From appreciation to production: humorous narratives by children in Spanish

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Resumen: El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar las producciones humorísticas de niños desde una perspectiva lingüística. Nuestra investigación se centra en los aspectos lingüísticos tanto de la producción como de la apreciación del humor a partir de 148 narraciones en español sobre el mismo tema (un viaje escolar a Marte) que fueron escritas a mano por escolares de 9-10 años. Entendida como "the experience of finding something amusing" (Kaufman et al. 2008: 241), los tipos de apreciación (Klein 2003: 7; Orekoya et al. 2014) que los niños disfrutan son la discrepancia física; la violación de las expectativas, del comportamiento racional, del conocimiento conceptual; la producción de reglas lingüísticas en lengua marciana; o las distorsiones/exageraciones. Desde esta aproximación lingüística, estos tipos de incongruencia se fundamentan en mecanismos lógicos (Attardo et al., 2002) que se basan preferentemente en razonamientos (analogía, coincidencia, etc.) más que en relaciones sintagmáticas, tales como la yuxtaposición o el paralelismo. Los niños de estas narraciones pueden usar diversas marcas humorísticas, como las exclamaciones, e indicadores humorísticos, como las metáforas y la fraseología, entre otros, para narrar una aventura en este mundo fantástico. Este trabajo podría, de este modo, corroborar la adquisición de la competencia humorística de los niños, centrando el análisis en los elementos lingüísticos que usan en sus narraciones.
Palabras clave: competencia humorística, producción del humor, apreciación del humor, incongruencia, niños.

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to analyze children's production of humor from a linguistic perspective. Our research focuses on linguistic aspects of humor production and appreciation analyzed through a corpus of 148 narratives in Spanish about the

same subject –a school trip to Mars– handwritten by nine-to-ten-year-old schoolchildren. Understood as "the experience of finding something amusing" (Kaufman et al. 2008: 241), the types of appreciation (Klein 2003: 7; Orekoya et al. 2014) that children enjoy are: physical discrepancy; violation of expectations, of rational behavior, and of conceptual thought; production of linguistic rules in Martian language; and distortions/exaggerations. From this linguistic approach, these types of incongruity stem from logical mechanisms (Attardo et al., 2002) based on reasoning –analogy, coincidence, etc.- rather than on syntagmatic relationships, such as juxtaposition or parallelism, to quote but two. The children involved can use a number of humorous markers, including exclamations, and humorous indicators –metaphors and phraseological units, amongst others– to narrate an adventure in this fantastic world. The present would thus corroborate the acquisition of humor competence by children, focused on the linguistic elements that they use in narratives.

1. Introduction[1]

This paper seeks to examine the linguistic expression of children's humor production. More specifically, it is our intention to show how children construct their written stories about a funny and amusing trip to Mars and how they express the incongruity existing between the Martian world and their own world. Corpus consists of 148 narratives in Spanish handwritten by nine-to-ten-year-old schoolchildren about a school trip to Mars.

There exists as significant body of psychological research which has analyzed the acquisition of sense of humor (Thorson and Powell 1993; Martin 2007: 194) and, more precisely, of one of its features, humor appreciation. Humor appreciation is understood as "the experience of finding something amusing" (Kaufman et al. 2008: 241). Several experimental works have described two types of responses to humorous stimuli –pictures, cartoons, jokes– namely: those where children enjoy funny, humorous, and fantastic stories (a positive response); and those where they demonstrate evasiveness (a negative response). Thus, several scales for sense of humor and humor appreciation were suggested (Ruch 1992; Ruch 2008; Ruch and Hehl, 1998; Chik et al. 2005; Carretero et al. 2006; Carretero et al. 2009; Martin 2007: 196-216; Loizou & Kyriakou 2016; Hoicka 2016). Nevertheless, the linguistic aspects of humor appreciation and production were poorly investigated in adults (Attardo 2001b; Alvarado-Ortega 2013), let alone in children. Consequently, "there is vastly more work on humor appreciation than on humor production" (Kaufman et al. 2008: 241). This study therefore tries to cover an under-researched approach to the pragmatics of humor in children considering its appreciation as well as its production. Another two aspects are worth considering in order to achieve this aim: humor acquisition in children; and incongruity as the main feature of humor appreciation.

