerges from the connotations of the word *toro* 'bull' in general Spanish, where references to this and other animals with horns tend to bring about the idea of *cuckolding*, which in Spanish is evoked and literally referred to by the word *cuernos* 'horns'. This is the case when Manolo is being introduced to Luis' grandmother, an old very bad-tempered lady who's apparently ill, lying in bed, and complaining about her bad health. Luis quickly rejoins:

(11)

Luis: *Venga abuela. Si estás hecha un toro.*

Abuela: *¿Lo dices por los cuernos?*

Luis: Oh come on, granny. You are as healthy as a bull.

Grandmother: You're saying that because of the horns? (meaning 'because I'm a cuckold'. As it turns out later, the lady was indeed abandoned years ago by her late husband for another woman, a hairdresser – a profession she declares she hates deeply – with whom he had another child, an illegitimate sister to Luis's mother, Isabel, who has just happened to find her and wants to introduce her to the family.) (Episode 1.1)

Other instances of humour related to language use occur whenever Manolín, Manolo's son, interacts with his father or other characters. He is described from the very beginning as a weird boy, and in fact he appears rather intellectual and serious for his age, his main feature being his tendency to employ specialised and obscure vocabulary. At the beginning of the first episode we hear Manolo's voice as the narrator describing his family and saying:

(12)

Manolo: *Es un buen chico, pero raro. Yo me quedaría más tranquilo si hiciera cosas propias de su edad. Si jugara al fútbol, por ejemplo, si me cogiera el coche sin permiso, si me llegara a casa a las 6 de la mañana, no sé, cualquier cosa, pero qué va. Es pero yo no sé a quién salió este muchacho!*

Manolo: He's a good boy...but weird. I would be happier if he did things which are typical of his age. If he played football, for example, if he took my car without my permission, if he arrived home at 6 am, you know, anything like that, but...not a bit of it! He's good but... I have no idea who in the family he is like! (Episode 1.1)

The first scene with dialogues in this episode 1.1 is very significant as it establishes the contrast between the father and the son's personalities, the former showing the typical profile of the Spanish, and also Canarian, *macho*, very fond of women and prone to encouraging this behaviour in his son:

(13)

Manolo entra en el salón y ve que Manolín está viendo un vídeo sobre los faraones en Egipto.

Manolo: *¿Otra vez faraones? Tú no veas cosas en las que salgan mujeres que se te va a poner cara de pirámide.*

Manolín: *Pues sabrás, Papá, que Nefertiti, la gran esposa de Canatone, está considerada la mujer más bella de la antigüedad. Además, ¿qué cosas quieres que vea?*

Manolo: *Yo qué sé, Los vigilantes de la playa, por ejemplo, ya sabes, un par de bikinis rojos en la arena, corriendo por la playa...*

Manolín: *Papá, Los vigilantes de la playa es un subproducto de los Mass Media sin ningún tipo de rigor científico y sin acción.*

Manolo: *¿Qué dices tú sin acción? ¿No es acción ver a la Pamela Anderson correr por la arena y pum, pum, pum, eh?* (Haciendo gestos con las manos imitando el movimiento de los pechos de una mujer)

Manolín: *Papá, prefiero la décimotercera dinastía.*

Manolo: *Y está viva, no como la Neferfrita esa, o cómo se llame.*

Manolín: *Nefertiti.*

Manolo enters the living room and notices that Manolín is watching a video on the Egyptian Pharaohs:

Manolo: Pharaohs again? If you don't watch programmes with women your face will turn into a pyramid.

Manolín: Well, Daddy, you should know that Nefertiti, Canatone's great wife, is considered to be the most beautiful woman in ancient times. Besides, what programmes do you want me to watch?

Manolo: I don't know... Bay Watch, for example, you know, a pair of red bikinis running on the sand along the beach.

Manolín: Daddy, Bay Watch is a mass media sub-production with no scientific rigour and no action.

