

Cartooning for Gender Equality: A Multimodal Expression of ‘Humour’ and ‘Vindication’

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explain how cartoons have become a fast and easy-to-process way to present humorous and yet highly vindicative messages which can be accessed by different people around the world. Therefore, they are increasingly used as an effective means to vindicate significant social issues, such as women’s rights and the claim for equal opportunities. As multimodal texts, they strategically combine different communicative ‘modes’, namely, verbal and non-verbal clues, in order to convey cognitive effects intended to be captured by the readers/viewers in order to grasp the whole meaning of the communicative act. More specifically, the present paper focuses on a selection of cartoons dealing with the controversial issue of gender equality, which have been extracted from newspaper digital editions, web platforms and publications appearing on-line during the period 2011-2014. Following the proposals put forward by Sperber and Wilson’s Relevance Theory, the analysis has revealed that the corpus of selected cartoons relies heavily on non-linguistic elements, especially on extremely meaningful visual metaphors, namely, the ‘cross’, the ‘key’, the ‘dart’, the ‘equals sign’ and the ‘scales’ images. This analysis allows us to explore how, by means of these non-verbal clues, cartoonists endow their drawings with a critical and vindicative message that is effectively and globally exposed to a wide international audience.

Keywords: Gender equality, cartooning, multimodal texts, women’s rights, Relevance Theory

1. Introduction

Cartoons have traditionally been considered as being a direct and easy-to-process way to transmit a message. In them, verbal and visual components interact in an attempt to produce meaning and humour; nevertheless, as Tsakona (2009) points out, cartoon humour is not always so easy to grasp fully, for, when interpreting it, readers need to pay attention to all the multimodal details of each cartoon.

Cartoons can communicate extremely relevant messages, with or without words, which can be accessed by different people around the world. For that reason, they have become a highly effective means to vindicate significant social issues. One of the latter is women’s rights and the claim for equal opportunities, which is increasingly becoming a leit-motif in forums, conferences and exhibitions.

Interest in the study of women’s struggle for equality as delivered through the work of cartoonists is also growing. To name but a few instances, recent publications on the subject have been Diane Atkinson’s *Funny Girls—Cartooning for Equality* (1997) or Liza Donnelly’s (2013) *Women Deliver, the World Receives; special issues of publications such as the International Journal of Comic Art devoted to ‘Women and Cartooning’* (2008); conferences such as *A Cartoon colloquium: Looking at women and cartoons held in Wellington, New Zealand, in November 2013*; or exhibitions like *Illustrators for Gender Equality*, which comprised the artworks of 30 cartoonists from 20 different countries, and was presented in different locations in Spain in 2013 after being shown in Mexico, Sweden and Cuba.

In this paper, I aim to describe how both humorous and vindicative messages are encoded and projected by cartoonists by means of their artwork, and how readers decode and interpret them. The corpus consists of a series of cartoons focusing on the claim for gender equality which were selected from those appearing in several digital editions of newspapers, web platforms and an on-line publication compiling international cartoons on gender equality between 2011 and 2014.

The readers’/viewers’ interpretations of new messages, such as cartoons, for instance, rely on their previous cognitive context. This is especially so in the case of vindicative messages, which are processed and contrasted against their background knowledge, beliefs and assumptions. That is why I have followed the proposals put forward by Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986, 1995; 1987) in order to describe how cartoonists encode their meanings through linguistic and visual elements, how readers/viewers decode both these verbal and non-verbal stimuli and what specific strategies both senders and receivers make use of in the encoding-decoding process.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Multimodal texts

As Kress & van Leeuwen (2001: 21) put it, multimodal texts are those which use different semiotic vehicles of communication (or “modes”), such as verbal elements, paralanguage, kinesics, sound, images or music, in order to convey their meaning. Actually, most, if not all, instances of human communication, from face-to-face

dialogues or films to websites, etc., are multimodal. Any comprehensive study of their meaning should thus focus on all these verbal and non-verbal aspects, both in isolation and in combination.

In spite of a long tradition of non-verbal studies, until fairly recently linguistic studies have neglected the non-verbal dimension of communication. A case in point is the literature on cartoons and comics which traditionally focused on the linguistic component and, thus, tended to choose as their object of analysis instances with a high verbal density. Nevertheless, more recent approaches to these texts take into account their multimodal nature and pay attention to both verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication.