As for humor acquisition, McGhee (2002) proposes a humor development model where the maturation of children's humor correlates with Piaget's development stages.[2] In terms of humor development, nine-to-ten-

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[2] The model devised by McGhee (2002) consists of six stages, namely: 0. *Laughter without Humor* (from zero- to six-month-olds)*; 1. Laughter at the Attachment Figure* (from six- to twelve/fifteen-month-olds); 2. *Treating an Object as a Different Object* (from twelve/fifteen-month-olds to two/three-year-olds); 3. *Misnaming Objects or Actions* (from two- to three/four-year-olds); 4. *Playing with Words* (from three- to five/six-year-olds); and 5. *Riddles and Jokes* (from six- to seven-year-olds). Compared to McGhee's previous version (1979), this one is broader and more integrative (Cunningham 2005: 105).

year-old children find themselves at the fifth stage of *Riddles and Jokes,* which represents a turning point in their passage to adult humor. They not only produce or remember jokes, riddles, and short humorous stories, but can also use elements from earlier stages, including humorous games and scatological humor, for instance. However, their individual thinking becomes more abstract, since "they are able to mentally manipulate more than two categories of variables at the same time, to detect logical inconsistences in a set of statements, to hypothesize logical sequences of actions, and to anticipate future consequences of actions" (Martin 2007: 241). Therefore, it is possible for them to enjoy philosophical riddles and jokes about the meaning of life, as well as to play with a variety of joke structures and forms.

Research on child humor presents incongruity as the major feature –in fact, an essential and universal component– within humor development. Children try to identify and unfold the incongruity concealed behind the humorous text (jokes, cartoons, pictures) (Orekoya et al. 2014). Three acquisition levels can be distinguished along these lines: the use of incongruity without resolution; the use of incongruity with resolution; and the use of abstract humor (Ruch 1992; Ruch & Hehl 1998; Hempelmann & Ruch 2005; cfr. Martin 2007: 200-205; 242). In fact, from the beginning of McGhee's fourth stage *Playing with words* to the end of the fifth stage *Riddle and jokes* children appreciate incongruities and try to interpret them. "The resolution of incongruity becomes important for humor appreciation" (Martin 2007:242) towards adulthood. Furthermore, child's humor progressively acquires a more abstract nature.

As far as humor research is concerned, the incongruity-resolution model actually constitutes the main theoretical foundation, albeit integrated into a *General Theory of Verbal Humor* (GTVH) (Suls, 1972; Raskin, 1985; Raskin and Attardo, 1991; Attardo 2001; Attardo 2008; Perlmutter 2002; Attardo et al. 2002). Overall, it is structured at two phases:

-Establishment phase, where incongruity –understood as an antonymic relationship– arises between two opposed scripts (Raskin 1985: 99); and

-Resolution phase, where incongruity is resolved in a playful, amusing way.

The GTVH describes the aforementioned resolution phase as a mechanism "whereby the incongruity of script opposition is playfully and/or partially explained away" (Attardo 2008: 108). Two types of logical mechanisms supporting this incongruity are described (Attardo et al. 2002): those based on syntagmatic relationships – juxtaposition, parallelism, etc. – and those based on reasoning –analogy, coincidence, metahumor, etc.

In short, the focus on humor acquisition, incongruity, appreciation and production can lead us to pose the following research questions and their hypotheses:

1. Are the children in our study able to describe a situation as funny and incongruous?
2. Which types of incongruity are appreciated by children? In this respect, according to Klein (2003: 7) and Orekoya et al. (2014: 65), children enjoy six types of incongruity, namely: physical discrepancy; distortions/exaggerations; violation of expectations; violation of rational behavior; violation of conceptual thought; and language rules.
3. Since they appreciate the Martian world is amusing and funny, they produce narratives which express incongruity. What types of incongruity does the corpus reveal? Taking into account that these children have reached the humor acquisition stage known as *Riddle and jokes* (McGhee 2002), they will most probably be able to appreciate mainly incongruity in humorous stimuli (Ruch 1992; Ruch & Hehl 1998; Martin 2007:242) and describe this incongruous situation. Abstract humor is not likely to appear in this corpus, though.
4. Which logical mechanisms support these types of incongruity? One can expect our corpus to reveal logical mechanisms (Attardo et al.

