

The role of laughter and gender identity in the construction of humor

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ABSTRACT

EN Humor and laughter are intertwined pragmatic phenomena that play a central role in conversational interaction. In colloquial Spanish, laughter is not merely a reaction to humor but a resource for negotiating social relations and performing identities, including gender identity. This article examines how different types of laughter contribute to affiliative or disaffiliative dynamics in humorous utterances, and how these dynamics participate in the construction of gendered identities. Drawing on conversational data from the Val.Es.Co. 2.0 and Briz & Val.Es.Co. corpora (2002), in which laughter is explicitly annotated, we analyze a set of representative examples illustrating how men and women deploy laughter differently as a conversational strategy. The findings reveal patterns: while affiliative laughter predominates in both genders, disaffiliative laughter is more frequently used among male speakers as a means of challenging or mocking interlocutors, whereas female speakers tend to avoid direct attacks on present participants. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of how laughter indexes stance, alignment, and gendered identity work in everyday conversation.

Key words: LAUGHTER, HUMOR, GENDER, IDENTITY, CONVERSATIONAL ANALYSIS, PRAGMATICS.

ES El humor y la risa son fenómenos pragmáticos interrelacionados que desempeñan un papel central en la interacción conversacional. En el español coloquial, la risa no constituye únicamente una reacción ante el humor, sino también un recurso para negociar las relaciones sociales y construir identidades, incluida la identidad de género. Este artículo examina cómo distintos tipos de risa contribuyen a dinámicas afiliativas o desafilativas en los enunciados humorísticos y cómo dichas dinámicas participan en la construcción de identidades de género. A partir de datos conversacionales procedentes del Corpus Val.Es.Co. 2.0 y de Briz y Val.Es.Co. (2002), en los que la risa aparece explícitamente anotada, se analiza un conjunto de ejemplos representativos que ilustran cómo hombres y mujeres emplean la risa como estrategia conversacional. Los resultados revelan patrones diferenciados: aunque la risa afiliativa predomina en ambos géneros, la risa desafilativa se utiliza con mayor frecuencia entre los hablantes masculinos como estrategia para ridiculizar a los interlocutores, mientras que las hablantes femeninas tienden a evitar ataques directos hacia los participantes presentes. Estos hallazgos contribuyen a una comprensión más profunda de cómo la risa sirve para identificar procesos humorísticos de construcción identitaria en la conversación cotidiana.

Palabras clave: RISA, HUMOR, GÉNERO, IDENTIDAD, ANÁLISIS CONVERSACIONAL, PRAGMÁTICA.

IT L'umorismo e la risata sono due fenomeni pragmatici interconnessi che giocano un ruolo centrale nell'interazione conversazionale. Nello spagnolo colloquiale, la risata non è solamente una reazione all'umorismo, bensì rappresenta una risorsa per la negoziazione delle relazioni sociali e le dinamiche di disaffiliazione nelle espressioni umoristiche e come queste partecipano nella costruzione delle identità di genere. Attingendo dai dati conversazionali del Corpus Val.Es.Co e Briz & Val.Es.Co (2002), in cui viene preso nota esplicitamente della risata, analizziamo una serie di esempi rappresentativi che illustrano come gli uomini e le donne facciano uso della risata in maniera differente come strategia conversazionale. I risultati mostrano dei pattern: mentre la risata affiliativa predomina in entrambi i generi, la risata disaffiliativa è utilizzata più frequentemente dall'interlocutore uomo come uno strumento a fronte di una controparte più provocatoria o sarcastica. Le donne, invece, tendono ad evitare di attaccare direttamente i partecipanti in loro presenza. Questi risultati contribuiscono ad una comprensione più profonda di come la risata possa indicare atteggiamento, schieramento e manifestazione di identità di genere nella conversazione di tutti i giorni.

Parole chiave: RISATA, UMORE, GENERE, IDENTITÀ, ANALISI CONVERSAZIONALE, PRAGMATICA.

1. Introduction

This study aims to analyze laughter as a pragmatic phenomenon in conversational utterances containing humor. Our objective is to investigate not only the presence of laughter, but also the diverse functions it performs in interaction. In this paper, we distinguish two interactional orientations of laughter within humorous sequences: affiliative and disaffiliative. Affiliative laughter displays alignment with the ongoing humorous frame and contributes to solidarity (e.g., co-constructing the joke, sustaining a playful mode, or mitigating potentially face-threatening content). Disaffiliative laughter displays disalignment or distance with respect to a prior humorous move and/or indexes a stance that challenges the prior speaker's positioning (e.g., laughter that accompanies teasing, ridicule, or overt distancing). Importantly, disalignment with a humorous attempt is not necessarily "disaffiliative" or "attacking": participants may resist or close down humor simply by withholding laughter, producing minimal uptake, or explicitly invoking a social norm. For this reason, we treat "attack" as a possible interactional outcome in some disaffiliative sequences (when laughter contributes to a face-threatening action), not as a defining criterion of the category itself. Our classification is therefore sequential: it is established through participants' next actions (continuation of the humorous frame, repair, topic shift, rejection, escalation), rather than through the origin of humor (speaker vs listener) or laughter alone. The distributional analysis of these types of laughter shows that they are not random but embedded within broader conversational strategies that reflect how identity is performed in talk. Affiliative laughter typically appears when speakers seek to strengthen in-group solidarity, co-construct a humorous frame, or reinforce agreement and solidarity. Conversely, disaffiliative laughter emerges when interlocutors position themselves against the humorous proposition, either by mocking the speaker, challenging their authority, or distancing themselves from the joke. Both uses of laughter highlight the complex role of humor in shaping interpersonal dynamics, but they also reveal recurrent tendencies linked to gendered patterns of communication. Therefore, the research objectives are the following:

- To analyze laughter as a pragmatic phenomenon in humorous utterances in colloquial Spanish.
- To differentiate the functions of affiliative and disaffiliative laughter in interaction.
- To examine the relationship between the use of laughter and the construction of gender identity in conversational contexts.

To achieve these objectives, we present the following research questions:

- How is laughter used to reinforce or challenge interaction in humorous utterances?
- What differences can be observed in the use of laughter between male and female speakers?
- In what ways does laughter contribute to the construction and negotiation of gender identity in conversation?
- Are there recurrent patterns in the distribution of laughter that can be linked to communication strategies specific to each gender?

The paper is therefore organized into four main sections. Section 2 explains what we understand as verbal humor in Spanish, drawing on pragmatic and discourse-analytic traditions. Section 3 focuses on laughter as a pragmatic phenomenon that distinguishes humorous utterances. Section 4 explores whether laughter highlights traits that define gender identity, bringing together findings from both corpora. Finally, Section 5 presents the analysis of selected examples, which allow us to draw conclusions about the broader relationship between laughter, humor, and gender identity.