Manolo: What do you mean with no action? Isn't it action to see Pamela Anderson running on the sand and and pon, pon, pon (he makes gestures with his hands imitating the movement of a woman's breasts).

Manolín: Daddy, I prefer the 13<sup>th</sup> dynasty.

Manolo: And she's alive, not like that Neferfried or 'ol' what's her name?

Manolín: Nefertiti.

Manolín is also portrayed as a know-it-all, smart aleck whenever he uses specialised computer jargon or when he paraphrases sentences in a wordly and pseudo-cultured, refined way.

Sometimes, humour is constructed with the combination of language and image, provoking a contradiction between what is said and what is visually shown. For instance, in episode 2.1, which marks the beginning of the second season, we are introduced again to the main characters and the changes in their particular situations. We hear Manolo's voice as the narrator telling us that Ana, his daughter, is now happily married to her boyfriend Luis, who maintains his role as a very clumsy and useless person, a really foolish man.

(14)

Manolo: *Ahora [Ana] está felizmente casada y camina con paso firme junto a su marido por la senda del matrimonio (Mientras tanto se ve a la pareja andando sonriente por la calle y de repente Luis desaparece al caer por una alcantarilla).*

Manolo: She [Ana] is now happily married and walks with firm steps at her husband's side, along the way of marriage. (*Meanwhile the screen shows the smiling couple walking along a street happily looking at each other when suddenly Luis disappears as he falls down an open drain.*) (Episode 2.1)

Irony and exaggeration are, of course, also present in the series, and sometimes they are used in combination. Thus, we hear comments which are both ironic and exaggerated in situations like the ones in (15) through (18):

(15)

Manolo va, de muy mala gana, a visitar a la familia del novio de su hija. Antes de entrar en la casa dice: 'De esta no salimos vivos, mi hijo.' *Luego, al entrar, Luis pilla la mano de Manolo con la puerta al cerrarla. Manolo gime de dolor:*

Ana: *Papá, ¿te encuentras bien?*

Manolo: *Ay, sí. Aprenderé a escribir con la boca, pero bien.*

*Y un poco más tarde:*

Luis: *¿Te duele mucho la mano?*

Manolo: *No, no, qué va, luego con un poco de meditación trascendental ya se me alivia.*

*Manolo is reluctant to visit his daughter's boyfriend's family. Before entering the house he says: We won't get out of here alive, my son.*

*Then, on entering the big old house, Luis traps Manolo's hand when closing the front door. Manolo is crying with pain:*

Ana: *Daddy, are you all right?*

Manolo: *Oh, yes, I'm fine. I'll have to learn how to write with my mouth, but I'm fine.*

*And a bit later:*

Luis: *Does your hand hurt much?*

Manolo: *Not at all. Later with a little transcendental meditation the pain will be relieved.*

(16)

Ana: *Papá, ¿no te importa quedarte un momento solo, verdad?*

Manolo: *No, no me importa.*

(Aparece Julián):

Julián: *¡Hombre, Manolo!*

Manolo: *Es más, me encantaría estar solo.*

Julián: *¡Qué alegría!*

Manolo: *Mucha alegría!*

Julián: *¿A que no sabes lo que me pasó?*

Manolo: *Te volviste transexual.*

Julián: *Me colé en unas listas en las últimas elecciones y ahora soy concejal.*

Manolo: *¡Mira, qué suerte p'al municipio!*

Ana: *Dad, you don't mind being on your own for a minute, do you?*

Manolo: *No, I don't.*

(Julián turns up):

Julián: *Hey, Manolo!*

Manolo: *What's more, I'd love to be on my own!*

Julián: *I'm so glad to see you!*

Manolo: *Oh yes, very glad!*

Julián: I bet you don't know what happened to me.  
Manolo: You turned into a trans-sexual.  
Julian: I sneaked onto the town election lists and now I'm a councillor.  
Manolo: What luck for the township!