2002) based on reasoning –analogy, coincidence, etc.– rather than those based on syntagmatic relationships –juxtaposition, parallelism, etc.

5. Have nine-to-ten-year-old children already developed their humor competence? Which humorous markers and indicators do they use? Ruiz-Gurillo (2014) referred to *humorous markers* –e.g. exclamations or capital letters– as linguistic elements which help to understand humor, in contrast with *humorous indicators*, such as polysemy or phraseology, which constitute *per se* humorous elements in this specific context.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

A total of 148 schoolchildren (75 girls and 73 boys) aged between nine and ten –enrolled in the fourth grade of Spanish primary school– recruited from five schools located in the province of Alicante (Spain)[3] took part in the present study. The University of Alicante selected these five specific primary schools for the purpose of encompassing the broad variety of the Spanish educational system: (1) public/private school; (2.a) monolingual –Spanish/ (2.b) bilingual –Valencian/ (2.c) bilingual –English education. The invitation for teachers to collaborate in this study came through an informative letter. Children had 1 hour to write an anonymous humorous narrative by hand –presented as a Spanish Language task– in the classroom. Anonymity along

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[3] Here is the list of schools with the number of narratives corresponding to each one of them: CEIP Divina Aurora (Beneixama) (13 narratives); CEIP Mare de Déu del Carme (La Cañada) (10 narratives); CEIP Antonio Machado (Elda) (41 narratives); CEIP Inmaculada Concepción (Torrevieja) (48 narratives); and Centro San Alberto Magno (Monforte del Cid) (37 narratives). Humor was found in all but one of the narratives collected.

with the absence of personal data processing ensured our participants' ethical commitment.

Data collection took place within the framework of Research Project FFI2012-30941 "Linguistic innovations of humor: Textual genres, identity, and teaching of Spanish," funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (2012-2015) during the academic year 2012-2013.

2.2 Materials

A guide for narratives with a humorous topic was designed. Children had to write a story about an exchange trip to Mars:

Figure 1. Guide for narratives

'A humorous story. Imagine that, within the framework of a school exchange program, you have to stay for two weeks as a student in a school of … MARS!

Tell us what your day-to-day at school is like, your subjects, your teachers, your classmates, what you do on the playground, how you communicate with your Martian friends, what the language in which you speak with them is like, … It will sure be fun!'

2.3 Coding

The collection of narratives gave way to their tagging and analysis. Data were transferred to a database using the Microsoft Access software, which includes 4 types of information: student data (gender –girl/boy–; school –name–; type of school –(1) public/private school–; (2.a) monolingual –Spanish/ (2.b) bilingual –Valencian/ (2.c) bilingual –English education; etc.)–; humorous markers (laughter, capital letter, exclamation, etc.); humorous indicators

(polysemy, phraseology, suffixes, etc.); and inferences (incongruity-resolution, physical appearance, cultural shock, linguistic rules, etc.).

3. Results

3.1. Quantitative analysis of narratives

Each narrative has some 250 words, which means that our corpus contains ca. 37,000 words approximately. Quantitative data supply a wide range of information about children's use of linguistic markers and indicators for humor. Despite being still in progress, the research has already produced a number of early results: Timofeeva (2014) analyzes children's humor concerning metapragmatic competence development; Aliaga (2014) describes the specific linguistic indicators used by girls; and Timofeeva (2016) delves into humor competence and the use of phraseology.

Even though narratives were handwritten in Spanish, the examples have been typed according to the original source; hence why they show spelling mistakes and lack of punctuation marks. A translation into English is offered after each example. The GRIALE Research Group expects to have complete translations of these narratives in the near future.