Numerous studies have appeared centering on the meaningful combination of language and visual imagery, one of which is Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) (see Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001), an emerging paradigm in discourse studies which is concerned with the analysis of ‘intersemiosis’, that is, the relations arising from the interaction of semiotic choices (Lenke, 1998; van Leeuwen, 2005; Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006...). Or studies such as Kaindl’s (2004) which explores visual techniques in their combination with verbal elements.

Some other works follow a pragmatic-cognitive approach and use Relevance Theory (hereafter RT) for their analysis of multimodal texts. This theory, albeit mainly centered on verbal language, encompasses all modes of communication and can be applied to both verbal and verbal messages, since it relies on the principle that, when decoding a (non-)verbal message, addressees (hearers/readers) choose the first interpretation that involves more cognitive effects (more interest) with a lesser mental effort.

A cognitive approach to interpretation seems the most appropriate one to serve our ends since cartoonists convey their meaning by combining different semiotic modes which not only add to, but multiply (Lemke 1998: 92) their potential cognitive effects on the readers/viewers. For instance, women’s rights cartoonists combine language and image (illustration, colour, typography, signs...) and carry out the difficult task of producing a humorous, sometimes ironical, other times satirical effect, while conveying a critical and vindicative social message.

Olowu, Kayode & Egbuwalo (2014) state that “[t]he job of a cartoonist is to lampoon albeit surreptitiously. He tries to attack the represented phenomenon through the convention of satire.” In the case of the women’s rights cartoons under focus in this study, the cartoonists purport to convey a double, bittersweet effect, for they intend to make viewers smile but then decode deeply critical messages: “the humorous message usually purports to make manifest the intention of softening a deeper, more bitter message underneath.” (Rivas, 2014). In Donnelly’s words (2013): “But while cartoons are often designed to make us smile, they do not always make us laugh... Cartoons allow us to take in difficult subjects because of beautiful imagery, and we may be caught off-guard. The viewer is expecting a laugh, and perhaps may laugh; but then the viewer may also think.”

3. Research Methodology

For the purpose of this study, nine cartoons have been selected from digital media (online newspapers, web platforms and publications). Our analysis has followed the precepts of Relevance Theory and focuses on the combination of verbal and visual components in the chosen cartoons.

3.1 Relevance Theory

Cognitive scientists like Pinker (2008) have stated that language is underdetermined by thought; that is to say that what we verbally express is much poorer and less informative than what we think. For this reason, in order to get to as much as possible of the addresser’s intended meaning, there is no other alternative but to rely on our powers to deduce it from all the explicit and implicit linguistic and non-linguistic clues.

Sperber and Wilson’s Relevance Theory (henceforth RT) (1986; 1987; 1995) starts from the pragmatic premise that meaning does not depend only on the decoding of the linguistic code but on the addressee’s process of deducing or ‘inferring’ from both the linguistic and non-linguistic inputs of the addresser’s message. The message is likely to convey not only explicit but also implicit meanings or ‘implicatures’ (Note 1). In other words, what really matters in communication is not sentence meaning but utterance meaning, which takes into account context.

The *communicative principle of relevance* states that all messages convey cognitive effects which are worthwhile processing in order to understand the whole meaning of the communicative act. The addresser (speaker, writer, cartoonist, etc.) provides explicit verbal and non-verbal clues which make *ostensive*, i.e. apparent, her intentions and her wish to communicate some information/emotion, etc. Thus, her message is a combination of propositional or linguistic elements plus other contextual facts (previous utterances in the communicative event, kinesics, paralanguage, etc.). While doing this process, the addresser tends to be as economical as possible so as to cause the interpreter the least effort possible. The addressee, then, performs the task of capturing the intended message by inferring it with the help of these contextual cognitive clues. Since the addressee needs to decode the implicit information the addresser intends him to receive, a mutual knowledge or ‘manifestness’ between addresser and addressee is very important in this pragmatic cognitive model.

The cognitive model could, thus, be summarized as follows:

addresser's thought/intention + context-bound information → codified → put across →
decoding + cognitive context information → interpretation

To sum up, comprehension is “a process of identifying the speaker's informative intention” by decoding the propositional or linguistic message and by inferring the implicit contextual meaning, “the former serving as a source of hypotheses and evidence for the latter” (Sperber & Wilson, 1987: 705).

Since interpretation is based not only on language decoding but on inference, interpretation becomes a “fallible process of hypothesis formation and evaluation” (Wilson, 1994: 47). Besides, as each addressee has a different personal background knowledge that helps him interpret a message, not all utterances are interpreted in the same way by different hearers/readers (Yus, 2003). That is the reason why RT states that “relevance is relevance to an individual” (Sperber & Wilson, 1995: 142). But this is the true nature of human communication, i.e. that there is no total guarantee that the hearer/reader will pick the interpretation originally intended by the speaker/writer.