(17)

Ana: *Mira, vamos al bar y te tomas algo.*  
Manolo: *Sí, cianuro con cola y dos piedras de hielo!*

Ana: Look, let's go to the bar and have a drink.  
Manolo: Yes, a coke with cyanide and two ice cubes!

(18)

Félix, el cura: *No te pongas dramático. Recuerda que hace poco veías la luz al final del túnel.*

Manolo: *Sí, y resultó ser que la luz era de un tren que venía de frente.*

Félix, the priest: Don't be so dramatic. Remember not so long ago you saw the light at the end of the tunnel.

Manolo: Yes, and it turned out it was the light of a train coming towards me.

Finally, if resorting to language and language-based gags is a common aspect in the construction of humour in the two episodes analysed, we can also find a few differences between them. Thus, episode 2.1 includes canned laughter, which did not appear in episode 1.1. Besides, while in chapter 1.1 the butt of the jokes focuses mainly on the presentation of the characters with humorous and rather stereotyped descriptions, episode 2.1 brings another object of ridicule, the Chinese as an ethnic group. This seems to happen not because this group is perceived as inferior in any way. On the contrary, we believe that the reason for this group becoming the focus of humour in the series is simply their economic success in Canarian society. It might be seen as an attempt to belittle the Chinese, to construct them as inferior, as they are felt to be a threat to the local economy; or maybe simply that sometimes they tend to be associated with the existence of mafias, as shown in episode 2.1.

### 3.2 Stereotypes in characters

Stereotypes are frequently resorted to for the production of humour in *LR*, since many of the characters that we find in the series fit into some category of what we can classify as stereotypes. Thus, we can clearly identify the characters who are playing the roles of the fool (Luis), the simpleton (Catalina, the cousin), the bad-tempered grannie (Edelmira), the know-it-all (Manolín), the corrupt politician (Julián Fuentes, the councillor, who even shares his proper name with that of Marbella's notorious corrupt ex-Mayor Julián Muñoz); the hysterical homosexual (Falín, the waiter), the social drop-out who grows marijuana (Pancho), the mystic (Isabel); the snobby and coquettish girl (Naty); the shrewd priest (Félix), the precocious adolescents (Elenita and Javi), and even the Chinese Mafia.

However, while the Canarian identity is linguistically constructed in this sitcom, our analysis of both the situations and the characters indicate that *RTVC* paid only lip service to their claims to display a humorous interpretation of and a mirror of Canarian society. Except for the language they employ, there is nothing in this array of characters

that can be classified as essentially or typically Canarian. In fact, they can easily fit into the framework of any other culture. In Hart's (1998: 170) words:

The characters of the fool, the innocent, the simpleton or of the foreigner who understands everything at a literal level are all part of the stock which we expect to find in humorous works and which we slot into the corresponding universal frame with a minimum effort. [...] There is no need to negotiate the sense of humour. The corresponding frames exist already in the other culture and only the labels have to be changed to conform to the new linguistic and cultural circumstances.

#### 4. General vs. ethnic or regional humour

When studying the essence of Australian humour, Jones & Andrews (1988: 60) stated that "to define a national humour is perhaps impossible". They argue that "jokes, bandied around from country to country through many retellings assume their own form of local colour, so that distinctions between the humour of one nation and another eventually come to depend on subtle differences of tone, nuance and language". The same can be applied to a regional type of humour such as Canarian humour. Thus, the Canarianness of the humour is achieved mainly through linguistically-based gags, the latter being basically provoked by the use of the typical features of this variety regarding vocabulary, pronunciation and intonation, as we have seen in the chapters under discussion here. Other secondary resources are the setting of the story in a big old Canarian house with a patio, the occasional inclusion in the soundtrack of the sounds of a *timple*, a typical Canarian instrument, and a few references to Canarian cultural elements, such as a famous local folk music group, or a well-known typical hot sauce as examples (19) and (20) from episode 1.1 illustrate:

(19)

*Al ir a conocer a la abuela de Luis en su habitación, Manolo se sorprende al ver que sí se puede levantar:*

Manolo: *¿No dices que no podía levantarse?*

Ana: *Es un decir. Ayer fuimos juntas a un concierto de Los Sabandeños.*

When meeting Luis's grandmother in her bedroom, Manolo is surprised to see she does get up:

Manolo: *Didn't you say she couldn't get up?*

Ana: *It was just one way to put it. Last night we both went to a concert by Los Sabandeños.*

(20)

Edelmira: *Bueno, ¿qué pasa con la comida?*

Catalina: *Si quieres te preparo algo.*

Edelmira: *No.*

Catalina: *¿Por qué?*

Edelmira: *Porque no quiero que la acidez nos mate a todos.*

Catalina: *¡Mujer, no es para tanto!*

Edelmira: *¿Qué no es para tanto? El otro día derramaste un poco de mojo y se hizo un agujero en la tabla de madera.*

Catalina: *La verdad es que me quedó un poco fuerte.*

Edelmira: *Un poco, no. Muy fuerte, que Pancho le echaba el aliento a las moscas y se caían al suelo atontadas.*

Edelmira: What's up with lunch?  
 Catalina: Would you like me to prepare something for you?  
 Edelmira: No!  
 Catalina: Why?  
 Edelmira: I don't want all of us to die of heartburn.  
 Catalina: It's not as bad as all that! No need to make such a fuss!  
 Edelmira: Really? The other day you prepared a *mojo* sauce and the little bit that was spilt on the chopping board made a hole in it!  
 Catalina: Well, it's true, it was a bit red-hot and spicy.  
 Edelmira: A bit you say? It was very red-hot and spicy! So much so that whenever Pancho breathed at the flies they fell down in confusion.

Actually, in the two episodes analysed we can observe that there is a mixture of general humour and Canarian humour. In addition, episode 2.1 includes instances of ethnic humour, in jokes whose butt is the Chinese as an ethnic group. The following are examples:

(21)

*En casa de Manolo, el traductor se ha ido y uno de los chinos se dirige hacia Manolo con gestos:*

Chino: ¡Sssss!

Manolo: ¿Y eso qué es ahora? ¿Un eructo chino? ¡Ah, que quieres ir al baño!

*At Manolo's flat, the translator is gone and one of the Chinese men addresses Manolo with gestures:*

Chinese man: Ssssss!!

Manolo: What's that now? A Chinese belch? Oh, I see, you want to go to the toilet!

(22)

*En la cocina del restaurante. El repartidor chino está inconsciente en el suelo:*

Naty: *Hay que reanimar a este hombre.*

Luis: *¿Y cómo se reanima a un chino?*

*(Falín, el camarero entra y ve al hombre):*

Falín: *¿Qué hace este chino en el suelo?*

Ana: *Mi padre...*

Manolo: *Tu padre no.*

Luis: *Y ¿qué vamos a decir cuando lo vean inconsciente?*

Falín: *Decimos que se tropezó con la esquina de la mesa. Todo el mundo sabe que los chinos no tienen visión periférica.*

*Más tarde:*

Manolo: *Qué, ¿se despierta o no se despierta?*

Luis: *A ver si oliendo esto se viene arriba.*

Manolo: *¿Y eso qué es?*

Luis: *Azafrán.*

Ana: *¿Azafrán? Pero ¿tú quieres reanimarlo o hacerle una paella? Necesitamos algo más fuerte.*

Luis: *¿Tabasco?*

*Más tarde:*

Luis: *Tenemos que esconderlo porque si el otro chino lo ve, tendremos un problema.*

Naty: *Sí, pero ¿dónde?*

Manolo: *¡Coño, mira, en la nevera!*

Ana: ¿ *En la nevera? Papá, que es una persona, no un litro de horchata.*

In the kitchen at the restaurant. The Chinese delivery guy is lying unconscious on the floor:

Naty: We must revive this man!