2. Theoretical framework: laughter as a marker of verbal humor

2.1 *Laughter and humor*

To address verbal humor in naturally occurring talk, we adopt an interactional perspective in which participants co-construct a humorous frame through sequential practices. Importantly, the elements that guide recipients' interpretation are better described as contextualization cues rather than as jab/punch lines: Attardo explicitly distinguishes "contextualization cues" from the humor itself (Attardo, 2020, p. 236–237). In this study, we do not operationalize jab/punch lines as analytic categories; instead, we focus on how laughter (when annotated in the corpora) participates in the sequential negotiation of affiliation and disaffiliation within humorous sequences. Attardo calls these lines "jab lines" (2001, p. 82) if the elements appear within the plot,

and “punchlines” if they occur at the end. Semantically, they are the same elements, but their textual position and pragmatic function differ. Thus, if they appear in the middle of the conversation they serve as jab lines to make humor, while if they appear at the end they are used as a humorous punchline.

Regarding the phenomenon of laughter, several authors have expressed their opinion on the subject. Archakis and Tsakona (2005, p. 46) argue that laughter is a perlocutionary effect triggered by humor, and that there must be a prerequisite, the opposition of scripts, for it to exist. From our point of view, this prerequisite may not appear in ironic-humorous utterances. In ironic contexts, the inversion of certain conversational principles leads to different types of irony. Thus, in cases in which the Principle of Informativeness (I), which proposes providing sufficient information, or the Principle of Manner (M), which recommends avoiding ambiguous expressions, is inverted, the irony becomes non-prototypical, since it is inferred by the multiplicity of referents, in the former, or by the appearance of marked expressions, in the latter (Ruiz and Padilla, 2009). In this way, the utterance conveys a figurative meaning due to the inversion of conversational principles.

Raclaw and Ford (2017) justify laughter as a resource that is used while the listener evaluates a humorous utterance. Partington (2006) states that laughter is a conversational resource used to achieve specific goals, such as building identity, arguing, threatening someone's image, or self-promotion. For her part, Clift (2016) studies the relationship between laughter and humor based on an audiovisual corpus, where the listener's response may indicate agreement or disagreement with the speaker. This idea is closely related to the classification we propose in Alvarado and Cortés (2017), where laughter is seen as a reactive action that shows either support or rejection of a speaker's discursive act. Hence, laughter can be affiliative when supporting the speaker or disaffiliative or attacking when it expresses discomfort or indignation.

Laughter frequently co-occurs with humorous talk. In interaction, laughter is better understood as a multimodal resource through which participants display stance, manage alignment, and organize next actions. For methodological purposes, we use the corpus tag [laughter] to retrieve candidate excerpts; however, whether a sequence is treated as humorous is established sequentially, through participants' uptake (e.g., continuation of a playful frame, repair, explicit rejection, or topic shift), rather than inferred from laughter alone. Notwithstanding, we adopt the ideas of Norrick (2003) about laughter, since he considers it to be the most appropriate explicit sign to support a humor-based corpus like ours, alongside other events like applause (Cortés 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). Poyatos (1994, p. 91) presents a complex view of laughter, describing it as:

a series of audible oral or nasal airflow movements, usually irregular, above all exhaled, with variations in muscular tension, rhythm and phonic characteristics, accompanied by variable corporal and facial behaviors and possible chemical, dermal and thermal reactions, simultaneous to verbal language or alternating with it or independent, that expresses positive or negative feelings with respect to oneself, to others, to events or to the environment.

This definition already speaks of positive or negative effects that we will link to what we call affiliative or disaffiliative laughter.

Before turning to the analysis, we briefly locate laughter within the successive phases through which a humorous utterance is produced and taken up until it becomes recognizable as humor (cf. Alvarado, 2014). This step is crucial for identifying the point at which the humorous frame is established and for linking that moment to the interactional resource(s) deployed by the speaker. This idea of phase recognition has been dealt with by Hay (2001, p. 67) and, later, by Attardo (2001, p. 166). For these authors, these phases are recognition, understanding, appreciation and agreement, and are closely related to the ability to understand humor and the execution of humor.

Recognition of the utterance in humorous terms is the initial phase in which the interlocutors must see the humor. In this initial phase of humor recognition is the interlocutor's ability to observe that humor is present in an utterance.

The next phase is that of understanding, which is closely related to the previous one, since the listener has previously recognized the humorous utterance and, in this phase, has also understood it.

In the appreciation phase, we move on to the stage of humor performance, since the interlocutors can share the humorous intention of the speaker because they have recognized, understood and appreciated it as such. At this stage, it is decided whether shared humor occurs or, on the contrary, failed humor appears. It is also here that the laughter shows the intention of the listener because, if it appears, the humor will be continued, while if it does not appear, it will be failed humor, either because it has not been understood or because it is not shared.

The last phase through which a humorous utterance passes is the agreement that both listener and speaker can show in producing and interpreting humor. In this phase of humor performance, the interlocutors have decided to continue it in the conversation, as shown by explicit laughter.

In Alvarado (2014), we proposed a figure to illustrate the phases through which a humorous utterance passes in our corpus, to which we have added jab lines, punchlines and laughter to show at what stage they appear (see Figure 1).

