Political cartoons on Greek debt crisis: a cognitive and pragmatic approach

Las viñetas políticas sobre la crisis griega de la deuda: una aproximación pragmática y cognitiva

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the artist-reader communication in political cartoons. We will define cartoons as a multimodal genre in which meaning is derived from a conceptual integration of image and text. We will present the *blending theory* as a useful model to illustrate how the reader reaches a new humorous reality by the connection of different mental *inputs*. We will describe cooperation within the cartoon as a reflection of contextualisation cues, i.e., those elements that the artist uses to create the cartoon and to help the reader interpret his/her work correctly. Finally, we will identify two different components within the political cartoons message: a) the *jest* and b) the *sting* (the critique). These two components and their corresponding pragmatic processes (pragmatic presuppositions and implicatures) interact with the different levels of interpretation and understanding of a cartoon.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar la comunicación entre humoristas y lectores en las viñetas cómicas políticas. Definiremos las viñetas cómicas como un género multimodal en el que el significado surge de la integración conceptual de la imagen y el texto. En primer lugar, presentaremos la teoría del *blending* como un modelo útil para mostrar cómo el lector construye una nueva realidad humorística mediante la conexión de diferentes inputs mentales. A continuación, describiremos la *cooperación* en las viñetas cómicas como un reflejo de los índices de contextualización, es decir, aquellos elementos que el artista utiliza para crear las viñetas y para ayudar al lector a interpretar su trabajo correctamente. Finalmente, identificaremos dos componentes diferentes dentro del mensaje de las viñetas políticas: a) la broma y b) el aguijón (la crítica). Estos dos componentes y sus correspondientes procesos pragmáticos (presuposiciones pragmáticas e implicaturas) interactúan con los diferentes niveles de interpretación y comprensión de las viñetas cómicas.

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1. Introduction[1]

From the late 19th century, newspapers have published cartoons. This tradition was known as the *funny pages*, and can still be found in any newspaper today. Readers love these funny pages because they offer a time-out in which humour, satire or a simple smile have their place. Recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of studies examining cartoons (Carroll, Young and Guertin, 1992; Templin, 1999; Schmidt and Williams, 2001; El Refaie, 2003, 2009; Plumb, 2004; Samson and Huber, 2007; Marín-Arrese, 2008; Schilperood and Maes, 2009; Schilperoord and Maes, 2009; Bounegru and Forceville, 2011; Dalalau 2014), especially those interested in multimodality and metaphors (Forceville, 1996). This paper deals with the study of artist-reader communication in political cartoons[2]. We will define cartoons as a multimodal genre in which meaning is derived from a conceptual integration of image and text. We will examine how the cartoonist uses techniques from the arts, such as colours, fonts, kinesics, perspective, etc. (Eisner, 1985; Fairrington, 2009) to create his/her story, and matches them with the possibilities offered by the informative structure (Prince, 1981; Giora, 1991, 1997). We will present the *blending theory* (Fauconnier and Turner 2002) as a useful model to illustrate how the reader reaches a new humorous reality by the connection of different mental *inputs*. We will describe cooperation (Grice, 1975) within the cartoon as a reflection of contextualisation cues (Gumperz, 1992), i.e., those elements that the artist uses to create the cartoon and to help the reader interpret his/her work correctly. Finally, we will identify two different components within the political cartoons message: a) the *jest* and b) the *sting* (the critique). These two components and their corresponding pragmatic processes (pragmatic presuppositions and implicatures) interact with the different levels of interpretation and understanding of a cartoon (Gironzetti, 2013; Padilla, 2013). A corpus of political cartoons published in newspapers and websites in 2015, which have in common the topic of Greek debt crisis, will serve as a starting point of our research.

2. The components of cartoons. Multimodality

Cartoons are made of an image and a text. Many authors (Barthes, 1964/1986; Forceville, 1996; Salway and Martinec, 2002; Tsakona, 2009; Bateman, 2014) have tried to determine how text and image actually relate to each other in multimodal genres. In the case of cartoons, the image-text relationship can be classified in three main categories: *unequal 1* (where the image is the *main* component and the text is *subordinate*); *unequal 2* (where the text is the *main* component and the image is *subordinate*); and *equal* (where both the image and the text have the same importance) (Salway and Martinec, 2002).

