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DEAF HUMOR:

A theater performance in Italian Sign Language

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*A mia madre,
esperta in Figliologia.
A mio padre
e a tutti i suoi conig, Collaboratori.*

Non sopporto chi confonde

i problemi teorici con i problemi terminologici:

la questione non sta nella parola, ma nella questione.

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INTRODUCTION

Humor is a ubiquitous form of human expression. It is part of our daily life with its interpersonal relationships and of our oral and written culture at large. In other occasions, though, it seems to be a unique activity that only few genius were able to develop, create and communicate throughout the history of literature, theater, cinema, without anybody's clear explanation of their special form of creativity. Its omnipresence in the written and spoken language, as well its rarity and singularity brought to many reflections and theoretic analysis in different fields. Every discipline with its own methodology and goals strove to explain and understand different aspects of the humor phenomenon. Since 1988 the International paper of humor "HUMOR" has been collecting the most influential and seminal theories by fostering an interdisciplinary dialogue that could provide valuable theoretic references for a deep comprehension of all forms of humor, its nature, its functions and effects in our society.

This research should be intended as a little contribution to the occurring debate upon humor. The aim is to bring fresh water to the contemporary basin of humor research, by stimulating the curiosity toward a field of investigation that so far has received little attention by scholars.

The focus is Deaf humor and its countless value for a better understanding and appreciation of Deaf culture in Italy. The intent is to turn on the light on visual humor, the potentialities of sign language, the response of the Deaf minority against discrimination with the use of humor, the powerful arm of disarmed people. Deaf humor and Deaf culture are two sides of the same coin: one aspect recalls the other in a intertwined relationship that reflects the peculiarity of Deaf lives, language and values. Bienvenu (1994:16), a Deaf researcher in ASL and Deaf Studies defines humor as follow "Humor is a difficult aspect of culture to study. One needs to have deep knowledge of the culture, with a full understanding of the people and the situations that the humor represents. You see, humor is integrally related to culture. Humor is based on people's perceptions of the world, and its shared between

groups of people who share similar values and belief systems.”

This thesis is a humor analysis about a Deaf show “ Pa Pa” performed in Italian Sign Language by the Deaf actor, Gabriele Caia. It is a monologue which celebrates and criticizes the Deaf Italian community with its daily life problems, funny situations and history of discrimination, from the perspective of an insider member of the minority. The analysis wants to recognize the value of this performance from an outsider point of view, pinpointing the main humorous strategies adopted by Caia with the help of the previous reflections that come from the current Deaf literature. In other terms, this thesis is a hearing investigation about Deaf humor that is moved from a personal conviction that reflections upon humor can help to have an indirectly clue about the system of values and attitudes that rules others groups or communities. Humor is a special key that allows us to see other people's perspectives in life, their way to gain knowledge, their world view, that other form of communication (spontaneous or performed) might not give to us. As Bateson (1952: 14) said at the Macy conferences about humor and communication:

In human exchange, in general, we deal with material which cannot be overtly communicated: the premises of how we understand life, how we construct our understandings, and so forth. These are very very difficult matters for people to talk about with precision, but if these premises are out of kilter between two people, the individual grows anxious or unhappy. Humor seems to me to be important in that it gives the persons an indirect clue to what sort of view of life they share or might share (Bateson, 1952:14).

The work is developed in four chapters. In the first one theories of humor in different fields will be briefly described in order to show the multidisciplinary nature that underlies humor investigations. We will present the traditional subdivision in three groups of the theories of humor, such as the “Theories of incongruity”, “Theory of superiority”, “Theory of relief”. Then, two influential linguistic theories will be summarized, such as “The semantic script theory of humor” (SSTH) and “The General Theory of Verbal Humor” (GTVH). The choice of describing these two elaborations was based on the realization that even though they were formulated more than fifteen years ago, they still occupy a relevant position in the linguistic humor debate. In fact, several current studies (like those focused on humor mechanisms in verbal and visual mode) work on broadening the main assumption of the SSTH and GTVH theoretical framework or by providing practical applications at the two

theories. It is the case of Villy Tsakona (2008: 1171) that in her research about language and image interaction in cartoons “aims at taking the GTVH a step further towards the unification of linguistic and semiotic approaches to humor”. Paragraph four emphasizes that social aspect of humor which is often ignored by linguistic theories or jokes theories. This perspective on humor will consider as essential the recipients of humor, the system of values and norm that rules their lives and perception of a humorous phenomenon. A classification of social theories provided by Rutter (1997) will be presented. The paragraph five describes the Violation Theory elaborated by Veatch with its anthropological utility for the understanding of humor in groups and minorities from an outsider point of view.

The paragraph six in the first chapter will focus on Deaf humor surveys. The little literature available in English about this topic can be easily confirmed: five papers will be here summarized in their main parts in five separated paragraphs. They basically provide reflections about BSL and ASL American humor with concrete examples like pictures, jokes transcriptions in English and references by American comedians or Deaf Studies researchers. Some reflections about the French Deaf community as well the publication of a book of French humorous cartoonist will be considered. This paragraph would be our main point of reference for the analysis of Caia's humor and its main features.

The second chapter can be read as a response to the little interest about Deaf humor in the current humor debate. This chapter tries to add new reflections and opinions about humor with an analysis of the Deaf show “Pa Pa” that received great support by the Italian Deaf community. It is a show of one hour and forty-three minutes entirely performed by the Deaf actor Gabriele Caia in LIS. For this purpose it has been divided in 58 short videos labeled with invented titles that could summarize the key words of the video. Each of them received an interpretation with comments about the humor technique and the cultural aspects occurring in it. When possible some references of other researchers of humor and their analysis will be reported.

The third chapter creates a bridge between our analysis and the previous Deaf humor literature, by offering reflections about the main features that characterize Caia's humor. It will bring out of the surface how Italian Deaf humor is a powerful and precious element for a better understanding of the Deaf culture and humor at large. Caia's humor presents

aspects that has been already detected in ASL and BSL Deaf humor, while also some elements that seem to characterize it with no other previous mention in the other studies. For each feature detected a list of examples from the show will be provided in order to enlarge the material already available in the Deaf humor literature.

The four and last chapter of this work summarizes the entire investigation, by showing the main challenges that has been encountered during the humor analysis. Some solicitations and suggestions would be proposed for the next studies in Deaf humor. The hope is that new reflections and investigations would take advantage of this work to continue the humor discourse with more confidence and curiosity.

CHAPTER 1

THE HUMOR DEBATE

AND

THE DEAF HUMOR LITERATURE

1.1 The quid of humor

Throughout history a rigorous definition of humor has been one of the main dilemma that tickled intellectuals, thinkers, scientists up to the present. The necessity to delimit the semantic dominion of this mystic and special object of study, brought to a wide production of speculations upon its essence and nature. In 1908 in “L'umorismo” Pirandello points out his opinion about the *quid* of humor:

Se volessimo tener conto di tutte le risposte che si son date a questa domanda, di tutte le definizioni che autori e critici han tentato, potremmo riempire parecchie e parecchie pagine, e probabilmente alla fine, confusi tra tanti pareri e dispareri, non riusciremmo ad altro che a ripetere la domanda: - Ma, in somma, che cos'è l'umorismo? Abbiamo già detto che tutti coloro, i quali, o di proposito o per incidenza, ne han parlato, in una cosa sola si accordano, nel dichiarare che è difficilissimo dire che cosa sia veramente, perché esso ha infinite varietà e tante caratteristiche che a volerlo descrivere in generale, si rischia sempre di dimenticarne qualcuna (Pirandello, 1992: 119).

Overseas, E. B. White (1948: XVII) in a collection of American humor seems to confirm Pirandello point of view: “ Analyst have had their go at humor, and I have read some of this interpretative literature, but without being greatly instructed. Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind”.

Again in 1994 Salvatore Attardo, the editor-in-chief of “Humor”(the journal for the

International Society of Humor Research) expresses his pessimism upon the very possibility of finding a definition of humor as follow “it seems that, not only has it not been possible to agree on how to divide the category of “humor” (e.g. “humor” vs “comic” vs “ridiculous”), but it is even difficult to find a pre-theoretical definition of “humor” in the most general sense”.

Nowadays, the discontent for this lack of rigor brought to the conviction that only a multidisciplinary approach toward humor can really help us to face the knotty problem. New disciplines, theories appeared out of the surface to turn the light on the multiform aspects of humor as an ubiquitous phenomenon. Contributions came from a wide range of disciplines, including linguistics, psychology, sociology, literature, philosophy, semiotics, education, philology. The idea that humor could be incorporated into a single theory has been surpassed by a more inclusive dialogue between mixed and integrated theories.

The next paragraph “Theories of humor” will summarize the most common subdivision of the theories of humor. It is well established in the traditional literature to divide them in three different groups, such as:

1. Theories of incongruity, bisociation or contradiction.
2. Theories of superiority, hostility, disparagement, criticism.
3. Theories of release, relief, relaxation, also known as psychoanalytic

1. 2 Traditional Humor Theories:

In this paragraph a synthetic explanation of the three main groups of theories about humor will be developed. In this traditional triad the first group concerns the *theories of incongruity*, as the most influential approaches to the study of humor and laughter. They are all based on the assumption that incongruity is the key to understand humor and laughter. Arvo Krikmann (2005) describes them as follow:

It is assumed that every such act involves two different planes of content, lines of thought, in newer works the planes are called frames of reference, isotopies, schemas, scripts, etc. These two are mutually incompatible, but also include a certain common part which makes the shift from one to another possible. The recipient begins to process textual or other information reducing it to the most

accessible -salient- “preprimed” script, and proceeds until the interpretation bounces over a semantic obstacle and fails. The some instantaneous cognitive work will be done to overcome the contradiction and another interpretation that has so far remained hidden can be found. The renewal of understanding is attended by the emotion of surprise and satisfaction, causing the reaction of laughter (Krikmann, 2005: 27).

One of the first thinker who conceptualized the roots for the modern concept of congruity was Schopenhauer (1907 [1818/1844], Book I, sec. 13), who provided an explanation of the cause of humor in this way: “The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity”. Usually, incongruity theories try to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of a humorous phenomenon: the essence of a funny, amusing event can be dissected in those indispensable conditions that make the phenomenon what it is. In this sense they are essentialist theories. They mainly focus on one aspect, feature in a humorous text or event, picture, etc. The suddenness of the transformation, the unexpected shift from a normal pattern to another one, the game with expectation, the mismatch between two ideas, an oddity in a nonthreatening way are the most common terms that appears in incongruity theories (Berger, 1976; Deckers & Divine, 1981; McGhee, 1979). They usually emphasize the cognition in their investigations, as John C. Meyer (2000) explains in this excerpt:

The mental capacity to note, understand, and categorize incongruous changes is necessary for the perceiver to experience humor, as it is viewed from the incongruity perspective. Only with this ability can humor arise from any sort of perceived incongruous relation, including an unexpected event or object, a physical or moral defect, an odd or disproportionate object, or any observable deviation from an implied standard. Comprehending these situations and their implications is required before humor, or a cognitive state of mirth, can be experienced (Meyer, 2000: 313).

The second group includes the *theories of superiority*. The emphasis is on the interpersonal aspect of humor with its aggressive, hostile nuances. People laugh at others (the target) because they feel a sense of victory, triumph over them (Feinberg, 1978; Gruner, 1978; Morreall, 1983; Ziv, 1984).

According to Keith-Spiegell (1972) Plato can be considered the archetype of the aggression theories for his speculations about “envy” and the mixture of “pleasure with pain” in his text *Philebus*. In an excerpt Socrate utters these words:

Our argument declares that when we laugh at the ridiculous qualities of our friends, we mix pleasure with pain, since we mix it with envy; for we have agreed all along that envy is a pain of the souls, and that laughter is pleasure, yet these two arise at the same time on such occasions (*Philebus* 50A).

Unlikely, Attardo (1994) believes that is Aristotele the precursor of the superiority theories for his opinion on comedy in the *Poetics*:

As for Comedy, it is (as has been observed) an imitation of men worse than average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind of the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly. The Ridiculous is something wrong and a deformity not productive of pain or harm; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain (*De Poetica* 1449a).

However, it is Thomas Hobbes the most quoted thinker of superiority theories. He provides an accurate description of laughter as the expression of superiority that triggers the laughter “against” (toward) the butt of the joke. According to Hobbes humor is an expression of a “sudden glory”:

I may therefore conclude, that the passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory arising from sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmities of others, or with our own formerly: for men laugh at the follies of themselves past, when they come suddenly to remembrance, except they bring with them any present dishonor. It is no wonder therefore that men take it heinously to be laughed at or derided, that is, triumphed over (Hobbes, 2013 [1889]: 42).

According to Attardo (1994: 50) “the most influential proponent of the superiority theory has been Bergson, from whom humor is a social corrective; i.e., used by society to correct deviant behavior.”

In “*Le rire*” Bergson (1900) elaborates a theory of humor that considers laughter as a social behavior triggered by a violated, broken norm; a lack of spontaneity, vitality and elasticity in human manners with the appearance of mechanical and rigid behavior. The comical is “something mechanical encrusted on the living”. Rutter Jason (1997) provides a punctual explanation of the accurate Bergson's philosophy:

“Laughter is the social gesture that highlights and embarrasses deviants into improvement or correction. Polarities are central to Bergson's theory of laughter as he distinguishes between not only proper and improper social behaviour but between animal and human, the natural with the mechanical, the elastic with the inelastic. Unlike animals, humans are governed by the opposing forces of Tension and Elasticity. Imbalance in these forces results in "sickness and infirmity and accidents of every kind," (1911, p.1 8) and therefore have social ramifications beyond the individual. In Bergson's phraseology we laugh as people's "mechanical inelasticity" (1911, p.10)1' which is the result of habit, the result of acting solely in accordance to our previous experience without paying heed to our contemporary situation. This formulation suggests that when we laugh, we laugh at the mechanical behaviour of an individual rather than at the individual themselves (Rutter, 1997:11).

Bergson focuses his analysis in three main aspects that represent the strategies for fabricating the comic, such as:

1. “The comic element in forms and movements-expansive force of the comic”. In this part Bergson emphasizes how “the attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine” (Sypher,1956: 79).
2. “The comic element in situations and the comic element in words”. In the first part Bergson reflects about the technique of repetition, inversion, the reciprocal interference of series with a parallelism between these forms of comedy with some games for children, such as the jack-in-the-box, the dancing-jack, the snow-ball. For what concerns “the comic element in words” he elaborates a distinction between “the comic *expressed* and the comic *created* by language” with examples and references from literature. Here the Bergson's distinction about language:

The former could, if necessary, be translated from one language into another, though at the cost of losing the greater portion of its significance when introduced into a fresh society different in manners, in literature, and above all in association of ideas. But it is impossible to translate the latter. It does its entire being to the structure of the sentence or to the choice of the words. It does not set forth, by means of language, special cases of absentmindedness in man or in events. It lays stress on lapses of attention in language itself. In this case, it is language itself that becomes comics (Sypher, 1956:127-128).

3. “The comic in character” is the third and last part of his essay.“Rigidity, automatism,

absentmindedness and unsociability are all inextricably entwined; and all serve as ingredients to the making up of the comic in character” (Sypher, 1956: 156).

All these strategies described in detail by Bergson are very important for our analysis in the next chapter. Caia with his theater performance will bring water to the theory with precise examples in the show in several occasions. His characters present, in fact, some rigidity in their behaviors, repetitions in signs and movements, and situations of reciprocal interference will appear.

Going back to the main aspects of Superiority theories of humor, they also focus on those positive effects that the feeling of “sudden glory” and triumph can trigger in us by delineating social boundaries. Humor helps to strengthen a sense of unity, solidarity, identification as members of a group, while it criticizes an outsider of the group. Meyer (2000) points out this aspect as follow:

Laughing at faulty behavior can also reinforce unity among group members, as a feeling of superiority over those being ridiculed can coexist with a feeling of belonging (Duncan, 1982). Two important effects of superiority humor follow: Human society is kept in order as those who disobey are censured by laughter, and people are made to feel part of a group by laughing at some ridiculed others. As examples of mild forms of superiority humor, television shows like *Candid Camera*, as well as many situation comedies, allow audiences to laugh at people caught in unenviable or idiotic situations (Meyer, 2000: 315).

The third group of theories of humor is called *theories of release, or relief*. They have a clear psychological and physiological matrix (Fry, 2001; Mindess, 1971). They focuses on the effects on the recipient of humor with his/her beneficial release of energy built up from laws and inhibitions. Unpleasant, sad, painful, stressful feelings are replaced by a positive sensation, a reduction of stress (Berlyne, 1972, Morreal, 1983).

The most important figure is Freud who considered laughter as a release of tension, “psychic energy”. Krikmann (2005) summarize Freud contribution as follow “Freud considers humor as one of the so-called substitution mechanisms which enable to convert one's socially tabooed aggressive impulses to acceptable ones and thus avoid wasting additional mental energy to suppress them”. Laughter turns up to be a beneficial and salutary response to society control and its taboo areas (sex, death, etc.).

As Meyer explained this kind of theories are based on a reduction of stress with the consequent effect of laughter:

The physiological manifestations or “symptoms” of humor are most important to this view, which holds that humor stems from the relief experienced when tensions are engendered and removed from an individual. Humor then results from a release of nervous energy. This tension reduction may engender humor by reducing the state of arousal (the “jag” theory) or increasing the arousal (the “boost” theory), depending on the perspective (Meyer, 2000: 312).

Herbert Spencer (1860) is usually quoted as one of the most relevant physiological theorists of humor. In his essay “The physiology of laughter” he points out that the main cause of laughter is an overflow of nervous energy, a physical relief of our body, an emotional involvement. He stresses that “nervous excitation always tends to beget muscular motion.” Emotional and nervous states are connected to each other on facial movements that are well displayed by Spencer with some illustrations in the paper. Rutter summarizes Spencer's physiological contribution as follow:

The important thing is not how the nervous energy is used but that it must be dissipated through whatever physical channel is available. If one or more channel of discharge is obstructed, then this will increase the energy dissipated through other avenues. Laughter, for Spencer, is an effective method for the releasing of otherwise blocked nervous energy. If "nerve force" cannot be used practically in combat or through flight, the body will seek another option most commonly through the regularly used lungs, diaphragm, lips, tongue and face, that is through the physical action of laughing (Rutter,1997: 14).

From a linguistic perspective, according to Attardo (1994: 50) relief theories are very interesting because they see in the violation of linguistic rules the opportunity of the recipient to experience a relief of stress and tension: “They account for the 'liberation' from the rules of language, typical of puns and other word-play, and also for the infractions to the principle of Cooperation”. At this regard we will consider in the next paragraph two linguistic theories of humor that are usually reported in the traditional literature of humor as the most influential: the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) and the General Theory of Verbal Humor.

1. 3 Linguistic Theories of humor

In the traditional literature of humor a considerable attention is dedicated to *The semantic script theory of humor* (SSTH) by Victor Raskin. It was first roughed out in Raskin (1979), but his seminal book “*Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* (1985) can be considered the standard reference. Often, it is superficially classified as an incongruity theory, while Raskin overtly identified it as a linguistic theory with this ultimate goal “Ideally, a linguistic theory of humor should determine and formulate the necessary and sufficient linguistic conditions for the text to be funny”(Raskin 1985: 47).

His thesis is divided in a theoretical part and in a practical one. The theoretical section (chapter three, four) includes an analysis of puns, ambiguity triggers, theories of humour and multimodality, while the practical part provides empirical examples in sexual humor (chapter five), ethnic humor (chapter six) and political humor (chapter seven). Here the main hypothesis of the SSTH:

(107) A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the conditions in (108) are satisfied. (108) (I) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts (ii). The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite in a special sense defined in Section 4. The two scripts with which the text is compatible are said to overlap fully or in part on this text (Raskin, 1985: 99).

The theory is based on the assumption that the script opposition is the most important factor in a humor text. According to Raskin a script is:

a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it. The script is a cognitive structure internalized by the native speaker and it represents the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world. Every speaker has internalized rather a large repertoire of scripts of "common sense" which represent his/her knowledge of certain routines, standard procedures, basic situations etc. (Raskin, 1985: 8).

However, it is manage to cover only verbal humor and in practice only punchline jokes. It explains that in a joke we can always identify two different scripts that are opposed to each other (bona-fide vs. scatological) until the punchline. It is only in this specific moment that a switch from one script to another becomes possible, by triggering the laughter. The text of a joke, that was clear (bona-fide script) up to the point of the punchline, is finally displayed in its real double structure. The punchline represents the moment when the hearer realizes

that another interpretation of the text (scatological script) was possible since the beginning. An essential key of Raskin's theory is that joke-telling is considered a violation of Grice's cooperative principle and the four conversational maxims elaborated by Paul Grice in Pragmatics. Jokes are a specific kind of “non-*bona-fide*” communication.

In the case of joke-telling four different situations may occur, depending on whether the speaker makes the joke intentionally or unintentionally, and/or whether the hearer expects or does not expect the joke. If the receiver does not assume a joke, he/she would try to understand what was said in a default *bona-fide* way and, after a failure to do so, seek some other, non-*bona-fide* mode of interpretation (joke, lie, nonsense, etc.). If an addressee is already from the beginning or after the switch-over attuned to the “joke wave”, the Cooperative Principle starts to operate again, but in a specific “joke-oriented” manner and with modified maxims, e.g. “Give exactly as much information as is necessary for the joke “instead of the usual Maxim of Quantity, of Quality, etc (Krikmann, 2005: 32).

In 1991 Salvatore Attardo defends his PhD thesis “From Linguistics to Humor Research and Back: Applications of Linguistics to Humor and Their Implications for Linguistic Theory and Methodology” under Raskin's supervision. Together they published in that year a revised version of the SSTH in the book “Script theory revis(it)ed: joke similarity and joke representation model”. They postulated three levels of abstraction of the SO (script opposition). Maxim Petrenko (2007) summarizes them as follow:

- 1) The real vs. the unreal (the most abstract level); this opposition may be manifested as:
- 2) actual vs. non-actual; normal vs. abnormal; possible vs. impossible; these three can be represented as
- 3) good vs. bad; life vs. death; sex vs. non-sex; money vs. no money; high stature vs. low stature, etc. (Petrenko, 2007: 57).

The integration of Attardo's (1987) model of five level of joke representation (surface, the language, the target + situation, the template and the basic) in the SSTH brought to the elaboration of a new linguistic theory: *The General Theory of Verbal Humor*. Rutter's statements about the important of this theory is very positive:

Without doubt GTVH has been the most influential work in humor research. The GTVH has become widely accepted across the various disciplines involved in humor studies as a theoretical basis for research. It has gained, despite its faults and lacks, a canonical status such that it is nearly impossible to find published humor

research that does not make a reference to it in some way (Rutter, 1997: 22).

The theory's name wanted to emphasize the fact that it is supposed to consider any type of humorous text, by broadening the scope of the Semantic theory. In fact it includes in his investigation not only semantic but also other areas like pragmatics, text linguistics and theory of narrative (Attardo, 2001: 22). "The basic units proposed by the GTVH for the analysis of humorous texts are the *punch line* and the *jab line*. Both are based on a script opposition, but their textual position and function are different. While the punch line is final and causing a surprise effect, jab lines are humorous elements fully integrated in the text and do not disrupt its flow" (Tsakona, 2009: 1173). GTVH does not aim to be a model of the real "online" production of jokes, but it is merely an analytical construct that can help researchers of humor in the joke analysis.

In this theory Attardo introduces six parameters, called the Knowledge Resources (KR). As a result, we can rely on an analytical construct based on six levels/categories in order to describe the components of jokes, their interrelationships, the degree of similarity between joke texts as well differences among humorous texts in general. Here the description provided by Attardo (1994):

1. Language. This parameter "contains all the information necessary for the verbalization of the text. It is responsible for the exact wording of the text and for the placement of the functional elements that constitute it."
2. Narrative strategy, how the joke is organized. "Any joke has to be cast in some form of narrative organization, either as a simple (framed) narrative, as a dialogue (question and answer), as a (pseudo) riddle, as an aside in conversation, etc."
3. Target, such as the butt of a joke. It involves the groups, institutions, people in a humorous text. If a joke is not aggressive we will find this parameter empty.
4. Situation. "Any joke must be "about something" (changing a light bulb, crossing the road, playing golf, etc.). The situation of a joke can be thought of as the "props" of the joke: the objects, participants, instruments, activities, etc."
5. Logical mechanism, "the parameter that accounts for the way in which the two senses (scripts, isotopies,...) in the joke are brought together." It is the logic that causes the script opposition. Krikmann (2005) points out that "This has proved the

most problematic element in the GTVH model. Here, “logical” does not stand for deductive logic or strict formal logic but rather should be understood in some looser quotidian sense 'rational thinking and acting' or even 'ontological possibility'. The common LM for the whole joke series under discussion is called figure-ground reversal”.