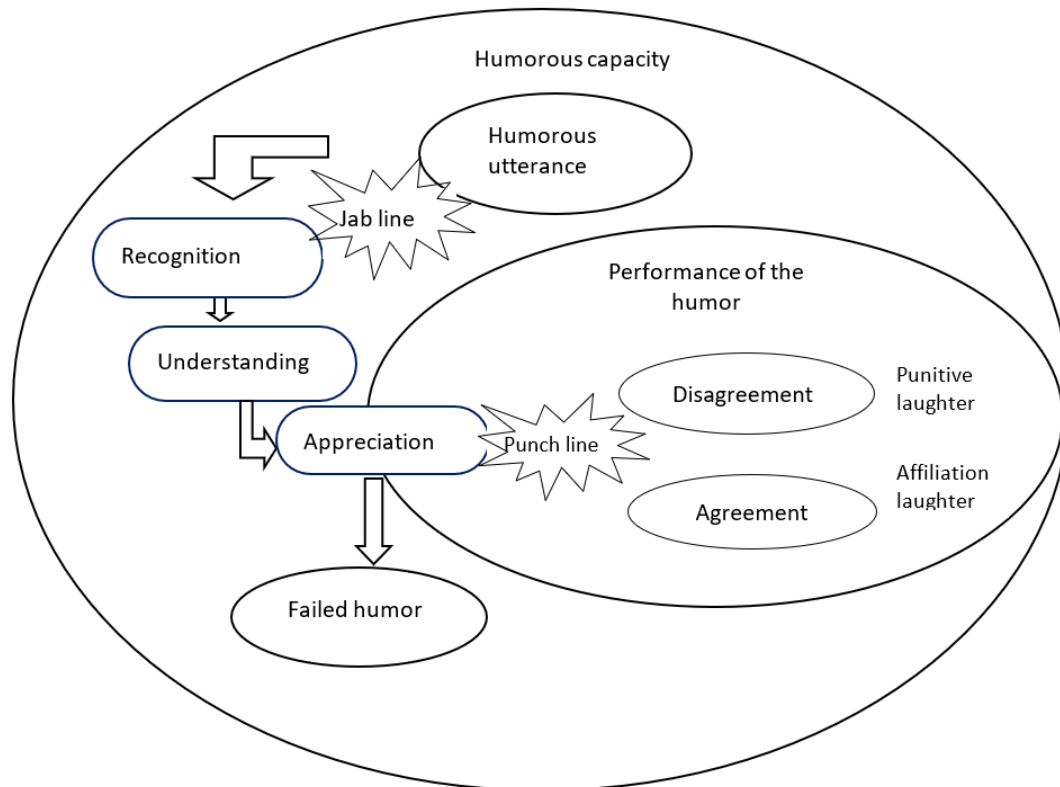


Figure 1. New Adaptation of the Phases of a Humorous Utterance (Alvarado).

As we observed, laughter is found in the performance of humor and in the appreciation and agreement phases. This happens because laughter is a reactive action (Abarca Vázquez et al., 2024) with which the interlocutor manifests sometimes in favor and sometimes against a discursive action by the speaker. Thus, we can distinguish between two types of laughter: *affiliative laughter*, when it is emitted as a reaction to an utterance made by the speaker, or it can be *disaffiliative or attack laughter* when the reaction causes discomfort or indignation in the interlocutor (Alvarado, 2017). We can say that, in the former case, the listener laughs *with* what is said by someone, while in the latter case he laughs *at* (mocks) someone; both actions are always done to elevate or devalue what is said by the speaker. The association of laughter as a reaction to humor acts in two completely opposite ways: on the one hand, it is a manifestation that strengthens bonds with the speaker; and, on the other hand, it is a direct attack on the speaker's public image. Both intentions appear in our corpus of colloquial conversations.

2.2 Gender and humor

The relationship between gender and humor has been studied by researchers for more than 30 years. The superiority of men over women reflected the reality of the time, as seen in the work of R. Lakoff (1975), inspired by Jespersen (1922), Labov (1972) and Trudgill (1972), among others, as we see before. The sociocultural context surrounding them marked the prevailing belief that women did not understand humor and therefore had no sense of humor (Lakoff 1975, p. 56). Lakoff (1975) reports it critically as a social stereotype, using hyperbolic framing (Lakoff, 1975, p. 80). We therefore treat such claims as gender ideologies

about language and humor, not as empirical descriptions. Thanks to the evolution of society in terms of equality, this premise has changed, since, as we will see in the corpus, women are not only capable of understanding jokes, but they make them in the same way as men and even use different conversational strategies that identify and define them. This is due to the fact that women are now fully integrated into the workforce and have adopted norms that were once associated only with male discourse (direct language, jokes, interruptions, etc.).

Thus, theories about women and humor have evolved, such as the one proposed by Suderland and Litosseliti (2002), which develops gender identity in the analysis of discourse and in the construction of social roles characterized by social status. Crawford (2003, p. 1425) states that humor in women has three main functions, since it serves to gain the respect of the audience; it is educational, in that it deals with sensitive issues in a more amusing way; and, perhaps the most important, to empower women against the macho discourse of men.

Similarly, Kotthoff (2006, p. 21) shows the convergence between gender and humor, according to sociocultural level. She states that women with low sociocultural status use humor like men, while men with high sociocultural status create humor like women. Other researchers, such as Mills (2005, p. 276), Bell (2009, p. 158) and Melchiori et al. (2025) assert that some humorous utterances can directly influence the interlocutor's image, for example, if they are used to interrupt the conversation, since this fact can alter the behavior expected by the speaker. Therefore, in order to create continuous humor (sequences co-constructed across multiple turns, where participants jointly maintain a playful frame), it is necessary to empathize with our interlocutor and anticipate their reaction to the humorous utterance. According to this idea, the greater the familiarity and closeness between interlocutors, the more likely humor will succeed in conversation, because if they are in a relaxed setting, they feel safer both producing and receiving humor, as seen in our corpus. In this way, a gender identity is created based on the procedures used in male and female conversations, which will serve to characterize them and establish differences in their use.

Furthermore, recent research emphasizes the performative dimension of humor in gender construction. Humor is not merely a reflection of social roles but an active tool in negotiating, resisting, or reinforcing these roles. For instance, women's use of ironic or playful laughter can serve as a form of social positioning, signaling competence, wit, or solidarity within the conversational group. Men, conversely, may use humor strategically to assert dominance or social authority, though they also adapt their strategies depending on context and audience. This aligns with theories of pragmatics that consider humor a conversational strategy influenced by both personal identity and social norms.

Corpus-based studies (Glenn, 2009, Glenn & Holt, 2013, Hanks & Egbert, 2022, among others) reveal that humor functions differently depending on the type of laughter employed. Affiliative laughter, for example, tends to create bonds, reduce tension, and indicate agreement or empathy, whereas disaffiliative laughter can signal criticism, social judgment, or subtle aggression. Importantly, these patterns are not uniformly distributed across genders: women are more likely to deploy affiliative laughter to foster inclusion, while men may more frequently employ laughter in a competitive or challenging way.

Ultimately, the intersection of gender, humor, and conversation demonstrates that humor is a dynamic, context-sensitive phenomenon. It simultaneously reflects social conventions and allows interlocutors to negotiate identity, power, and relationships. By analyzing conversational corpora, researchers can trace how these strategies vary according to gender, providing insights into both the pragmatics of humor and the evolving role of women and men in contemporary social interaction.