In Figure 1, for example, the image (main component) is amplified by the text (subordinate). The cartoon's readers will understand in this case that the drawings of the dinosaurs –which evoke something old, static and extinct– are actually three of the main world economies threatened by will happen in Greece.

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[1] This work was supported by the Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competitividad (MINECO, Spain) under the Grant *El habla con significado emocional y expresivo: análisis fono-pragmático y aplicaciones* (FFI2017-88310-P/MINECO).

[2] Unlike other types of cartoons, as *gag-cartoons*, with a more naïve content.

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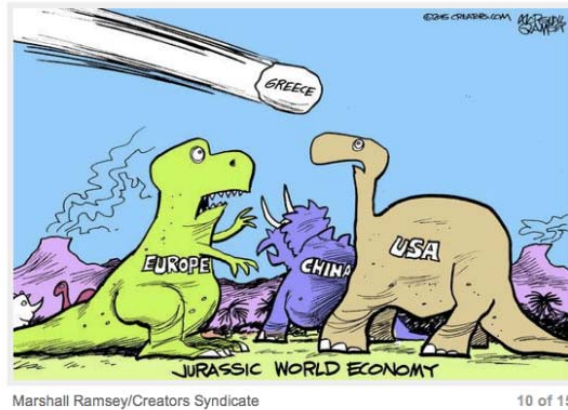.artículo | **Political cartoons on Greek debt crisis: a cognitive and pragmatic approach**

Figure 1 [© Marshall Ramsey. *Creators Syndicate*, August 18, 2015]

In Figure 2, we find the opposite case. In this example, the text, situated in a *speech bubble* –a sort of reinforcement–, transmits the main part of the message –a critique to the austerity measures–; and the image –the fat creditors, the Parthenon and the thin Greek man– (subordinate) complete this information.
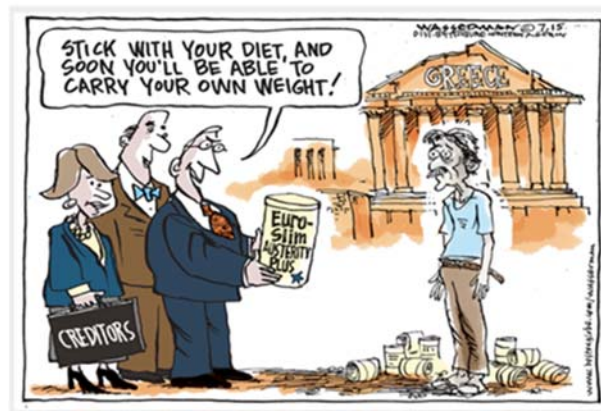

Figure 2 [© Dan Wasserman. Tribune Content Agency, July 2, 2015]

Finally, in Figure 3, the image and the text are equally important. In this example, the text (EURO) enhances the meaning of the image (the Parthenon), and vice versa; there is a cross-reference between the columns of the Parthenon and the word Euro.

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Figure 3 [© Petar Pismestrovic, http://www.pismestrovic.com, January 18, 2015]

Regardless of their relationship, the image and the text work together in the cartoon as part of its informative structure. From a *functional analysis perspective* (Mathesius, 1961/1975; Halliday, 1976; Chafe, 1976, 1974; Prince, 1981; Padilla, 2005), texts are normally ordered in accordance with the principle of the *communicative dynamism* (Danes, 1964, 1970). This principle states that texts usually start with a highly thematic constituent (known information) while ending with a highly rhematic constituent (new information). New information, on the other hand, is usually *focus*, i.e., *salient* information (Prince, 1981; Padilla, 2005). This way of organizing texts provides them with coherence and cohesion and, consequently, the reader receives the information in a progressive and orderly manner.

When we analyse the informative structure of cartoons, we also find order and progression, but humourists exploit the communicative dynamism according to *multimodal* requirements. In Figure 4, for instance, five elements (see below) show us the hypothetical consequence of the Greek elections (the Grexit):

1) The caricatures of Merkel (Germany) and Hollande (France),

2) the Greek voter,

3) the flag of Greece,

4) the ballot box,

5) the word **€XIT.**

Figure 4 [© Patrick Chappate. International New York Times, January 6, 2015]

These elements are organized following the way readers access the visual information—at least in Western culture: the caricatures appear on the left side (first position), everything related to Greece (the flag, the ballot box, the Greek voter) is located in the centre (middle position), and the result or consequence of the elections,

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the exit of the eurozone, is situated on the right side (the last position). This last word, **€XIT** (Grexit or Euro-Grexit), the highly rhematic constituent of the cartoon, closes the story and simultaneously takes advantage of the *recency effect*[3] (Baddeley et al., 2002). According to this effect, the final words show the best recall in memory.