When constructing a hypothesis for the interpretation of an utterance, an interpreter will follow a series of procedures or tasks, not compulsory or necessarily sequential, depending on the context and strength of the addresser's intended meaning. As the message unfolds, the addressee's hypothesis is constantly being revised and contrasted with, or complemented by, previous expectations (anticipatory hypotheses).

According to Wilson & Sperber (2004: 261), these sub-tasks followed by the hearers/readers when interpreting, i.e. when constructing a hypothesis, are the following:

- ⇒ constructing an appropriate hypothesis about *explicit content (explicatures)*
- ⇒ constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual assumptions
(*implicated premises*)
- ⇒ constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual implications
(*implicated conclusions*)

For her part, the addresser may deliberately “exploit” these procedures in order to achieve certain contextual effects. One such contextual effect is humour.

In the attempt to build humorous strategies intended to be captured by the receiver, a speaker/writer/cartoonist may exploit, for example, the following interpretation procedures followed by the addressee (Yus, 2003: 1300):

- *ambiguity resolution*,
- *reference assignment* (interpreting polysemous words, locating spatial-temporal referents, etc.),
- *enrichment* of implicit information left semantically incomplete by the addresser, and
- *the deriving of implicatures* providing the highest number of contextual effects in exchange for the processing effort required.

In the case of multimodal discourses, non-verbal elements provide the interpreters with a huge amount of information producing many contextual connections with their cognitive frames. These connections will help the interpreters to deduce the contextual assumptions that, after being reinforced/contradicted by previous assumptions, will derive in contextual effects. (Note 2)

4. Gender roles in cartoons

Although the editorial cartoon became important in the late 19th century, it is nowadays when cartoons are achieving a greater influence with the increasing power of the mass media and the social networks. The subject matters dealt with in cartoons cover all kinds of key social issues, ranging from political to ethnic, racial and, of course, gender conflicts, and the cartoonists' capacity to raise the audience's awareness has proved highly relevant in historical events as important as democratization processes (Note 3).

Since cartoons are a multimodal form of mass media, the audience has to construct a hypothesis, i.e., to interpret, both on the basis of the linguistic and the visual clues, as well as on their previous background knowledge of the events/matters presented in the cartoons (Dines & Humez, 2010). This will trigger different potential interpretations by the different readers/viewers depending on each individual's spatio-temporal circumstances and their cognitive schemata, the ambiguity being greater in the case of ‘weak communication’, and smaller in the case of ‘strong communication’ in which the intended interpretation is more easily accessed (Forceville, 2005: 251). (Note 4)

As regards cartoons dealing with gender equality, they tend to critically portray the stereotypical gender roles imposed by society. Since the social imposition of roles is a global phenomenon, there are instances of cartoonists all over the world who denounce it by means of their works.

The following cartoon, entitled ‘Cover up’, is just an example of this; it intends to show how, in spite of the obvious cultural differences, societies apparently as far apart as the Western and the Arab ones are equally

impositive and oppressive with regard to women, and how men in all these countries disregard women's real nature and needs.



Figure 1. 'Cover up' (Note 5)

The Western woman in the cartoon feels trapped by the image she is expected to project, and the Arab woman is ensnared by a socio-religious tradition that imposes what image she should **not** "project". Though the situation is apparently contradictory, both are subject to the same limitation: they explicitly express that they have to "hide" their true nature because someone or something decides for them.

In Spanish cartoonist Miguel Villalba-Sánchez's words:

Women, like men, have a role imposed by society through family structure, past generations, future generations but, above all, business interests in the female projection. The day that equality is real there'll be no further need to mention gender, sexual orientation or colour of the skin. There'll be no further need of an 8 of March." (March 6, 2012). (Note 6)

5. Analysis of the corpus

In this section, eight cartoons by authors from different countries will be analyzed according to the precepts of Relevance Theory. The most outstanding information provided in the drawings comes from the use of visual metaphors, namely, the 'cross', the 'key', 'dart', the "equals sign" and the 'scales'.

5.1 The 'cross' visual metaphor

Villalba-Sánchez, also known as "Elchicotriste", (cited above), created the following illustration in order to commemorate International Women's Day in 2012, hence the title "Women's Day".