6. Scripts opposition, the only level of Raskin's theory incorporated in this new model. “This parameter deal with the script opposition/requirement presented in the SSTH. It should be noted that the SO is the most abstract (perhaps sharing this degree of abstractness with the LM) off all Krs, which accounts for the fact that the SSTH could collapse all 6 KR's onto this one (while basically ignoring all other five, with some exceptions, such as TA and LA)of all resources.

A crucial technical aspect of the GTVH is it hierarchical organization of the Krs, that is structured from less determined to more determined: SO, (LM), SI, TA, LA, NS, LA.

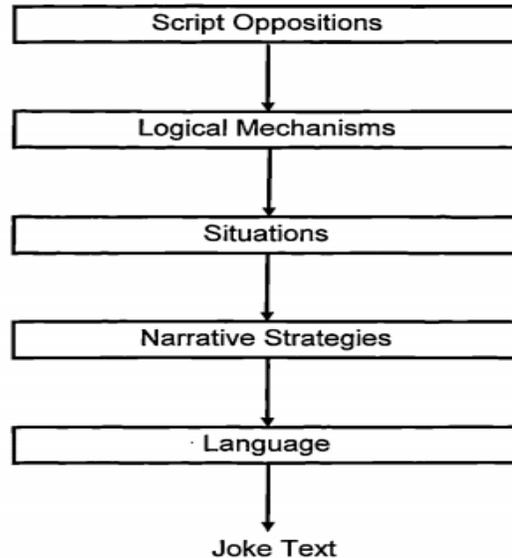


Figure 1. From Attardo & Raskin (1991:325). The hierarchical structure of Krs.

Comments about the narrow focus on the text\script are often reported as one of the big limits of these two theories. Veale (2004: 9) with his social perspective in humor believes that “what is needed is not a logical mechanism as such, or a logic of oppositions, but a social logic that allows a theory to ground the interpretation in the specific concerns and prejudices of the listener as a social agent”. He criticizes Raskin and Attardo theories as follow:

The emphasis placed on opposition as a causal force or “trigger” by the SSTH and GTVH seems misplaced. It perhaps makes more sense to think of structuralist opposition as an excellent basis for categorizing jokes than as a computational basis for explaining them. This does not weaken the SSTH and GTVH as theories, but simply suggests that the level of oppositions and logical mechanism may not be most important or the most pivotal” (Veale, 2004: 11-12).

This kind of observation is usually common by those who investigate humor from a social lens. Linguistic theories seem to have a strict narrow gaze toward the humorous text and its structure, while forgetting the specific contest, the frame, the social and cultural environment that create humor. In the next paragraph some main aspect of this standpoint will be described.

1. 4 Social Theories of humor

Social theories emphasize the social behavior of laughter, the relationship with the others. They draw attention on the social context, instead of investigating why, the reasons that makes us laugh. In fact, in comparison to other perspectives, they usually prefer to focus on the way a humorous act is performed, in its specific environment rather than reflect upon the causes of a humorous text. A joke is analyzed in its social and cultural elements, including also its interpersonal effects on the audience. Jason Rutter (1997) in his research “Stand-up as interaction: Performance and audience in comedy venues” denounces the limits of the previous literature in humor for their lack of interest in “in situ observation which draws on both conversation analysis and audience research.” Rutter investigates the interaction created in a stand-up comedy between the performer and her\his audience because he wants to prove that “audience laughter is organized in a consistent fashion and that the transition between comedian's talk and audience laughter is socially organized”.

He also provided a useful subdivision of social researchers in three groups that will be here represented. He divides this perspective in “Maintenance Theories”, “Negotiation Theories”, and “Frame Theories”.

Maintenance theories “suggest that jokes are used by individuals to reinforce established social roles and divisions”. Jokes reinforce and consolidate solidarity, identity, common values among the insiders of a group. In Bogardus (1945) with his analysis in cartoons and in Francis (1988) we can find the basis of this perspective. However, it is with Radcliffe-Brown's theoretical contributions (1940,1949) that the Maintenance Theories gain territory in the field of humor research. Radcliffe-Brown points out that humor helps to maintain the 'social equilibrium' within important organizations in our society, like for example, families. He defines “joking relationships”as follow:

[A] custom by which persons standing in certain relationships resulting either from kinship, or more usually from marriage, were permitted or required to behave towards one another in a disrespectful or insulting way at which no offence might be taken (Radcliffe-Brown, 1949, p.133).

Another important support to this perspective comes from the work elaborated by Christie Davies (1991) on ethnic humor. He turns the light on the selection of the butt in a joke as an important humorous strategy to maintain the *status quo* and solidarity among insiders in a group. He believes that the sense of identification that an ethnic joke can trigger is created, sometimes, by stressing diversity in groups very similar to each other. It is in the diversity in the similarity that the but of the joke is selected, rather than a alien target who doesn't share anything in common with the audience\the hearer:

In general their relationship [that of the joker and the butt of the joke] may be described as one of center to periphery. The center laughs at the alleged stupidity of the periphery, at people who are seen not as aliens but rather as comic versions of themselves (Davies, 1988, p.48).

The second group of social theories mentioned by Rutter is represented by *Negotiation theories* which are summarized by Mulder as follow:

Negotiation theories look at humor and laughter from a specifically sociological

perspective. They focus on the role of humour as a means of interaction, pastime and an event where more than one person is involved. The hearer defines if a joke is funny or not, depending on the social and cultural context of the joke and its environment. A study of humour and jokes can offer insight in a culture and reveal aspects of this culture that would otherwise not be observed (Mulder, 2002: 7).

Zijderveld (1983) is usually one of the most quoted in this area of research. He believes that to understand humor there must be a change of perspective: humor analysis should focus on the social and cultural environment and not on the coding of a humorous text. Because humor is not an individual response to a dry stimulus, we need to investigate the entire humorous event, with its communicative interactions, as a group experience. It is the hearer that will fill with cultural meanings, values, expectations an empty text of a joke. Jokes, in this way intended, help us to realize how roles and norms (that rule our lives) are often taken for granted; are the expression of society's incongruities and paradoxes. According to Zijderveld in contrast with Davies's theory, a humorous event becomes a moment of negotiation between individuals and the rules that build our societies. Humor is negotiation, dialogue, constructive critic upon values and believes that rules our society.

Frame theories emphasize a very different perspective in comparison to the “Negotiation Theories”: they consider a humorous event as a separated moment from the serious routine that rules our daily life. Humor consists in a shift from a serious frame to a funny one, where comments, criticism, play with roles and taboos are allowed and accepted. During a joke, a riddle or a spontaneous comment the traditional, common social discourse is suspended: the joker is allowed to ignore the sense of hierarchy, the status roles, taboos with sense of freedom. “As such the joke, the joker and their social and historical context are completely intertwined. They make not only the decoding of the joke possible but they control the social regulations that underlie what can be joked at and even what is indeed a joke” (Rutter, 1997: 33).

One of the most influential research in this field is the contribution of “humorous mode” elaborated by Mulkay (1988). His theory can be considered a mixed theory that integrated in it the reflections of Raskin (1985), Koestler's paper in human creativity (1968) and the “Incongruity theories” at large. According to Mulkay the shift from a serious mode of

discourse to a funny frame is an occasion to open a discussion, a negotiation between people about the absurdities\paradoxes\ambiguities\ encountered in our society. Humor stimulate us to accept the paradox, the unresolved contradictions without looking for the logic resolution, which is indeed our normal tendency in a serious mode.

Far from been comprehensive and exhaustive of all social theories on humor, this categorization seem a perfect example of how a humor phenomenon, like jokes inserted in a social setting, can be analyzed from different standpoints with a consequent different vision on society, culture and the system of value. At this regard the next paragraph will point out in a single theory the importance of our personal “moral values” and our commitment on them for the perception or not of a humorous situation.

1. 5 The violation Theory

“The violation theory” elaborated by Thomas Veatch (1997) is based on the assumption that three “necessary and (jointly) sufficient conditions for the humor perception” can allows us to understand not only what is funny, but also the non humorous cases. As the term “necessary” implies, if one of these three features are not detectable there would not be humor perception. They also need to occur “jointly” in order to give to the theory a scientific credibility. According to Veatch this main assumption is essential because usually the most common “competing theoretical views” seem to lack in scientific rigorous. He proves (pages 185- 194) that those perspective analyze only one feature of humor as the unique, exclusive essential element to understand humor, such as“absurdity and incongruity”, “truth”, “aggression”, “superiority”, “timing: brevity and surprise”, “comprehension difficulty”, “cognitive restructuring”, “Freud”. Veatch opinion about Raskin's theory of verbal humor goes in the same direction:

Raskin's teory is strictly limited to jokes, viewed as linguistic forms, or texts. Because of this restriction, it cannot deal with differences that are not in the text itself. It cannot deal with humor that makes no use of linguistic means- sight gags and slapstick, for example. It cannot deal with differences in interpretation, such as jokes that fail in some situations nut not others-where, for example, a difference in perceived humor is related to differences in affective evaluations by different

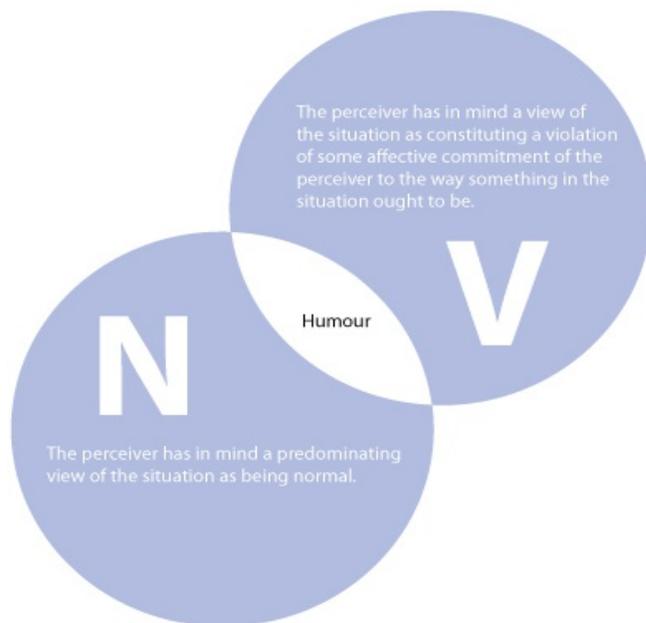
subjects, or to differences in the tension in a social situation, etc. Clearly humor is not restricted to jokes, so the present theory relaxes this restriction (Veatch , 1998:193-194).

Unlikely, Thomas Veatch's theory “makes strong, testable empirical predictions, and provides useful and integrated insight into previously mysterious and unrelated phenomena”. Here the three conditions that build his theory:

V: The perceiver has in mind a view of the situation as constituting a violation of a "subjective moral principle" (cf. next section). That is, some affective commitment of the perceiver to the way something in the Situation ought to be is violated.

N: The perceiver has in mind a predominating view of the Situation as being normal.

Simultaneity: The N and V understandings are present in the mind of the perceiver at the same instant in time (Ivi: 163-164).



The necessary and (jointly) sufficient conditions for the perception of humour.

Figure 2. From **John Dunbar Kilburn's Blog**. The three conditions of Veatch's theory.

[John Dunbar Kilburn's Blog](#). Last acc. 1-10-2014.

By looking at the chart we can understand Veatch's formula of humor: “Humor is (emotional) pain (V) that doesn't hurt (N)”.

The “subjective moral violation” (the condition V) is simply a violation of what we care about. It can be also an attachment for something or a commitment. The grade of attachment for this moral subject is crucial to determine if a specific situation will be considered, experienced as funny or offensive for the perceiver. It is in this different concept of violation that humor should be analyzed and connect with.

For this reason Veatch takes in consideration three-level scale of commitment that triggers different reactions in a perceiver, such as normality (get it), offended reaction (is offended), an amusing mood (see humor).

			Perceiver		
level	logic	commitment	gets it	is offended	sees humour
level 1	not-V	none	no	no	no
level 2	V and N	weak	yes	no	yes
level 3	V and not-N	strong	yes	yes	no

Figure 3. From Thomas Veatch (1998: 117). The three-level scale.

In the following part of the paper the author provides a wide description of different types of humor-related phenomena that proves the validity of the violation theory. It is the case of examples of jokes (elephant jokes and offensive jokes), satire, linguistic humor, puns, giggle-fests, peekaboo, relief laughter, exaggeration, ridicule, and embarrassment.

In general the violation theory has a very practical utility for those who want to understand why people laugh. It is a tool to clarify why and what makes others laugh, while we will not in a similar occasion. From our analysis in Deaf humor, this anthropological and ethnographic perspective represents an important contribution to understand different individuals frames of minds and different systems of moral commitments among communities or groups. With his speculation we should detect the key of humor, the sense

of humor in other people:

To summarize, if you laugh and someone else does not, consider which condition is absent in the context: N, V, or their simultaneous juxtaposition. Conversely, if someone else laughs and you do not get it, look for something in the situation which could involve a violation of something they care about, and infer that they do (Ivi: 212).

In more recent years the Veach theory received a further additional elaboration and integration thanks to the work of McGraw and Warren (2008: 1141). They suggested that humor is the result of “violations that are simultaneously seen as benign”. In other terms their investigation detected three conditions of this humorous benign violation, such as “the presence of an alternative norm suggesting that the situation is acceptable”, then then “weak commitment to the violated norm”, and a “psychological distance from the violation”.

1.6 Deaf humor investigations

Deaf humor is a very recent topic of study. Thanks to the diffusion of Deaf Studies programs within the universities, as well the consequent sensibility about Deaf culture and Deaf lore (Baldwin, 1982; Carmel, 1991, 1996; Hall, 1991; Paaes 2002), humor has gained more attention by researchers of linguistics (Sign Languages) and of Deaf Culture in the last decades. At the moment the literature available in English mainly concerns investigations of ASL and BSL humor in American and British culture. It is the case of the three papers, here summarized, that often recall to each other in their contents and references: “Reflections of American Deaf Culture in Deaf Humor” by the Deaf researcher M. J. Bienvenu; the most comprehensive article about Deaf humor “Deaf jokes and sign language humor” on 2012 by Rachel Sutton-Spence and Donna Jo Napoli; and the paper “Funny in Deaf. Not in Hearing” published this year (2014) by Susan D. Ruherford, a hearing investigation of a famous Deaf joke. Two French contributions will open and close this state of Deaf humor researchers. Guy Bouchaveau and his reflections about humor conveyed by sign language in the book “The Deaf way” Perspectives from the International Conference on Deaf Culture” (Erting, 1994) will be here described with some of his

explicative pictures. A book of French cartoonists translated in Italian “L'umorismo dei sordi in Francia” will conclude this first chapter with drawings and humorous messages about the Deaf community.

1.6.1 G. Bouchauveau

“Deaf humor and culture” is a short paper collected in the famous book “The Deaf Way: Perspectives from the International Conference on Deaf Culture”(Erting, 1994) by Guy Bouchauveau. It is a Deaf writing about the humor expressed by the Deaf community in sign language “and how this form of humor develops within Deaf culture”. Since the beginning the author specifies that for the appearance of humor it is necessary a meeting group, a place where Deaf people can gather and share their opinions, life style, ideas, projects and problems. This is what happens in Deaf associations, clubs, banquets and dances where sign language is used and expressed to convey funny jokes and amusing situations. According to the author this contest was the only one possible in France: “Humor existed whenever Deaf people got together. Comic art emerged spontaneously in the context of communication among Deaf individuals”. Only with the appearance of the Visual Theater (IVT) Deaf humor and signs broke the intimacy of the spontaneous and private little group to occupy a public space. The Deaf community became more conscious about its culture, potentialities as “Deaf world” full of comic nuances. New comedies, artistic products and performance broke free reaching not only members of the Deaf community but also hearing people and those willing to know more about this minority culture.

According to the author another aspect that seems a prerequisite for the occurrence and the develop of humor is the presence of adults who can sign and communicate with Deaf children. Only in this way generations exchange their visual knowledge, perception of the world, a Deaf sensibility about what surrounds them. “When adult Deaf people laugh, a Deaf child can understand the joke and laugh in turn, but if the adult is a hearing person, the Deaf child is excluded from the understanding and the laughter”.

Age is also another important aspect that must be taken into account for the analysis of Deaf humor. During the adolescence crack jokes based on mockery seem to be the most common form of humor. Physical changes, sexual references are part of the communication among young Deaf boys and girls. Around their twenties, when usually Deaf people have enter in the work place, “there are elements of ridicule but also visual word games”. It is only with maturity (the age of forty) that the best creative potential can be expressed in sign language by a person fully conscious to occupy a position as Deaf member in a hearing society: “they incorporate political themes into their funny stories and take jabs at hearing individuals. They have become conscious of their oppression by hearing people and, through mockery, take their revenge upon the hearing world”.

Here I will summarize the four main ways to produce Deaf humor in sign language described by Bouchauveau with pictures and nice visual examples.

The first strategy consists on telling a funny story that ends with a funny punchline. It is the case of the soccer match described in pictures by the author: only at the end we come to realize that all visual details described by the actor about the pre-match soccer where leading us to a wrong mental frame, such as the fact that the actor was signing the atmosphere of a real soccer match. With the last scene we discover, indeed, that he was referring to the beginning of a soccer table match. Our expectation is broken and laughter is triggered. The second technique consists on imitations (of animals) and caricatures (of people). Two different examples are provided with pictures that pinpoint the potential of the facial expression jointed with sign language. The third strategy is here presented with a figure: sign language invents imaginative, absurd images that don't exist in the reality. Here an example:



Biplane wings in their normal position



One wing prods the other to suggest going north.



That wing goes north, but the other insists on going south, with disastrous results.

Figure 4. From Erting (1994: 29). Bouchaveau performs an absurd funny image

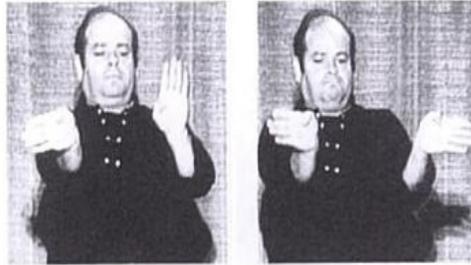
The last considered aspect in the paper is that kind of humor in sign language that can hardly be translated. It is a humor that must be seen, enjoyed with its visual logic and redundancy of images. Here below an example of it:



A man is walking.

He is stricken.

He falls on back.



One foot falls.

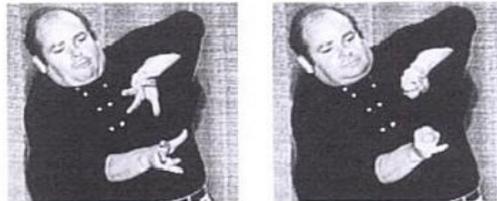
The other foot falls.



Bird with top-knot.

The bird is walking.

It is stricken.



It falls on its side.

Its toes curl into fists.

Figure 5. From Erting (1994: 30). ASL humor narration difficult to translate in a spoken language without losing the humor content.

This last aspect seems very important for the author that in two moments in the paper stresses the difficulty to appreciate, understand and detect Deaf humor for those who are not part of the Deaf community, or do not experience Deafness. Here the two long excerpts

that displays this concern:

Hearing people can read a funny story and laugh at it. I have noticed that Deaf people never laugh at these stories, regardless of whether or not they are oralists. Hearing and Deaf people don't find the same things funny. For example, I can understand plays on words in French, but that's not what it takes to make me laugh. When a joke in French is translated into sign language, Deaf people respond, "yes, that's interesting," but never actually laugh-for them it's not really funny because the two cultures are too far apart (Erting, 1994: 24).

Deaf people practice this comic art among themselves and unfortunately, even hearing people who know sign language may have trouble appreciating the humor. These individuals-sometimes parents with one Deaf child-can't seem to participate in the visual logic and therefore don't fully share the Deaf culture, unlike their Deaf children who are immediately in tune with it. Perhaps these parents are too timid to take it on or they can't understand it-it's hard to say. There is a parting of the ways between hearing parents and their Deaf children in this area: They don't laugh at the same things. The same situation occurs among Deaf parents with hearing children. I hope that in the future there will be an exchange and a meeting of the two worlds. It is important that we are able to share humor (Ivi: 25).

This reflection expressed by a Deaf person is of primary importance for a hearing person who wants to investigate Deaf humor from an outsider perspective. It makes us more conscious of the seriousness and of those delicate aspects that underline a humor phenomenon. Keeping in mind the considerations of the Veatch theory and these excerpts in the next chapter we are going to deal with this critical aspect of humor perception.

1.6.2 M. J. Bienvenu

Another chapter of "Deaf way" is dedicated to some Bienvenu's personal observations about Deaf humor and its relationship with the American culture. She identifies four categories in Deaf humor that are intertwined with the cultural American system: the visual nature of humor; humor based on Deafness as an inability to hear; humor from a linguistic perspective; and humor as a response to oppression.

According to Bienvenu a requisite for the appearance of humor is the presence of a group of Deaf people, as Bouchaveau had already mentioned "Humor is essential at social gatherings where people cluster in groups and exchange stories, jokes, and experiences. Humor is one way people share their perceptions of the world, express different levels of

intimacy, and find comfort in knowing that others share their beliefs and their sense of humor”.

The first category taken into account is “The Visual Nature of Deaf Humor” where Bienvenu stresses the importance of eyes for a Deaf person's life. What it seems a banality it is, indeed, underestimated by hearing when they “don't get” a Deaf joke. Deaf people gain visual knowledge of the world with its visual logic occurring in it. As consequence their culture and experiences are transmitted, shared visually among members of the community. In this sense humor represents a visual translation of the visual perception of the world. However, this powerful visual gaze can hardly be appreciated if translated in English, as it happens with the transcription of the following Deaf joke:

Question: A train is roaring down the tracks, black clouds of smoke puffing from the smokestack. All of the sudden it screeches to a halt, and all the cars topple and crash into one another, until there is nothing left but a smoking charred pile of demolished cars. What happened?

Answer: There was a tiny ant standing on the tracks with its arm outstretched to stop the train.

Many people may not find this funny, and in sound-based language such as English, it loses much of its humor. But for Deaf children, and even adults, the visual irony of a wee, insignificant ant causing so much damage to something as powerful as the locomotive is an image rich with humor (Erting, 1994: 18-19).

“Humor based on Deafness as the Inability to Hear” is rooted in the conviction and awareness that being Deaf does not mean not being able to hear. Deafness is much more than this and humor displays this aspect.

Deafness is a complete culture, where one's decibel loss is much less important than one's allegiance to the Deaf community. Yet a significant amount of Deaf folklore contains jokes and stories that deal with the inability to hear. While the majority culture may perceive a Deaf person as an object of pity and despair, most Deaf people feel particularly clear in this category of humor, which always portrays the Deaf person as victorious (Ivi: 19).

“Hazard of Deafness” is an example of a book that doesn't express the humor and Deaf tradition. It is a hearing perspective of Deafness that displays the inability to hear, that pity

condition, the lament to be Deaf. An example is a story of a Deaf person who is having troubles in cleaning the carpet with her\his vacuum. After moments of frustration, it turns out that the machine was unplugged. The author defines it as “an outsider's view of Deafness”. Unlikely, according to Bienvenu the real Deaf humor belittles the hearing prejudice toward the Deaf as unlucky people unable to hear. It twists this condition in a positive reality, an advantage. The Motel Joke is a clear example:

A Deaf couple has just arrived at the motel for their honeymoon. They start unpacking for the night, and then the nervous husband goes out to get a drink. When he returns to the motel, he realizes that he has forgotten his room number. Because it is dark outside and all the rooms look alike, he walks out to his car and continues to honk the horn until the rooms start lighting up with angry hearing boarders who were awakened by the noise-al but one room, where his Deaf wife is waiting for him! (Ivi: 19).

As Padden and Humphries argued in their analysis about Deaf lore, the butt of the Motel joke is not the Deaf person, but hearing people who are very sensitive to the noise. The Deaf character knows about it and he takes advantage of this situation for his benefit (Paales, 2002:62).

Another category described by Bienvenu is “Humor from a Linguistic Perspective”. It is in other terms a linguistic game of manipulation with sign language and its rules. It is the case with puns, with a new use of syntactic structures and with the lexicon. The most famous example is the Giant joke that displays how linguistic humor “is visually active”, “is linguistically funny”, “is funny in its irony, because culturally Deaf people hate oralism”.