The components of the cartoon are organized, moreover, in a perceptive way. In Figure 4, the caricatures of Merkel and Holland figure in the *background*, almost outside the scene; the Greek voter and the hypothetical consequence of the ballot box, the word **€XIT**, stand in the *foreground.*

Finally, cartoonists also take into account two visual conditions: a) the *picture superiority effect* (Curran, and Doyle, 2011) and b) the *laws of perspective* (Eisner, 1985; Fairrington, 2009). Following the *picture superiority effect*, the pictorial component in the cartoon is more likely to be viewed before words. And, in accordance with the laws of the perspective, the reader's eyes will automatically follow the vanishing point, highlighting that place over the rest of the areas of the vignette. These two visual conditions affect, for instance, the word **€XIT** in Figure 4. **€XIT** is not an image, and **€XIT** is out of the vanishing point; therefore, the cartoonist tries to stop the negative effect of these two conditions on the reader's attention using the *bolt font* that turns the word into the focus.

In sum, to create the cartoon, the humourist uses techniques from the arts, such as colours, fonts, kinesics, perspective, etc. (Eisner, 1985; Fairrington, 2009), and matches them with the possibilities offered by the informative structure (Prince, 1981; Giora, 1991, 1997; etc.).

3. Cartoons and cognition. Blending theory

From a cognitive point of view, cartoonists use their imagination to create a new mental reality. This reality derives from image and text integration and generates a funny reaction in the reader-viewer.

According to the *blending theory*, when we think, we use temporary conceptual packages called *mental spaces* (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002). These mental spaces are sets of activated neuronal assemblies and can be described by three main characteristics: a) they can be interconnected in working memory; b) they can be modified dynamically; and c) they contain *elements* structured by *frames* (see section 4.1.). Mental spaces are divided in partial structures called *input spaces*. We can use input spaces to create new realities that are not exactly in the inputs but are derived from them. The *emergent structure* of this cognitive creation is the *blended space* or the *blend*.

Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 42-44) develop in a precise way how the blend emerges out of the input spaces. They mention the *composition*, i.e., we can compose elements to provide relations that do not exist in the inputs separately; the *completion,* i.e., we can bring additional structures (familiar frames) to the blend to interpret a

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[3] According to Baddeley (2002: 34), "when recall is immediate, the probability of a word being recalled correctly is typically highly dependent on its serial position during presentation, with the first one or two words enjoying a modest advantage (the primacy effect), the middle items showing a relatively flat function, and the final words showing the best recall (the recency effect)".

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o e z ñ j o m a t b x i l **U n i v e r s i t a t . d '. A l a c a n t** b e i f ñ o i y l d l y r t
l m v l i n w y t i s d ñ f b x c i e g h ñ b v o t l a q w i o p y j h w x b z ñ q w i c i

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richer pattern; and finally, the *elaboration*, the running of the blend modifies it imaginatively. As we run the blend, we establish a connection across spaces and this yields a *flash of comprehension*. Nevertheless, anything fused in the blend projects to counterparts in the input spaces (see Figure 6). One important characteristic of the blend is that it does not matter how odd the resulting blend is or how far it is from any possible scenario (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002); writers, cartoonists, etc. use them to represent new –possible or impossible– mental realities in life, art, culture or science.

3.1. The Greek debt crisis

The Greek debt crisis, for example, has generated a great number of political and journalistic opinions. Cartoonists, as other political commentators, have lined up in one of two main possible sides. On one hand, those who believe that the origin of the crisis is the Greeks themselves, and, on the other hand, those who believe that the Greek debt crisis is the result of the austerity measures imposed by creditors (the so-called *troika*[4]). Both sides have used two main sources of content: the modern Greek stereotypes (lazy, wasters, etc.), and the legacy that ancient Greek culture has left on the Western culture (democracy, philosophy, etc.). The cartoonist's ideology usually tips the balance one way or the other in order to support one of the two main lines of thought mentioned before. Nonetheless, some cartoonists deliberately adopt a halfway or equivocal position.