3. Methodology

To achieve these aims, our study draws from Corpus Val.Es.Co. 2.0, which consists of 46 naturally occurring conversations and provides a rich sample of colloquial Spanish. This corpus explicitly marks instances of laughter and, crucially, allows researchers to track its distribution across turns and phases of interaction. From this material, we identified 921 occurrences of laughter. We first retrieved all annotated laughter events in the dataset ($n = 921$). Because our analysis requires close sequential inspection, we then defined an analytic subset of laughter tokens by applying replicable inclusion criteria: (i) the laughter token occurs to show humor, (ii) the surrounding turns provide sufficient context to identify the target of the humor, and (iii) the excerpt contains clear cues for tracking the negotiation of affiliation/disaffiliation. Applying these criteria yielded 60 laughter occurrences, which constitute the dataset examined in detail. These 60 occurrences were selected because they contain affiliative or disaffiliative laughter within humorous sequences produced by both male and female speakers.

For the purposes of the present paper, we validated the selection because laughter occurs together with other humorous elements and we analyzed six statistically representative examples to test our initial hypothesis: that humorous utterances exploit laughter as a pragmatic resource serving different communicative purposes. These examples illustrate, in our analysis, the dual role of laughter as affiliative support and as a tool of attack.

This work builds on previous studies, particularly Alvarado (2014, 2016, 2021) and Khaylina and Alvarado (2023), where we analyzed the dynamics of sustained and failed humor in both male and female speakers. Those studies showed that humor unfolds in phases, and that irony and humor function as communicative strategies primarily serving the speaker. In the present contribution, however, we narrow our focus to verbal humor and to the explicit markers that enable researchers to reliably identify it in conversational corpora. Among such markers, laughter stands out as a crucial signal: it not only reveals the perception of humor by participants but also demonstrates how humor can be mobilized either to attack or to affiliate within the conversational group.

Ultimately, our hypothesis is that laughter, beyond being a spontaneous reaction, constitutes a strategic resource in interaction. By examining how laughter patterns across different speakers and contexts, we argue that it plays a significant role in the construction of gender identity. In this way, laughter becomes a window into broader social processes, showing how men and women use humor not merely to entertain but to negotiate power, solidarity, and identity within everyday talk.

4. Analysis

As we are concerned here with the study of laughter in colloquial conversations, we will focus only on the utterances in which it is recorded and marked as such in the corpus.

In example (1), there are 2 interlocutors who talk about the play that one of them had performed in with other classmates who are not present in the conversation, in which they had to sing:

- (1) 261 E: § yes/// uhh/// (()) the one who plays the groom, that's actually his voice//Xavi's too, his voice is real//
 262 J: yes/ Xavi's really//
 263 E: ^o((what else))/
 264 J: I was already getting suspicious/ wow, Nando singing (())/
 265 E: the day they handed out the singing roles, I wasn't there/ otherwise/ just imagine!// (()) §
 266 J: § he says→/ let's see/ okay Ernesto/ start singing!// and you're like→/ damn!/ I only sing in the shower! (LAUGHTER)/ oh man, stop/ so funny dude/ when he said something like→/ I'm going to become a nun! (())/ and everyone goes → he's crazy! he's crazy!// [so funny/ dude!]
 267 E: [no way!] (LAUGHTER)§
 268 J: § I can just see you doing that↑ I started cracking up↑ it's just one of our dumb jokes// [from Pamesa]
- 261 E: § sí/// eeh/// (()) el que hace de novio ese sí que es su voz// Xavi también es su voz//
 262 J: sí/ el de Xavi si quee~//
 263 E: ^o((qué más))^o/
 264 J: a mí ya me estrañab-/ uuyy Nando cantando (())/
 265 E: el día que repartieron los papeles/ para cantar yo no estaba/ si noo/ imagínate↑// (()) §
 266 J: §dice→/ a ver/ tú Ernesto/ ¡a cantar!// y tú→/ ¡hostiaaa!/ ¡si yo sólo canto en la duchaa! (RISAS)/ ¡ay! calla/ qué risa/ nano/ cuando salió→ no se qué/ cuando dice→/ me voy a meter monja↑ (())/ y todos→ ¡está loco! ¡está loco!// [¡qué risa/ nano!]
 267 E: [¡alaa!] (RISAS)§268 J: § te veo- te veo haciendo eso↑ me empecé a descojonar↑ es que es una parida nuestra// [del Pamesa]
 (Corpus Valesco 2.0, Conversation 14, Interventions 260-268)

In (1), J's utterance reproduces, in direct speech, the words of an absent person at the moment he is asked to sing in the play and he responds *I only sing in the shower*. This utterance, followed by *I'm going to become a nun*, triggers laughter based on a humorous situation, because E empathizes with the story J is telling and builds on the humor, as seen in, *I started cracking up*. In this case, the humor is recognized and continued

by both E and J, and the laughter is affiliative among the members of the conversational group, since a humorous utterance has been made about a situation known to both and the image of neither is attacked.

In (2), three interlocutors discuss the anxious behavior of some students at the university when taking notes:

- (2) 2 C: § of course! I'm going to take notes
 3 N: so generous
 4 J: when it comes to analyzing the space↑ [aside]
 5 C: [when it comes to] [(LAUGHTER)]
 6 N: [(LAUGHTER)] *more slowly please (LAUGHTER) that's like when- when you go to uni and → haven't you noticed- you walk in and the lecturer says hi! good morning! and people start writing things down/ and you're like, what the hell are they writing! hi, good morning'? I mean, come on*
 7 C: or others get lost in class because the first time I went↑ [(LAUGHTER)]
 8 N: [(LAUGHTER)] I usually get lost
 9 C: I understood but, did you get anything from that? [(LAUGHTER)]
 10 N: [(LAUGHTER)]
- 2 C: § ¡claro! voy a coger apuntes
 3 N: generosa
 4 J: a la hora de analizar el espacio↑ [aparte]
 5 C: [a la hora] [(RISAS)]
 6 N: [(RISAS)] más despacio por favor (RISAS) eso es como cuando- cuando vas a la facultad y→ no os habéis dado cuenta que- que entras y dice el profesor ¡hola! ¡buenos días! y se ponen a copiar/ y prácticamente tú ¡qué coño estarán copiando! hola buenos días porque vamos
 7 C: u otros que se p(i)erden en clase porque yo la primera vez que fui↑ [(RISAS)]
 8 N: [(RISAS)] yo normalmente siempre me pierdo
 9 C: yo entendía pero ¿has pillao algo? [(RISAS)]
 10 N: [(RISAS)]
 (Corpus Valesco 2.0, Conversation 22, Interventions 2-10)

In (2), N's utterance *more slowly please*, which refers to students frantically taking notes in class, works as a jab line to show humor, as we see with the appearance of laughter in all the interlocutors, since humor is created about an everyday situation easily recognizable by all of them. This humorous intervention is continued by all the members of the interaction, who have decided to follow the humorous mode, in order to strengthen bonds with the conversational group. The laughter is, therefore, affiliative.