Figure 2. 'Women's Day'

Miguel Villalba Sánchez (ELchicotriste), from Spain

March 6, 2012

Source: <http://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/5615>

i. *Explicit content*: Since there is no text in the cartoon, the verbal explicatures are substituted here by 'explicit'

iconic elements; in this case, the most outstanding image is that of a “crucified” young woman in casual clothes, the cross occupying the most important and central part of the cartoon. The image is made even more outstanding as there seems to be a circle of white light behind the cross. The viewer’s gaze becomes immediately attracted to the woman’s face, framed by the circle of light, and to her immense, wide-open eyes. Moving the eyes down, the receiver will discover that the wooden cross that she is nailed to is nothing else but the lower part of the “symbol for female” turned upside down.

It is, of course, the viewers’ background knowledge which helps them identify the cross as part of the symbol for female, and find the parallelism between the woman in the image and Christ, because, like Him, she is wearing a crown of thorns and the three nails in her bleeding hands and feet.

The circular part of the female symbol is surrounded by people who are happily clapping the scene (in fact, the word ‘clap’ is the only paralinguistic element on the cartoon and appears numerous times in two different sizes and colours representing the strength of the applause). By the way they are dressed, the viewers will easily infer that it is her family (most probably her mother or mother-in-law, her husband, her son, even her dog), as well as a probable employer in jacket and tie and two strange characters, who most probably are a metaphorical representation of: on one hand, the entrepreneur who profits from the business behind the projection of the female image; and, on the other, an extreme example of women completely given over to this state of affairs, a slave to her own image.

ii. *Implicated premises (contextual assumptions)*: The viewers will have to activate their cognitive schemata in order to contextualize and interpret the images in the cartoon. Their background knowledge will most probably help them construct the hypothesis that the female symbol has actually become a cross on which the woman is being sacrificed, and this previous knowledge will also remind them that crucifixion is a terrible punishment. In spite of this, she is the only character in the drawing who is neither satisfied nor happy with the situation. Since a sad event like this should not make anyone rejoice, unless its audience are enemies, which here is far from the case, there must be an explanation for this audience’s satisfaction. (Note 7)

iii. *Implicated conclusions*: The conclusion derived from all this is that the roles women are expected to perform are a type of punishment for them, and that even the people who love them do not realize it because society imposes norms that people tend to follow in a servile unquestioning way like a flock of sheep. In this case, people do not seem to realize that the female role is one that means “sacrifice”, since a woman is a slave to the image that others expect from her.

Like Villalba-Sánchez, Kenyan cartoonist Victor Ndula employs the visual metaphor of the symbol for female as a cross.

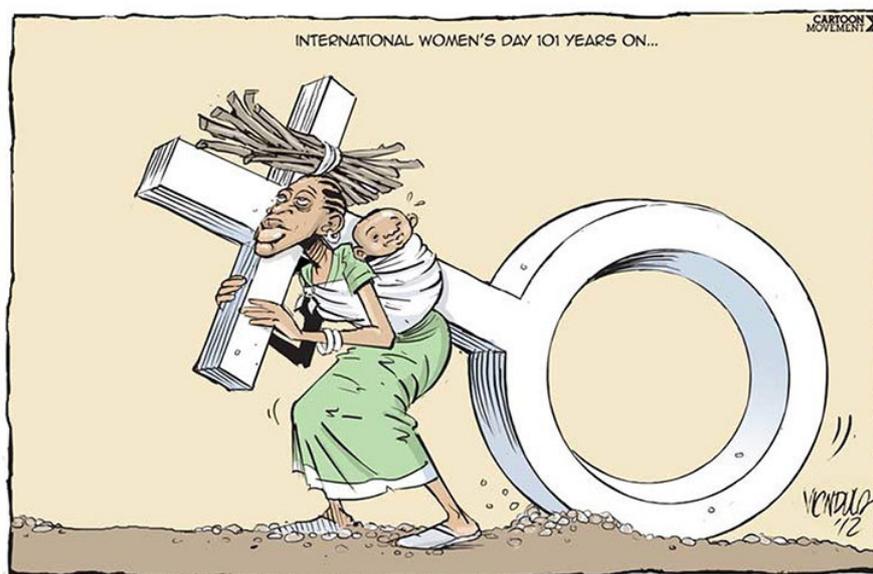


Figure 3. ‘Sad celebrations on International Women's Day’
Victor Ndula, from Kenya
March 8, 2012

Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/gallery/2012/mar/08/international-womens-day-cartoons?picture=387022281>

i. *Explicit content*: Below the caption “INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY 101 YEARS ON...”, is the image of an African woman carrying a child on her back, a bundle of wood and a huge heavy stone-like symbol for

females like a cross. She obviously looks very tired, has bags under her eyes, and walks with a stoop because of the unbearable weight.

ii. *Implicated premises (contextual assumptions)*: The viewers will easily recognize the image of an African woman performing her extremely hard “duties” of taking care of her kids and going for provision at the same time; she is carrying her child on her back as well as a heavy burden of wood or it may have been water or any other provision). The image completes the meaning of the elliptical explicature “INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY 101 YEARS ON...”, for it serves as a visual clue for the addressees to ‘enrich’ the implicit information left semantically incomplete by the addresser. In other words, the readers/viewers will deduce that 101 years after the proclamation of International Women’s Day, as the verbal clue shows, things have not improved. Far from it, the woman is carrying a bigger metaphorical load, that of an extremely difficult-to-move cross ending in a ring, which the addressees’ previous knowledge will associate with the symbol for females. Her facial expression indicates that she is hardly able to move it.

iii. *Implicated conclusions*: The implicit denunciation underlying the image suggests that the role assigned to women is a heavy burden for them, since they have to carry out too many hard tasks. In addition, the author seems to be criticizing the fact that the declaration of an international day for women does not appear to have triggered any significant impact to promote changes.

5.2 The ‘key’ visual metaphor

The next cartoon, drawn by Jean Gouders, is entitled ‘Gender equality’ and subtitled ‘There are still a lot of challenges ahead’. It was published in January 2012 by the platform <http://www.cartoonmovement.com>.

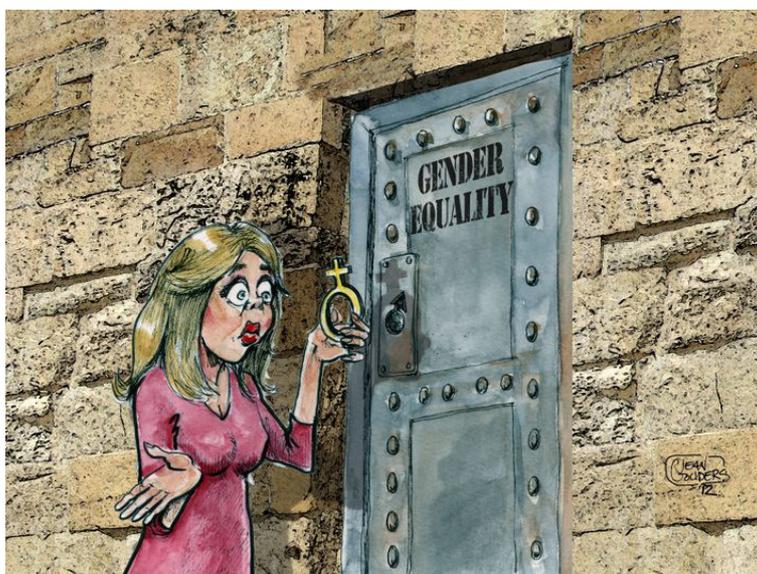


Figure 4. ‘Gender equality’ ‘There are still a lot of challenges ahead’

Jean Gouders

Jan 2, 2012

Source: <http://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/4776>

i. *Explicit content*: As in 5.1., Gouders’s cartoon mainly provides visual information. The scene represents a woman trying to open a door with the wrong key, more specifically with a key which does not fit into the keyhole. The golden key (as shiny as the woman’s blonde hair) occupies the central part of the image, projecting its shadow onto the dark, smaller keyhole. The viewer soon realizes that the key is in the form of the “female symbol” and that the keyhole is in the form of the “male symbol”. The woman seems to be completely puzzled by this situation and stares at the key she is holding in her left hand while the gesture of her right hand seems to be asking: “What is going on here?”

The key to all this may reside in the only verbal clue in the image, namely, two words written on the upper part of the door: GENDER EQUALITY, which indicates that the door is the entrance to that particular area. What seems curious is the fact that the door is not an ordinary door, but a heavy, metal, reinforced one, and the stone wall resembles those in prisons or bunkers, that is, of inaccessible places.

ii. *Implicated premises (contextual assumptions)*: The viewers’ background knowledge will help them recognize that the key, pretty and golden as it is, is useless and will never open that door. Besides, the type of fortress the door belongs to indicates that the woman has no access to that area.

iii. *Implicated conclusions*: The cartoonist seems to be implying that, in actual fact, ‘gender equality’ is just a chimera, because men are the only ones who have access to it; then, the name itself becomes a farce since it signifies something impossible to achieve.