In Figure 5, the well-known Horse of Troy (the image) and the Roman quote *timeo danaos et dona ferentes* —Beware of Danaans [Greeks] bearing gifts— (the text-caption) are used here to convey meanings related to current events: *Beware of Greeks bearing debt*[5].

BEWARE OF GREEKS BEARING DEBT

Figure 5 [© Ken Catalino. Creators Syndicate, January 18, 2015]

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[4] MFI, European Central Bank and European Commission.
[5] This kind of parody or truncation of sayings that reveals a playful discourse with traditional proverbial wisdom is called *antiproverb* (Mieder, 2004). See also Figure 10: *It's Greek to me*.

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According to the *blending theory*, we can interpret the cartoon in Figure 5 as the creation of a new mental space (*emergent structure*) that integrates information of the image and text.
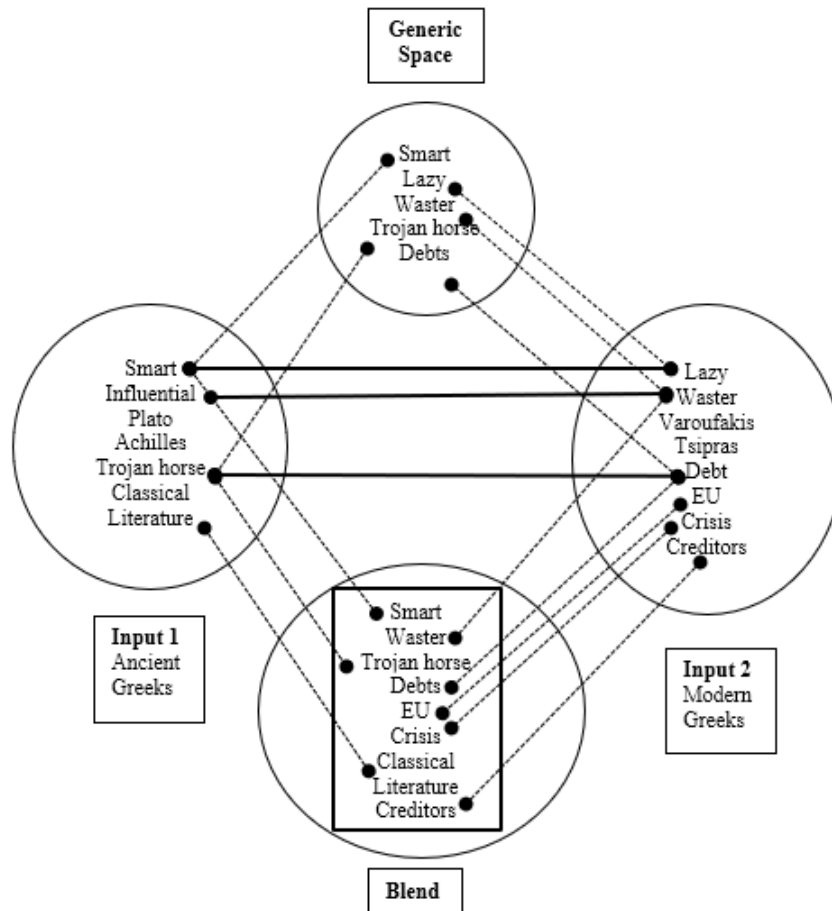

Figure 6

In Figure 6, the *generic space* represents the set of elements that the mental inputs (or partial structures) have in common; input 1 is the ancient Greek culture (Achilles, Plato, Smart, Influential, etc.); input 2 is the stereotypes of modern Greeks (lazy, wasters, etc.); and the resulting blend is *horse-debt gift*[6].

The emergent structure generated in Figure 6 has the following properties[7]: a) there is a cross-space mapping ancient Greeks and modern Greeks (solid lines); b) there are connections between the two inputs and generic and blended spaces (dotted lines): some of the behaviours and characteristics of the ancient and modern Greeks; and c) some of these behaviours and characteristics (selective projection) are fused into the blend

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[6] As we will see below, the reader will be able to infer that this gift is a poisoned gift (implicature), and will accept it after the cartoonist's sting-message (presuppositions): no matter whether you deal with the ancient or the modern Greeks, if you trust them, you will receive a poisoned gift (horses, debts, etc.).