In (3), three friends are talking about an interesting moment in the motorcycle races they were watching on TV, when they are suddenly interrupted by an advertisement:

- (3) 75 D: § he's lost§
 76 P: § and he lost time/ did you see/ he was overtaken↑///
 77 D: (LAUGHTER) the director goes/ ah, screw you Lorenzo/ I'm putting on ads↑ [(LAUGHTER)]
 78 P: [(LAUGHTER)]
 79 D: [(LAUGHTER)]/// (15?) /// (LAUGHTER)
 80 E: ayy↑/// (COUGHING)/// (9?)/// (40?)
 81 P: (()) (10?)
 82 D: ((motorcyclist's name)) is in seventh
 83 E: and/ in moto GP geepee/ Rossi's starting from pole, right?/ I saw it in the practice sessions↑
- 75 D: § ha perdido§
 76 P: §y ha perdido el tiempo/ vees/ si le ha sacao↑///
 77 D: (RISAS) el realizador dice/ aa vete a la mierda Lorenzo vaa/ voy a poner publicidad↑ [(RISAS)]
 78 P: [(RISAS)]
 79 D: [(RISAS)]/// (15?) /// (RISAS)
 80 E: ayy↑/// (TOSES)/// (9?)/// (40?)
 81 P: (()) (10?)

82 D: el ((nombre de motorista)) está séptimo
 83 E: y/ en moto GP gepé/ sale Rossi desde la pole ¿noo?/ que lo vi yo en los entrenamientos↑
 (Corpus Valesco 2.0, Conversation 15, Interventions 75-83)

In (3), several interlocutors are commenting on the motorcycle racing when they suddenly put on advertising, and D reproduces, in an imaginary way, the words of the television producer, who is not present in the conversation (*the director goes/ ah, screw you Lorenzo/ I'm putting on ads*), which causes P and E to laugh, because it is an absurd statement to justify what has happened, an interruption in the most interesting moment of the race. In this case, the laughter is also affiliative since humor is created from the situation and continued by all the interlocutors.

In the three cases analyzed, we have noticed that laughter occurs in humorous utterances to show affiliation to the conversational group, since it has been decided to continue the humor without any of the members having their image damaged. Next, we will see humorous utterances in which laughter has other functions, including attacking the image of one of the interlocutors.

In (4), the same speakers from the previous conversation continue talking about motorcycle racing:

- (4) 195 P: in Motociclismo, the/ reporters from- the magazines
 196 D: they're always looking for- drama and scandals
 197 P: ah↑ yeah-// that paddock we were in on Sunday↑ there's a PHOTO of it in Motociclismo// the only thing is, I didn't bring it/ and- and I can see less than a cat in the (())/ but // I think we're in it§
 198 E: \$you have to be in it
 199 D: (LAUGHTER) of course↓ of course↓ of course↓ I'm cracking up
 200 P: damn↑ exactly↑// plus we had a banner right in front of us, remember?
 201 D: but/ what about the grandstand we were watching from?§
 202 P: \$yeah↑ there's a photo↑//in Motociclismo§
 203 D: \$of the grandstand?

195 P: el Motociclismo sí que loos/ reporteros dee- de las revistas
 196 D: buscan loos- la bronca y las movidas
 197 P: ah↑ ee-// el paddo(ck) ese donde estábamos nosotros el domingo↑ viene una FOTO en el Motociclismo// lo que pasa es que no lo he traído/ yy- yy yo me veo menos que un gato en el (())/ pero // creo que estamos por allí§
 198 E: \$tenéis que estar allí
 199 D: (RISAS) claro↓ claro↓ claro↓ me parto
 200 P: joder↑ justamente↑// además teníamos una pancarta allí delante ¿te acuerdas?
 201 D: pero/ ¿y de la grada dónde estábamos viendoo?§
 202 P: \$sí↑ hay una foto↑// en el Motociclismo§
 203 D: \$¿de la grada?
 (Corpus Valesco 2.0, Conversation 15, Interventions 195-203)

In (4), several friends went to watch the motorcycling championship live and, a few days later, they are trying to spot themselves in a photo of the stands featured in a motorcycle magazine. The humorous utterance occurs when E states that *you have to be in it* and D, faced with the impossibility of recognizing anyone in the photo, laughs at P and continues with *of course↓ of course↓ of course↓ I'm cracking up*, ironically, to show that it is impossible to identify anyone. As we see in the conversation, neither E nor P continues with the humorous mode because they feel, to some extent, attacked by D, and they decide to continue with the serious topic. Thus, the laughter here serves the function of attacking the image of a member of the conversation by mocking E's assertion.

In (5), two friends talk about the musical tastes of one of them:

- (5) 437 A: [the songs] from the sixties↑// and from the-/ from the- what are they called?/ Los Bravos and all those↑ [I just love them]
 438 B: [all that↓ yes]/ and besides↑/ I remember those- those that appear-/ who brought out the last records from the seventies↑
 439 A: yeah

440 B: from when→ I was little/ and all that↑
 441 A: (LAUGHTER) and all that↓/ dude/ you're not that old/ (LAUGHTER)
 442 B: noo/ but it reminds me↑ of when I was six↑/ seven↑/ or five years old→
 443 A: so.../ then↑ what else→? like→ music↑/// I also like Elton John/ I also have→ some songs/
 George Harrison↑ I like The Beatles too→// well/ a bit of everything↑ §

437 A: [las canciones] de los años sesenta↑// y de los- de los- ¿cómo se llaman?/ Los Bravos y todos
 estos↑ [es que me encantan]
 438 B: [todo aquello↓ sí]/ y además↑/ yo me acuerdo de- de estas que salen-/ que han sacao los últimos
 discos de los años setenta↑
 439 A: síi
 440 B: de cuando→ yo era pequeño/ y todo esto↑
 441 A: (RISAS) y todo eso↓/ hombre/ tampoco eres tan mayor/ (RISAS)
 442 B: noo/ pero me recuerda↑ cuando tenía seis años↑/ siete años↑/ oo cinco años→
 443 A: y nada/ luego↑ ¿qué más→? así→ música↑/// me gustan también de Elton John/ también
 tengo→ algunas canciones/ George Harrison↑ Los Beatles también me gustan→// bueno/ es que de
 todo↑ §
 (Corpus Valesco 2.0, Conversation 1, Interventions 437-443)

In (5), B is reminiscing about the music from the 1960s he listened to when he was little, and A responds with a humorous utterance *and all that↓/ dude/ you're not that old/ (LAUGHTER)*. This utterance contains humor directed at someone present in the conversation, B, who was not trying to be funny and whose image is threatened by A's laughter about his age and musical taste. That is why he decides not to continue the humor and returns to the serious topic, as seen in the subsequent interventions.