5.3 The ‘dart’ visual metaphor

The following cartoon by Bernard Bouton also makes use of the symbols for female and male, but, on this occasion, they become darts.

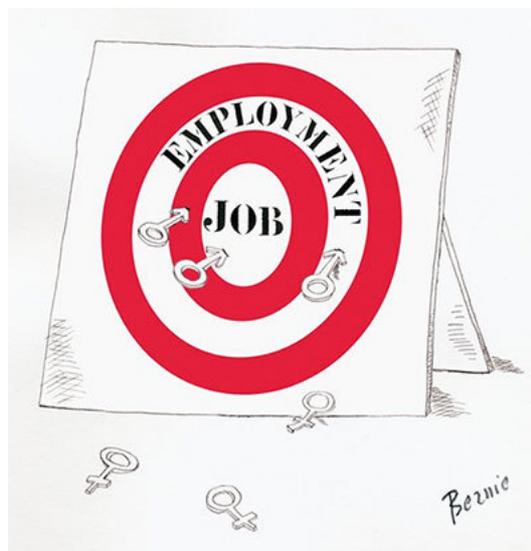


Figure 5. Gender inequality in job access
Bernard Bouton (Bernie), from France
08 March 2012

Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/gallery/2012/mar/08/international-womens-day-cartoons?picture=387022285>

i. *Explicit content*: The cartoon presents a big dartboard; three darts have scored the target, one of them is a bullseye and the other two have scored the side rings. There are two words written on the dartboard, ‘employment’ and ‘job’ (bullseye). Three other darts have failed to hit the dartboard. Curiously enough, the three fortunate darts have the form of a male symbol, the three loser ones have the form of a female symbol.

ii. *Implicated premises (contextual assumptions)*: The viewers possess the previous knowledge that a dart needs a pointed end in order to adhere to the dartboard. Since the object of the game is to hit ‘job’ and ‘employment’ (the only, though key, verbal information in the cartoon) and the female symbol is shaped in such a way that makes it inoperable as a dart, then the viewers will infer that the cartoonist’s intended meaning is that only the ‘male symbol-shaped’ darts will obtain these prizes.

iii. *Implicated conclusions*: The addresser most probably aims to transmit the message that being a woman may mean an unsurmountable obstacle when trying to get a job in a society in which, even in the 21st century, being a man is a great advantage.

5.4 The ‘equals sign’ visual metaphor

Palestinian cartoonist Mohammad Sabaaneh does not make use of the symbols for female and male like the cartoonists in the examples above do. Instead, he conveys key information clues by means of the equals sign.



Figure 6.
Mohammad Sabaaneh, from Palestine
In: Donnelly (2013: 46)

- i. *Explicit content*: The cartoon presents only visual information in a minimalist style: on a black background, there is a group of eleven “women” (the addressee will recognize the symbol similar to the ladies rest room sign) that are made equivalent to a single man by means of the equals sign (similar to the ‘gentlemen’ sign).
- ii. *Implicated premises (contextual assumptions)*: The addressee will construct the hypothesis that, since the equals sign is in between, the group on the left amounts to the person on the right and viceversa. Hence, in this case, eleven women amount to one man.
- iii. *Implicated conclusions*: The addressees will arrive at the critical conclusion that, in our society, being a man seems more important than being a woman, for men tend to wield the power and control.

5.5 The ‘scales’ visual metaphor

We shall finally analyze three cartoons that make use of the ‘scales’ visual metaphor. This is a frequent device in gender equality cartoons.

For instance, Portuguese cartoonist Cristina Sampaio uses this visual device in her illustration.



Figure 7.
Cristina Sampaio
Source: <http://www.cristinasampaio.com>
Also in: Donnelly (2013: 20)

- i. *Explicit content*: Sampaio does not employ any verbal resource and all the information provided is visual. The addresser is presented with quite a simple illustration consisting of a pair of scales evenly balanced; there is a woman in the left pan and a tiny item, probably a speck of dust or a dot, in the right pan.

ii. *Implicated premises (contextual assumptions)*: When constructing a hypothesis for the meaning intended by the addresser in this cartoon, the viewers will activate their cognitive schemata and recognize the scales as a weighing instrument. Their previous knowledge will also tell them that the pans of the scale are balanced when the weight in both pans is the same; since they are evenly balanced, they will deduce that the tiny itemt and the woman are of the same weight, and, hence, that the woman weighs very, very little.