Luis: But how do you revive a Chinese man?

(Falín, the waiter enters the kitchen and sees the man):

Falín: What's that Chinese man doing lying on the floor?

Ana: My father....

Manolo: Your father didn't...

Luis: And what are we going to say when they realise he's unconscious?

Falín: We can say he ran into the corner of the table and fell down. Everybody knows the Chinese have a very poor periphery eyesight.

(Later on):

Manolo: Is he coming round or not?

Luis: Let's see if he does by smelling this?

Manolo: And what's that?

Luis: Saffron.

Ana: Saffron??

Ana: But what are you trying to do? Revive him or cook him a *paella*? We need something stronger.

Luis: How about tabasco?

(Later on):

Luis: We must hide him somewhere because if the other Chinese guy sees him, we'll be in trouble.

Naty: Right, but where?

Manolo: Hey, how about the fridge?

Ana: Daddy, he's a person, not a bowl of ice-cream.

Instances of jokes targeting other ethnic groups were not found in these episodes, not even explicit references to Canarian ethnicity or to members of the other Spanish regional groups, let alone self-deprecating humour<sup>4</sup>.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

Our analysis of the humorous strategies used in Vieira's performances and in the two *LR* episodes shows the crucial role played by language in provoking humour. In addition, both the characters and the situations are the butt of many jokes in Vieira's discourse as well as in *LR*. However, while Vieira's humour draws from the very essence of regional Canarian ethnicity in the three factors studied (language use, context-based situations and characters), in the series we find a combination of both ethnic and general humour. Thus, a certain sense of Canarianness is achieved through the use of the main linguistic features of Canarian Spanish, as well as with references to a few elements of Canarian culture. This contributes to establishing that both the characters and the audience belong to the in-group. Notwithstanding, the stereotypical characters presented in *LR*, like the situations, seem to have a much more general nature, with Vieira acting as the only real representative of Canarianness.

This might suggest that the concept of Canarian humour, as conceived by traditional Canarian comic characters such as Pepe Monagas and Cho Juaá, or contemporary comedians such as Manolo Vieira, is evolving towards a more general type of humour, which still retains basic linguistic features in line with *RTVC*'s claim of

Canarianness. Thus, while the former relied completely on the Canarian speech variety and local culture, context-based situations and characters, *LR* emerges as a deliberate attempt to innovate the regional humour industry, by following the patterns of other national and international TV programmes. This move towards more general stereotypes seems to be in parallel with the globalisation process our modern societies are going through, a process which apparently also involves the reduction of cultural differences and the standardisation of audiences.

## Notes

[1] A preliminary version of this performance was shown on *RTVC* last New Year's Eve (cf. Vieira 2013).

[2] In this city, people have always been open-minded and tolerant of homosexuality, even in Franco's time. This is proved not only by the fact that some areas on the islands are well-known as favourite resorts for gay tourism, but also in special celebrations like the famous Las Palmas Carnival's Drag Queen Competition and Grand Parade.

[3] These limitations in the translation of humour are not new, and Hart (1998: 16) goes as back as the times of the Classics to quote Cicero, who noticed how the translation test was crucial, when he wrote: "When something is said in another way and is still funny, the humour resides in the object itself. If the statement is no longer funny when said some other way, this means that the humour depends upon the words used [...] humour which is no longer humorous once it is reorganised or the words modified, depends upon 'how' things were said and not upon 'what' was said in itself".

[4] Ana's comment on Luis trying to cook a *paella* by using saffron to revive the Chinese man might be taken as a case of self-deprecating humour, though it is a bit ambiguous. *Paella*, the Spanish favourite national dish, is usually eaten in Canarian homes and is also served in restaurants to both locals and tourists, but comes originally from the Mediterranean regions of Valencia and Castellón, in continental Spain, to which it is more typically associated.

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