In (6), several friends talk about the boy one of the girls likes:

- (6) 100 B: = very well↑ I thought you wouldn't remember me↑ I don't know girl↑
 101 A: yes, yes that's it yes, I dare but not that, girl, and, you know what [happened? last year]
 102 C: [*the one- the one who became*] the love of my life [(LAUGHTER)=]
 103 A: [*GO to hell*]
 104 C: = (LAUGHTER)§
 105 A: § but the thing is last year he was in my group, right? and I wrote to him↑ and for- for Christmas↑ and all that and I wrote to him↑ and he didn't answer↓ and then↑ when he came to Valencia one day he came here to Valencia/ and I told him I said wow! you didn't write back to me and he said nooo it's that I don't like writing I never write to anyone so then I/ well I could write to [him, no problem, but- but I know he might not answer]
- 100 B: = muy bien↑ pensaba que no te ibas a acordar de mí↑ yo qué sé tía↑
 101 A: sí sí eso sí eso sí que me atrevo pero eso no tía y ¿sabes lo que [pasa? que el año pasadoo]
 102 C: [*el- el que hizo*] de mi vida [(RISAS)=]
 103 A: [*VEte a la mierda*]
 104 C: = (RISAS)§
 105 A: § pero es que el año pasado estaba en mi grupo ¿no? y le escribí↑ y por- para navidad↑ y esas cosas y le escribí y no me contestó↓ y luego↑ cuando vino a Valencia vino un día aquí a Valencia/ se lo dije le dije ¡hala! no me has escrito no se que dice noo es que no me gusta escribir no escribo nunca a nadie no se menos entonces mee/ pos si yo podría escribirle a [él perfectamente pero- pero sé que igual no me contesta]
- (Corpus Valesco 2.0, Conversation 20, Interventions 100-105)

In (6), B and C try to convince A to write a letter to the boy she likes, but A is reluctant. However, C simulates A's feelings and laughingly remarks *the, the one who became the love of my life* to mock what A might write about her feelings in the letter. The humorous utterance is understood by the interlocutors, but it is not continued because it undermines A's image, who immediately replies to her friend with the intervention *GO to hell* and brings the conversation back to the serious topic.

In all the examples analyzed so far, laughter is used as a strategy of attack (see 4, 5, and 6) or affiliation

within the conversational group (see 1, 2, and 3), depending on whether the interlocutor agrees or disagrees with the humorous mode utterance. Next, we will show how all this relates to gender identity.

Since the focus of this study is on laughter in conversations of both genders, we will concentrate only on utterances where laughter is documented in the corpus. So, we will start with the first three examples of humor performed by men.

In example (7), several friends are spending the day in the countryside, talking about the landscape around them and the Coca-Cola bottle cap they have dropped:

- (7) D: careful or it'll fall!... damn it! I've dropped it/ well, where do we put this?/ just leave it around here
 D: that way it'll stay nice and cool (5")
 C: we need to (()) so that it doesn't fall
 A: what could be healthier than lunch among the countryside flies!?
 (LAUGHTER)§
 B: § [(LAUGHTER)]
 D: [(LAUGHTER) and a] sh- (LAUGHTER) and SHIT everywhere
 B: (talking about shit/ someone's taking a dump over there)
 A: for sure (5")
 B: is this a natural park↑ dude?§

 D: ¡cuidao a ver si se cae!... ¡coño! esto me cae/ bueno ¿esto dónde se deja?/ déjalo por ahí
 D: así sí que estará fresquito (5")
 C: a esto lo hemos de (()) pa que no se caiga
 A: ¿iqué más sano que una comida entre las moscas del campoo!?
 (RISAS)§
 B: § [(RISAS)]
 D: [(RISAS) y una] mier- (RISAS) y la MIERda que hay
 B: (hablando de mierda/ hay alguien cagando ahí)
 A: seguro (5")
 B: ¿esto es un parque natural↑ nano?§
 (Briz and Val.Es.Co. group 2002: 51[H38.A.1.:50-60])

In (7), A's utterance, *what could be healthier than lunch among the countryside flies!?*, about the lunch they are having in the middle of nature, triggers humor through irony. The rhetorical question leads the interlocutor to interpret it as an ironic-humorous utterance, which causes laughter and thus humor. Moreover, the humor is recognized and continued by D, who remarks *and SHIT everywhere*, that serves as the punch line, generating laughter from A, B and D. In this case, the laughter expresses affiliation among the members of the conversational group, since the ironic-humorous utterance is about their shared environment.

In (8), the same group of friends is now talking about a girl who works with D and is not present:

- (8) A: and how do you know her↑ the other one↑?
 D: stuff that happens/ that you learn from
 A: (LAUGHTER)/ so she picked you up off the [street↑ or something↑=]
 D: [go to ((())]
 A: = sometime?§
 D: § FF she- she gave me a blowjob (LAUGHTER)/ stuff/ so now the girl from the pub told me we should go one day↓ she'll invite us/
 she's told me twice now... [I say pa-]
 B: [if she's inviting↑] then yes, but if we've got to pay↑

 A: ¿y de qué la conoces↑ a la otra↑?
 D: cosas de la vida/ que te enseña
 A: (RISAS)/ ¿que te recogió de la [calle↑ o algo↑=]
 D: [que (())]
 A: = alguna vez?§

D: § FF mee- me la chupó (RISAS)/cosas/ pues ya me
 ha dicho la del pab a ver si vamos un día↓ que nos invitará/
 me lo ha dicho ya dos veces... [digo pues pa-]
 B: [si invita↑] sí si hay que pagar↑
 (Briz and Val.Es.Co. group 2002: 51[H38.A.1.:103-111])

In (8), A's utterance: *(LAUGHTER)/ so she picked you up off the [street↑ or something↑=]* is an ironic intervention in which a rhetorical question is directed at D, which serves as the humor trigger, as evidenced by the laughter. D responds with a crude remark, indicating disagreement with A's insinuation, which was a direct attack on D's public image. D replies with a humorous punch line before returning to the serious topic (*so now the girl from the pub told me we should go one day↓ she'll invite us/*). In this case, the laughter functions as an attack or punishment between the speakers since D's image has been damaged.