A huge giant is stalking through a small village of wee people, who are scattering through the streets, trying to escape the ugly creature. The giant notices one particularly beautiful blonde woman scampering down the cobble-stoned street. He stretches out his clumsy arm and sweeps her up, then stares in wonder at the slight, shivering figure in his palm. "You are so beautiful," he exclaims. The young woman looks up in fear. "I would never hurt you, he signs, "I love you! We should get MARRIED." Producing the sign MARRY, he crushes her. The giant then laments, "See, oralism is better"(Erting, 1994:20).

“Humor as a Response to Oppression” could provide significant examples to the Superiority Theories of humor as well to the Relief Theories. Deaf humor expresses the

anger and the desire to redress the balance in a hearing ruling society. In this kind of stories the Deaf have the last word as winners, while they show the hearing ignorance behind their prejudices on diversity. For many years sign languages were forbidden by hearing educators and the use of signs is now considered a conquest of freedom by the members the community. Therefore, in their stories a sense of revenge, anger towards the hearing people appears on the surface as a form of empowerment, and pride to be Deaf signers. Here an example of this kind of humor:

A group of Deaf people was at a restaurant, chatting away. At the table next to them is a group of hearing people who rudely mimic their signs and behaviors. One particularly bright Deaf woman decided she'd had enough of this abuse. She leaves the table, walks to a nearby phone booth, picks up the receiver, and put the coins in the machine, making making sure that she is being observed by the hearing group. After a short pause, she starts signing into the receiver, using natural expression and pausing, from the person on the other end to respond. When she has completed her call, she hangs up and strolls back to the table to resume her conversation. Needless to say, the hearing people are dumbfounded and unable to move, much less ridicule the Deaf crowd. When the Deaf group leaves the restaurant, they watch as the hearing people run over to inspect the phone (Ivi: 21).

Bienvenu concludes her reflections with a very meaningful comment hat it is worth mentioning for our humor analysis. She stresses the beneficial effects of humor that twists negative feelings and real conditions of oppression or discrimination in a salutary reaction and empowering response:

“Humor is an essential part of all our lives. I am sure you have all heard the expression, “Laughter is the best medicine.” Well, there is much truth to that, particularly when you analyze minority cultures and realize that they all inevitably incorporate the mechanisms of majority oppression into their humor. It is a common response to the frustration and tedium of our everyday lives” (Ivi: 23).

1.6.3 R. Sutton-Spence and D. Jo Napoli

So far, the most comprehensive paper pertaining to humor (British and American Deaf communities) is a recent paper “Deaf jokes and sign language humor” published by Rachel Sutton-Spence and Donna Jo Napoli on 2012. It is a unique article that highlights the importance of humor in a minority culture so variegated and often ignored by the mainstream culture and researchers. It describes how the visual experience influences the

Deaf knowledge, opinion and creativity. Deaf Humor in jokes, anecdotes, puns is deeply connected with the visual-manual modality that drives their lives in a hearing society.

The article is divided in three main parts, that will be here summarized in their crucial aspects.

In the first part entitled “What is Deaf humor for?” the two authors focused on the function of humor, which is an aspect that is usually mainly investigated in sociological or psychological fields (Meyer, 2000; Martineau, 1971). Humor can be useful, functional for the recipients and for those who produce it: “Humor in any culture may be expected to give pleasure, fun and laughter to the comedian and/or audience. Additionally it allows community members to share experiences and create a bond between jokester and audience” (Sutton-Spence, 2012: 312). This aspect is very important within the Deaf minority because it allows for many new members to find their Deaf identity for long hidid or ignored to them (for example Deaf people who followed a oralist education while they grew up). Another function individuated by the authors is that “it may be used to support the in-group. Deaf humor supports the Deaf in-group by teaching new members of the community the rules of their society and reinforcing these rules for existing members”. This aspect is very common among minorities in so much as that Lawrence W. Levine (1977), who wrote about Black culture and Black consciousness, seems to write something very similar:

Humor is primarily an interactive process among those who share a sense of commonality of experience and situation...laughter..not only helps to strengthen a sense of group cohesion, it assumes the presence of at least the rudiments of an already existing sense of identification. The widespread existence of laughter throughout Afro-American history is in itself evidence of the retention and development of forms of communal consciousness and solidarity among a group that too often and too easily has been pictures as persistently and almost totally demoralized and atomized (Lewine,1977: 358-359).

This effect can be reached in several ways, like stressing positive features that characterize the community as well criticizing, challenging negative common behavior, attitudes of the in-group culture. Another strategy to strengthen a sense of commonality between the members is to attack the out-group. In the Deaf culture the target is the hearing society at large, as well those who are against signs or deny Deafness as cultural inheritance.

Overall poor signing by hearing people who are not part of Deaf culture is a great source of belly laughs for Deaf people [...] The ASL signers Keith Wann, Peter Cook, and Crom Saunders join together in the video “ASL Comedy Tour” to poke fun to a range of grammatical errors that poor signers make, from slapstick (such as putting nose to nose to show they understand that “eye contact is important in ASL”- one of the premier rules of signing) to linguistically sophisticated (such as a poor signer mimicking multiple features of a movement-essentially doing mime, and outside the signing space-rather than simply using classifiers). (Sutton-Spence, 2012: 323).

The second part of the paper describes that kind of humor that derives from the sign language. Sutton-Spence and Jo Napoli entitled this linguistic perspective of humor “Playing with sign language”. For the sake of clarity they developed this area in three different points:

1. Humor as a result of the creation of “new and highly visually representative signs (especially using facial expression and other non-manual elements)”;
2. Humor created by “playing with the internal structure of signs”;
3. Humor stems from “using bilingual humor to blend the form and meaning of spoken and sign languages”.

The first point is what they called “classic traditional Deaf humor”, that is the result of the way something is signed, performed. While hearing people might expect a punch line at the end of a sign joke, a comic resolution, or an unusual conclusion in a story, what causes the humor effect in a common funny Deaf story is the way scenes are visually performed, and how the characters are created with entertaining images. “In this type of signed humor, the gestural elements of sign languages work closely with the linguistic elements, creating performances that take the language to new and entertaining heights”.

According to the authors the main strategy to construct new and elaborated visual image with humorous effect is the use of classifiers, which is a very linguistic element of all sign languages. Then, of course, “like so much wit in any language, conceptual creativity is needed to decide what aspect of a visual image to present and then select unexpected (but nevertheless logical) classifier constructions to represent them in a new and highly visual way”. Deaf adults also report that even an extensive impersonation of characters, with the engagement of roleshift, transfer of person by the storyteller create amusement in a

performance. For what concern the subject imitated, embodied by joke teller there are often people who are identified as “non-visual, sound-related, out-group members”, like doctors, teachers, social workers, etc. Also a great deal of animals is anthropomorphized for their non-human features. They are embodied as Deaf animal that often have a reduced capacity to sign which amuses the viewer. “To show signing animals, first the signer selects hand-shapes and location and movements that present the form the that animal and then he uses these to limit the animal's signing skills. For example, the bird signs with flat hands to show its wings”.

Signers may also perform inanimate objects, like apples, elevators, mountains, which amuse for seeing human emotions in non human things. Usually hands are not part of the impersonation, while eyes and facial expressions allow the object to communicate non-manually.

Thus, for example, a tree looks around furtively when it begins to sprout in the forest (see Figure 4), a mountain looks up at the sky in annoyance when the rain falls, the elevator looks out hopefully upon opening its doors and adopts a disappointed face when nobody wants to ride in it, the apple is malicious when it knocks another from the tree, and the volcano screws up its face in discomfort as it suffers terrible indigestion (Sutton-Spence, 2012: 318).



Bird stands



Me



Deaf

Figure 6. From Sutton- Spence (2012: 318). The performer is using flat hands to show a bird signing with its wings. While usually the sign ME is made in BSL with the index extended, here we see a bird-adaptation of the sign. The same happens for the third picture with the sign “Deaf”. The index and the middle finger are substituted with a wing-flat hand to impersonate the bird.

Another crucial part of Deaf humor is the facial expression, especially when it is exaggerated with big or small signs or with an unusual pace in their movements.

Caricature is a highly valued part of humor within sign language folklore (Bouchauveau 1994, Ryan 1993; Rutherford 1993). As well as being entertaining for the audience and allowing signer's to demonstrate their language skills, it is also a weapon against those considered dangerous to the in-group, such as powerful hearing oppressors. A caricature of a poor-quality interpreter or a fierce oralist teacher that forbids the use of signing makes them appear ludicrous and thus less threatening (Sutton-Spence, 2012: 316-317).

For what concern humor created by “Playing with the internal structure of signs”, emphasizes the ability of the storyteller in changing one of those cheremes that compose a sign, by giving an additional meaning which turns to be funny. In this way a new sign is created thanks to an unusual adaptation of the traditional parameter. The authors give the example of the sign UNDERSTAND, that if articulated with the little finger instead of the index finger, can mean “understand a little”.



Understand



Understand-a-little

Figure 7. From Sutton-Spence (2012: 320). The traditional sign “understand” is articulated in the second picture in a different and creative way, conveying a different meaning.

Another strategy consists in playing with the generally associated connotation of some

parameters. In BSL, for example, signs with the little finger extended from the fist have a negative connotation. By substituting in the sign HEARING-PERSON the index finger with the little one, it creates a new sign with a negative nuance: BAD-HEARING-PERSON. This humor based on a linguistic perspective is an example of humor as attack to the out-group. To entertain with signs the storyteller can stress the double meaning of their hands, that are not only articulators of Sign Language, but also as simply hand.

One sign meaning VOLUNTEER (recognized in both ASL and BSL) is articulated by raising one hand, but when a signer uses the other hand to pull that articulating hand down and shove it firmly into a pocket, it means “I’ve just realized it was stupid to volunteer so I have change my mind”. By reminding everyone that the signing articulator is also a hand, and by attributing autonomy and volition to the hands, the action becomes much funnier than simply signing conventional signs such as CHANGE-MIND, VOLUNTEER NO (Sutton-Spence, 2012:321).

Another aspect that should not underestimate as trigger of humor is the prosody, the pace in signs. The authors remind the performance by May Beth Miller in Live at SMI while she signed the American national anthem with different nuances of pace and time as it could have been signed in different periods of history.

The last part in the humor triad proposed by the two authors is the “Bilingual sign language-English humor”, which requires the audience to know both the oral than the sign language in order to be appreciated and deeply understood. The authors indicates a famous ASL joke that will be better explained in the next paragraph thanks to the paper published by Rutherford (2014), the researcher who dedicated an entire article about this famous Deaf joke. What can be interesting here to add is that mistranslations of English idioms (deadline\ underwear) in sign language with a literal meaning (dead line\ under where) is often another way to play creatively with the language and its standard roles. Other linguistic aspects that are reinterpreted in a funny way are the use of the manual alphabet to built little stories. The most common are called ABC stories because they involve only these three different hand-shape. By using a wider range of letter the narration can become very visually effective and amusing.

In the third and last part of the paper, Sutton-Spence and Jo Napoli consider other two features that make Deaf people laugh, such as “Sign jokes from English” and “Sign jokes

originating in the Deaf community”. In the first case, even though the content of the joke is not related with the Deaf culture, it is still appreciated by the Deaf community because often the protagonist becomes Deaf, making the audience identify with him and its manners. In other occasions the adaptation in sign language from the original text in English implies some additional visual details and images. It is the case of the following English riddle, that amuses Deaf signers in ASL because they have the opportunity to see the embodiment of the walking skeleton. A verb becomes a visual action that amuses the Deaf audience.

Q: Why did the skeleton cross the road?

A: To get to the Body Shop

“Sign jokes originating in the Deaf community” are the last aspect analyzed by the authors. Humor can be expressed with a joke that is created within the Deaf culture. The main topics of the Deaf jokes are stories that usually involve doctor's, dentists, misunderstanding with hearing people, people with cochlear implants or hearing aids, but also interpreters, teachers, speech therapists. Many of them could be translated in a spoken language, but because of their strict relationship with the Deaf world, they would lost part of the cultural information and its humor effect. Bergson would call them “the comic expressed by language”. Other jokes are based on gestures in the punchline. “Where these gestures are shared between Deaf and hearing people in the same local or regional or national society, the jokes can be translated between the spoken and sign languages with relative ease, and indeed there are jokes in English that require gestures for their punch line”. The authors provide the English transcription of a Joke signed in BSL by Philip Ashford as example of their statement. Then, they indicate that there are also several jokes that Bergson would call “the comic created by language”. This kind of jokes are the most difficult to translate in a spoken language because they depend upon the linguistic visual-gestural channel. They involve a mixture of gestures and sign languages that alternated, overlap in the narration by maintaining the rules of sign language. In other occasion they use of the speech simultaneously with the sign is performed just to work on the contrast of the two texts uttered and of the two world that they represent. The most famous joke both in ASL and

BSL is the King Kong\Giant joke where the humor stems from a linguistic game with the sign “marry” and its visual articulation. E. Lynn Jacobowitz jokes as well as Richard Carter jokes in ASL and BSL are described as example to support this observation. The article concludes with a already mentioned reflection by Bienvenu about the visual sensibility of Deaf people and how that “requires a strong visual motivation for its full appreciation”.

1.6.4 S. D. Rutherford

The paper “Funny in Deaf. Not in Hearing” by Susan D. Rutherford focuses on the text of a famous joke well known in the American Deaf community. The title wants to stress an interesting aspect of this joke: it is often considered a joke that hearing people, who don't know sign language, cannot understand. It is a Deaf joke that plays with the language itself, the sign language, and with the condition of Deafness.

Here the joke translated in English:

One time a man, well a person, a Deaf person, was driving along and stopped at some train tracks because the crossing signal gates were down but there was no train going by. So he waited for a long time for a train to go by, but nothing. The person decided then to get out of the car and walk to the control booth where there was a man who controlled the railroad gates. He was sitting there talking on the phone. The Deaf man wrote in his very best way (elegantly), “please b-u-t,” and handed the paper to the controller. The controller looked back at the Deaf person quizzically, “Please but? Huh?” He didn't understand that (Rutherford, 2014: 310).

The humor effect in “Please but” stems from the awareness of the phonological similarities between the ASL sign for the preposition “but” and the classifier that visually portrays the “railroad crossing gate”. In other terms the ASL sign for the English word “but” has exactly the same parameters of the classifier “railroad crossing gate” with a difference only in the palm orientation.

F

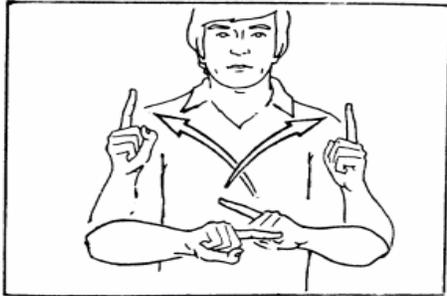


Figure 3. “Open the railroad crossing gates” (used with the permission of T. J. Publishers).

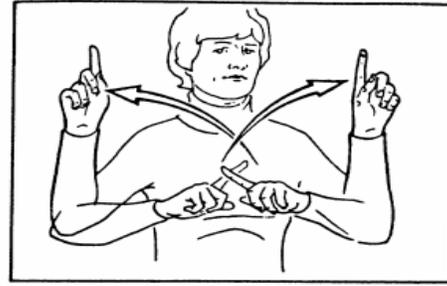


Figure 4. “But” (used with permission of T. J. Publishers).

Figure 8. From Rutherford (2014:312) The phonological similarity of the sign “but” and the classifier “Open the railroad crossing gates”.

However, the real analysis in this paper concerns something that goes beyond the linguistic aspect of sign language. It develops a reflection on the cultural specificity of humor:

But even many people who are fluent in sign and who understand and enjoy the play between sign and gloss do not fully appreciate the joke. That this happens is evidence of the more important fact of the cultural specificity of humor, for here, the lack of appreciation does not stem from “not getting it”, but from a lack of a shared cultural experience (Ivi:312).

Rutherford points out how for a hearing person, the awareness of Deaf oppression and discrimination as well all issues related to communication, is more a cognitive recognition than an affective condition. Therefore, it is in this lack of the real Deaf experience where the Deaf essence of humor stands out in all his aspects. Deaf culture and humor are so intertwined that a rough interpretation of this joke from a hearing perspective could miss to highlights the richness and the power of humor itself as an important window for the understanding of the Deaf community.

As Susan Rutherford writes, if we pay attention at the manifest content of the joke we can definitely detect that it concerns a problem with communication of a Deaf person, who is unable to write the correct English to a hearing person. We recognize that the Deaf wanted to communicate “open the railroad gate” by writing at the end an English gloss of ASL sign, that is similar from a phonological level. It is a story that testify Deaf problems with writing, trouble with English, a metaphor for the language situation, or more in general a

picture of conflict with the majority culture and its language. One of the informant who gave an opinion about the joke said “The joke makes fun of Deaf English and the writing problems, which “they” blame on the influence of sign language. People blame sign language, so we have jokes that blame sign language. We laugh at that”.

This joke creates solidarity, self-identification of the Deaf members who emotionally bound with the Deaf person in the joke. As Martineau (1972) suggested in his four functions of in-group humor this joke intensify the sense of the group as minority, by reaffirming those behavioral norms and attitudes that characterize it. In addition because the joke is for the bilingual, it may create an addition group solidarity between those who have to interact with the hearing people more than their more isolated Deaf members.

If we keep in mind all of this, according to Rutherford it appears clear now how this joke is a linguistic and creative response against hearing oppression and their educational control towards the Deaf. It reflects not only the conflict between two worlds, but also it reaffirms the group identity of the Deaf as members of a minority. The author recall Douglas and Feinberg in support of her analysis:

Douglas asserts that jokes mirror the incongruity in society. Jokes are anti-structure-an attack on the established order. By joking in a play frame, the resultant disruption challenges the social order on a symbolic level and re-affirms order on a social level (1968:361). Further, Feinberg suggests that word play is aggression against conformity, especially, with reference to puns, a rebellion against linguistic conformity. When the language is distorted, it represents a revolt, albeit playful, against the rigidity of language (Feinberg 1978:106). Given the history of linguistic rigidity imposed on the Def individual by the majority culture, it is apparent that “Pease b-u-t,” as a playful linguistic distortion, serves as a particularly satisfying source of rebellion (Ivi: 318).

This paper is an essential point of reference for our investigation because it reminds us how an analysis on a Deaf joke is something very serious that needs accuracy, competence in the Deaf world, knowledge of sign language and reflections that go beyond of the structure of the text.

1.6.5 S. Allier, Y. Lapalu, M. Renard

“L'umorismo dei sordi in Francia” is an anthology of Deaf visual humor published in 2000.

It collects the creative work of three French Deaf cartoonist, Sandrine Allier, Yves Lapalu and Marc Renard with the Italian translation provided by Enrico Cimino. The anthology is a selection of comic strip material of four original covers, such as:

1. “Sourd, cent blagues” in the 1997. A little volume of 88 pages with 124 jokes and comic strips by Marc Renard and Yves Lapalu. The title and the illustration in the cover play with the French words “cent” and “sans” that are pronounced in the same way. In Italian the game could be translate in these two titles “Sordo, cento barzellette!” and “Sordo, senza barzellette”. The introduction of the volume appears as “Usi sociali e tipologia dell'umorismo sordo”, which was published in Italian in the Journal “L'educazione dei sordi”.



Figure 9. From “L'umorismo di sordi in Francia” (2000: 11). Sourd, cent blagues

2. “Leo l'enfant sourd” in the 1998. It narrate real adventures of a Deaf guy in 62 colored pages wit by Yves Lapalu. Even in this case Marc Renard writes “senza pretesa di esaurirle, Leo illustra un gran numero di difficoltà sperimentate dai sordi, perché tutte le scene e le battute si basano su situazioni di handicap uditivo realmente accadute”:



Figure 10. From “L'umorismo dei sordi in Francia” (2000: 27). Leo l'enfant sourd.

3. “Les sourdoués” in 2000 by Sandrine Allier, a volume of 64 pages. In the cover there is a Deaf person who asks to the genie of the lamp to become Deaf. Even in this case the title is a play on words “sous” and “sourd” with a famous movie “Les sousdoués. The author substitutes the word “sous” (under) with “sourd” (Deaf) with the final title of the volume “Les sourdoués”. Sandrine continues Yves Lapalu's work by translating in pictures and imagines Marc Renard's jokes presented in “Sourd, cent blagues”.

Sandrine Allier

LES SOURDOUÉS



Figure 11. From “L'umorismo dei sordi in Francia” (2000: 35). Les sourdoués.

4. “Sourd, cent blagues! Tome deux” in 2000 by Sandrine Allier who turned jokes and texts of the first volume in images and pictures. In the illustration there is a play on four words “vert” (green) “ver” (worm) and “verre” (glass), “vers” (verse). Here, again, they specifies that “il nostro scopo non è quello di ridere dei sordi, come siamo noi stessi, ma di ridere con loro e, infine, di farli meglio conoscere attraverso il loro umorismo”.

Figure 12. From “L'umorismo dei sordi in Francia” (2000: 47). Sourd, cent blagues! Tome deux.



The introduction of this book points out the importance of humor as an essential key for a better understanding of the Deaf minority culture. With his cartoons Renard Marc wants to prove that Deaf people have their own humor which stems from their experience of Deafness in a hearing society. He sees humor as an occasion to bound, to strengthen the Deaf identity with the narration of daily frustrations for incomprehensions, lack of

communication, for hearing prejudices and attitudes towards Deaf. “Non si tratta di ridere dei sordi ma di ridere insieme ai sordi”. He also believes that thanks to humor Deaf people can teach more about their world to the mainstream culture than thousands of boring theoretic lessons. Cimino, the translator, encourages the Italian Deaf to tell their stories, their funny situation that occurs in their lives, as the French community is successfully trying to do. “Lo fanno I sordi francesi, perché non dobbiamo farlo anche da noi, è la domanda che abbiamo posto a noi stessi e qui poniamo ai lettori”. And he also challenges the Italian community to consider humor as a way to laugh about their own condition as Deaf, as members of a discriminated minority:

E' giusto che anche i sordi siano e si rendano protagonisti di storie e di strisce umoristiche, che mettano in evidenza, per se stessi e per gli altri, i problemi che affrontano (la protesì, la lingua dei segni, l'interprete, la logopedista, i sottotitoli...) e il modo con cui li risolvono. Un punto in più di uguaglianza-diversità dei sordi, di equiparazione ad altre oneste e dignitose categorie di cittadini (Ivi: 5).

Even though this collection of humorous cartoons is something different from the visual humor elicited in a theater by Gabriele Caia, it is not so different if we consider their contents and stories (the speech therapist, subtitles, at the bar, the mystery of sign language, etc.). What is even more surprising is that one of the story in “Sourd, cent blagues! Tome deux” entitled “How to refresh” (2000: 52) is also performed by Caia in his show (at the video 23u) with a five minutes narration full of funny details. This coincidence proves that Deaf culture with all its funny stories and experience can really break free beyond nationalities (French\Italian) and forms of art (cartoonist\actor) to celebrate its pulsing and variegated minority around the world.

CHAPTER 2

THE DEAF PERFORMANCE IN LIS

2.1 Caia's show and its structure

Caia's show “Pa Pa” is a theater performance in Italian Sign Language of one hour and forty-three minutes. The title “Pa Pa” is the lip oralization of two LIS signs often used in the show, that can be here roughly translated in a more general meaning “able to” “not able to do”. What join all those different nuances in meanings is the fact that the two signs mainly refer to the Deaf manners, Deaf situations and ways of expression of the Deaf. If we should translate in two words these two signs we could call the show “Deaf Culture”.

The show has a very interesting structure that seems to follow a specific Deaf communication feature: during a conversation, signers might interrupt or change topic before the end of the narration to reconnect with it only at a later time. This is exactly what Caia says about Deaf signers, while they communicate to each other at the minute 10:04 to 10:13 (video5 “The interruption in speeches”). In the show this attitude occurs several times in Caia's performance.

Despite this apparent disorganized structure, Caia's show can be easily divided in two parts. The first part goes from the beginning until the minute 57:12. It contains several stories related to Caia's life. This aspect matches with Ben Bahan's analysis about the face-to-face tradition in the America Deaf community:

Narratives of personal experience are probably the most common type of storytelling in the Deaf community. These are real-life accounts of various events, including those that are humorous or tragic and those of struggles to overcome various odds. In some of them “the speaker becomes deeply involved in rehearsing or even reliving events of his past” (Labov, 1972, 354) One commonly retold humorous story in the Deaf WORLD involves a Deaf person being asked by a hearing person, maybe a stewardess, if he can read Braille (Bahan, 2006: 29).