Focusing on incongruity, humor appreciation and its production are going to be quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed in this paper. Therefore, a quantitative analysis centered on some of our database variables will be presented, together with an illustration of various logical mechanisms and humorous markers and indicators used by children. Based on Klein (2003: 7) and Orekoya et al. (2014: 65) analyses, our corpus show that children appreciate the following types of incongruity: physical discrepancy with Martians; distortions/exaggerations; violation of expectations, of rational behavior, and of conceptual thought; and linguistic rules of the Martian language. Nevertheless, our corpus reflects these types in different

proportions, which led us to classify humor appreciation types on the basis of these data.

Physical discrepancy with Martians stands out as the most significant type of incongruity in our corpus, with 99 out of 148 humorous narratives (66.89%) referring to this variable:

**Table 1:** Physical discrepancy with Martians in narratives
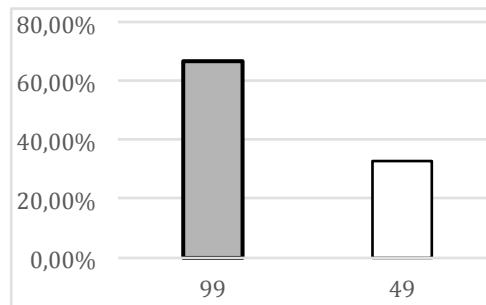
The different types of violations, such as those based on expectations and rational behavior, as well as conceptual thought, are tagged under the variable "cultural shock" in 80 out of 148 narratives (54.05%).

Table 2: Cultural shock in narratives
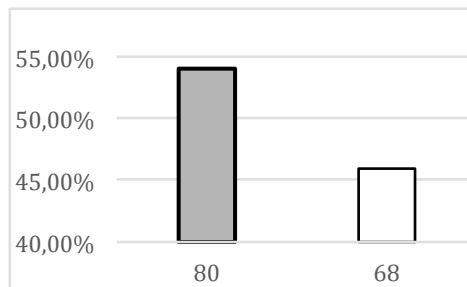
One of the most productive types of humor appreciation revolves around the production of a new Martian language, which is labelled in 63 out of 148 narratives (42.56%):

Table 3: New Martian language in narratives
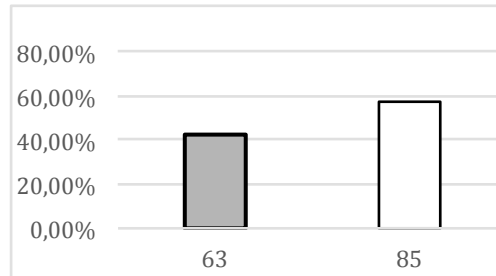
Children use exaggerations or distortions of their known world to appreciate and create comic incongruity in their narratives. Only 34 out of 148 narratives show this feature (22.97%), though:

Table 4: Exaggerations in narratives
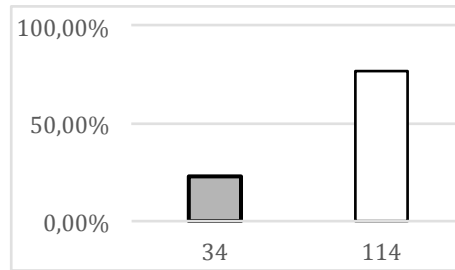
Consequently, humor appreciation appears in humorous narratives through physical discrepancy, violations, a construction of a new Martian language, and exaggerations:

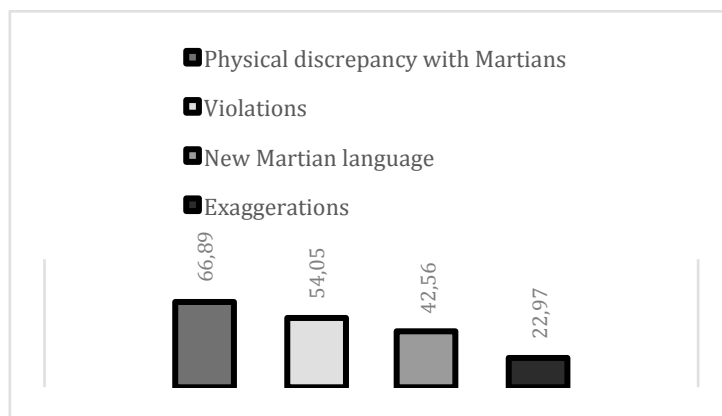**Table 5:** Humor appreciation in database