[7] Evidently, the diagram is just a picture of a complicated process where speakers can deactivate previous connections, by reframing previous spaces and other cognitive actions (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 46).

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(ancient and modern Greek gifts remain in time) (solid square). In addition, readers are also projected into the blend as hypothetical Greek debt *creditors*[8].

In sum, the artist uses his/her imagination to put together all these mental connections creating the humorous effect (Palinkas 2014). As Fauconnier and Turner (2002) point out, the *magic* of the process is that all this imaginative work is unconscious.

4. Pragmatics of cartoons

Whatever system we use to describe how the artist creates humour, communication can only occur if his/her readers, once they have recognised the text as a cartoon, agree to cooperate and to interpret the author's communicative intentions.

4.1. Contextualisation cues

For Grice (1975), successful communication is adhered to the fulfilment of the *cooperation principle* and its *maxims* (quality, quantity, manner, and relation[9]). Grice (1975: 45) argues that talk exchanges are "characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction". When creating the cartoon, the artist deliberately *flouts* the maxim of manner, i.e., he/she is being somehow *obscure* or *ambiguous*; nevertheless this *flouting* is only an apparent lack of cooperation.

We describe *cooperation* within the cartoon as a reflection of *contextualisation cues* (Gumperz, 1992), i.e., those elements that the artist uses to create the cartoon and to help the reader interpret his/her work correctly. These cues can be classified as *internal* or *external* (Padilla and Gironzetti, 2012a and 2012b), depending on whether they belong to the body of the cartoon or they frame it. For example, the fixed position of the cartoon on the newspaper's page, the title of the section, the author's name, or the entire drawing itself (the sum of the caricature, fonts, colours, the vignette, etc.) are external cues and predispose the reader to identify a specific type of humorous genre (*formal frames*). The internal cues, on the contrary, are usually linked to the content of the cartoon, and activate *content frames* (Abelson, 1975; Rumelhart, 1975; Schank, 1975; Schank and Abelson, 1977). In Figure 7, for instance, the presence of the caricature of well-known or at least recognizable characters, such as the Prime Ministers Merkel (Germany), Rajoy (Spain) or Tsipras (Greece), the EU and Greek flags, the stormy sky, the word *Euro*, etc. activate our previous knowledge related to the topics of crisis, politics, economics, etc.

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[8] All these processes generate a new structure, but at the same time the link to the inputs is constantly maintained.

[9] Maxim of quality: supermaxim: try to make your contribution one that is true; submaxims: 1) do not say what you believe to be false, 2) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. Maxim of quantity: 1) make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange), 2) do not make your contribution more informative than is required. Maxim of relevance: be relevant. Maxim of manner: supermaxim: be perspicuous. Submaxims: 1) avoid obscurity of expression, 2) avoid ambiguity, 3) be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity), 4) be orderly.

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Figure 7 [© Ingram Pinn. Financial Times, https://www.ft.com/ingram-pinn, January 18, 2015]

Readers recognize and interpret the contextualisation cues almost automatically, following cognitive processes. However, the contextualisation cues are not an ornament, they are part of the cartoonist's strategies to create humour and to be cooperative at the same time; i.e., with them, cartoonists are *humorously* cooperative.

4.1.1. Presupposition and implicature

Within the pragmatic study of communication, different types of *content* and *implicit content* have been identified (Grice, 1975; Levinson, 2000; Bach, 1994; Bertucelli, 2009). *Pragmatic presuppositions* are the conditions that must be fulfilled in order for an utterance to be used as an effective illocutive *communicative act* (Fillmore, 1982, 1985; Stalnaker, 1970, 1999; Stalnaker and Thomason, 1970). These presuppositions represent the beliefs and previous knowledge that the speakers take for granted when producing an utterance. Furthermore, presuppositions contribute to organize the information as *background* and *foreground* or, from an informative point of view, as theme (known) and rheme (new) (see section 2). That means that they make new information to become part of the known information, allowing the natural development of a text.