In addition, in this first part there are stories that involve other people, like Deaf signers,

hearing parents with Deaf children, a Deaf guy with digital hearing aids, a speech therapist and so on. For the sake of humor analysis, this part of the show has been divided in 32 short videos. Each of them received an invented title that summarizes the main developed topic. Here the list of them in chronological order:

The perspiration. Video 1 (1:06)

The name sign. Video 2 (0:09)

The name sign and Caia's education. Video 3 (3:41)

The numeric precision. Video 3a (0:12)

"The sick deaf people". Video 3b (0:10)

"The annoying deaf people". Video 3c (0:10)

Marks in Italian. Video 3d (21sec)

The name sign "Saint". Video 3e (0:34)

Waiting. Video 4 (0:28)

The interruption in speeches. Video 5 (0:11)

Caia's parents. Video 6 (1:12)

Caia's education as commuter. Video 7 (0:47)

Yes, that thing. Video 8 (0: 22)

I don't trust you. Video 9 (0:40)

Sign Writing. Video 10(2:02)

Mafia. Video 11 (5:00)

The sign "Deaf". Video 12 (2:42)

Caia and the example for the sign "Deaf". Video 13 (0:27)

So, there is a doctor, hearing parents and a speech therapist. Video 14 (1:20)

The speech therapist. Video 15 (4:47)

Slaps. Video 16 (0:44)

The digital prosthesis. Video 17 (3.18)

Must hear well. Video 17a (1:39)

Incommunicability. Video 18 (7:32)

The Deaf girl at the disco with the hearing boy. Video 18a (1:58)

At the door. Video 18b (0:56)
A deaf and a bartender. Video 18c (1:02)
A deaf and two hearing writers. Video 18d (3:24)
Earwax in the eyes and in hearing ears. Video 19 (2:04)
Caia at the university. The SW and the written Italian. Video 20(1:34)
The Italian writing for Deaf and the Sign Writing. Video 21 (1:24)
LIS and the elegant clothes. Video 22 (0:49)

The second part covers forty-two minutes until the end of Caia's show. The story is a detailed narration of a marriage between a Deaf bride and a hearing groom. It starts with Caia wearing the right dress for a wedding (23a) with a concluding scene about a challenge between a wedding Deaf guest and a hearing (23z). Here is the division of this part from 23a to 23z in 25 short videos.

The doctor's "What does that mean". Video 23a (1:12)
The bow tie. Video 23b (0:13)
The bow tie and Monnalisa. Video 23c (0:35)
Kisses in the church. Video 23d (0:22)
The launch of rice. Video 23e (0:12)
The pictures. Video 23f (0:06)
The buffet. Video 23g (0:48)
The borderline between Deaf and hearing people. Video 23h (0:44)
The differences between Deaf and hearing during the buffet. Video 23i (2:18)
The light in the kitchen. Video 23ij (1:32)
Deaf, hearing people and noise. Video 23k (0:32)
The bride's name sign. Video 23m (0:19)
The hearing workers and the alarm clock. Video 23n (1:37)
The groom's name sign. Video 23o (0:29)
Chatting and water. Video 23p (0:29)

"L'indennità di comunicazione"¹. Video 23q (3:16)
The disable hand. Video 23r (38 sec.)
The argument with the hearing guest. Video 23s (2:31)
The Deaf outlet. Video 23t (0:34)
One hearing, one signer and one deaf oralist. Video 23u (5:27)
The oralist. Video 2v (1:15)
The old Deaf people. Video 23w (1:49)
The subtitles in TV. Video 23x (0:35)
Greetings. Video 23y (4:31)
The end. Video 23z (1:58)

Differently from the first part, in this second section only few stories can be extrapolated from the main red thread that remains the wedding throughout the entire performance. In other words, even though they are integrated with the story of the wedding, they can also be considered as independent stories. This is the case of video 23q "L'indennità di comunicazione"; video 23u "One hearing, one signer and one deaf oralist"; video 23x "The subtitles in TV"; or video 23n "The hearing workers and the alarm clock".

Here is a synopsis of the whole performance in some detail:

(0 -0.10) Caia appears on stage. He says "hi" to everybody waving his hands. He leaves the stage after few seconds.

(0.15-2.50) A cleaning woman appears with a broom. She puts a drawer at her right side that will be used by Caia to talk about Sign Writing only later. She introduces the topic of menstruation, while she cleans the stage. After a while she leaves.

(3:02-1:41) The show starts at 3.02 and finishes at 1:41 minutes. At the minute 3.02, Caia introduces his first topic: pit stains and the visual difference in perspiration between Deaf signers and hearing. While the former use all their bodies to communicate, hearing speakers only move their lips.

¹ "L'indennità di comunicazione" is an allowance that is allocated by the Italian Government for those who are identified as deaf. It consists on an amount of money that should be used to pay, for example, the interpreting service and all other communication facilities.

From minute 4: 07 to 24:24 Caia talks about himself. He shares personal experiences that can be very familiar to his Deaf audience, such as when his parents discovered that he was Deaf; his daily life with other Deaf children in the dormitory, far from his parent's house; his relationship with priests that educated him; how and why he has that name-sign. What must be highlighted is that all his experiences are intersected with several opinions about “Deaf culture ” by using the sign Pa Pa in its several meanings. Caia says for example that Deaf people instead of giving precise information, prefer to say “more or less” (più o meno) ; they jump abruptly from one topic to another to come back again later to the previous one; they prefer to chat during activities where “silence” and visual concentration are expected. Here some examples:

1. The numeric precision. Video 3a
2. Waiting. Video 4
3. The interruption in speeches. Video 5
4. I don't trust you. Video 9

In this span of time (4: 07- 24:24) he also introduces the topic of mafia that will be performed only later in all its parts.

(13:52-16:03) Caia explains the meaning of the sign Pa Pa and all other signs in the drawer next to him. During his exposition, he claims that LIS is not a poor language as many believe.

(16:15-21:26) Caia explains the original meaning of the term “Mafia” by recalling the blood that the cleaning woman saw on the floor at the beginning of the show. He reminds to the Deaf audience that LIS has the same prestige and linguistic value as American Sign Language (ASL).

From 22 to 24.24 Caia explains that in his family and in his girlfriends' family there are only Deaf people. He highlights the importance of the sign “Deaf” for a minority that is connected by a physical disability which is invisible at the first sight.

From minute 24:25 to 33 minute Caia tells a story that another Deaf person told him: that's Deaf culture. Storytelling represents an important occasion for the community to share and remember a tradition that is not written. In this case, the story is about a Deaf child in a hearing family. The worried and anxious parents talk with the doctor about

Deafness. The doctor tells them that the children will lose his disability if he learns to speak well. The parents send the child to the speech therapist. At this point, Caia personifies two characters: the Deaf child and the speech therapist with a pair of glasses. The speech therapist slaps the kid to stimulate him to speak better, while he cries and suffers. This story ends with Caia's opinion about how hearing people treated Deaf children in the past and how things now are, for some aspects, better. He says that he speaks well because he received a lot of slaps on his lips when he was a kid. He invites parent to do the same.

(33:15-45:46) In this part of the show Caia tells the story of a deaf guy who received an oral education. The guy does not want to hear Caia's opinion about the importance of LIS. The deaf buys a digital hearing aids to hear better and detect sounds. The story involves a hearing person and a doctor. The deaf is portrayed as a person negatively influenced by hearing believes and sound-related biases.

(38:13-40:12) Caia keeps talking about the same oralist deaf with a digital prosthesis. This time the deaf is in a disco. Here again the story involves other hearing people that approach the deaf guy while he is drinking a Whisky alone. The two hearing people and the deaf drink together communicating with a pen and paper. The end is funny for its absurdity. Even here, this main story is “interrupted” at the beginning by two stories with a similar topic.

(40:13-41:16) Caia tells a short story about a Deaf girl and a hearing guy at the disco, while they try to communicate to each other without results. The particular environment allows Caia to point out some misunderstandings related with sound and the auditory channel for both hearing and Deaf people.

(41:17-45:46) Caia makes a provocative remark, a crazy proposal for the Deaf: if a hearing person knocks at their doors they should turn on the music before starting to communicate. In this way, Deafness can really disappear as a problem! In fact, they can always tell the hearing person that they cannot communicate because of the music, too loud for both.

(45:47) The story is about a family in Southern Italy. Caia highlights a visual difference between hearing and Deaf with an analysis on earwax.

(49:27) Caia links his previous explanation about Sign Writing on the drawer with his personal experience in writing at the university. Again part of his personal life becomes an

occasion to talk about some topics that are very important for the Deaf community, in this case writing.

(57: 12- 1.41) Half of his show describes how a Deaf person participates to a wedding between a hearing groom and a Deaf bride.

Tab. 1 Time span of the 58 videos

1	The perspiration	1:06
2	The name sign	0:09
3	The name sign and Caia's education	3:41
4	The numeric precision	0:12
5	“The sick Deaf people”	0:10
6	“The annoying Deaf people”	0:10
7	Marks in Italian	0:21
8	The name sign “Saint”	0:34
9	Waiting	0:28
10	The interruption in speeches	0:11
11	Caia's parents	1:12
12	Caia's education as commuter	0:47
13	Yes, that thing	0:22
14	I don't trust you	0:40
15	Sign writing	2: 02
16	Mafia	5:00
17	The sign “Deaf”	2:42
18	Caia and the example for the sign “Deaf”	0:27
19	So, there is a doctor, hearing parents and a speech therapist.	1:20
20	The speech therapist	4:47

21	Slaps	1:17
22	The digital hearing aids	3:18
23	Must hear well	1:39
24	Incommunicability	7:32
25	The Deaf girl in the disco with the hearing boy	1:58
26	At the door.	0:56
27	A deaf and a bartender	1:02
28	A deaf and two hearing writers	3:24
29	in the eyes and in hearing ears	2:04
30	Caia at the university. The SW and the written Italian	1:34
31	The Italian writing for Deaf and Sign Writing	1:24
32	LIS and the elegant clothes	0:49
33	The doctor's "What does that mean?"	1:12
34	The bow tie	0:13
36	The bow tie and Monnalisa	
37	Kisses in the church	0:22
38	The launch of rice	0:12
39	The pictures	0:06
40	The buffet	0:48
41	The borderline between the Deaf and the hearing	0:44
42	The differences between Deaf and hearing during the buffet	2:18
43	The light in the kitchen	1:32
44	Deaf, hearing people and noise	0:32
45	The bride's name sign	0:19

46	The hearing workers and the alarm clock	1:37
47	The groom's name sign	0:29
48	Chatting and water	0:29
49	"L'indennità di comunicazione"	3:16
50	The disable hand	0:38
51	The argument with the hearing guest	2:31
52	The Deaf outlet	0:34
53	One hearing, one signer and one deaf oralist	5:27
54	The oralist	1:15
55	The old Deaf people	1:49
56	The subtitles in TV	0:35
57	Greetings	4:31
58	The end	1:58

Before beginning this humor investigation, it is important to highlight that in the whole investigation the word “deaf” will be used or not used with the capital letter “D” by following and respecting the position elaborated by Carol Padden and Tom Humphries (1988):

We use the lowercase deaf when referring to the audiological condition of not hearing, and the uppercase Deaf when referring to a particular group of deaf people who share a language – American Sign Language (ASL) – and a culture. The members of this group have inherited their sign language, use it as a primary means of communication among themselves, and hold a set of beliefs about themselves and their connection to the larger society. We distinguish them from, for example, those who find themselves losing their hearing because of illness, trauma or age; although these people share the condition of not hearing, they do not have access to the knowledge, beliefs, and practices that make up the culture of Deaf people (1988: 2).

2.2 The humor analysis of the show “Pa Pa”

The perspiration. Video 1 (1:06)



The perspiration. Video 1 (1 min 06).mp4 (Riga di comando)

In this video, humor is built around the common prejudice for LIS visibility and its extensive body involvement. For a long time, signers were considered like apes, sick and evil people just because they moved their hands and arms to communicate. Even today this prejudice is still present among some hearing people who laugh when they happen to see Deaf people signing to each other. In his performance, Caia overturns the situation: signers are represented as confident people who move arms, hands, shoulders, while hearing people stand stock-still using only their lips to communicate with a snobbish behavior that we can detect in Caia's sign “to speak”.

The narrative strategy that creates humor is exaggeration and absurdity. Caia focuses on the different perspiration supposedly produced by hearing people and signers. The Deaf sweat a lot in comparison to the hearing thus he suggests that they should buy different towels for their perspiration. “What is the right towel for the Deaf?” he asks. While the hearing can buy normal products, the abundant perspiration in signers might require napkins for menstruation. It is just his opinion that he shares with the audience to let them decide for themselves.

The interesting aspect to highlight here is that Caia relies on a visual aspect to start and develop this short performance. When he appears on stage, what immediately stands out is his sweaty armpits. While, maybe, for the hearing culture this common daily life aspect is something that we do not consider either crucial or polite to talk about in public, for Caia that seems a good chance and topic to perform at the beginning of his show. This feature confirms what M.J. Bienvenu wrote in Earting (1994):

As most of you know, Deaf people perceive most things through their eyes. Naturally we acquire language visually. It is worth noting that Sign Languages throughout the world adapt to meet the visual needs and comfort of the people who use them. We also acquire world knowledge visually. Everything we value and

everything we experience are acquired visually. It should come as no surprise, then, that Deaf humor also has a strong visual base. [...] Because this visual communication is so critical in Deaf languages, it comes as no surprise that Deaf humor also has a strong visual base (Erting, 1994: 17).

Only few lines above Bienvenu reported an practical example that can clarify this aspect often underestimated or considered too much obvious to need a reflection upon it. One day while she was coordinating an intensive ASL course for hearing people he proposed to watch the movie King Kong with the volume turned off:

Of course, the volume was off, and for the first time, they realized what Deaf audiences have known all along: the actors' expressions are hysterically funny. On the screen, the New Yorkers were running for their lives with the shadow of a monster ape looming over their heads, yet the people experiencing this spectacle *visually* for the first time were laughing. I asked them what they found so funny. They said, "Their faces!" The same people would have felt scared if they had heard the actors screaming in terror, with threatening music in the background. So, they got a glimpse of how funny visual humor can be (Ivi: 18).

The name-sign. Video 2 (0:09)



The name sign. Video 2 (09 sec).mp4

For those who are part of the Deaf community, as Deaf signers or as hearing signers or coda (children of deaf adults) it is common to have a name in the spoken language and also a name-sign. Especially for a Deaf person, this cultural feature reminds them their double identity, the two worlds in which they live: the hearing world and the Deaf one. As in the hearing society, even in the Deaf community greetings and introductions are part of a very formalized way to behave. Usually, at the beginning of an introduction, the Deaf present themselves with the oral name by using the dactylogy, the manual alphabet and the Italian oral sound. Then, they show their name-sign, one of the most important marker of Deaf culture. After that, sometimes, Deaf people explain the origin and the reason of that name-sign; other times it is the addressee in the conversation who asks information about that name-sign; while in other occasions the name-sign is uttered and accepted without

questions related to its meaning.

What happened in Caia's show is that he introduces himself to the audience by first saying his name-sign and then his oral name. However, if we look at his face expression, the pace of his dactylology with the space separation “Gabriele, space, Caia” we can easily detect his real message: dactylology is long and boring, while the name-sign is short and it is uttered in few seconds. In other terms, Caia exploits facial expressions and nonverbal expression to convey an additional message. The oral name and the name-sign are not considered at the same level for Caia who stresses a preference for his name-sign. It is a very transgressive way to introduce himself to the audience in front of him.

The humor in this short video consists in showing the automatic behaviors due to conformity to cultural roles. While Caia's fingers “follow the rule” by finger spelling the letters C-A-I-A, his face expression, and the pace of his hand seem to contradict this common attitude: this cultural role is boring and time-consuming. This simultaneous and double meaning expressed in his performance reminds the audience that for a Deaf person the manual alphabet is something more related to the written language of the mainstream culture than an inner aspect of a minority group. Caia belittles the hearing culture in order to strengthen the Deaf culture in a way that seems both implicit and very visual (“evident”) in its contents.

The name-sign and Caia's education. Video 3 (3:41)

The show focuses on a theme that is meaningful and central for the Deaf culture: the explanation of Caia's name-sign. As in a normal introduction among Deaf, Caia tells to the audience the reason of his name-sign; who gave it to him and on which occasion. He talks about his education in the religious institute for the Deaf, the relationship with other children and priests. He cares to remember the audience thorny topics such as the fact that priests used the money allocated for the education of the Deaf for their own interests; and that they hit the children to get their attention. While he narrates his personal childhood as a Deaf person, he knows that the story will touch other Deaf people's memory and records. It is not only a moment to remember with the audience part of the history of the Deaf education in religious institutes, but also an occasion to share part of the deaf tradition with

the hearing and the new Deaf generation. In almost four minutes Caia creates moments to celebrate the Deaf identity with pride and fun regardless the seriousness of the topic.

Let's see now the video³ in details:

The numeric precision. Video 3a (0:12)

In this video Caia puts into practice Marc Renard's words (2000:12), such as the idea that humor can be an occasion to laugh with somebody instead of laughing to somebody “il nostro scopo non è quello di ridere dei sordi, come siamo noi stessi, ma di ridere con loro, e infine, di farli meglio conoscere attraverso il loro umorismo”.

In this specific case, we see Caia talking about his childhood. He tells the audience that he was almost six years old. While he is signing that “at that time I was more or less six years old”, he interrupts the narration by saying that the Deaf are not clear and precise about time, periods of time, numbers when they communicate to each other. What the audience experience is a meta cognition in the show of the Deaf culture: “Deaf people precise PAPA” says Caia. Having said that, he continues the story giving again a blurred information about his age again “ I was almost six, seven years old”.

With this funny style of signing Caia is trying to strengthen a sense of group cohesion with the audience. Without an intimate relationship with his public, he would never be able to express all his opinions with a comic effect.

During the show, we will see how Caia mocks some Deaf behaviors just to laugh of himself, while he does exactly like them. Or from another perspective, Caia is a Deaf actor who criticizes some Deaf behaviors with the strategy of a self deprecating humor.

“The sick deaf people”. Video 3b (0:10)



The sick deaf people. Video 3b (10 sec).mp4 (Riga di comando)

The power of language and its performativity is well understood by all minorities which experience insult and verbal discrimination for their “diversity”. It is common for those who are part of a minority group to use an offensive expression from the mainstream

culture or from outsiders as a form of protest or an expression of freedom. The value of language as a place for change is well expressed by the American feminist Bell Hooks:

Language is also a place of struggle. We are wedded in language, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle. Dare I speak to oppressed and oppressor in the same voice? Dare I speak to you in a language that will move beyond the boundaries of domination – a language that will not bind you, fence you in, or hold you? Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle (Bell Hooks, 1990:146)

While Caia talks about the paternalistic way Deaf children were treated by the priests, he uses the hearing expression and the common idea that “Deaf are disable people, sick, they use hands as crazy people” as a way to denounce the hearing prejudice and discrimination towards their visual body language. In these ten seconds an offensive expression turns out to be a moment of empowerment and consolidation of community's identity and belonging: Caia uses LIS, a language which is not recognized by our Government, to remind the audience how the Deaf are labeled in Italian. A double discrimination (an offensive expression\ the negation by the government of LIS as a real language) is uttered in LIS by a Deaf member of the Deaf community. In this way the language is taken back by an insider to receive a positive connotation with regenerating effects for the members of the Deaf community. As Freud (1928) pointed out:

Like jokes and the comic, humour has something liberating about it; but it also has something of grandeur and elevation[...]The grandeur in it clearly lies in the triumph of narcissism, the victorious assertion of the ego's invulnerability. The ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality, to let itself be compelled to suffer. [...] Humor is not resigned; it is rebellious. It signifies not only the triumph of the ego but also of the pleasure principle which is able here to assert itself against the unkindness of the real circumstances (Freud, 1961:163).

“The annoying deaf people”. Video 3c (0:10)



The annoying deaf people. Video 3c (10 sec).mp4 (Riga di comando)

Caia is telling how he received his name-sign in the religious institute where he was living with the other Deaf children. On one occasion, a priest came among them with only one color picture book for all of them. Caia describes the situation as an exciting moment for all children who started to wave hands and to ask the book for themselves. Here again, Caia uses a hearing expression to label the Deaf children behaviors as “annoying” as we saw in the previous video: “deaf children, those people are annoying”.

Caia wants to highlight the lack of didactic materials for the Deaf children who had to fight with each other to receive what we now call “right” for education. An offensive hearing expression is again used against the Deaf children with an opposite effect: for the audience, it becomes clear that the frame is wrong and not the children excitement which seems annoying. This humor strategy seems to provide a clear example of what Umberto Eco wrote in his essay “Frames of Comic 'Freedom'.’”:

In humor we smile because the contradiction between the character and the frame the character cannot comply with. But we are not longer sure that it is the character who is at fault. Maybe the frame is wrong (Eco, 1984: 8).

With this short story Caia shows that there is a frame that must be considered, such as the hearing world and its approaches to the Deaf. It is a frame that makes discrimination invisible while Deaf are judged with any critical analysis of their environment and educational opportunities.

Marks in Italian. Video 3d (0:21)

To appreciate these twenty seconds, it is important to have clear in mind the connection of folklore with the education that Deaf people receive in a hearing society. Rutherford in the analysis of a bilingual joke remarks this important aspect as follow:

Considering how much of our socialization and education depend on language, we cannot understand the culture of Deaf people without understanding the educational system that controls the enculturation and linguistic development of the Deaf individual. (Rutherford, 2014:315)

In these few seconds Caia denounces the lack of opportunities in education of the Deaf children. However, he prefers to use his personal experience instead of making general assumptions about it.

After all kids had played with the book given by the priest, Caia receives it back full of holes and ripped up. However, even though he is not happy, he does not complain about it. And here comes the punch line. Caia makes a speculation about his bad mark in Italian at school: maybe his bad results were related to all those holes in the color picture book. Here again, thanks to humor, it comes evident that the frame is wrong (the kind of education that hearing provide to the Deaf) while Caia was only a child without a book for himself and bad marks.

The name-sign “Saint”. Video 3e (0:34)



The name-sign Saint. Video 3e (34 sec).mp4 (Riga di comando)

As we had the opportunity to know, Caia's name-sign is related to the stroke he received while he was a child. However, despite his previous narration, here, Caia gives another explanation of his name-sign: it means “Saint” because he always had good behavior while he grew up. He also points out that his name-sign is beautiful in comparison to those of other Deaf people like “beanpole”, “fat”, “big nose”, “full of tattoos”. In these 34 seconds of Caia giving misleading information, the Deaf audience who knows how a name-sign is attributed to a person in the Deaf community is aware of the game invented by Caia. What they know is that the kind of information provided conforms with the formality that rules the hearing culture. It is not just misleading information.

Caia expresses the mainstream hearing role of formality, such as the common opinion that it is embarrassing or impolite to define other people for their physical appearance, especially if that feature is evident or considered a negative quality by the society (fat person, big nose). However, this rule is not followed by the Deaf community which finds physical traits an important distinctive aspect of a person. In this sense the hearing value is overturned to create laughter.

At the same time, the Deaf audience bond with the actor because they know that what Caia is uttering does not really match with his Deaf identity and real believes. Caia is a member of the Deaf community and the meaning of his name-sign has nothing to deal with his

santity and with the hearing formalities. As Andreone (2013) wrote:

Il comico deve essere, nello stesso tempo, creatore delle regole cui attenersi e trasgressore delle stesse. Trasgressore in quanto non esiste espressione comica che non si faccia beffe di una qualche regola logica, sociale, morale, etica estetica, del buon gusto o del buon senso. Creatore perché in realtà la linea logica che il pubblico dovrà seguire, per poter cadere nella trappola umoristica, deve essere il più possibile chiara e precisa (Andreone, 2013:123).

Waiting. Video 4 (0:28)



Waiting. Video 4 (28 sec).mp4 (Riga di comando)

Caia comes back on stage and gives a direct opinion about Deaf manners in theater. By using the sign Pa Pa Caia explains that Deaf people are not able to wait for the appearance of an actor on stage with their gaze oriented toward the show: they must sign to each other when the actor goes to the backstage until he appears again. He imitates the urgency that the Deaf have to communicate to each other even for a limited span of time, like a short break during a show.

After this, he finds important to stress that he is not “criticizing them” for their behaviors. “I am like you. I totally agree with you”. With these signs he seems to recreate a sense of identity, of group cohesion that he had just broken. He says this thing from a hearing perspective and knowing how the hearing world works. Caia gives examples of a priest that hits and scolds a Deaf child for his lack of attention on his face, while he is teaching him how to speak.