3. 2. Qualitative analysis of narratives

3.2.1 Physical discrepancy with Martians

With regard to the most important type of incongruity in our corpus –i.e. physical discrepancy with Martians– logical mechanisms stem from *a correct reasoning based on an almost situation* (Attardo et al. 2002.). Children expect their Martian classmates to look like them and incongruity arises from the anomaly. Differences based on ugliness can be frequently found. Some narratives such as (1) describe Martian classmates through their prominent features (head, eyes, mouth). The child tries to stress the funniness of his classmates' physical features:

(1)   *Mis compañeros son muy feos tiene solo dos dientes y cuatro pelos en la cabeza son de color verde y las chicas son de color rojo los ojos son feisimos parecen de serpiente y las orejas las tienen en la boca y la boca en las orejas la nariz la tienen de color negro y tienen tres agujeros de*

respirar el pelo lo tienen de color amarillo y las mujeres de color azul la cabeza la tienen muy gorda.

'My classmates are very ugly, (he) has only two teeth and four hairs in the head, they are green-colored and girls are red-colored, the eyes are extremely ugly, they look like snake eyes and the ears, they have them in the mouth and the mouth in the ears, the nose they have it black-colored, and they have three breathing holes, the hair they have it yellow-colored and the blue-colored women have a very large head.' (10,12-13IO37)

Remarks on differences also become visible in (2), where the child shapes a fantastic world based on cartoon characters (Dumbo and Snow White). Actually, his close friend *Danielo* is a copy of himself –his *alter ego[4]*. Incongruity derives from a correct reasoning based on the analogy between himself and his classmate Danielo:

(2)   *Mi mejor amigo es Danielo que tiene el pelo rubio, las orejas de Dumbo, las antenas gigantes y las piernas de un enanito de Blancanieves, mi mejor amiga es Claudia tiene el pelo de un mono y la espalda llena de pelo y tenía granos en la cara!*

'My best boyfriend is Danielo, who has fair hair, Dumbo's ears, giant antennae and the legs of one of the dwarves in Snow White, my best girlfriend is Claudia, (she) has the hair of a monkey and the back full of hair, and (she) had pimples on the face!' (10,12-13AO29)

3.2.2 Violation of expectations

Narratives often develop through the violation of expectations, of rational behavior, and of conceptual thought. The child in (3) appreciates an incongru-

ity between his world and Mars based on an analogy which stems from a correct reasoning. He wonders whether he will be able to understand his classmates and teachers and solve the possible inconsistency with the skills that he owns. The resolution ("I'll get by") involves an emerging abstract humor:

(3)   Bueno, en marte sono una sirena, ¡la sirena del colegio! Ya era hora de ver todo: mis profesores, mis compañeros y mis asignaturas. Solo me preguntaba una cosa ¿Hablan mi idioma? Porque o si no… ¿Como me comunicaré con ellos? Bueno da igual ya me apañaré.

'Well, a bell rang in mars, the school bell! It was high time to see everything: my teachers, my classmates, and my subjects. I only asked myself one thing: Do they speak my language? Because or if they don't… How will I communicate with them? Well, it's the same, I'll get by.' (10,12-13IO32)

The incongruity in example (4) comes from a scary and hyperbolic image of Martians; in other words, a faulty reasoning based on a exaggeration ("they would eat my brain"). However, the resolution offers a calm script ("it was better at the school"). Note that the word *chuatataca* does not exist in Spanish, since it is a personal nonsensical invention:

(4)   En Marte fui En un ovni, pensava que me comerian el cerebro y me hice pis, pero en el colegio era mejor se llamaba chuatataca.