Unlike presuppositions, *implicatures* are a type of implicit content and depends on the inferences made by the listener/reader as part of the comprehension process of a message (Grice, 1975). Implicatures are partially based on the content of presuppositions; for example, the knowledge (about the language, the world, etc.) that cartoonist and reader share in this context (Sbisà, 1999). Nevertheless, implicatures typically require inferences going beyond the *linguistic or the pictorial material* contained in the text[10].

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[10] Exploiting this possibility, *flouting a maxim*, is one of the situations that characteristically gives rise to an implicature (Grice, 1975: 49; Thomson, 1995: 64).

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4.2. Two components for a single message

Behind the desire for cooperation (Grice, 1975) is the cartoonist's hope of transferring a message efficiently. This message, in the case of political cartoons (op-ed or editorial cartoons)[11], contains two different but merged components: a funny component and a critique (of a person, an organization or an event of the current socio-cultural scene) (Gironzetti, 2013).

4.2.1. The jest or funny component

In Figure 8, for example, the reader has to activate two inputs: *to go on a diet* and *Greek debt crisis*, but the cartoon's interpretation takes a step further (yielding the flash of comprehension) if he or she is able to establish the following equivalences: *diet*= austerity measures and *own weight* = the real nominal GDP of the Greek economy (implicature). Obviously, the author does not show the reader clearly and overtly the consequences of these equivalences (austerity measures might be a mistake). Instead, the author uses cartoons' tools (the image and text[12]) and leaves the readers with the responsibility of inferring them and formulating their own implicatures.
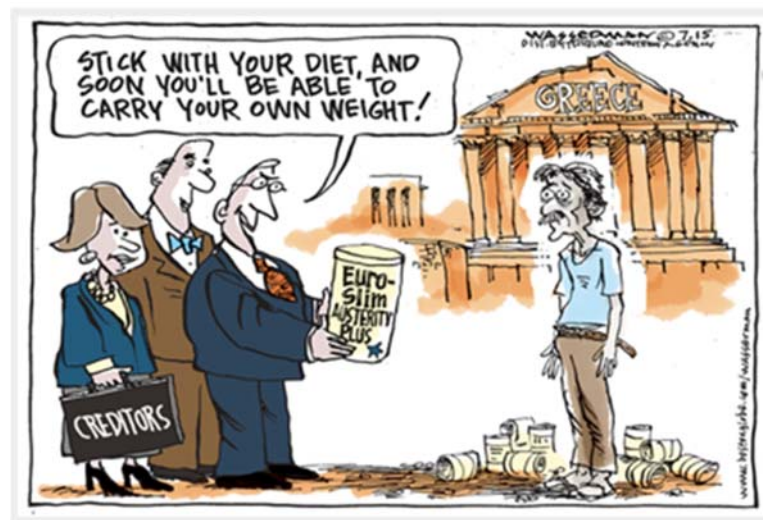

Figure 8 [© Dan Wasserman. Tribune Content Agency, July 2, 2015]

Establishing these equivalences –and making inferences– is the first step in the process of comprehension and causes the first humorous effect on the reader, the *jest*; however, for a full interpretation of the cartoon the reader must go beyond.

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[11] See note 2.
[12] As we mentioned, the inputs are activated by both words and images. The figure representing a Greek man is skinny and seems to have a poor health; on the other hand, the creditors are fat and healthy. The choice of the groups or individuals depends on stereotypes and mythical scripts (Zhao, 1988).

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4.2.2. The sting or critique

As stated before, hidden behind the funny façade of the political cartoon there is a critique of a certain aspect of the current socio-cultural scene (Carbajal, 2016). This critique (the *sting*) reflects what the cartoonist thinks about a specific person or event, and on a pragmatic level it relates to the humourist's pragmatic presuppositions (Gironzetti, 2013). The reader has to accept these conditions in order to be able to see the cartoon as a critique of the real world. This is a required step in order to reach the deepest level of understanding.

Figure 9 [© Steve Benson. Creators Syndicate, January 18, 2015]

Figure 9 shows two fat politicians (input 1), a Greek one and an American one, representing Myron's Discobolus (input 2). The caricatures of these two politicians have the same physical characteristics (absolutely far-away from the real Discobolus) and both are standing on top of the same falling platform (cronyism, corruption and tax evasion). Both inputs, the fat politicians and Discobolus, merge dynamically in our mind and part of their elements are fused into the blend.