The humor here is based on the exaggeration for the Deaf urgency, the need for communication. His way of moving his hands (sign with the Deaf person in the next seat instead of looking at the show) displays the necessity and craziness of the Deaf to dialogue to each other whenever it is possible. A truth is expressed in an unnatural way by provoking laughter. While the Deaf are represented as funny in those few seconds of an unnatural representation of reality, in the laughter the reflection of their condition is highlighted: sign language has been oppressed for centuries; Deaf meetings\ performances are rare events that allow Deaf people to spend special moments together.

This technique of exaggerating a behavior seems to match with what Henry Bergson pointed out in his essay “Le rire” :

To speak of small things as though they were large is, in a general way, TO EXAGGERATE. Exaggeration is always comic when prolonged, and especially when systematic; then, indeed, it appears as one method of transposition. It excites so much laughter that some writers have been led to define the comic as exaggeration, just as others have defined it as degradation. As a matter of fact, exaggeration, like degradation, is only one form of one kind of the comic. Still it is a very striking form. It has given birth to the mock-heroic poem, a rather old-fashioned device, I admit, though traces of it are still to be found in persons inclined to exaggerate methodically. It might often be said of braggadocio that it is its mock-heroic aspect which makes us laugh (Sypher, 1956: 141).

The interruption in speeches. Video 5 (0:11)



The interruption in speeches. Video 5 (11 sec).mp4 (Riga di comando)

What happens in these eleven seconds can be considered as the key to understand the structure of the show. Caia interrupts his narration saying that his style in the storytelling is confusing. However, he believes that this disorganized way of signing is more a Deaf attitude than a personal attitude: Deaf people do not go straight on in one single direction; they start in a path to turn on their left , and then on their right with no care about all these interruptions. He still uses the sign “Pa Pa” to introduce this cultural tip.

Caia wants to strengthen a sense of group cohesion with this mirror\imitation of Deaf manners. Here is what Apte Mahadev (1985) wrote in his anthropological approach to humor:

Humor is culture based in the sense that individual cultural systems significantly influence the mechanism that triggers the humor experience. Familiarity with a cultural code is a prerequisite for the spontaneous mental restructuring of elements that results in amusement and laughter... If the foundation of most humor is cultural, then understanding how humorous experiences are cognitively formulated, either intentionally or accidentally, should lead us better insight into the cultural system (Apte, 1985: 16-17).

Therefore, if we do not believe that Deaf people really communicate in that way, we do not

find Caia's face expression with the tongue in plain view funny; his serenity while he changes directions as if he was really walking on a street without a clear idea of his movements. We must believe in what Caia says about the Deaf to truly enjoy these few seconds.

As Sutton-Spence and Napoli wrote about the essential part of facial expression in the Deaf humor: “Characterization is generally considered funny when it is over exaggerated and caricatured. Facial expression is frequently exaggerated, and unusually big or small signs can be used, made with unusually fast or slow movements” (Sutton-Spence, 2012: 316). This video contains these features.

Caia's parents. Video 6 (1:12)



Caia's parents. Video 6 (1 min e 12 sec).mp4

Caia interprets in this scene some parents' concerns about their child born Deaf. He knows pretty well that the Deaf audience has a very intimate relationship with this topic because 95 percent of Deaf children are born in a hearing family. However, Caia is not one of them because he has both Deaf parents. This situation makes him in a very nice position: from one side he clearly shows to the audience that the entire story is unreal, on the other side, though, he can perform the real unexpected situation of a hearing family which finds itself to deal with Deafness for the first time.

The entire story uses the reversal perspective as humor strategy: Caia's Deaf parents immediately discover with desperation that he is Deaf. This beginning is amusing from a minority perspective that represents only the 5% of the cases. By doing this, he provides information that is in contrast with reality: we know that, unlike hearing parents, Deaf parents are prepared to consider two different possibilities: a Deaf child or a hearing child. We also know that hearing parents not only do not expect a Deaf child, but they also come to discover it only later, sometimes even after years. With this little description Caia reminds the audience the pain and those negatives reactions toward their Deafness when

they were kids. However, here the record is fulfilled by humor that in this case works as a medicine, the cure, the relief. Deaf parents look funny, ridiculous while they look worried about a child that is exactly like them.

Then the scene maintains this fake narration while the audience starts appreciating the reversal perspective. As De Bono (1992) wrote “L'umorismo [...] mostra come percezioni organizzate in un certo modo possano essere riconfigurate in modo diverso. Questa è l'essenza della creatività.”

Caia describes the moment of parent's concerns about their child's problems because of his Deafness. As hearing parents have hearing concerns (the child will not speak well, she will not speak well) Deaf parents should worry about something too. Caia says that they do not want a Deaf child because she will need an interpreter who offers an expensive service; or she will gossip with other people the privacy of him. They even complain because they know that their language is not legally recognized with all negative consequences. In the reality Caia's parents knew what their child had to go through because they were Deaf too. With this reversal perspective, we come to know that things would look totally different if we started thinking from a different perspective. Humor often provides this new key of interpretation.

To appreciate Caia's humor in this part, we must try to put ourselves in a Deaf body. We will find funny to see how Deaf parents sign with little concern “ A child Deaf? Damn (mannaggia), I want him to be hearing”. Caia uses the Italian gesture “mannaggia” to express the “Damn!” as a way to remind us that the real focus of the narration, it is not the Deaf parent's reaction, but the hearing one. We also know that the “damn gesture” as a form of protest does not really match with the real psychological shock that sometimes hearings go through when they discover that their child is Deaf. A situation very dramatic is depicted as a silly complain of the parents who seem to talk about an insignificant preference. All this invented-real narration, change of perspective, diminishing-exaggerating behaviors amuse the audience, while they also remember the real dominant perspective that drives the concerns of hearing families.

Caia's education as a commuter. Video 7 (0: 47)



Caia's education as commuter. Video 7 (47 sec).mp4 (Riga di comando)

Education is another delicate topic for the Deaf community because it involves personal choices that were made by parents, speech therapists and doctors. For example, Caia left Sicily as a young boy to receive an education in the Institute for the Deaf in Verona, far from his family. Like him, many Deaf children grew up far from their parents, suffering for this distance throughout the entire childhood and adolescence. They know that it was probably the only choice their parents had to provide with them with an education. What is funny in this part is how Caia emphasizes this difficult and long period called “education” with a linguistic game originated by sign language. With the articulation of the sign “Growing up as a commuter” Caia is “plays with the internal structure of signs” as R. Sutton-Spence and D. Napoli called it. Here their explanation of this technique :

Signs have a given handshape, location or place of articulation and a movement, and that humorous signing may alter one of these parameters to reflect animal body parts. Witty signers can also change one of these parameters in a sign to give it extra and entertaining meaning by reinterpreting or revitalizing the conventional and almost arbitrary meaning of the original parameter. These playful ideas build upon an in-depth knowledge of the motivating forces behind creation of visual signs and the conceptual metaphors that often drive them (Sutton-Spence, 2012: 320).

In the sign “Growing up as a commuter” he expresses humor by playing with the movements of the sign “commuting” and “growing up”. A more clear explanation would be provided in the next chapter in the picture number . Here it is important to understand that thanks to Caia's creativity two signs “growing up “and commuting” are put together, with the resulting meaning “growing up while commuting”. With this strategy we come to know that for years and years he commuted everyday from his parent's house, in Sicily, to the Deaf institute in Verona. If everybody can get this well constructed lie, the information would appear funnier for all those Deaf people who had the same experience in their childhood, such as they left permanently their family to study in a Institute for the Deaf.

Yes, that thing. Video 8 (0:22)

Caia comes back on stage. He sits down trying to figure out what he was talking about before he left the stage. In these few seconds, we see Caia using the sign PE. It is a very common sign in LIS. Here his sentence “Yes!?! What was I saying? Ah, yes ok...I've already spoken about that! That, that, Deaf people do it like that, that, that, what? It's clear! I must think, but I don't want to”.

Sometimes the sign PE in an informal conversation is used too much by the Deaf as a way to recall a name, a person, a topic earlier mentioned. The way Caia imitates Deaf people using it with exaggeration makes this truth laughable. What it seem clear for them while they are involved in a conversation, to those who are watching the scene as outsiders it seems a very vague and confusing conversation full of PE signs.

If we consider what Bergson wrote about the repetition strategy as a powerful effect for humor, we could use this video as a good example of it. In other words, Caia supports Bergson's speculation that a very common device in comedy is the repetition of a word or a sentence uttered by an individual. Let us see in details Bergson's claim:

Let us disentangle its central element, and we shall hit upon one of the usual processes of classic comedy,--REPETITION.

Why is it there is something comic in the repetition of a word on the stage? No theory of the ludicrous seems to offer a satisfactory answer to this very simple question. Nor can an answer be found so long as we look for the explanation of an amusing word or phrase in the phrase or word itself, apart from all it suggests to us. Nowhere will the usual method prove to be so inadequate as here. With the exception, however, of a few special instances to which we shall recur later, the repetition of a word is never laughable in itself. It makes us laugh only because it symbolizes a special play of moral elements, this play itself being the symbol of an altogether material diversion. It is the diversion of the cat with the mouse, the diversion of the child pushing back the Jack-in-the-box, time after time, to the bottom of his box,--but in a refined and spiritualised form, transferred to the realm of feelings and ideas. Let us then state the law which, we think, defines the main comic varieties of word-repetition on the stage: IN A COMIC REPETITION OF WORDS WE GENERALLY FIND TWO TERMS: A REPRESSED FEELING WHICH GOES OFF LIKE A SPRING, AND AN IDEA THAT DELIGHTS IN REPRESSING THE FEELING A NEW(Sypher,1956:107-108).

I don't trust you. Video 9 (0:40)

Here again Caia uses the same narrative strategy that we saw in videos number 4, 5, and 8. In this specific case he asks the Deaf audience if they know the meaning of the term “mafia” by specifying that he will not trust them. This communicative approach looks funny: there is openness toward others, a question to somebody and suddenly the distrust of the audience. It appears amusing because it is the demonstration of Caia's assertion: often signers do not believe each other while they seem to believe hearing people more. At this regard he performs a situation where one Deaf says to the other during a conversation “Wait a second. I don't confirm it. I don't trust you, I don't, I don't” before going to a hearing person to have the confirmations he needed about the topic. After talking with the hearing person, the Deaf feels confident to come back where there is the Deaf guy to say “Yes, yes, you are right” and to continue the conversation with him. The sign “yes” is signed with a lot of conviction and energy as the Deaf received the real truth from the hearing person. Even in this case the double behavior “I don't trust you” and then “Yes, you are right” shows Deaf people as insecure, suspicious, cautious. The contrast in behaviors, the shift from openness towards the others and at the same time the suspicion reaction towards the other Deaf seem the key for appreciate Caia's humor here.

Caia makes it clear that his imitation is a sort of warming: “But what is our language?” It comes naturally to the audience's mind the reflection upon their behavior “Why Deaf people feel the need to have a confirmation by hearing people? “ Why don't they trust to each other when they sign? Is it because LIS is not written? What makes Deaf people insecure in their dialogues? Caia seems to provoke the audience, reminding them that their culture is based on an oral tradition where their values are encapsulated in the visual\oral narrative. That should be their certainty.

Sign Writing. Video 10 (2. 02)

To the title of the show “PA-PA” Caia dedicates two minutes of his performance. Thanks to a white-board close to him he explains how two different signs have the same oral sound. In other terms Caia shows that one sound (“borrowed by the spoken language”) has two

different signs which can convey several meanings. That seems enough to prove that it is Italian and not LIS to be a poor language. This is of course only a provocation about the linguistic potentials of a language that is still considered only a gestural code or an imitation in gestures of some Italian words.

The critic launched by Caia is also toward Deaf people who do not care about Linguistics. They find boring to listen explanations about LIS as an academic topic. Because they have LIS as mother tongue, they do not give value to its inner structure from a linguistic lens. These Deaf people are the real target. Caia imitates them while they look at the opposite side of the white-board. They use the sign “to talk” with a rigid and slow movement of their fingers that expresses their boredom for Caia's speeches and their already acquired experience in LIS regardless any real studying. Therefore, Caia decides to not bore them even more with his linguistic explanation. What he does is to explain Sign Writing as fast as he can, in a rush. In this way he ends up providing a visual representation of each feature of SW in an incomprehensible way that provokes laughter. If Deaf people want an easy and quick explanation, Caia thinks that this is the best way to get one. It is a powerful provocation that is addressed with the strategy of humor. Caia' facial expression follows the rapidity of his fingers that copied the shape of SW symbols. The results is a quick, confusing and long explanation of two simple signs that would need only few seconds to be normally articulated. This difference in time between SW (long and confusing) and LIS (synthetic and clear) creates a humorous effect.

Mafia. Video 11 (5:00)

This part could be divided in few smaller parts for a more detailed analysis. However, the risk is to dissect the narration in an unnatural way. Because of this, I chose to maintain only one video of five minutes. For the sake of the analysis it will be divided in four parts. The main topic is the meaning of the term “Mafia” with several digressions related to the “Deaf attitude”.

In video 9 Caia has already introduced the topic “Mafia” to drop it few seconds later. Here, indeed, it is developed in all its parts.

In the first part Caia works to bring the public closer, more involved in what he is talking about. He wants to stimulate the public to take an active part in the show. Because of this, he starts a fictional dialogue with the people making up responses. First of all, he asks the audience when World War One finished. He asks for the precise month, without any response from the public. Then, he asks for the precise date of the end of the war. He looks very careful to the darkness comic up with two different dates. At the end he asks for the precise year of the end of the war. Again by invention, Caia receives two different responses, such as 1948 and 1933. This feedback from the audience allows him to confirm what he said in the video 3a and 9: Deaf people are never precise. They give wrong information. They misunderstand things: he cannot trust them. In this case the fake dialogue with the public is a monologue which helps him to connect with the audience that feels as part of his show.

In the second part (0:56) Caia points out that Deaf people prefer to sign to each other instead of reading books. They sign and they end up with a vague response like “But yes, more or less”. The humor here is expressed in the way the Deaf are imitated by Caia: they seem robots instead of passionate people communicating to each other. This is one of the possible interpretation of Caia's humor here that is supported by Henri Bergson's opinion about laughter in humans. Bergson wrote that the comic effect is easily created when we have the impression that life is subject to rigidity, automatism and mechanism. “The illusion of a machine working in the inside of the person” makes a situation, a person, her gesture, his speech, entertaining and comic. Let's see his words in details:

We will now pass from the comic element in FORMS to that in GESTURES and MOVEMENTS. Let us at once state the law which seems to govern all the phenomena of this kind. It may indeed be deduced without any difficulty from the considerations stated above. THE ATTITUDES, GESTURES AND MOVEMENTS OF THE HUMAN BODY ARE LAUGHABLE IN EXACT PROPORTION AS THAT BODY REMINDS US OF A MERE MACHINE. But the suggestion must also be a subtle one, for the general appearance of the person, whose every limb has been made rigid as a machine, must continue to give us the impression of a living being. The more exactly these two images, that of a person and that of a machine, fit into each other, the more striking is the comic effect, and the more consummate the art of the draughtsman. The originality of a comic artist is thus expressed in the special kind of life he imparts to a mere puppet. Then let gesture display a like

animation! Let it accept the fundamental law of life, which is the complete negation of repetition! But I find that a certain movement of head or arm, a movement always the same, seems to return at regular intervals. If I notice it and it succeeds in diverting my attention, if I wait for it to occur and it occurs when I expect it, then involuntarily I laugh. Why? Because I now have before me a machine that works automatically. This is no longer life, it is automatism established in life and imitating it. It belongs to the comic (Syphe, 1956: 79).

If we look again at Caia's performance from minute 1.02 with his quick and crazy movements of the hands, we can find an example of the Bergsonian speculation.

In the third part (1:45-2:20), what is central is the LIS value as a language with its signs rooted in the Italian culture. It is the case of the "original" sign for "America" that has currently been replaced by the official ASL sign for "America". Caia remarks that even if ASL has prestige all around the world, LIS is nothing less: the old LIS sign for "America" is deeply connected with the Italian/Sicilian culture during World War One that must be remembered. Here the humor is based on the creative use of Italian Sign Language. At minute 1:50 Caia signs with exaggerated circular movements the words "technology in progress", "languages", "LIS" and with a well displayed tongue that seems to communicate lacks of consciousness, dispersion, superficiality, ingenuity. This is a scold that Caia as a Deaf person is doing to the Deaf members in order to make them conscious of the enormous value of LIS with its historical and cultural connections with the entire country.

The fourth part (1:16-5.00) overlaps with the third part because, as we already saw in video5, Caia likes to make digressions. He narrates the story behind the term "Mafia" that involved poor people in Sicily during the world. Regardless the seriousness of the topic, his predisposition as serious storyteller, we also see that his story is full of ridiculous visual details. He explains, for example, that when the American allies came to Sicily, they saw poor children with their penis uncovered. Why? Because they scratched too much their pants for the shortage of water. This alternation of a serious moment, where he is providing to the audience information about a sign, and some wrong and fictional details is the strategy that triggers humor. The fact that there is a shift from a serious to a trivial description creates a contradictory feeling in the audience of trust and mistrust.

Caia and the sign “Deaf”. Video 12 (2:42)



Caia and the sign Deaf. Video 12 (2 min e 42 sec).mp4 (Riga di comando)

Caia starts with his personal opinion about the sign “ignorant”. It seems to him that Deaf people do not take the sign “ignorant” seriously. They use it with simplicity, while hearing people find it very offensive. Caia specifies that hearing people can kill you with a shotgun if you tell them they are ignorant. This different behavior is probably related to the fact that Deaf people are conscious that their ignorance is in part the result of their discrimination. We will see that Caia also uses this sign toward another deaf guy in video 17.

Here again as in the videos 3b-3c Caia uses a hearing expression “illness spreads everywhere”, while he refers to his Deaf family. Deafness has been considered a horrible illness by the hearing world. Caia takes this terms back to give it a positive nuance: the Deaf heritage connects all his family and her girlfriend's family. They are all Deaf.

Within the Deaf community the term “Deaf” is used very often. As Caia points out hearing people do not feel the need to use the sign “hearing” to introduce themselves or to talk about one of their hearing friends. Caia makes this comparison very funny: Deaf people use it so often that their constant repetition without emotions of the sign “Deaf” seems crazy. Deaf people love this sign.

Caia gives his explanation to this fact. As a minority they feel the need to identify all the members of the community with the term “Deaf”. Minorities like the black, the lgbtiq community, need words and shared terms to recognize each other with pride. Only the mainstreaming culture with its members do not feel the need. In this specific case, because hearing people are the majority in this society, they do not need to use the term hearing. Caia points out that ones cannot see a Deaf person as it would be the case for a person with a physical disability. Even thought, Deafness is a invisible disability, Deaf people exist. “Deaf people exist!Deaf people exist!”. In this sentence there is an expression of the Deaf pride. The Deaf exist regardless their “invisibility”.

The official sign in LIS for “Deaf” is articulated in the face with the index finger that moves from the ear to the mouth. Because of the high frequency in the articulation of this sign Caia says that at the end of the day, he has his chin and cheek all deformed. He must touch his face to give it a normal shape. This is of course a visual exaggeration that reminds the close relationship of sign language with its physical channel. This change of level from the linguistic world to the body-physic one is the key of Caia's humor.

Caia and the example for the sign “Deaf”. Video 13 (0:27)



Caia and the example for the sign deaf. Video 13 (27 sec).mp4 (Riga di comando)

Caia comes back to the show. The laugh comes naturally when he starts a new story with a “a Deaf person told me”. Only few minutes ago he said that Deaf people always uses the term “Deaf”. Now he is the first to use it: he is not different. He is one of them. He cannot avoid using the sign Deaf. Caia seems really laughing with the Deaf, as Marc Renard wrote about his cartoons. His careful and serious description of some Deaf cultural behaviors and signs (video 3a-5-8-9) is often confirmed in his spontaneous way of signing. And when he realizes that he has used the sign “Deaf”, he genuinely asks the audience “and how could I do otherwise?”. The logical solution would be to avoid the sign without any funny implications. It is his unexpected reaction that creates humor. He proposes alternatively to sign “Deaf” in a different way, for example with movement of the head without using the index finger. For sure in this way he would not ruin his cheek and chin! The humor here is based on the fact that Caia plays with his body not as a linguistic device but as a simple body in movement. We detect, as audience, the transposition from the linguistic level to the physical one. It is this shift that triggers humor.

So, there is a doctor, hearing parents and a speech therapist. Video 14 (1:20)

in the next videos (15-16) Caia talks about one of the most common topics of discussion among the Deaf: how they learn to speak; what decision their parents made for them; the relationship with the speech therapist. This introductory video, indeed, helps him to create

the context for the next performance, where a Deaf child (Caia) is alone with the hearing speech therapist. The woman is introduced with the proper sign for “logopedista” but with a very open mouth that seems more a provocation than the regular sign. She keeps a mirror in front of him to teach how to utter sounds. Caia says that she speaks in front of the mirror making the spit bounce off behind her.

Caia tells to the audience that he will leave the stage to get the glasses that will help him imitate the woman. When he comes back on the stage with those glasses, he says that he will wait for the audience to finish their conversation before he starts again. This is funny. What he said in the video 4, is confirmed here: as soon as he leaves the stage everybody starts signing. Deaf people are not able to wait in silence: they must talk to each other until the actor appears again in the show. This strategy of repetition of the same idea (see video 4) in different situations in the show, helps Caia to bond with the public that become active part of the his narration. What he said about Deaf manners in video 4 is here confirmed again. This strategy could be defined with the words used by Matteo Andreone in *Lezioni di comicità* “creazione dell'ambiente pre-umoristico in ambito teatrale”.

L'ambiente pre-umoristico è ciò che esiste un attimo prima della stessa espressione comica e che costituisce il terreno adatto per la sua nascita e la pista di decollo per la sua evoluzione. Senza un ambiente pre-umoristico adatto, nessuna battuta sarebbe abbastanza forte, nessuna battuta abbastanza efficace, nessuna abbastanza comica da generare una sintonia umoristica con il pubblico e la conseguente risata (Andreone, 2013: 77).

Going back to the scene, from the introductory part we understand that a Deaf child is going to the speech therapist because a doctor told his parents that if he learns how to speak he will grow up well, without any pathology or problems. Otherwise, he will be sick. With these two “options” we can imagine which choice parent decide to undertake for their child. Caia denounces the lack of information provided to the parents, by teasing the doctor with a witty imitation. He does it with his way of signing, his face of expression (see figure in chapter 3 number 38) that make the doctor looks ridiculous. The doctor presents to the family only one realistic option, such as a hearing model to pursue for the Deaf child. Because of it, instead of being portrayed as a good adviser, he is substituted, here, by a funny figure that in front of worried parents give a silly advice. “The situation is not so

terrible, not so tragic. If he learns to speak well the disability will disappear and he will be like the others. But if he won't he will remain sick". Thanks to Caia we see in LIS words that usually are expressed in Italian and that are expression of a hearing mentality: "Must speak" "sick" .

One of the most respectable professions in our hearing society is here mocked by a Deaf person. With his performance we see how a comic imitation can redresses the balance by showing the superficiality with whom deafness is treated by doctors. Their advice will influence parent's choices and ultimately Deaf lives.

The speech therapist. Video 15 (4:47)

Almost five minutes are dedicated to the imitation of the speech therapist, a woman with black glasses that stands in front of a Deaf child ready to learn how to speak. The woman is an hysterical professional who hits the child to make him improve the articulation and the uttering of sounds. Because she argues with her boyfriend, she unloads her anger with the child that struggles to understand her instructions. Caia shows the weakness, her lack of confidentiality while she slaps the child's lips, emphasizing in this way the abuse of power that occurred during the therapy.

Since the beginning we come to understand that Caia will tease us with information not reliable. It is the case when Caia specifies that in the past all speech therapists were women because with men mustache it could have been impossible to teach how to speak to a Deaf. This absurd explanation is based on visual humor: mustache creates problems for the lip reading because they hide lips. We have already encountered in video1 with the Deaf and hearing perspiration.