'In Mars, I rode in a ufo, I thought they would eat my brain and I wetted myself, but it was better at the school, it was called chuatacaca.' (10,12-13SO21)

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4 The child's first name is *Daniel.*

3.2.3 Violation of rational behavior

Violation of rational behavior arises when children cannot breathe (5) or they can float (6) in Mars. Example (5) shows a correct reasoning based on an analogy with the Earth's atmosphere where a phraseological unit (*to laugh in my face*) acts as an indicator of humor resolution:

(5)   *[…] los alumnos ivamos con trajes espaciales. Resulta que no necesitabamos los trajes espaciales y un alum[n]o marciano me abrió la capsula y yo como una tonta haciendo como si me ahogaba, al cabo de unos minutos me dí cuenta de que en marte podia respirar. Los marcianos se rieron en mi cara […].*

'We students wore special outfits. It turns out that we didn't need the special outfits and a Martian student opened my capsule and, like a silly girl, acting as if I were drowning, after some minutes I realized that I could breathe in Mars. Martians laughed in my face.' (10,12-13SA9).

In turn, example (6) provides a correct reasoning based on an almost situation. Note that the child describes how strange his new classroom seems to him –incongruity being made visible through a repeated metaphor (the blackboards are made of moonstone, the chalks are white stones and the floor is red rock from Mars). This funniness supports the kind of incongruity that he describes:

(6)   *La clase es muy raro las sillas y las meses están en el aire flotando. Todo está flotando cuando me doy cuenta las pizarra están echas con piedra lunar, las tizas son piedras blancas y el suelo es roca roja de Marte.*

'The class is very strange, and the tables are in the air floating. Everything is floating, when I realize, the blackboards are made of moonstone, the chalks are white stones and the floor is red rock from Mars.' (10,12-13IO19).

3.2.4 Violation of conceptual thought

The children's realization that the reality of Earth is not the same as that of Mars makes them appreciate an incongruity with conceptual thought. Note that the description of the swimming pool in (7) expresses an altered script where the liquid is watery piranha snots. After describing this incongruity, the child expresses a resolution, a faulty reasoning based on hyperbole ("they'll "chop off my head"):

(7)   *Se me da bien nadar. ¡Pero es una piscina de mocos de piraña acuosos! Pero si me dejo perder me "cortan la cabeza", así que lo inten-taré.*

'I'm good at swimming. But it is a swimming pool of watery piranha snots! But if I let them win, they'll "chop off my head," so I'll try.' (10,12-13SA2)

Since children find themselves at the stage *Riddles and jokes* (McGhee 2002), they can already tell comical stories. Although scatological stories are characteristic of earlier humor development stages, narratives show elaborate stories based on a wide variety of scatological situations. Actually, a correct reasoning derived from an almost situation serves the child in (8) to introduce incongruity between toilets in Earth and those in Mars; he also writes the resolution ("there was a special toilet for guests"). Therefore, example (8) shows a small step towards adult humor:

(8)   *En los baños de este planeta son muy raras a los que tenemos aquí porque son triangulares los bateres por los culos de los marcianos. (y para hacer popo, había que ponerse un tubo porque los marcianos tenían dos…) Yo cuando fui no podía hacer nada, pero al final me enteré de que había un baño especial para los invitados.*

'In the toilets of this planet, they are very strange/different from the ones we have here because the toilet bowls are triangular due to the Martian's bums (and to poop, you had to use a tube because Martians had two…) Me, when I went, I couldn't do anything but I finally found out that there was a special toilet for guests.' (10,12-13IO16)

3.2.5 Linguistic rules in Martian language

From the fourth stage *Playing with Words* (McGhee 2002), children discover that they can play with language –making rhythmical games and creating new words, for instance. Their sparkling imagination allows them to construct a new Martian language that reflects a self-reflexive kind of humor; or expressed differently, the logical mechanism is based on a metareasoning that has language itself as its purpose. The confrontation between the languages of Mars and the Earth causes comprehension problems (9) or misunderstandings (10). The use of pictograms has to do with the expression of Martian language complexity. The assessment of Martian writing in (9) concludes with the phraseological unit *to drive* [someone] *crazy*:

(9)   *Cuando llege a el colegio un grupo de marcianos me recibieron jo no los entendia decian cosas asi: clarformiclrerno. luego me escribieron pero no entendi nada era asi: …., me pusieron loco.*