In fact, the woman is portrayed as a thin, far from voluptuous little person, whose gestures and attitude seem to suggest an insipid, colorless person.

iii. *Implicated conclusions*: The implicit criticism intended to be apprehended by the addressee is that being a woman in our society equals being next to nothing, with no voice, no power at all.

Another instance of a cartoon on gender equality that makes use of the scales device is Bernard Bouton's, entitled "Gender Perfect Equality", which as we shall explain is a 'perfect' irony; hence the subtitle "Some improvements could still be made...".



Figure 8. Perfect gender equality
"Some improvements could still be made..."

Bernard Bouton

03 October 2012

Source: <http://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/7658>

i. *Explicit content*: Like Sampaio, he presents a pair of perfectly balanced scales. In the left pan is seated a man and in the right one is a woman seated next to different domestic appliances (namely an iron and a Hoover) and a set of saucepans. The only verbal information presiding the picture in the upper middle part says "Perfect gender equality", which 'explicitates' what the scales are weighing.

ii. *Implicated premises (contextual assumptions)*: As commented on above, the addressees' background knowledge will support the hypothesis that, since the balanced pans of the scales carry the same weight, then, according to the picture, a man equals a woman plus all her domestic utensils. The linguistic information indicates that the variable to be measured is the quality of 'gender equality' which is said to be perfect; hence, the supposed perfection in gender relations is having a woman bound to her role as a housewife.

iii. *Implicated conclusions*: The cartoonist evidently intends the viewers to pick up the irony in his words... He is denouncing the fact that in today's society a woman is still linked, or better, is a slave to, her role as housewife.

Our final cartoon was part of the project "Millennium Development Goals" and was drawn by Arcadio Esquivel in order to commemorate the 2011 International Women's Day. He drew it as the result of an idea that a contributor to the project (named Andrea) proposed: "My idea for the cartoon is that the symbols for female and male get together to become one with the meaning of equality. So instead of 2 symbols it turns into one." (Note 8). Esquivel answered her and proposed the scales as the link between both symbols.

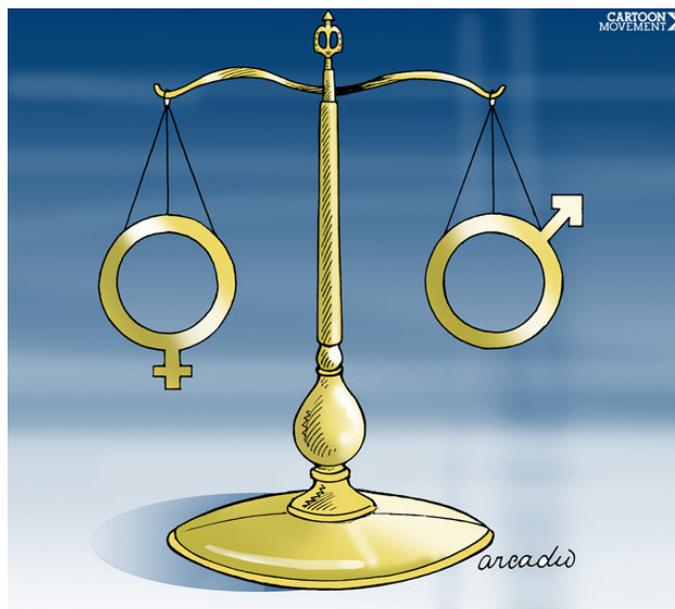


Figure 9. Gender equality
Arcadio Esquivel
08 March 2011

Source: <http://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/1501>

- i. *Explicit content*: As in Sampaio's and Bouton's cartoons, in Esquivel's drawing the protagonist is a pair of scales perfectly balanced. They are pretty and golden and stand out against a blue sky-like background; instead of pans the scales bear the two symbols for female and male.
- ii. *Implicated premises (contextual assumptions)*: Once again, the viewers will infer from the balanced scales (supporting the symbols which their schemata will have recognized as being those for males and females) that a woman and a man 'weigh' the same, that is, they are equals.
- iii. *Implicated conclusions*: This cartoon is not a description of reality but the reflection of a wish. With this drawing, the cartoonist is expressing the fact that both genders are actually equal and, hence, they should be treated and allowed to behave as such. The hidden criticism underneath is that this does not in point of fact happen.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of nine cartoons dealing with the widely debated and controversial issue of gender equality, which were selected from newspaper digital editions, web platforms and on-line publications, has revealed that, as multimodal texts, they purposefully combine different communicative 'modes', verbal and non-verbal clues, with the intention of their being captured by the readers/viewers. Nevertheless, the cartoons which comprise our corpus rely heavily on their non-linguistic elements in order to convey cognitive effects which the addressees have to process so as to grasp the whole meaning of the communicative act. More specifically, the selected cartoons make use of meaningful visual metaphors, namely the 'cross', the 'key', 'dart', the "equals sign" and the 'scales' images. By means of these non-verbal elements, cartoonists endow their pictures with an enormous communicative effectiveness, since their meaning can be picked up by addressees all over the world and, hence, their critical and demanding message is globally exposed.