The mistake that could be made, here, is to believe that Caia wants to merely narrate a bad story where a Deaf child is discriminated by his speech therapist; or to bring to light part of the history of the Deaf community. While these two aspects are undeniable, this is, however, a superficial way to read Caia's show that will not allow us to detect what we might call "the double-edge irony strategy". According to Nancy Walker (1988) this is a narrative strategy used by women writers in the past when they felt themselves too weak to

attack in a direct and aggressive way their oppressors. A simple description of an event is only one way to read the performance, while the real critic to the society with its rules and weakness runs between the lines. In these four minutes the description of this experience for the Deaf child gives the opportunity to see the hearing frame which surrounds him with its weakness, absurdities. We see a crying kid getting bitten by an adult who finds as the most important thing her success in her career. In fact, if the child learns how to utter more than RA-RA, the speech therapist would have the opportunity to manage an international conference with experts and researchers. When he utters RA-TA-TA-TA Caia as actor displays her happiness and satisfaction. This authoritative perspective has as counter side a little, vulnerable deaf child that does not need red lipstick because of all those slaps he receive by the woman. He, also, does not understand that those sounds RA-TA-TA-TA are not the noise of the machine gun, but the phonemic aspects of words that have meanings. It is an absurd situation that highlights how hearings ideas and goals are without sense, uncontrolled and violent. Regardless the gravity of her actions and Caia's serious topic we find moments to laugh. Thanks to Caia's impersonation in a woman's body and the constant shift from his part as narrator and the one as a woman, we are able to smile when she moves her mouth; touch her glasses; uses the sign "to teach". But to really appreciate Caia's humor strategy here, we must give attention to his description of the relationship between the speech therapist and the child. Caia says, for example, in first person as he is a Deaf child who describes the past "You know speech therapists usually would look at you up and down, every detail, from head to foot, even if you were only Deaf. She would look only at the hearing person's mouth, Deaf people from head to foot" ". As the audience is aware of what it is really happening in the show, growing up the Deaf people become conscious of what was really happening during their therapy. Their past respect for the woman as adult, hearing, and competent professional it is replaced with a laughter by the audience during the show with a sense of revenge and freedom. .

Another moment of double edge irony is expressed when Caia describes how the therapy was conducted from a Deaf perspective: the woman was spitting everywhere with their words and sounds. Here Caia's words "The Deaf kid looks at her: what a shitty stuff, she has spit everywhere on the table! Deaf people don't spit, they have clean hands. Do you

know that? The Deaf kid looks at that disgusting thing and in a very polite way he tries to repeat and follow the words uttered by the speech therapist” It is evident that with these sentences Caia turns up side down the hierarchy, substituting the age and the competence of the hearing with the education, respect and patience of the Deaf child. And even later “The Deaf child suffers for the stupid\ignorant hearing person” gives us the key to read his text with two different lines of interpretation.

It can be possible that this double edge irony strategy is a good mean to denounce situations without an over critic to the mainstream culture, especially when that involves professional figures as doctors, speech therapist. In fact, if we try to look the entire performance (video 14-15) from a Deaf perspective we will understand that for a Deaf person it is very difficult to aggressively attack the prestige that their job means for the hearing society, and also the important role that they hold for the Deaf during their childhood. In order to criticize them, to belittle their authority\social recognition in a hearing society, a Deaf person must use irony and subversive devices of humor as Caia here has demonstrated.

Slaps. Video 16 (0:44)

In this video Caia uses irony to conclude the performance started in video 14. Here he does not have glasses anymore. He is again himself as at the beginning of his show. What he says, however, it is not what he really thinks. Nobody in the audience will consider acceptable his idea that it is right for a Deaf child to get bitten for the sake of learning. Caia signs that sentence only as a provocation to remember to the audience the history of the community, a common fact of discrimination and abuse of power. His humor is created with a comparison between the Deaf education received in the past and that one currently offered for the new generations. Caia says that today children do not receive slaps on their lips with their consequent failure in speaking. Today the Deaf use signs with its negative consequences: they have a voice that seem the sound of desperate new born birds. To make the thing even more exaggerate he says that does speak very well, perfectly, because they bit him while he was a child. That' s why, before leaving the audience, he invites everybody to bit their children to better teach them how to speak.

The humor aspect here is built on a visual image that appears very effective. Because

nowadays Deaf sign instead of getting bitten in their lips, they have a voice similar to that of a little bird crying. Caia visually reproduces the bird crying by showing is bad “sound performance” with some visual details. We do not hear the voice, either of the Deaf or the birds. That would be a hearing humor that in order to give an opinion about the voice of those Deaf signers would find a similar patten in sounds. Here,indeed, we see the physical effect that birds crying have in their beak in desperate movement. This visual feature that characterizes the baby birds is something that a Deaf can compare with the difficulty encountered by the dead child when they have to articulate words. This video could be considered as an example of what Bienvenu called“Deaf humor with a strong visual base” (as we already saw in video1 “The perspiration”).

The digital hearing aids. Video 17 (3:18)



The digital hearing aids. Video 17 (3.18).mp4 (Riga di comando)

For the sake of clarity this Caia's representation will be divided in two videos, 17 and 17 a. Video 17 contains the story of a Deaf with his new digital hearing aids having a short conversation with a hearing person under his window. The funny dialogue between the two has the aim to make the audience reflect about the meaning of Deafness and its consequences in communication. In video 17a, indeed, Caia reflects about the story, the deaf reaction and those hearing prejudices that negatively affected him. The boundary between the two moments (17-17a) is very neat because Caia at the end of video 17 seats down in a chair saying that “Doctors are the problem”. From that moment it is clear to the audience that a sort of comment about the event will occur.

Video 17 starts with Caia that comes back on stage at the minute 32.31 introducing a new topic: the digital hearing aids. Since the beginning he anticipates the story with a “It happened a lot of times”. With these sentences he makes us believe that the topic will be familiar to the audience. This moment of cohesion helps Caia to initiate the performance with a tone of confidentiality. Then, he continues telling us that there is a deaf guy who does not want to sign or receive Caia's LIS information. He buys, indeed, the digital hearing aids with the desire to hear as better as possible. In spide of this reaction Caia

shows respect for him “Whatever, I give him some information anyway: please pass it to your family.”

Since the beginning we are lead to take Caia's side for his attitude, while the deaf guy is portrayed more as a snobbish deaf who considered LIS something not important in comparison to the opportunity to hear well. We laugh when Caia describes digital hearing aids as almost invisible, luxurious devices inside the ear in comparison to those used in the past: they were so big, external to your ear that made you look as you had protruding ears. This visual comparison is a humorous description of hearing aids based on Caia's facial expression. Because he is aware that the topic is very delicate for the community, he breaks the ice with a silly comment as a relief of tension.

This introduction it is not only a simple moment for the introduction of the protagonist, but also a fundamental occasion to build affinity, cohesion with the audience about a topic that could even offend part of the community which uses digital aids. This aspect must be kept in mind throughout the story.

So, the story starts with a guy with his new hearing aids while he is looking outside the window. He is excited to perfectly hear the noise of an airplane in the sky. In the past he did not hear anything, while now he seems to detect in a second its presence. Even the rumble made by the car is an impressive experience for how he looks happy. This escalation of euphoric feeling is contrasted by Caia' amusing comments “It is not true! How stupid!” Caia uses his visual ability to undermine the guy ingenuity: “There is a girl who just got her driving license in the car. She has forgotten to engage the third and the fourth gear and he says 'I can hear her', that's for sure. It is all very noisy!”. Beyond the contents of this funny comment it is even more interesting the creative use of “how stupid” in LIS. In LIS “Che ignorante” is normally produced in the forehead. However, in this occasion the sign is articulated close to the mouth. This sign is one example of what Sutton-Spence called humour based on linguistic LIS features. Caia wants to remind that Deafness goes beyond the opportunity to hear well with the digital hearing aids or to the ability to speak well. With this sign his opinion is synthetic (one sign), funny and effective.

After this comment Caia's opinion disappears to turn the light on the presence of a hearing person that passes under the window of the deaf guy. Caia likes to specify that the hearing does not know anything about all the “hearing news” of the deaf guy with his new hearing aids. The conversation between the two is funny because the hearing receives weird responses by the deaf. He asks “How are you” and the guy replied “I can hear very well, these hearing aids are wonderful! You know the birds which built their nest under the roof? I can hear them very well! I hear the twitter”. For a hearing person hearing aids or sounds of birds are not a daily life topic, because he/she is simply not deaf. On the other hand, because these topics are common among the Deaf (regardless their level of Deafness) what makes the audience laugh it is a sort of sense of identification with this funny guy.

While Caia and the audience laugh for the long Deaf response, the smile is quickly replaced by reflection: contents, “topics” and not sounds are the most important thing in a simple communication. Regardless the ability to hear or not to hear, some topics are just Deaf! Because Deafness is more than just “hear well or not hear well” it appears with all its evidence in this dialogue between the two.

Going back to the story, Caia explains that the hearing willing to leave decides to ask “What time is it?” and the deaf guy replies “Yes, one costs 2.5000 for a total amount of 5000 euros, which I am paying by installments”. The story ends here. For the second time the conversation between the two failed. What was reached, indeed, is a humor scene. That happens because the deaf guy violates two of the four Grice's maxims, such as the maxim of quantity (the deaf guy gave more information than necessary) and the maxim of relation (he says things that are not relevant, pertinent to the discussion). As Umberto Eco wrote (1981):

Si prendano le regole convenzionali di Grice. Inutile dire, come fanno gli ultimi crociati che si ignorano, che nella interazione quotidiana le violiamo di continuo. Non è vero, le osserviamo, oppure le pensiamo per buone affinché acquisti sapore, sullo sfondo della loro esistenza disattesa, l'implicatura convenzionale, la figura retorica, la licenza artistica. Proprio perché le regole, sia pure inconsciamente, sono accettate, la loro violazione senza ragioni diventa comica (Eco, 1981:3).

After this response Caia starts his reflection introducing the sign “we” “in the sentence: “But what did the hearing person ask him? I felt sorry for that deaf guy, hearing people ask

something and we always reply the wrong thing”. It is talking about the misunderstanding caused by the inability to hear. Only later (video 17a) he will also points out how the deaf can be complicit to the hearing stereotype that to hear well is the most important thing for them.

As Langston Hughes (1966) pointed out:

Humor is laughing at what you haven’t got when you ought to have it. Of course, you laugh by proxy. You’re really laughing at the other guy’s lacks, not your own. That’s what makes it funny – the fact that you don’t know you are laughing at yourself. Humor is when the joke is on you but hits the other fellow first – before it boomerangs. Humor is what you wish in your secret heart were not funny, but it is, and you must laugh. Humor is your own unconscious therapy (Hughes 1966; VII).

At the end of this video the entire story explicates the real target of Caia's performance: doctors. With as said expression on his face, referring to the deaf guy, he says “It is not his fault. He can hear perfectly at a 100%. The problem are doctors”. Caia sits down in a chair, the symbol of hearing power throughout the entire show (see also video 17a).

Here again we can see the double edge irony described in video 3c-15. Caia does not want to laugh to the guy. It is the hearing frame that should be blamed: doctors are the people to laugh at because they are the promoters of prejudices against Deafness. However, even though he makes his target very clear with this last sentence, Caia's position as a Deaf member of a minority prevents him by overtly mocking them. He uses a more subversive way to convey his accuse again them by describing a unsuccessful conversation with a deaf guy as protagonist. Only with this key we can really appreciate Caia's humor.

In the next video Caia will explain why it is the frame to be responsible for the entire story.

Must hear well. Video 17a (1:39)



Must hear well. Video 17a (1 min e 39 sec).mp4 (Riga di comando)

Caia explains his previous statement “the problem are doctors” with an invented *excursus* of medical research about the technology of hearing aids. Caia tells us how throughout the years doctors, sitting comfortably in a chair, were able to reduce the dimensions of hearing

aids from big antennas to almost invisible devices inside Deaf people's ears. With the arrival of the digital era doctor founded a new system that would allow Deaf people to hear at 100%. The problem with this device was that the two antennas, one meter long out of the ears of a person, would have create problems in a bus and in a pedestrian zone full of people. Therefore, to resolve this problem they twisted the antennas, pressed them until they became very tiny. At this point they put them into the Deaf people's ears reducing, though, the percentage of sound receptivity. However, with this device Deaf people could hear only at 22%. At this point Caia asks to the audience: “And the remaining 78%, where is it? Pressing 100% of the antenna only 22% has left”.

Then, there is another visual entertaining situation when we see how doctors put the hearing aids without delicateness and attention, as they are dealing with a machine, in the ear of a Deaf person. They also say to “it” “C'mon, c'mon, speak, c'mon”. Their words and attitudes do not match with our expectation of a doctor with a professional conduct and a sympathy for his/her patients: it is this incongruity that makes us laugh. Here as we saw in video 11”Mafia” the rigidity, the lack of elasticity of the doctors seems the key of our laughter, as carefully described by Bergson in his essay “Le rire”.

Looking at this video we can say that regardless the fictional story with unrealist details with still pay attention to Caia's excursus and explanation because of the way it is narrated. What Andreone wrote in his book it seems put in action by Caia:

Il comico non è 'cosa' si dice ma 'come' lo si dice, attraverso il corpo e la parola. Non conta da dove si parte, da quale idea, da quale argomento, conta lo sviluppo che gli si dà. Quindi, se si vuole far ridere un pubblico, è molto più importane badare alla forma che al contenuto, sapendo che la comicità si trova qui e non lì (Andreone, 2013: 111).

At the end of this performance Caia makes clear what there is beyond all his stories and things performed in videos 14- 15-16-17-17a. He expresses the two hearing prejudice in two sentences “slaps are really important, don't forget them” (as a comment of videos 14-15-16); and also “It is important to hear to be equal in the world of hearing people” (as a comment of videos 17-17a).

Incommunicability. Video 18 (7:32)



Incommunicability. Video 18 (7 min 32 sec).mp4 (Riga di comando)

Even though the story about the hearing aids is concluded, Caia maintains that deaf guy as the protagonist for another story. In this case, though, his presence is more fluid. At the beginning he is only recalled to for a general statement. Caia says “These deaf people, with their digital hearing, when they grow up they go out dancing. Is dancing forbidden for deaf people? No, no they are allowed to. Deaf people go dancing when they see hearing people dancing, they throw themselves into it. Deaf people like dancing”. Then he disappears for minute with the introduction of another deaf person with hearing aids, such a nice girl at the disco (video 18 a); or with a sudden weird Caia's proposal (video 18b); to come back again as protagonist with a bartender and two other hearing guys in the disco (video 18c, 18d). The two stories (18a-18b) are intersected in the main narration that focuses on communication: the issue of verbal communication; how to deal with misunderstanding and with the “invisible” Deafness. As Caia said in video 5, Deaf like interruptions in speeches and these seven minutes (video 18) are the proof that he is not an exception.

These seven minutes could be summarized with the Bienvenu quotation “[D]eafness is much more than the inability to hear. It is a complete culture, where one's decibel loss is far less important than one's allegiance to the Deaf community. Yet, a significant amount of Deaf folklore contains jokes and stories which deal with the inability to hear”.

The Deaf girl at the disco with the hearing boy. Video 18a (1:58)

At the disco a hearing guy sees a very beautiful girl. While the audience knows she is Deaf, the hearing guy does not. He goes nearer to speak with her, as all hearing people do, such as talking close to the others' ear. The girl immediately says to him that she is Deaf with the sentence “I can't hear you”. However he keeps talking as she were Deaf even when she repeats to him “I can't hear you. I already told you. I can't hear you”. The funny thing is what Bergson called “the reciprocal interference of independent series”, Here Bergson analysis:

This is a comic effect, the precise formula of which is very difficult to disentangle, by reason of the extraordinary variety of forms in which it appears on the stage.

Perhaps it might be defined as follows: A situation is invariably comic when it belongs simultaneously to two altogether independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time. You will at once think of an equivocal situation. And the equivocal situation is indeed one which permits of two different meanings at the same time, the one merely plausible, which is put forward by the actors, the other a real one, which is given by the public. We see the real meaning of the situation, because care has been taken to show us every aspect of it; but each of the actors knows only one of these aspects: hence the mistakes they make and the erroneous judgments they pass both on what is going on around them and on what they are doing themselves. We proceed from this erroneous judgment to the correct one, we waver between the possible meaning and the real, and it is this mental seesaw between two contrary interpretations which is at first apparent in the enjoyment we derive from an equivocal situation (Sypher, 1956:123).

The audience not only knows that Deaf girl is Deaf, but they also experienced in first person the meaning of Deafness as an invisible condition that needs to be communicated at the first approach to the others. However, this kind of information and share experienced is something that the guy ignores. This aspect create an example of reciprocal interference as explained in Bergson.

Because the hearing guy is not used to meet a Deaf woman, he thinks the problem is the volume of the music. His attempt to speak louder makes the situation more funny. Thanks to the visual description provided by Caia, we can see his blood vessels getting bigger and bigger while he keeps talking close to her ears. His commitment, however, it is not rewarded. We know, as outsiders that it will never be. Regardless her last attempt to explain that the real problem is her Deafness, the guys seems to not understand the message. At this point the girl decides to pretend to hear “just to have fun”. She starts giving responses that will not be understood by the guy. This part seems to confirm what Sutton-Spence and Napoli wrote about Deaf jokes:

There are all matters where sound and speech are set against vision and signing. Jokes about Deaf misunderstandings and miscommunication with hearing people also show the visual side of Deafness. Hearing people doing stupid things and Deaf people making fools of themselves by trying to pass as hearing, are examples of jokes that mock out-group people and wayward in-group members but they, too frequently come back to the contrasts between sound and vision (Sutton-Spence, 2000:330).

When the girl starts talking, we see from the face that the hearing guy is not able to hear her. However, he pretends to understand the conversation. We laugh because we know that he is faking a natural conversation while he nods “Sure, yes, sure”. We know that there is no communication between the two even though they are both perfectly playing their own part. The comic effect is created because there are seconds of reality, when we see their desire to hear the other person without results and then the consequent pretending a successful conversation. Caia says at this point “They keep speaking, but about what?” He makes the Italian gestures that means “I cannot say, I don't know”. The entire scene based on the misunderstanding of the sentence “I cannot hear”; the ignorance of the hearing who does not consider the option of Deafness; the pretending strategy adopted by both of them with different reasons, make the audience laugh about the main problem of the Deafness, such as its invisibility. The story finishes with a unlikely Caia's comment “ At the end nothing happened because the Deaf girl does not like that guy full of pimples”. While we could expect that the two would have quit their communication soon for their difficulties in communication, Caia tell us that the real problem was the lack of interest of the woman for the guy's skin. This silly explanation ends with the following sentence “This means they always have trod on us, we can be equal now”.

At the door. Video 18b (0:56)

The sentence “This means they always have trod on us, we can be equal now. “ represents the end of the previous story and the beginning of another one. After these words Caia makes a weird suggestion. Let's see his entire speech “If someone rings at your door and you see that it is a hearing person who wants to speak with you, just say 'wait a minute'. You take a stereo, turn up the volume and then you can speak peacefully. There will be no communication problem anymore. It is because of the stereo which my voice, it not my fault. The other person does not know I am Deaf. It is because of the music. It is just a piece of information I am giving to you. Music could be a positive element for the Deaf people. Who is mad? Am I mad? No. No”.

At this point he leaves the stage to come back only after few seconds with these words “But pay attention o what time it is, do not do it in the evening otherwise your neighbors might

get angry, and never by night!”.

In this case, the translation in English or Italian maintains the entire comic effect expressed in LIS. However, what is missed here is the body language between the hearing person at the door and the Deaf, who appears in front of the door with a stereo to better communicate. In those few seconds we have the opportunity to see the Deaf perspective during a communication with a stranger. When Caia opens the door, we see a person who opens her\his mouth without sounds. That's the hearing person in front of a Deaf person. We see Caia using the Italian gesture “Wait” to communicate with the hearing. Caia proposes to say “Wait a minute”. At this point he suggests to leave the entrance with the aim to come back with a stereo. He says that with a stereo turned on close to the door the conversation could finally have a beginning. This visual imagine is so well represented with the use of Caia's body language, that in its absurdity, makes us feel the disorientation of the hearing in front of the door who sees exactly what we saw.

In addition the provocation between the line is very powerful: Deafness is an invisible condition that Deaf people must go through in their daily life. They must accept it. Deaf would never be in the same condition as the hearing, even in a noisy environment like a disco or close to a stereo, where even for the hearing the communication is problematic. To engage a conversation with a hearing person they must make clear this aspect. This is exactly what it does not happen in this case: the entire responsibility is relegated to the music, while the person can pretend to not be Deaf. The punch line at the end of this story clears away every doubt about the different condition between a Deaf and a hearing person: Caia reminds that even if this strategy with the music is good to hide the Deafness it must be used with moderation. Music is nice but noisy in the night.

A deaf and a bartender. Video 18c (1:02)

This part is the introduction of the story that will be developed in video 18d “The deaf and the two hearing writers”, where the deaf guy with hearing aids reappears as the protagonist of the story. What we come to know in this minute is that the guy is at the disco, alone, sitting down in a chair, tired of dancing. He cannot speak with anybody. The bartender close to him is hearing. A hearing person asks for a whisky. The deaf guy asks for one too.

With this introduction Caia creates a pre-humor atmosphere based on the sense of identification with the protagonist. As we already saw in video 14 “So, there is a doctor, hearing parents and a speech therapist” Caia gives some cultural tips about Deaf behaviors (the sign Pa Pa appears again) during the description of the contest, in a way that the audience will feel more connected, in harmony with his next narration.

His pre-humor situation is created in two moments of identification in the “Deaf world”.

In the first one, Caia points out the use of the LIS sign “che culo, per culo!” for the Deaf, that is a vulgar term (buttock) to say in English “luckily”. Deaf people use it very often with exaggerated emphasis by looking at Caia's imitation of them. “Deaf people like the sign for ass. They could use it all the time, you know? A hearing person sitting next to ”. Caia uses this term too when he says that at the disco a hearing guy “buttock” (luckily) sits close to the alone Deaf guy. We can see him smile during his narration. Caia smile creates even more identification with his persona. Caia is laughing with the Deaf about themselves as Marc Renard did in his cartoon bubbles. Caia's imitation of the deaf seems to fit with Perret Gene' words:

Although comedy is based on truth, it's not that often that true statements generate jokes without some sort of tampering by the humorist. One way to highlight the truth of a statement is to exaggerate or distort it out of its true proportions.

This is the same principle that caricature artists employ in making their drawings. They isolate a few features and distort them to false prominence. The resulting likeness isn't anatomically correct, but it doesn't destroy the recognizability; many times it enhances it. Some celebrities are easier to recognize from a caricature than they are from a photo (Perret, 1982:104).

The second moment occurs when Caia tells us that the deaf guy thinks that the bartender knows LIS. In the reality the bartender catches the point (a whisky request) thanks to the simple deictic gesture. “The barman knows Deaf people use signs and understand him. The Deaf guy thinks the barman knows the signs language, but he's just followed the instruction and gives him a glass of whisky”. their lives and expectations.

It is interesting to notice how Caia turned the story of a deaf oralist in a Deaf signer to communicate some cultural Deaf tips. This description creates intimacy with the audience because it shows the value that they assign to their world. All Deaf people wish hearing people know the Deaf world, their language and manners. When it happen to meet a

hearing who knows LIS, for example, is a moment of pride, a feeling of acceptability, an encounter of two different cultures. This desire and hope sometimes is so strong that creates projection which do not exist in the reality as in this case. Caia knows that this occasion happened to all of them at least once in a life. He knows that that guy will express part of

A deaf and two hearing writers. Video 18d (3:24)

In this part the deaf guy comes back as protagonist. The story itself has a comic plot that becomes even more interesting thanks to some Caia's expedients. Here the skeleton of the story:

A hearing guy approaches the deaf guy because he notices that he is sitting alone and sad. When the deaf makes him notice that he cannot hear because he is deaf, the hearing reacts with a “Ah nothing, nothing!”. At this point Caia stops for few seconds the story. He looks at the audience as to confirm that hearing people really behave in this way. The deaf (provocatively described as touchy) after asking some papers to write on it, expresses his opinion to the hearing with the sentence “Why nothing, nothing, if you asked a question?”. With the pen and a lot of paper received by the bartender he keeps writing to the hearing “If you ask me a question don't say nothing. We can be speak and become friends”. The hearing replies on the paper “Why are you sad?”. So they start chatting about several things, while the hearing guy offers several drinks to the deaf guy. Caia interrupts the narration with a reflection that the Deaf “like drinking if someone offers them; hearing people consider Deaf people like poor ill people who gesticulate, they do not speak, so they offer them drinks. Deaf people know they are not ill but they ply along with them, they pretend to be ill so the other keep on offering drinks!Deaf people can do it”. Here in this sentence the sign Pa Pa as a cultural tip.