'When I arrived at the school, a group of Martians welcomed me, boy, I didn't understand them, they said things like: clarformiclrerno. then they
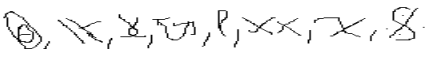
wrote to me, but I didn't understand anything, it was like this: ….,
they drove me crazy.' (10,12-13BO7)

The appreciation of incongruity associated with the Martian language in (10)
is reflected by means of a phraseological unit: *hablar en chino* [*to speak in
Greek*], which evaluates the odd situation. It deserves to be highlighted that
the child also uses the formula *a slap on the back of my neck* both in a literal
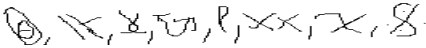and in a metaphorical sense:

(10)   *Porque es que es como si me hablaras en chino no entiendo nada.*
Aunque si yo no entiendo nada mi professor o melo vuelve a explicar o
colleja al canto. Espero que tu agas lo mismo pero sin la colleja al canto.

'Because it is as if you spoke to me in Greek, I don't understand anything.
Although if I don't understand anything, my teacher, either he explains it
to me again or it's a slap on the back of my neck. I hope you will do the
same but without the slap on the back of my neck." (10,12-13BA11)

Some children can actually build a language –as illustrated by the word
Criptomnian in example (11)– with a new alphabet that includes non-existent
letters such as *triple w*. *Criptomnian* also acts as a humorous derivational
indicator, perhaps built on *Krypton*, the name of the planet where Superman
was born:

(11)   *En clase de lengua nos an enseñado su idioma, el criptomniano. Las*
letras son 3X, ⬡, ✕, ✕, ⊽, ℓ, ✕✕, ✕, ⊗ *. I la más destacada*
(¡¡¡¡La uve triple!!!!).

'In the language class, they have taught us their language, Criptomnian. The letters are 3X And the most outstanding one (the triple U!!!!).' (10,12-13BO9)

The expression of a paradigm language is the construction of a complete Martian vocabulary (see 12). Ever since the fourth stage, children play with words and create new ones. Children can create new words from languages that they know (e.g. *piedra dura difícil, choques* –Spanish; *pruns, plor* – Valencian), but they modify either their form (*arreglatos, arbola*) or their syntactic structure (*frases medio*). A child can invent completely new words too (*traoncortil, sinsueti, amproin*)[5]:

(12)   *extraterrestre basico, escribir, frases medio, piedra dura difícil; co-rintos bajo, esquivos y arreglatos. Jurintoru fursin, mapolota, dura movil otrtina y arbola. Forril, hombría, choques, rompedor traoncortil, dor-mlor, sinsuenti, amproin, arblonto, fins, Indus, frutus, calawiki, pruns, muns, rans, jons, nis, chuns y plor.*

'Basic extraterrestrial, writing, frases medio, piedra dura difícil; corintos bajo, esquivos y arreglatos. Jurintoru fursin, mapolota, dura movil otrtina y arbola. Forril, hombría, choques, rompedor traoncortil, dormlor, sinsuenti, amproin, arblonto, fins, Indus, frutus, calawiki, pruns, muns, rans, jons, nis, chuns and plor.' (10,12-13IO6)

3.2.6 Distortions/exaggerations

Children use exaggerations or distortions of their known world to show comic incongruity in their narratives. A faulty reasoning supported on exaggeration

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[5] Because this example is nothing but a long list of totally invented words based on both Spanish and Valencian, only the first three words have been translated.

is the logical mechanism which serves as the basis for script opposition. Example (13) shows a fantastic world where the Moon is made of cheese and children can taste it. This metaphor used as a humorous indicator underpins incongruity. However, the child writes not only about the incongruity of a moon made of cheese but also about the resolution of this humorous situation; he eats a piece, which allows him to join the Martian group:

(13)   *Al quinto día de estar ahí mefui de excursión a la luna y la visite entera y estaba echa de queso y yo cogí un trozo y me lo comí, como todos mis compañeros.*
-¡Estaba buenísimo! – dije yo.
-Y ¿Cómo está el tuyo? dije otra vez a Jordo.
-El mio está pasado de fecha – dijo Jordo.