According to the communicative processes described above, the readers identify the *jest* and formulate the first implicatures, but they will eventually arrive to the deepest level only if they are able to establish the *sting*, the critique component of the message, a connection between what is represented in the cartoon and what is happening in the real world. In Figure 9, this means that readers should assign the US the same characteristics (cronyism, corruption, etc.) the artist did. Those characteristics are the content of the humourist's pragmatic presuppositions, the beliefs and the previous knowledge that he/she uses when creating the cartoon. When reading a cartoon, readers accept the content of the humourist's presuppositions (political opinion, the *sting*) as the price to pay to be able to fully comprehend the cartoon's message and enjoy the complete humorous effect.

5. Levels of understanding

The processes described above are not always available to all readers (Smith, 1982). It is possible that the cartoonist and the reader do not share the same background information, or common ground, and this may keep the reader from obtaining certain inferences. Or perhaps the reader could simply refuse to make the

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comprehension effort that requires the reading of the cartoon. Taking this into account, it is possible to establish three different levels of reading/understanding (Padilla, 2010, 2013; Padilla and Gironzetti, 2012a, 2012b): 1) a superficial level (stage 1), in which the humorous effect is produced by the recognition of an unusual situation or character; 2) a second level, in which the humorous effect increases, and derives from the jest, the funny component of the message (stage 2); 3) and a third level, in which the reader is able to identify in the cartoon the *sting*, a critique to some event or person of the cultural and social scene (stage 3). The humorous effect occurs at all levels, although with different intensity, and the access to one level or another depends on the specific characteristics of the reader, such as age, education, culture, political ideology, mood, etc. These levels can be considered as stages that a single reader reaches (or can reach), but also as parts of the whole process of understanding every cartoon.

At the first level, the humorous effect is only superficial and is unleashed by the recognition of an unusual situation or character. Following the *picture superiority effect* (Curran and Doyle, 2011), the pictorial component in the cartoon is more likely to be viewed before words generating an expectation for its verbal component (Houston, Childers and Heckler, 1987). From a perceptual perspective, the image, in this level, becomes the gestaltic foreground (see section 2).

In Figure 10, for instance, the reader has to recognize the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. The humourist[13] does not show us directly who the character in the cartoon is, but uses a caricature instead. In Figure 10, the cartoonist draws the character (Tsipras) based on the exaggeration of some of his most distinctive physical features[14] (nose size, face shape, etc.).
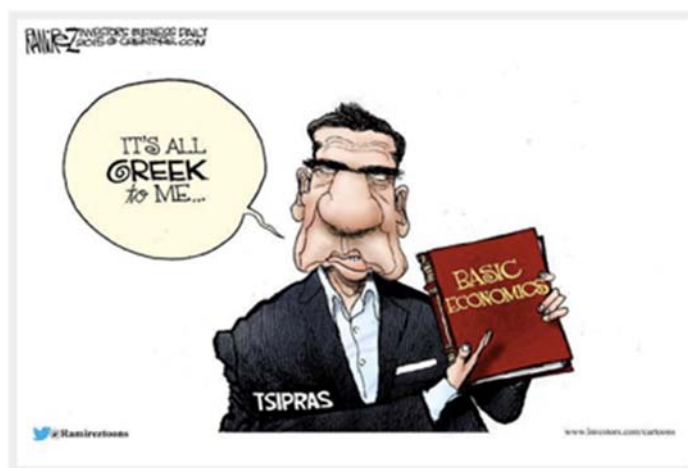

Figure 10 [© Michael Ramírez. Creators Syndicate, January 18, 2015]

The second level of interpretation involves a greater humorous effect than the first one, and coincides with the identification of the jest. In Figure 11, readers can recognise two blended inputs: (input 1) *an ancient world*

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[13] *It's all Greek to me*… is playing with two blending meanings: a) is something unknown to me and b) I'm Alexis Tsipras, a Greek politician who, as such, has no idea of economics. See also note 5.

[14] As children, cartoon lovers prefer in general kind and rounded features to realistic ones (see Bonaiuto and Giannini, (Eds.) (2003); Klein, 2014; Carbajal, 2016). See also: Eisner (1985) and Fairrington (2009).