In the scene we see two guys who communicate to each other only with a paper and a pen. We see how they pass the block of papers from an hand to the other with a frenetic pace that gives us the feeling of an animated conversation. The hearing keeps offering thinks until another hearing person sits close to the deaf person. We see three chairs with the deaf in the middle and the two hearings at his right and left side. Again the previous situation with the other hearing guy is represented now: the hearing talks to the deaf. The deaf guy

turns and gives him something to write on. Even this guy sits and offers drinks to the deaf. The three keep on writing to each other only thanks to the passage of the paper and the pen on their hands. After a while the deaf guy's head starts spinning in so much as he writes "Stop, stop. I go home, stop. I leave".

What we see then is a deaf guy standing behind the three chairs with the intent to leave, while the two hearing guys gets nearer. Because they both think the other is deaf they keep on writing. The deaf guy "looks at them but leaves things like that, that writing communication works well even though he is not among them anymore".

The story finishes in this way with a sentence that reminds to the Deaf their limits in Italian writing but their no limits of sign language "Maybe it is going to improve their writing skill in Italian. Deaf people on the contrary, never improve, that's why they keep on using signs".

Let's see few details in these three minutes. Caia specifies that "buttock" (luckily) a hearing guy approaches the deaf guy. With that sign he make us recall his previous explanation about the vulgarity of the Deaf. His *nonchalance*, spontaneity in Caia's expression, as well his rigidity and repetition of that sign (buttock) amuses. What we saw in video 11 "Mafia" as a good example of the Bergson speculation the dichotomy life\mechanic figures it is here reaffirmed.

As in the video 18a, Caia gives us the opportunity to see how deaf people are approached by hearings. It is funny to see the body language strategy that the deaf guy employs to communicate with the hearing who does not know LIS. To understand Caia's humor we should create the image of one English speaker who approaches an ancient Italian person. We already knows that before the conversation starts there will be a problem in communication and that the Italian will use Italian gesture. It is this consideration, common knowledge that makes us laugh when we see our expectation getting performed in the show. The Deaf person uses gestures because he-she knows that the hearing person will not know his signs, LIS. On the other side the body language strategy used by the hearing in "Oh, nothing nothing" with the Italian gesture "nothing" it is not a way to communicate with he deaf, but a sort of embarrassed reaction. These two different ways of using gestures are an important aspect to detect the comic imitation here performed by Caia.

Another humorous part is evident in the sentence “so they start chatting about several things, I am deaf and ...”. The entire humorous effect is based on the way Caia uses signs. The movement and pace in his signs give the idea of an intimate dialogue, a reciprocal confrontation between the two. That seems more an exaggeration of Caia's narration, a dream, a friendly relation than a realistic approach at the disco.

We also laugh when Caia says that the deaf pretend to be sick in order to receive drinks by the hearing. Hearing patronizing behaviors turn to be a positive condition for the deaf who takes advantage of them. His signs “I confirm, yes, I confirm I am ill” shows the incongruity between what he says (the mainstream hearing prejudice toward the Deaf) and what he really thinks (the expression of the Deaf community with its cultural values).

Earwax in the eyes and in hearing ears. Video 19 (2:04)



Earwax in the eyes and in hearing ears. Video 19 (2 min. 04 sec).mp4 (Riga di comando)

Caia starts with a “it happens to me too. In my family we are all Deaf. We four we may meet the rest of the family for Christmas”. With this introduction the audience is ready to listen Caia's life, while at the same time expecting something in common with him. This is how Caia creates the right mood, a common ground for a shared experience with the audience.

What we see here is something similar described in video 15 “The speech therapist” where Caia denounces in a very subtle way an unpleasant fact. It seems that he is only describing a Christmas lunch and a research he made about the difference between Deaf and hearing people. However, he is denouncing a situation where hearing people, in this case his aunt, feel embarrassed of having a Deaf person in the family. It is something that we can understand with his sudden introduction of a “scientific research” which is a topic with no connection with the “Christmas lunch”. It is another occasion of double-edge irony in the story.

Caia describes the lunch with his hearing relatives, the food handmade by mothers, the card

game, bingo. Then it comes the moment when he decides to dance with his cousins. Here a reaction of his aunt seems the key of the story. Caia says that the aunt suddenly comes close to him by saying “Stop this music, stop dancing”. That makes us the feeling that the aunt did not want Caia to dance because he is Deaf. This is only a speculation because Caia seems just to describe the situation without commenting that reaction. What we see is that Caia keeps telling the story with these words “Being Deaf I don't understand her. I made a research, I am Deaf but I am like them. I am Deaf that's for sure. I made this research looking in the ears of hearing people like my fatty aunt, and I've understood, but what?”. This is a subtle strategy to says something without saying it. What follows is a shift of the topic with the introduction of a fake scientific reason of “why hearing and Deaf people have different ears”. It is in this sudden and unrelated topic that humor is sewn with the double edge-irony strategy.

At this point we see Caia looking at the mirror making clear that even though he has similar face-traits with his ground-father, his ears seem to have something different. “I've done a research and I've discovered that yellow thing! It's different in Deaf and hearing people. If you look in people's ears you will find earwax, the kind of pus which you remove with cotton buds, the yellow one. Deaf people don't have much earwax in their ears.”

Caia explains that hearing people have a lot of ear wax because they have to use their ears a lot. “They sweat and their ears become full of this yellow thing. That's why!” Deaf people, instead, have only for heat or sport. “We have more dirt in our eyes, this is typical for Deaf people, we are different don't forget it. We have dirt in our eyes because we communicate with our eyes”. The description is unrealistic for everybody and visually exaggerated: the earwax in a hearing ear is portrayed as a big circle that requires the involvement of both Caia's arms because of his huge dimension.

In addition the fact that Deaf people seems to use ears only for sports can be seen as a sort of provocation to highlight that they listen only what they really care. Also, when he says that Deaf people use their ears for the heating, he creates the scientific list even more confusing and impossible. In few words a serious and scientific explanation is substituted with a unrealistic and not precise information. This shift of levels is the key of humor here. Leaving the stage with a “So now I've explained it to you” what he has discovered, without

coming back with the story of the Christmas lunch, makes us understand that Caia's aim was talk about something different than the Christmas lunch.

The scientific difference between Deaf and hearing is a silly explanation as it is silly to deny to dance to a Deaf person. It seems that Caia is reporting how the aunt made him feel, as a different person, when she denied him the freedom to dance with his cousin.

Caia at the university. The SW and the written Italian. Video 20 (1:34)

In video 20 Caia uses the visual reference of the white-board at his right side to recall the topic of Sign Writing and the value of LIS for its own linguistic features. He comes back as the protagonist of his speeches in a new environment: the university. “Is university forbidden to Deaf?” He asks as he did for the disco environment at video 18. Here again the Deaf person is alone. With the use of irony in the sentence “You know those rooms full of hearing people” Caia make us recognize the sense of loneliness that a Deaf student might encounter in a place ruled and attended by hearings. Even though discos and universities are not forbidden for the Deaf, Deaf people are usually isolated in these environment. Here Caia is attending one ordinary lesson at the university in front row with the interpreter. He will make some reflections about writing, moved by a strong educational aim. He wants to encourage the Deaf to attend university regardless all their personal worries and their “rude gesticulation”. He provokes the audience with a “the two Deaf people over there could never go to university. They would fail immediately with their gesticulating, really rude-people”.

He also highlights the importance of Sign Writing as a way to give more dignity to LIS. With S signers could rely on a written form of LIS instead of using Italian. According to Caia, SW would be easier to learn than the Italian written form, which is a skill that Deaf people will never master as perfectly as a hearing person. He recalls the importance of a good training with the speech therapist as follow “Those who have been beaten up a lot knows the Italian, those who got only few small slaps to speak are not good in Italian.”

Caia hopes for a future with the SW for the Deaf. The image created is that one of a hearing student who peeking into Caia's note is not able to understand the written form of his language. Unlikely, in the reality when a Deaf rely his transcription on the written Italian, at

his first mistake (il acqua) the hearing student has to prove that Caia, the Deaf, does not know Italian.

As we can notice the story for itself does not have a comic content. However, two descriptions at the beginning of the story seem interesting for a humor analysis because Caia is able to show us a new perspective, a new corner of observation.

Caia twists the common image of the LIS interpreter as a professional who provides a service to the Deaf. In this case Caia is a the Deaf person who stays close to the interpreter because he understands that “It's not easy to sign without having someone to look at”. The interpreter is signing alone at the front row without anybody. It is a very unusual perspective which only humor can allow us to see and accept it. Let's see how he introduces the entire situation:

“I entered in the room and I sat down, you know to one of those lessons in which the room is full of hearing people and I sat down on the first row. Deaf people always sit on the first row never at the back, but why? I would like to sit in the back, but I've got to give some feedback to the interpreter who is lot otherwise and doesn't know where to look.”

So, Caia that can go at the back decides to stay at the front row to take care of the interpreter. Looking at Caia's face we can also perceive that there are not paternal feelings toward the interpreter: that's how it is.

Caia's humor gives to the audience a new way of looking things: the interpreter as expert needs the Deaf person. This part of the scene makes us reflect about the paternalist gaze that sometimes hearings look at the role of the interpreter that stays close to the Deaf people for them, to help them.

The comic line is maintained by Caia with the caricature of the interpreter for few seconds very effective. We see Caia changing his gaze expression a little bit; he becomes a concentrated hearing while he is listening something before the translation. The interpreter uses the sign “PE” that transmits the image of a hearing signer involved in a translation for minutes. The amusing effect can be related to the fact that we make a shift from Caia's signs and his exuberant style of communicate with us in the show, to the formality manifested in the interpreter and her\his few signs.

The Italian writing for Deaf and the Sign Writing. Video 21 (1:24)

As in video 20, Caia maintains a very serious tone. The topic of the writing skill seems very important to him in so much as that he avoids vagueness, double meanings or overt humor. Here he claims the importance of writing in “an Italian suitable for the Deaf” that is considered “wrong” for the mainstream culture. He denounces the fact that it seems forbidden for the Deaf to write an Italian that is easy to understand for other Deaf. In fact, his hearing friend keeps telling him that “It is full of mistakes!” or “Mistakes, mistakes, mistakes!”. Caia ends his speech with a strong sentence “ hearing people can steal us whatever they want, while we can't”.

All his reflections are related to the video 20 because he hopes that SW will be used in the future “If we used that writing hearing people would have to respect it, they could not steal it! But they steal our research, they help us in many things and we go on. We are forbidden, however, by hearing people to carry with an Italian suitable for Deaf people. When will Deaf people be free, have a strong identity, and have no communication problems?'Signs blow in the wind”.

This video as only one part that must be considered interesting for a humor analysis. It is the imitation of a hearing person while he\she corrects Caia for his Italian writing. From a hearing perspective it is funny to see how a Deaf person look at us when we usually want to give a hand to them for some corrections in writing. Even in this case the hearing sits down (sitting down is the most common behavior of hearing in this show) while with attention he\she receives the paper on his\her ends. The hearing looks confused. He reads Caia's sentence signing with an evident labial “Explain it to me, I do understand, explain it better”. With a final dry Caia's comment “And a simple sentence becomes complicated”. Hearing and Deaf are very different in their ways of behaving, thinking and writing.

LIS and the elegant clothes. Video 22 (0:49)



LIS and the elegant clothes. Video 22 (49 sec).mp4 (Riga di comando)

Caia here uses his presence in the show to turn the light on his clothes. We can see that his shirt is not in order. He says that he made a mistake dressing so elegant. “Deaf people are not used to smart clothes, they are not suitable for them. He continues saying that casual clothes are much better because they allow to sign without problems. With the use of the L configuration in the sign “elegant” and for LIS he shows us the visual disorder that LIS creates in movements. With this video we have another example of humor based on visual feature. It was the case of perspiration in video 1, man with mustaches as speech therapists in video 15, and even here with an absurd comparison between hearing and Deaf for their clothes.

The doctor's “What does that mean”. Video 23a (1:12)

This part seems more an improvisation than a managed performance. Caia is wearing a waistcoats for the wedding when we see that he is not able to wear it in a proper way. For the sake of the performance Caia starts talking about doctors just to cover his wrong acting. He makes a comparison between what it is happening to him in that moment and the insecurity of doctors. What is interesting for our analysis is the target chosen by Caia: doctors again. Here his words “I didn't know but it's the new fashion for wedding. I didn't know it. It's like with doctors who study a lot and if you ask them what's the sum of 2+2 they don't know the reply, they are never sure, 'what do you mean by 2+2?' Just as it happened to me with this waistcoats which I didn't know how to wear.” If we consider hearing jokes, doctors often represent the wise, intellectual, right side in the story, while it is the patient who misunderstands the doctor's advice creating the comic effect. Here, in Caia's humor doctors are portrayed as people very insecure that cover their doubts with a sense of authority that looks funny for their faces and nervous questions “What does it mean?”. This video is another example (as video 21) of a Deaf imitation of a hearing person while she\he behaves to a Deaf request.

The bow tie. Video 23b (0:13)

These 13 seconds shows another example of visual humor. Caia says that he will wear a bow tie for a reason that is not related (as we should expect) to formalities, or elegance or

other common ideas about clothes for weddings. He just specifies that “You have to wear something on your neck, something big because having shaved you need something”. We see the sign of little cuts on his neck that must be covered with something. The bow tie seems the best solution for Caia.

The bow tie and Monnalisa. Video 23c (0:35)

Caia looks at the audience in a static way because he wants to have an opinion about his bow “Am I ok? Does it suit me?”. Caia in a subtle way seems to already have the response: he is like the Monnalisa portrait, while the audience is compared to Giotto. Unlike Gioconda, who maintained for long time the same position, Caia recognizes to have problems to keep the same expression on his face. However, he says that if nobody wants to correct him, for what concern himself the work is finished. The humorous part here lies on the paradox, the instability in two extremes. From one side Caia overestimates himself, while on the other side he does not give value to face expressions which is, indeed, a Deaf pride within the Deaf community.

Kisses in the church. Video 23d (0:22)

The day of the wedding the couple with all guest to the wedding go to the church for the celebration of their love. Caia describes the ritual scene: the couple kneeled down; look at the priest who blesses them all. Once he has finished they cling to each other for a kiss. With this description nothing seems amusing until we see Caia performance. He exaggerates the act of kissing that looks very inappropriate in a church, while it gives us the idea of the strong desire the couple had to display their love. During these seconds the priest looks somewhere else with reluctance for their kisses. It is interesting how Caia is able to communicate his opinion in silence, just stopping the narration. This strategy will be used in other occasion with the same intention in the next videos. For the sake of simplicity we will call the “finger strategy” because Caia suddenly looks at his finger with a concentrated gaze as he was not the storyteller of the show anymore. In this moment we know that he is commenting the priest's behaviors thanks to his body language.

The launch of rice. Video 23e (0:12)

Once the ceremony is finished there is the launch of rice. In this moment Caia finds something that is related to the hearing culture. He says that for hearing people it is a nice moment to launch rice on the face of the new married couple. Hearing think “this is party, this is the real party”, while from Caia's face we see his disorientation and unconvinced reaction about this costume. It is amusing to see the difference in the launch of rice between the hearing and the Deaf. Deaf are represented as more careful, sweet, while the hearing have a violent launch with their arms. Caia again gives his opinion without saying anything. He uses again the “finger strategy”. We can imagine that the main difference in this cultural behavior is based on the fact that during the launch of rice hearing people cannot see anything but hear. For a Deaf person eyes are too much important in so much as the Deaf guest avoid the direct launch of the rice on their faces.

The pictures. Video 23f (0:06)

This is a clear example of linguistic humor with sign language. Caia plays with the sign “picture” and “take pictures”. They are two signs with a rectangular visual shape that involve both hands in a symmetrical position. Because of the several pictures, posed, positions that the couple have done for their wedding volume the sign “picture” becomes asymmetrical too. With the modification of one the traditional LIS sign, we come to know something about the couple by enjoying the linguistic creativity expressed.

The buffet. Video 23g (0:48)

Here for the third time Caia uses the “finger strategy” already mentioned in video 23d and 23e. He prefers a provocative silence than an explicit punchline or explanation. What we see is another description with some allusions about the difference between Deaf and hearings in behaviors. Caia puts a table at the front of the stage making us imagine that it is a long table full of food for the wedding buffet. On his left side there a group of Deaf people signing. On his right side there is a group of hearing chatting. With the arrival of the couple we see how the two groups, both very hungry, behave in a different way close to the buffet. The Deaf look at the buffet while hearing do not. This simple sentence turns out to

be funny for the pace Caia's sign are articulated. In the description of the Deaf group at Caia's left side we come to know two different aspects of the group: the Deaf are hungry; they look at the food. Then, he talks about the hearing group on his right side. In this moment we expect two sentences, or adjectives, or nouns that would describe them. It is in this broken expectation that we laugh when Caia says that they are hungry and that "It's the same". What indirectly Caia points out is how the visual channel is more developed in Deaf. He does not say it, though. It is there, in the description, in his shorter description of the hearing group, in the "finger strategy".

This is an example of humor as a powerful tool to belittle with a subtle aggressiveness the mainstream culture by stressing a positive feature that distinguishes the minority group. Freud's statement about how humor has "something of grandeur and elevation" seems to match in this portion of video.

The border line between Deaf and hearing people. Video 23h (0:44)

Caia uses the sign Pa Pa to explain how between Deaf and hearing there is always a borderline that creates, separates the two worlds. Here his speech "None of them know the language of the other group. Deaf people know that you have to speak in the world of hearing people, they have learned it with slaps. Hearing people know nothing about signs and they do not know how to get closer so they leave things as they are". Their mutual respect for the other world is displayed with a smile in their face that look very unnatural for their teeth well exposed.

What is amusing in this sentence is the linguistic game created thanks to sign language. Caia stresses the difference between the two worlds with the use of two signs "slaps" and "they don't know how to get closer so they leave things as they are". The fact that they are both articulated with the same configuration (B) creates a visual connection between the two signs and the two world. Thanks to this linguistic game Caia tell us something about the difference of the hearing and Deaf world with a similarity that could be explained with Walker's words:

At the same time, whereas all groups in a society are aware of the values, beliefs, and behaviors that are promoted by the dominant culture, those belonging to the dominant culture do not generally have the same awareness of the attitudes, habits,

and experiences of those excluded from or oppressed by it (Walker, 1988: XXII).

The difference between Deaf and hearing during the buffet. Video 23i (2:18)

Even though Caia has already started a comparison between hearing and Deaf behaviors in videos 22, 23e, 23g, 23h, here, in this video he seem to define all this comparison a “borderline condition”, where hearing and Deaf people maintain a formal and delicate distance without really interacting to each other. This video it is interesting because it is the imitation of the Deaf as pigs, from a hearing perspective. The humor strategy adopted here is the same we saw at the beginning of the show in video 3b “The sick deaf people” and 3c “The annoying deaf people”. A negative connotation is used by an insider to empower the members of the minority group. However here, Caia not only uses some hearing sentences uttered against the Deaf, but also performs in the scene their prejudice and believes. His denounce becomes more powerful and evident at the end of the show.

Caia explains that hearing guests complain all the time during the eating moment.

They consider the Deaf guests like pigs because they are noisy and impolite when they eat. They even “pass the border to take some food. And the hearing get angry, they smile at you showing their teeth as it they wanted to kill you!”. They say to each other “Look there, look at him he's taking the food, that rude guy and keeps on spitting”.

As response to this opinion Caia explains thanks to his studies in statistics that it is, indeed, a hearing misunderstanding. They do not realize that the Deaf, having the mouth not occupied to talk, can concurrently sign and eat. This things makes hearing believe that they eat like animals.

The light in the kitchen. Video 23j (1:32)

Caia makes another comparison between the hearing and the Deaf with the previous detected “finger strategy”. Even after launch the two groups do not mix up. While hearing prefer to relax in the sofas in the living-room with a suffused lighting, Deaf people go to the kitchen because it is a place with a wonderful light. The amusing part is created thanks to a metaphor. We see Caia struggling with the darkness to communicate with another person as he is a soldier in a war. Even though the humor nuance is lost in the translation, let's see his

speech: “Deaf people need a lot of light to communicate, they need to see properly, when it's dark you cannot see much. You cannot use binoculars like during the war, it's crazy, exaggerated”. The two different contexts, the war and a room in a house, overlap in a way that would never happen in normal occasions. That is the ability in creating what Adreone (2013) called “capacità di riconoscere collegamenti originali e associazioni inedite tra cose, oggetti, pensieri, parole”. It is even more effective the fact that the image created is immediately negated by Caia himself who says that “It is crazy, exaggerated”. Our logical thinking finds in this way a recognition in his final comment, which make us bound with him, get closer to his persona.

Deaf, hearing people and noise. Video 23k (0:32)

As in video 23i Caia performs the hearing opinion toward the Deaf with a powerful imitation that displays the different way the two group react to the presence of the other one. Hearing people complain about Deaf manners, while Deaf do not.

Hearing guests in the living room complain for the noise that comes from the kitchen. They hear a noise that makes them think a real fighting is happening among Deaf, while they sign to each other. Their speculation about the noise is so unrealistic and exaggerated that it appears evident that the hearing guest are the real target of the gag. “It's because they hear a lot of noise, it's as if they were beating each other, it's as if someone was falling down and breaking his bones”. On the other side the Deaf do not complain about the fact that “hearings grind their teeth” s because they cannot hear them. “The Deaf pretend nothing, while the hearing complain. Well, that's normal”.

The bride's name-sign. Video 23m (0:19)

Caia starts talking about the new couple. He introduces the bride with her name-sign as usually happens in a Deaf dialogue. However, the name-sign is really absurd because it is related to the bride's dress and to that specific moment of her wedding. When we see her name we already know that is so ridiculous that even what will follow (such as an explanation about the reasons of her name-sign) would make the situation even more unlikely and funny.

At this point we have a similar moment described in video 3 when Caia gave a fake explanation to his name-sign: “Because the bride has to wear an elegant white dress and she has to have a nice high breast, but how does she do it? What's its support? A brace with wheels? No! No, the metal boning of the corset. From this come the sign name.” Caia wants to make us believe that the name-sign of the bribe is realistic, by giving us a visual image that is even more absurd, such as a brace with wheels. In this spontaneous way of signing he shows that the name-sign is true; that it has a realistic explanation; that he is just giving to the audience the information we need. In other terms humor is in the lie of Caia's storytelling. As Davide Zoletto wrote in the chapter "Livelli di realtà dell'umorismo. Bergson, Bateson e Fry" “non si ride per prendere le distanze da qualcosa di artificiale a favore di una realtà assodata, ma al contrario si ride per tenere insieme due situazioni che, da un momento all'altro, sembrano scambiarsi vicendevolmente lo statuto di realtà” (Bateson, 2006:117).

The hearing workers and the alarm clock. Video 23n (1:37)



The hearing workers and the alarm clock. Video 23n (1 min 37).mp4 (Riga di comando)

This video is a little parenthesis to the wedding celebration. Caia makes this digression thanks to a flashing alarm that is on the table in the show. This visual material that allows the bride to understand when the phone is ringing, becomes now an instrument to talk about something different. Here the protagonist of the story is Caia when he was working in a factory. He tells us that even though he had to wake up at five everyday, he never came late to work. One day one of his coworkers asked him how (being Deaf) he was able to wake up. Because once he saw Caia with the interpreter in the factory for a workshop and other problems, he thought that Caia slept with the interpreter every night.

Caia signs are articulated with a pace that gives us the idea of routine of his life: waking up with the interpreter; working all day long; going back home; sleeping with the interpreter. We enjoy to see a visual representation of the coworker's misunderstanding. Then Caia replies “But Deaf people don't sleep with their interpreters.” And again we see a hearing

very curious to know Caia's life while he asks “So how do you wake up?”. The entire scene is a funny fictional story that ends with Caia's comment: “They don't know our world, what kind of equipment we have, that we have flashing alarm clock, they don't know. It is never the opposite but why?”. Caia concludes the speech with a strong position in support of LIS recognition by the Government by playing with the double meaning of “sleeping with”. Here his signs “If only there was a state law giving me some money when it's cold I could ask the interpreter to heat me up”. Sign language need to be recognized because that will help Deaf to have an interpreting service whenever they need it.

The video finishes with the finger strategy that strengthen his position as a Deaf actor .