'On the fifth day that I was there, I/went on an excursion to the moon and I visited the whole of it and it was made of cheese and I took a piece and I ate it, like all my other classmates.
- It tasted really good! –I said.
- And how is yours? I said to Jordo once again.
- Mine is out of date –Jordo said.' (10,12-13IO19)

4. Discussion and conclusions

Children find the new situation in Mars amusing, which leads them to describe their classmates and teachers as well as their school through the incongruity that they observe. They also narrate a number of comical situations which generate incongruity between their world and the new world (i.e. Mars). The present study consequently supports Research question 1, since nine-to-ten-year-old schoolchildren are able to create narratives that are amusing.

Different types of incongruity are used by children in narratives (Research question 2). Our database reveals that these types appear in various proportions: physical discrepancy with Martians being the most important (66.89% of narratives) followed by violations of expectations, of rational behavior, and of conceptual thought (54.05%); linguistic rules in Martian language (42.56%); and distortions/exaggerations (22.97%).

Since children are still developing their humor competence, the samples sometimes reveal incongruous situations without a resolution (Research question 3). Some narratives do reveal incongruity with its resolution, though. The same as in other previous research works (Ruch 1992; Ruch 2008; Ruch and Hehl, 1998; Martin 2007), examples of abstract humor are practically non-existent, which makes sense because a wide cognitive development is needed. Thus, whereas examples (1), (2), (6), (9), and (10) merely show incongruity, examples (4), (5), (7), (8), (11), (12), and (13) reveal incongruity with its resolution; only example (3) could be referred to as abstract humor.

These types of incongruity are based on some specific logical mechanisms. As Research question 4 predicts, the logical mechanisms supporting this incongruity often stem from a correct or faulty reasoning (Attardo et al. 2002). Primarily, a reasoning grounded on an almost situation contrasts the known script with the Martian one: children observe and describe a strange situation from which incongruity arises. As shown by the database, the logical mechanisms used by children are: correct reasoning based on an almost situation; correct reasoning based on analogy; faulty reasoning based on a false analogy; and self-reflexive humor. Moreover, syntagmatic relationships are absent as predicted in Research question 4.

Finally, linguistic clues (*humorous markers* and *indicators*) help to express this humorous situation (Research question 5). As markers is concerned, exclamations and quotation marks help to understand these amusing situations. Especially exclamation is one of the most humorous markers used by children in our corpus of 148 narratives. Examples (2), (7)

and (11) illustrate the use of exclamation as marker of surprising and funny context.

Focusing on indicators, a number of linguistic indicators –including derivation, metaphor, hyperbole and phraseology– support such logical mechanisms and make it easier to understand incongruity. Derivation is one of the most linguistic indicators, since children can invent new words such as *chuatataca* (example 4), *clarformiclreno* (9), *cliptomniano* (11), *sunsuenti, amproin*, etc. (12). Indicators which express semantic relations are frequent, such as metaphors which children use to understand this new Martian world, such as "the eyes are extremely ugly, the look like snake eyes " (1), "the blackboards are made of moonstone" (6) and "it [the moon] was made of cheese" (13). Thus, phraseology help to understand these non-stereotypical situations, such as "Martians laughed in my face" (5), "they'll chop off my head" (7), and "if you spoke me in Greek (…)" (10). Example (5) also shows a hyperbole.

Humorous texts authored by children obviously differ from those written by adults. Although some indicators such as metaphor and phraseology, together with a number of markers –amongst which stand out exclamation or direct style (Timofeeva 2014) – predominate in these narratives, other very important clues of adult humor (especially polysemy) are virtually absent. Nevertheless, children's fantasy and creativity enables them to use a number of specific markers and indicators.

In conclusion, the present research paper shows that nine-to-ten-year-old schoolchildren are actually developing their sense of humor and, more precisely, humor production, insofar as they can produce humorous texts which feature funniness and amazing situations. Incongruity about their classmates, about school, and about Mars are expressed by means of different humorous indicators, such as derivation, metaphor, hyperbole, and phraseology, to quote but a few. Obviously, these results still need to be broadened with other complementary data regarding age, geographical, and

social variation. Future research on this field must definitely deal with such aspects.

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