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v l i o c a e d l m d ñ x b z ñ **X o s e . A . P a d i l l a** t i m u o x w a l ñ u t o p y l
o e z ñ j o m a t b x i l **U n i v e r s i t a t . d '. A l a c a n t** b e i f ñ o i y l d l y r t
l m v l i n w y t i s d ñ f b x c i e g h ñ b v o t l a q w i o p y j h w x b z ñ q w i c i

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where Greek warriors went to war (with all the symbolic elements: armours, flags, white flags, etc.); and a *current world* in which modern Greeks withdraw money from ATMs (input 2). Obviously, Greeks nowadays do not go to war against ATMs dressed as ancient warriors, but the reader may make fun of viewing an ancient Greek warrior going to withdraw money this way (the blend fuses it imaginatively).

Figure 11 [© Deb Milbrath, Cartoon Movement, January 18, 2015]

In this second level readers also formulate implicatures. For example, based on the *morphing Greek flag into a white flag*, readers can infer that the Greece is surrendering.

At the third and last level, the reader reaches the deepest level of comprehension. The reader accepts the cartoon's (or the humourist's) presuppositions (political opinions, etc.) and the next step is to transfer them (the sting) to the real world, modifying in this way his/her perception of it. In Figure 12, readers, besides formulating the necessary implicatures at the previous levels of understanding (to see the president of the MIF, Christine Lagarde, as a *captain abandoning ship*), are in some way invited to accept the presuppositions of the cartoon's world and therefore to transfer them to the real world, modifying in this way their perception of reality — Christine Lagarde, the MIF, the creditors, the capitalist system, etc. are *the bad guys*.

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Figure 12 [© Martin Rowson, https://www.theguardian.com/profile/martinrowson, January 18, 2015]

Obviously, at this level readers can also fail to modify their perception of the real world and conclude that the cartoon is not funny at all (failed humour[15]), e.g., if the reader of the cartoon was, for instance, Christine Lagarde herself.

Once readers have reached the three different levels of understanding for the first time, the status of the cartoons changes to some extent. All cartoons —and humorous texts in general— use surprise[16] as a part of their humorous effect. Hence, after the first reading they lose some strength and their humorous and persuasive effect decreases. In addition, all cartoons —and all breaking news— have an expiration date. The farther they are from the real event, the harder it is for readers to reach more levels of understanding and to interpret them. When this happens, readers have only two ways to interpret a cartoon successfully: a) stop at the first level (superficial reading) or b) go further using a general or cultural knowledge and creating new or renovated blends and implicatures. Cartoons can stand the test of time only when the elements used by the humourist have a universal scope.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we have analysed some important aspects of artist-reader communication in political cartoons. We have described cartoons as a multimodal genre in which meaning is derived from a conceptual integration of image and text. To create his/her story, the humourist uses art techniques, such as colours, fonts, kinesics, perspective, etc. (Eisner, 1985; Fairrington, 2009), and matches them with the possibilities offered by the informative structure (Prince, 1981; Giora, 1991, 1997; etc.). We have used the *blending theory* (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) to illustrate how the connection among different mental inputs can allow the reader to reach a new humorous reality. Cooperation (Grice, 1975) within the cartoon is reflected by the use of contextualisation cues (Gumperz, 1992), i.e., those elements that the artist uses to create his/her work and also to help the reader

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[15] See Raskin (1985); Attardo (2001, 2006); Bell and Attardo (2010); and Carbajal (2016); Krikmann (2006); etc.
[16] This surprise emerges, among other things, from the blend, the product of the artist's imagination. See section 3.

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interpret it correctly. We have identified two different components within the political cartoons message: a) the jest and b) the sting (the critique). These two components and their corresponding pragmatic processes (pragmatic presuppositions and inferences) interact with the different levels of interpretation and understanding of a cartoon (Gironzetti, 2013). The jest and inferences take place mainly at the first two levels, while the sting and the transfer of the author's presupposition occurs at the third level. This last level may allow the reader to reject the sting and to conclude that the cartoon is not funny at all (failed humour). The humorous effect occurs at all levels, although with different intensity, and the access to one level or another depends on the specific characteristics of the reader, such as age, education, culture, political ideology, mood, etc.

In sum, political cartoons are a specific type of humorous and multimodal communication created for the purpose of influencing while entertaining. The artist uses the features and tools of the genre to express his/her views in a disguised and persuasive way.

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