In (9), we continue with the same conversation between friends. Here, they talk about an absent person:

(9) C: § didn't she say she- that she knew you and some-?§
 D: §-that- that she knew me- that I was with/ other people
 A: [(LAUGHTER)]
 B: [(LAUGHTER)]§
 D: § I was with two or three [friends]
 B: [A fairly [accurate] conclusion]

C: § ¿no dijo que co- que te conocía a ti y a
 uun-?§
 D: §que- que me conocía a mí que- conmigo iba/ gente
 A: [(RISAS)]
 B: [(RISAS)]§
 D: § que iban dos o tres [amigos]
 B: [una conclu]sión bastante [acertada]
 (Briz and Val.Es.Co. group 2002: 51[H38.A.1.:163-170])

In (9), D reproduces the words of someone who is not present in the conversation (*that she knew me that I was with other people*), which trigger laughter from A and B because it is an absurd utterance to argue that she knew him. The utterance produces non-prototypical irony and humor, as shown by the laughter of A and B, and B's humorous punch line (*a fairly accurate conclusion*). In this case, the laughter is affiliative, since the humor concerns a person who is not present in the conversation and all the utterances made revolve around the same purpose, affiliation to the conversational group.

In the three cases we have analyzed, we have seen that men have used humor in the conversation either to show affiliation or to attack a group member's image, although such attacks do not rupture the conversational group. Next, we will examine whether women use the same conversational strategies in humorous utterances:

In (10), two women discuss what happened to C, who attended a promotional event with a friend and received a free wallet, and C was also sold an encyclopedia:

(10) C: she went to one of those meetings↑/ she didn't buy any books↑/ and look at this lovely little wallet/
 [(LAUGHTER=)]
 P: [(LAUGHTER)]
 C: =so pretty/ she says [((I was→))=]
 P: [this ((for free))]
 C: = free/ of course/ it's what they were giving away as a gift§

 C: se fue a una reunión d'estas↑/ no compró
 ningún libro↑/ y mira qué carterita/ [(RISAS=)]
 P: [(RISAS)]
 C: = más bonita/ dice [((he sido→))=]

P: [esta ((gratis))]

C: = gratis/ claro/ lo que daban de regalo§

(Briz and Val.Es.Co. group 2002: 51[G.68B.1+G.69A.1.:22-27])

In (10), the ironic utterance occurs when C shows the wallet she was given just for attending (*and look at this lovely little wallet*), where the diminutive serves as an indicator for the listener to interpret the utterance in that way. In fact, P continues the humor and asserts that it was free, to show that it was not necessary to buy an encyclopedia. The laughter appears as an affiliation strategy between the interlocutors, who comment humorously on the situation C describes.

In (11), two women talk about a couple who bought the apartment of one of them and want to renovate it:

(11) M: § I have given them a floor plan/ I gave them the floor plans of my apartment↑/// and now they're thinking of... putting in/ one of those round baths with/// [hydromassage=]

A: [oh wow, how (())!]

M: = hydromassage and everything§

A: § that's outrageous! (LAUGHTER)§

M: § yeah, yeah/ (that's the idea)/ yeah (LAUGHTER)

M: § les he dao un plano/ les ha dao unos

planos de mi piso↑/// y ya en las ideas... de hacerse/ esas mm...

baños que hay redondos con/// [hidromasaje=]

A: [¡uuyy qué (())!]

M: = hidromasaje y todo§

A: § ¡qué barbaridad! (RISAS)§

M: § sí sí/(esa es la idea)/ sí (RISAS)

(Briz and Val.Es.Co. group 2002: 51[S.65.A.1.:491-498])

In (11), A uses the subjective routine expression *that's outrageous!* to show surprise at the fact that they are going to put in a hydromassage bath, as something unusual. A's utterance serves as a jab line to show irony and humor with respect to what M has said, who is forced by this utterance to ratify what she said previously (*yeah, yeah, that's the idea, yeah*). The laughter shows agreement and affiliation of the conversational group, since they both laugh at a situation external to them.

In (12), two friends recount a funny anecdote from the youth of one of their mothers:

(12) P: § she was referring to/ and then she told a story (LAUGHTER) about the mother- your mom... she says that→... once, Rosita went who knows where↑ with Pepe↑(2'') and- and they stayed in El Perelló↑... and she says/ girl/ the glass of a door had broken↑... and she says and the old girl said to us/ can you close the door/ I'm cold?§

C: § (LAUGHTER)/ and she didn't know the glass was broken / she didn't know?§

P: § she didn't know§

C: § (LAUGHTER)§

P: § can you close the door/ I'm cold?... but GIRL/ the door is closed... no way it is! §

C: § (LAUGHTER)§

P: § and then she says and then she says/ well/ I'll close it now/ she says/ we pretended to close the door/ (and she says) see? now the cold doesn't come in. [of course=]

C: [(LAUGHTER)]

P: § ella se refería/ y luego contó una historia (RISAS) de la mamá- de tu madre... dice que→... una vez se fue Rosita no sé dónde↑ con Pepe↑(2'') y- y se quedaron allí en El Perelló↑... y dice dice/ tía/ se había roto el cristal de una puerta↑... y dicee y la tía nos decía/ ¿queréis cerrar la puerta/ que tengo frío?§

C: § (RISAS)/ y no sabía que estaba el cristal roto/ quer- ¿no lo sabía?§

P: § no lo sabía§

C: § (RISAS)§

P: § ¿queréis cerrar la puerta/ que tengo frío?... pero TÍA/ si está la puerta cerrada... ¡qué va estar cerrada! §

C: § (RISAS)§

P: § y dice bueno/ pues/ahora la cierro/ dice/ hicimos como que cerramos la puerta/ (y dice) ¿tú ves cómo ahora no pasa el frío? [cla(ro)=]

C: [(RISAS)]

(Briz and Val.Es.Co. group 2002: 51[G.68B.1+G.69A.1.:652-669])

In (12), the irony and humor is produced by the description of the situation told by the interlocutors about a person not present in the conversation, who is a relative of one of them, who was cold and thought that a door was open when, in reality, what happened was that the glass was broken. The anecdote is humorous as shown by the different jab lines that appear, the situational irony they describe, and the affiliative laughter that arises. In this case, they also try to create bonds in the conversational group.

Figure 2 shows the data referring to the strategies used in the examples seen in this paper, in which laughter appears, by men and women:



Figure 2. Occurrence of laughter, according to gender.