In the drawings, the symbol for female is represented as a cross, as a key and as a dart in order to denounce the limitations and oppression women are subject to: the implicated premises or contextual assumptions imply that it is a 'cross' (Figures 2 and 3), since the women's role involves derision and sacrifice; it is a useless 'key' and 'dart' (Figures 4 and 5), since it opens no door and hits no dartboard target. The implicated conclusion represented by the cartoonist, then, being that women are nothing by themselves.

The artists employ the visual metaphor of the equals sign and the scales in order to show how a woman amounts to almost nothing. A large number of women are needed to equal a single man (Figure 6); in fact, when weighed on the scales, they need to be accompanied by their domestic utensils in order to be on a level with a single man (Figure 8), for, when alone, they amount to a speck of dust (Figure 7). Again, the cognitive effects intended to be processed by the viewers imply a sarcastic, sad humor, loaded with a large dose of denunciation and criticism. Even Figure 9, which visually represents what a perfect gender equality (women and men at the same level on the scales) should be, encloses the implicated criticism that this is just a wish, not reality.

Relevance Theory has revealed itself to be a useful, most adequate tool for analyzing multimodal texts such as cartoons. As Yus (1998) aptly put it, it is perfectly valid for all types of messages, both verbal and non-verbal. The analysis has shown how the interpretation of the cartoons by the addressees needs to rely not only on the explicit verbal and non-verbal clues provided by the addressers, but also on their previous cognitive schemata, their background knowledge, their beliefs and assumptions (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). Cartoonists 'take advantage' of the processes that the addressees have to carry out in order to construct a hypothesis for the interpretation of the message and they deliberately exploit these procedures in order to build up their sometimes humorous, other times ironic, bitter or even sad criticisms and vindication of gender equality.

These conclusions coincide with those reached in Rivas-Carmona (2014), which focused on the vindication of a better work-life balance for women through cartoons. Since cartooning, as a means of vindication, is acquiring a growing significance, our future research will further investigate cartoons presenting multimodal portrayals of male chauvinism, on the one hand, and cartoons denouncing women's educational discrimination, on the other.

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Notes

- Note 1. Implicatures are “[t]hose contextual assumptions and implications which the hearer has to recover in order to satisfy himself that the speaker has observed the principle of relevance” (Wilson & Sperber, 1986/1995: 383).
- Note 2. Interesting literature on the application of RT to humor is Tanaka, 1992, 1994; Yus, 1996, 1997, 1998.
- Note 3. See Lent (2001) on this matter.
- Note 4. See El Refaie (2009) on the way different readers interpret cartoons.
- Note 5. This cartoon is available at:
https://www.google.es/search?q=cartoons+on+women+in+english+newspapers&hl=es&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=hce6UtSDNuep7AaBw4DoBA&ved=0CFgQsAQ&biw=1097&bih=482#facrc=_&imgdii=_&imgrc=-LJUme5rPY5-zM%3A%3B6FcNeoGKPPtZXM%3Bhttp%253A%252F%252Fi1199.photobucket.com%252Falbums%252Faa470%252FCato_Minor%252Fpolyp_cartoon_islam_west_women_rights_burka.jpg%3Bhttp%253A%252F%252Fwww.indiamike.com%252FIndia%252Fkerala-f39%252Fno-ogling-beach-t182637%252F4%252F%3B720%3B382 [Retrieved June 24, 2014]
- Note 6. Available: <http://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/5615> [Retrieved June 26, 2014]
- Note 7. In response to a comment on the presence of women applauding their fellow women’s sacrifice in the above-mentioned website, Villalba-Sánchez explained: “Women, like men, are victims of different aspects of society’s expectations and instrumentalised visions of gender. This society’s expectations are often nourished with the complicity of other women, not just men.”
- Note 8. Available: <http://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/1493> [Retrieved June 28, 2014]

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