Among the occurrences of women, we observe that, when humor appears in the conversation, as in (10), (11), and (12), the laughter is affiliative in relation to the conversational group; while in the occurrences of men, as in (7), (8) and (9), the laughter, when it appears, is used to attack or punish the interlocutor. This variation in data between the humorous utterances of men and women, is due to the fact that the conversational strategies used by men are different from those used by women, since the humorous mode is negotiated according to whether or not it affects the interlocutors' image. Women try to strengthen their conversational group without attacking the image of the interlocutor and create humor towards people not present in the conversation or situations; while men, in similar situations, use continuous humorous utterances to strengthen their conversational group based on attacking the public image of one of the participants in the conversational exchange, which makes it difficult for them to continue the humorous mode.

5. Conclusions

From all the examples analyzed in our corpus, we can conclude that laughter is both a marker and an effect of humor and is used as communicative strategies that are at the service of the speaker and the listener and can be used to show attack or affiliation to the conversational group (see Table 1).

Table 1

Types of laughter, according to the origin of the humor

Origin of Humor	Humor Realization	Types of Laughter	Discourse Strategy
Speaker	Agreement	Affiliation.	Strengthening group bonds
Listener	Disagreement	Attack or punishment	Attacking the public image of the speaker

In general, we can see that affiliative laughter reflects agreement on the realization of the humor made in the utterance, since the humor comes from the speaker, and the laughter is understood by the interlocutors

themselves as a strategy of affiliation to the conversational group. This happens because shared experiences are often the target of the jokes, so that they avoid damaging their public image.

However, when attack laughter occurs in colloquial conversations, the humor is not shared and the strategy that appears shows disagreement or punishment, since the target of the humor is present in the conversation, so there is a direct attack on the interlocutor, since its intention is to damage their social image.

If we extend these conclusions to gender identity, we have found, in our analysis, that men use laughter to show attack on their interlocutor, and this fact is understood by the interlocutors themselves as a strategy of affiliation to the conversational group. In these cases, the participants present are the target of the jokes, which does not occur in conversations between women, who prefer to avoid such situations that could damage their image. Thus, in the laughter in conversations between women, the strategy used is affiliation, since the target of the humor is normally not present in the conversation, so there is no direct attack on the interlocutor, since their intention is to prevent attacks on their social image.

These results are derived from the corpus analyzed in the present study and should therefore be interpreted as corpus-contingent rather than universally generalizable. It is plausible that analyses conducted on different corpora—varying in interactional settings or participant profiles—would yield partially different patterns and distributions. Accordingly, our findings are best understood as evidence of what occurs in our dataset, not as claims about all conversational data.

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- ES** **María Belén Alvarado Ortega** es Catedrática de Lengua Española en la Universidad de Alicante. Ha trabajado como profesora visitante en la Universidad de Rutgers (EEUU), Cork (Irlanda), Roethampton (Reino Unido), París III (Francia), Milán (Italia), Mercy University (EEUU) y Bruselas (Bélgica), entre otras. Imparte asignaturas de Grado y de Máster, como "Español del turismo y del ocio" en el Máster de Español e Inglés para fines específicos que oferta el IULMA. Ha sido tutora y miembro de tribunal de más de 30 trabajos final de grado y final de máster, desde 2013 hasta la actualidad. Ha coeditado, junto a la Dra. Ruiz Gurillo, la tesis doctoral de Laura M. Aliaga Aguza, leída en 2020, titulada *Análisis lingüístico del humor en el medio audiovisual: las estrategias humorísticas de la comedia de situación*. Ha dirigido, como investigadora principal, dos proyectos de investigación emergentes: "Lengua y sexo" (2013-2015), y "La variable género en textos humorísticos del español y del inglés" (2015-2017). Además, trabaja desde 2002 como investigadora en el grupo GRIALE, con más de 70 publicaciones, entre las que se encuentra L. Ruiz/X. Padilla (eds.) (2009): *Dime cómo ironizas y te diré quién eres: una aproximación pragmática a la ironía*. Frankfurt, Peter Lang, trabajo que se ha convertido en un manual sobre la ironía en español. Asimismo, ha publicado la monografía *Las fórmulas rutinarias del español: Teoría y aplicaciones* (2010), en Peter Lang, y junto a Leonor Ruiz Gurillo (eds.) (2013): *Irony and Humor: From Pragmatics to Discourse*. Amsterdam, John Benjamins. Actualmente, dirige el proyecto de investigación "CIAICO/2024/6: Discursos humorísticos digitales: Compilación y etiquetaje pragmático del corpus DIGITHUM", subvencionado por la Generalitat Valenciana (programa para grupos de investigación consolidados). Además, es directora de la Revista *ELUA* y se encuentra en el ranking de las investigadoras más citadas de CSIC.
- IT** **María Belén Alvarado Ortega** è Professoressa Ordinaria di Lingua spagnola presso l'Università di Alicante. Ha lavorato come docente ospite presso l'Università Rutgers (Stati Uniti), Cork (Irlanda), Roehampton (Regno Unito), Paris III (Francia), Lisbona (Portogallo), Viterbo (Italia), e Bruxelles (Belgio), ed altre. Insegna corsi sia a livello triennale che magistrale come "Lo spagnolo per il turismo e per lo svago" Mater in Spagnolo e Inglese per scopi specifici dalla IULMA. Dal 2013, ha supervisionato e lavorato come membro di comitati di esame per più di 25 tesi triennali e magistrali. Insieme a Ruiz Gurillo, ha co-diretto la tesi di dottorato di Laura M. Aliaga Aguza, discussa nel 2020. È stata la ricercatrice principale di due progetti di ricerca emergenti: "Lingua e sesso" (2013-2015) e "La variabile del genere nei testi umoristici in spagnolo e inglese" (2015-2017). Dal 2002, come ricercatrice nel gruppo GRIALE, ha lavorato su oltre 70 pubblicazioni, tra cui L. Ruiz/X. Padilla (a cura di) (2009): *dimmi come ironizzi e io ti dirò chi sei: un approccio pragmatico all'ironia*. Francoforte, Peter Lang, un'opera che è diventata un'enciclopedia dell'ironia in spagnolo. Ha anche pubblicato la monografia *formule di routine in spagnolo: teoria e usi* (2010), Peter Lang, e insieme a Leonor Ruiz Gurillo (a cura di) (2013): *Ironia e umorismo: dalla pragmatica alla discussione*, John Benjamins. Al momento dirige il progetto di ricerca "CIAICO/2024/6: Discussioni umoristiche digitali: raccolta e annotazione pragmatica del corpus DIGITHUM", finanziato dalla Generalitat Valenciana nell'ambito del programma per gruppi consolidati di ricercatori. È inoltre caporedattrice della rivista *ELUA* ed in graduatoria come una delle ricercatrici più citate del CSIC.