The groom's name-sign. Video 23o (0:29)

This video is related to video 23m because we find the same humor based on a lie game. Caia talks about the groom who has as name-sign a stiff leg. The reference is to his erected penis. He wants to have sex with his wife in a wrong moment in so much as she invites him to leave. With this absurd name-sign, Caia wants to play with the important value that name-sign have for the Deaf community and also with LIS as a body related language. The humor is created because a common role is broken . Even though name-sign can definitely describe a physical feature of a person this is not the way to do it. Usually they are expressed with hands by following LIS configurations. In this case, however, it is the leg that become part of the LIS language to describe the sexual desire of the groom.

Chatting and water. Video 23p (0:29)

Because her stomach aches the bride goes to the kitchen to heat some water for a tea. There she gets stuck talking with her friend on the MTS. Being involved in a conversation she forgets the water which was boiling and evaporating. Caia with his mouth open imitates the water boiling with bubbles. Looking at his face we can see a visual description of the water boiling in a pot.

The situation get funnier because in the kitchen there are all other Deaf that are communicating like robots during the evaporation of the water (see video 4). Nobody can hear anything, of course, but only seeing others signing. Caia uses again the weird name-

sign of the bride to tell us that she comes close to them. They all say to her that they were, of course, chatting.

With this visual description Caia makes us laugh for how deeply involved Deaf people are when they communicate to each other. It is also something similar to video 18, where the inability to hear of the Deaf girl becomes a funny moment for the audience. In fact, thanks to Caia's performance Deafness is portrayed as amusing with any sense of guilty of the Deaf group for its inability to hear the boiling water. Even here the story finishes with the “finger strategy” at the end. What Cimino wrote in “L'umorismo dei sordi in Francia” should make us reflect about the meaning that we confer to Deafness and the ability to hear:

Perché i sordi non dovrebbero ridere? Perché non dovrebbero ridere di noi e di loro, per le situazioni in cui veniamo a trovarci; noi a causa della nostra capacità di udire e loro per la loro sordità; noi per le difficoltà che incontriamo a capirli e loro per le difficoltà che incontrano nel farsi capire? Perché queste situazioni devono essere viste soltanto in una prospettiva drammatica, senza cogliere quanto di comico è possibile vedervi, come in tante altre situazioni esistenziali? (Allier: 2000:8).

"L'indennità di comunicazione". Video 23q (3:16)

Caia makes a shift from the wedding scene to a different contest with the question: “What do you use your pension and your communication allowance for?”. With this question he starts a sharpen critic against the improper use of “L'indennità di comunicazione” within the Deaf community.

He starts saying that the communication allowance is used to buy the television set. He makes this response follows to his first statement “No, there's already a VAT relief for that! You get already a present in the tax return, in your wallet, what more do you want?”.

Then he considers another option: “for the interpreter, there are crowds of interpreters unemployed and with numb hands. We don't need that, we write, gesticulate and we are all right.”

Caia asks again the same question just to reinforce his critic. “It's saved up to travel! It's saved up to buy a new car. It's true, no excuse!”. Even later he will say that it is used to have fun, to buy clothes.

After this long provocation Caia invents a short personal story that will allows him to

criticize from a personal point of view the wrong use of the indemnity made by the Deaf community. This strategy to talk in first person facilitates him in his critic towards the community where he belongs. “Let me give you an advice, use it to pay for water or gas consumption. The Deaf should use it for these things! This is the correct use of your communication allowance. It happened to me”.

He starts in a very hilarious way, by saying with enthusiasm that he went two weeks on holiday with his girlfriend: “I had a lot of fun, went to visit my relatives. It was wonderful.”. By looking at his face expression we can easily detect that his enthusiasm is exaggerated for a holiday with relatives. This contrast in his signs with his body language are visually entertaining.

At this point he tells us that when he came back home, he found the entire house cleaned, without dust on the furniture. At the end he realized that he forgot to close the cooker hood which sucked everything during his holiday. Here his response to the question at the beginning of the video “The right use however is to be allowed to leave your cooker hood switched on for two weeks. [...] Do it too, leave it switched on at the maximum power, while you are on holiday. What would you do with your communication allowance why should you save that money otherwise? The government says it is to make cooker hoods work. “

And at this point he comes back to his story by saying that the bill for those two weeks with the cooker hood was very expensive. He finished with a punch line very aggressive that reminds to the Deaf that they even have “la tredicesima” (Christmas bonus) that could be used for that bill: “It's not a joke, I promise. No, it's better if I don't tell you, otherwise you will cry for your year-end bonus lost”.

The disable hand. Video 23r (0:38)



The disable hand. Video 23r (38 sec.).mp4 (Riga di comando)

This video is another example of Caia's humor, that from a linguistic perspective, criticizes

the prejudice of the hearing people toward the Deaf community. One of the most spread labels which define Deaf people is the word “disable”. The sign for “disable” in LIS involves two hands that move around the forearms. However, the Deaf community does not feel disable, but leaders of their world, their language, their culture.

In “Deaf jokes and sign language humor” Rachel Sutton-Spence and Donna Jo Napoli remark that:

there are forms of Deaf humor that are told against physically and mentally disable people. At first glance this may seem surprising, as people might view members of Deaf communities as disabled. However, a rejection of disabled status is properly considered to be part of Deaf community identification [] Jokes mocking disabled people show that the Deaf community considers them out-group (Sutton-Spence, 2012:313).

With a modification of the common sign “disable”Caia shows how a different perspective can twist the situation toward the hearing people who do not know sign language. He creates a similar sign to “disable”, such as the sign for “disable hand” by making the two hands go around themselves. Hearing people have limits on their hands. They have something less than the Deaf signers.

What here below Nancy Walker wrote about the humor expressed by when it is also a perfect support of Caia's performance in this video:

The use of self-deprecating humor by women could be a defensive reaction of those who feel themselves too weak or vulnerable to attack with impunity the forces that oppress them, but the seemingly defensive weapons of humor can also become offensive in the hands of women and other out groups. For example, as psychologists have observed, laughing at one's shortcomings is not only a way of diminishing their importance and potentially overcoming them but it is also a technique for cleansing them of pejorative connotations imposed by the dominant culture and, thereby, turning them into strengths. Similarly, the use of incongruity in humor by women as a means of targeting attributes and behaviors prescribed for them by the dominant culture is an act of rebellion (Walker, 1988: XXIII).

In addition, the powerful effect of this sign “disable hand” appears even more effective in his goal of “redressing the balance” because it is articulated by a hearing guest at the wedding and not by Caia. Caia tell us that after lunch hearing people are comfortably sitting on the sofa, when one of them starts thinking about the Deaf ability in moving their hands to communicate. “One of them is thinking about his hands which have some limits, they

cannot express themselves like Deaf people, even if he tries to make some signs”.

The argument with the hearing guest. Video 23s (2:31)

This video is the only scene in the entire show where a real argument between a Deaf and a hearing person is performed. A hearing guest goes to the kitchen close to a group of Deaf. Instead of repeating always the same Italian gesture to communicate with them “Is the food ok? Is everything all right?” he tries to use the sign “ nice” (simpatico) to tell them that they are nice. However, he ends up to use another sign with a very offensive meaning that makes furious one of the Deaf guy. The upset guy stands in front of the hearing by signing close to his face with a pace that gives us the idea of his angry mood. Caia tells us that the Deaf aggression scares the hearing: “The hearing doesn't know what to do, with all that gesticulating, he didn't think they could do that, he thought they were moderate”.

The humor aspect of this video is based on a language misunderstanding. The entertaining effect is created with the same strategy we saw in video 18a with the girl at the disco: “the reciprocal interference of independent series” explained by Bergson. In this specific case we are the only one who knows that the hearing wanted to be nice, while the Deaf guy did not. His mistake makes us understand both reaction for different reasons. In addition, we are the only one to see with the Deaf person an offensive sign articulated by the hearing, who is not aware of what he had signed for real. It is our awareness of both intentions that makes us look at their behaviors with a smile.

In addition Caia caricatures of both people are so natural and full of visual details that make the narration even more enjoyable. It is the case, for example, when we see hearings approach the Deaf using Italian gesture with the thumb up and slapping on Deaf shoulders. Caia comments this behavior as follow “he has been signing always the same words for ages!”.

And then we see the Deaf perspective in this communicative approach that is usually obscured to hearings. At the 12th second Caia uses the little finger with insecurity to highlights the fact that in this situation it is the hearing who is alone, isolated when he approaches the Deaf group. Then Caia provides an important information that allows us to understand that the situation created is something that happens even on the other side, such

as when a Deaf person approaches a hearing group. Here the comment “The Deaf reply ok, as he did and make the same face as the hearing when a Deaf goes to their group”. It is funny from a mainstreaming perspective to see performed how the Deaf group make fake polite faces just to respect the hearing approach. It is an unusual perspective. The only difference is that hearings patronize an Italian mistake made by a Deaf person (“that poor guy is Deaf”), while Deaf reacts in a very aggressive way. Caia invites the Deaf to do as hearing do. When a hearing makes a mistake in LIS they should dry their tears for what they saw. “We should try to be calm instead, explain him that the LIS is a language and tell him something about its history. ' No you are wrong. The sign for nice is this one, do you see the movement?“. In this suggestion we understand how a daily discrimination in little things brings to different behaviors between Deaf and hearing in a apparent similar situation. It is a very interesting point of view that denounces with humor how some attitudes are rooted in social inequalities.

The Deaf outlet. Video 23t (0:34)

In this video we have an imitation of Deaf people for their strong desire to share their stories with the others. When the hearing guest left the kitchen for the shock of the argument with the Deaf, all Deaf people start talking to each other about what has just happened. Everybody starts sharing past experiences “It happened to me too, a hearing offended me too”. It is an amusing imitation that highlights how signs are badly and quickly articulated for the strong emotion which drives their communication in that delicate moment.

Deaf discuss, confront and share experiences all the time to each other. This cultural aspect is based on the fact that “LIS has always been underestimated, we couldn't express ourselves, we had to hide ourselves, instead of using it.” Caia uses the pronoun “us” as a way to remember that he wants to laugh with the Deaf, as a member of the same community.

One hearing, one signer and one deaf oralist. Video 23u (5:27)

What we see here is something different from the rest of the show: Caia tells a story that is

already known among the Deaf community in several countries. As actor he narrates it with his personal style with the aim of conserving the Deaf tradition for the next generations.

The story highlights the difference between hearings, signers and deaf oralists when they come close to a glass of water after a long conversation: “the hearings need to drink, the Deaf to refresh their hands and the deaf oralist to dip their eyes, it's normal”. Caia will fulfill the story with a lot of funny details related to a volcano and its lava that makes the three people stand out for their behaviors. Before describing these five minutes of Caia's show let's see how in “L 'umorismo dei sordi in Francia” Marc Renard, a French cartoonist drew it the same story with the title “How to refresh”:



Figure 13. From “L 'umorismo dei sordi in Francia” (2000: 52). How to refresh.

Caia's show starts with a description of a hearing people who after a long talk come close to a glass of water: "The hearing's throat is like Mt. Etna, red like the lava flow produced by the volcano, it burns, they drink in a hurry. Oh, how refreshing, it's like having conditioned air in one throat."

After this description we see the action of Caia grabbing the glass with his hands to drink. Then it is the moment of the Deaf description "Their hands are tired, their wrists are burning like the lava pouring out from the volcano." The Deaf put his fingers in the glass with the Caia comment

"It's like with wrought iron, you heat the iron over the flame and when it becomes red you can hammer it; if you put them the iron in water smoke comes up. Well, it's the same thing!". And then he even adds another detail about the fact that Deaf people with wet fingers do not need, like the hearing, to dry their hands by shaking them or by drying on their trousers. They just need to start to sign naturally on the air. The deaf oralist is described by Caia with even more details. He is portrayed as an insecure person who does not know if it is better to sign or speak. At the end he chooses the company of another deaf oralist. Caia likes to specify, though, that he is not judging them "I've got plenty of deaf oralist. We are good together there's no problems, they say 'I don't sign that good', Ok it doesn't matter, I can teach you step by step. The deaf oralist never say 'you are going to become step by step an oralist' while we say 'you will learn to sign step by step". With this sentence he shows how the Deaf community is variegated and respectful of diversity. At the same time, though, he likes to highlight how signs are the natural channel for all Deaf, regardless their oral education. This sentence sounds very provoking "It's often like that because the Deaf community is very strong in signing, the hearing are very strong in speaking and the oralist speaks, but in a different way. Well, we were saying 'step by step...'".

Coming back to the behavior of the oralist close to the glass of water, Caia points out how oralist get tired after a while they pay attention to the lips of the other person. He describes the situation as follow "like the volcano which erupts and the lave goes down until it arrives to the sea where it becomes smoke, they punch their heard and take their eyes of, put them in a bowl like fishes who swim and swim in water and then they put their eyes back and see

perfectly again”.

As we can understand by this performance, what it is funny it is not the three actions made by Caia with the glass: the Deaf community is likely to already know the story. What it is funny it is how it is narrated. It is the style of Caia as storyteller who contributes with visual details and description to transmit the Deaf tradition, the Deaflore. For what concern the ownership of the story we should take in mind what Bahan wrote about it:

Tellers may invent their own stories (e.g., telling a narrative of their own personal experience), but in many cases stories are passed down (or passed along) within the community. Even if a story is original, the question of ownership is unclear because unlike stories that are written down, which the writer can write for himself and never share with others, stories in the face-to-face tradition are told to an audience and shared with members of the community. In my discussions with storytellers, I found that most of them are facing this interesting paradox. As in much of the oral tradition, the notion that “the community” owns the story remains, in some sense. The teller may own only his or her style and perhaps the process of rebuilding the story after acquiring a “story -skeleton” from the culture” (Bahan, 2006: 42-43).

The oralist. Video 23v (1:15)



The oralist. Video 23v (1 min 15 sec).mp4 (Riga di comando)

This video is just a little part of the video 23u where Caia performs the imitation of a deaf oralist. His expressions, gaze and “not using hands” is really entertaining if we look the show from a Deaf signer gaze. Here some words pronounced by the oralist and Caia's description “In the Deaf group there some oralists, but they do not resist much time with the signers and automatically leave to find other oralist like them 'How are you? Is everything ok?' and the other 'Yes, but a bit! So confusion”.

The old Deaf people. Video 23w (1:49)

This video introduces the topic of subtitles in TV. Caia brings out different behaviors between different generations of Deaf. While young Deaf people watch TV with subtitles relaxed on their chairs, old people were used to carefully look all scenes with intensity and

concentration. Regardless the lack of information old Deaf seem to better understand action movies than the young one. Here, we see another imitation of three old Deaf who watch the TV without subtitles with their tired bones and inclined heads.

The subtitles in TV. Video 23x (0:35)



The subtitles in TV. Video 23x (35sec).mp4 (Riga di comando)

This video can be considered the only joke in the show. There is a short comparison about the way a hearing person and a Deaf one watch the TV. The difference is based on a visual signal, such as the light outside the window of these two people. Outside from the window of the hearing you can see the light of the TV turned on, while from the Deaf window there is a constant flash of lights. With a punchline at the end Caia concludes with the explanation of this weird situation: the Deaf is looking for subtitles. While on the rest of the show descriptions, details, contests were the entertaining part, here it is the punchline, the last part of the short narration that creates the suspense and the satisfaction of the audience.

With this joke Caia denounces the hearing discrimination towards the Deaf who cannot have access to information without subtitles. The use of humor here is an over strategy for a Deaf person to rebel against the *status quo*. Rutherford in a analysis about Deaf jokes writes something that fits with the joke already described:

This joke is a metaphor for the language situation of the community, the experience of the community within the hearing world and the search of the individual for identity. In each of these dimensions, the way is externally blocked. The language is dismissed: the culture is not recognized; and the individual is prevented from gaining true acceptance on an formal level within the hearing world. Thus, the joke reflects the very real conflict that exists between two cultures-the hearing and Deaf-and at the same time serves as an aggressive outlet against the majority as well as a vehicle to reaffirm the group identity of the Deaf minority (Rutherford, 2014: 320).

Greetings. Video 23y (4: 31)

This is the conclusion of the wedding celebration and of Caia's show. This last scene is based on the different behaviors between hearing and Deaf people next to the entrance of

the house. Cain tells us that the bribe and the groom want to send their guest home. However, while hearing take five minutes to say goodbye, the Deaf people take three hours to leave the house. Caia remarks again the importance for the Deaf of chatting, communicating to each other, as he did in videos “Waiting” and “Chatting and the water”. He is proud of his culture in so much as he feels confident to say what the Deaf guy did at the disco to receive more drinks “they are ill, I confirm it, Deaf people are crazy but for chatting. Those who speak go out first, while it take a lot of time to go out to those who sign, they are really ill.”

The confusion the Deaf group create to go out of the house makes them and their culture very funny and friendly. We see the bribe asking help to his ex Deaf boyfriend who tries to push the group outside without results “He's gathering the Deaf together when someone call his 'Juventus-AC Milan, last time, during the first leg?’ and starts discussing with this person. Noo!He forgets to send the Deaf home and starts chatting! When they have to leave, they all start asking things and calling.”

It is amusing to see how the Deaf pushes with his arms the Deaf group, while they keep on signing without caring about their surrounding. He guy who pushes is described by Caia as a very muscular man, not because of the gym but “by dint of pushing and pushing the Deaf toward the door he has become muscular”.

There is also a short dialogue between the groom and the hearing, who argued with the Deaf before, that points out the narrow perspective of hearing about the Deaf world. The hearing says “I saw the Deaf laughing all the time. I've never seen something like that, hear people laugh like that is strange, it's as if they had no problems”. And the groom replied “there are always problems. For example, are you happy when you get a fine?No! And the same happens to the Deaf, they have lots of problems too.. Now they are happy for the wedding of their Deaf friend.”

Caia gives voice of the hearing idea that Deaf people are always sad, suffering for their Deafness. Deaf people, indeed, have a lot of funny things to share to each other, as everybody else, especially in a wedding party of one of their member of the community. This is exactly what Cimino wrote in “L'umorismo dei sordi in Francia.”:

Possiamo ritenere che i sordi, in quanto minoranza, possono dare un particolare significato di rivalsa o di compensazione al proprio umorismo. Lo stesso Renard fa notare che sembra che i sordi siano tristi, ma esiste, al contrario, un umorismo, che ha in comune con l'umorismo degli ebrei di essere quello di una minoranza che ride di se stessa prima di prendersi gioco degli altri “dall'adorabile battuta del bambino alla scatologia più abominevole, l'umorismo sordo esercita la sua inventiva in ogni genere, presentandosi di volta in volta come humour nero, aspro, sciocco, infantile, malandrino, licenzioso”, affermando nel contempo che scoprire i sordi “per il tramite del loro umorismo significa farli conoscere e capire meglio che attraverso mille noiose esercitazioni teoriche” (Sandrine, 2000:7).

The end. Video 23z (1:58)

The end of the show finishes with a verbal duel between the hearing and the Deaf who previously argued together. It is a tit for tat that shows how the hearing is outsmarted by the Deaf guy, who has at the end the last laugh.

I am sure you've all heard the expression, “Laughter is the best medicine.” Well, there is much truth to that, particularly when you analyze minority cultures, and realize to that they all incorporate fighting back at oppression into their humor. It is a common response to the frustration of our everyday lives, for in humor, the storyteller determines who will 'win' (Bienvenu, 1980: 4).

In this specific case they are both outside the door when it starts raining. Under the canopy before going to their cars the hearing asks to the Deaf “Do you hear the rain falling on the roof?” The Deaf replies 'I don't hear it, but I see the drops falling on the floor'. The hearing has been cheated.”

When it stops raining before leaving the Deaf asks to the hearing other two questions “Do you hear the sun?” “Do you hear the sun getting over the sea disappearing slowly?”. With the hearing response to the last question “I don't hear anything, I see it” the Deaf and Caia with him reply “I won, 2 to 1” the Deaf seems to win the verbal duel.

The last sentence of the show concludes this performance with a little of bitterness between the two guys “The Deaf is a bit worried, he knows the risk, the cars arrive, they get in, the hearing looks at him, the Deaf looks back, waves goodbye and they leave.”.

CHAPTER 3

REFLECTIONS

The 58 videos analyzed in the previous chapter represent a precious resource for the advancement of the Deaf humor literature that still counts on few studies and contributions. They can offer practical examples to the available reflections, by supporting and enriching their statements and observations.

In this chapter the aim is to report the crucial aspects that define Caia's humor, maintaining as points of reference the considerations already elaborated by Sutton-Spence and Napoli, Bienvenu, Rutherford and Bouchaveau.

Let us first begin with what is one of the most evident feature in Caia's humor, such as its **visual nature**. The visual nature of humor is an aspect that has already received attention in Bienvenu's reflections and in Sutton-Spence and Jo Napoli's paper (cf chapter 1.6). Here we will see how for the appreciation of Caia's performance in its general structure the visual perception of his gestures, signs, facial expressions, body movements stands out as an essential prerequisite. Objects such as the mirror, the black board, glasses, chairs, tables, the telephone help Caia to create the visual world performed on the show. The hearing world is often dominated by characters who prefer to sit down on a chair, or a sofa, while the Deaf world is portrayed with people standing in front of the audience. It is often the case that, when he is talking about Deaf he sits down on a chair to stand up few seconds later (see video 5 "Waiting" at the seconds 15\16). On the contrary, in the video 17a "Must hear well", before taking the role of a hearing doctor, Caia specifies at minute 8:51 " Uh, I haven't be sitting down for a while. I love this chair". After this he sits down.

If we go in details we can notice the different nuances of this crucial aspect of deaf humor. Here the list of the videos that contains this first feature:

1. "The perspiration" video 1
2. "The speech therapist" video 15

3. “The bow tie” video 23b
4. “Mafia” video 11
5. “One hearing, one signer and one deaf oralist” video 23u

Caia's first scene as storyteller in the show is based on a visual feature: the perspiration. He knows that the audience must have noticed his sweaty armpits. Instead of hiding the thing, or ignoring it, he takes advantage of the situation to create humor and a warm atmosphere with the audience.

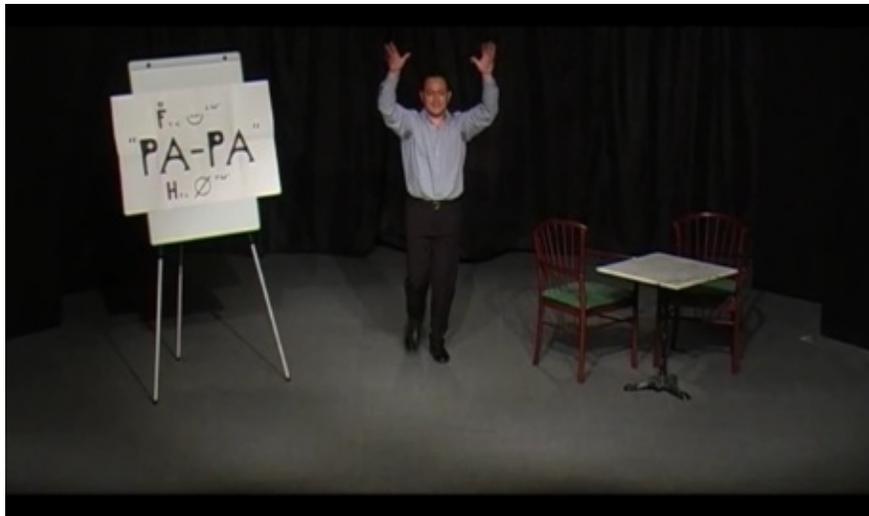


Figure 14. From “The perspiration” video 1. Caia appears in the show with sweaty armpits. This visual evidence allows him to make a funny comparison between hearing people and Deaf people.

A visual situation where the Deaf world seems to gain knowledge thanks to visual perception and visual logic occurs in “The speech therapist” video 15. Caia says that in the past, all speech therapists were women, providing a visual explanation about this phenomenon: men couldn't teach lip-reading because they had mustaches that hid their lips. This is a very direct explanation based on a visual perception.

A similar situation occurs in “The bow tie” video 23b when Caia explains that in a wedding celebration men used to put something on their neck (a bow tie) because in this way they could cover the wounds made by shaving with a razor. Also in “Mafia”, video 11 (2:42), he says that in poor Sicily during the war, children had holes in their pants . He explains this

situation with a visual action: because of the shortage of water they scratched their pants for the itch. Visual perception, visual knowledge and visual explanation are keys to interpret Deaf humor.



Figure 15. From “Mafia” video 11. The serious tone adopted by Caia to explain the reasons why children in Sicily had hells on their pants. A serious topic is explained with a silly visual evidence.

The best example for a clear explanation of the meaning “The visual nature of Deaf humor” is expressed in “One hearing, one signer and one deaf oralist” video 23u. The story stresses the difference in the way people refresh themselves with some water after a long conversation. The protagonists are one hearing person, a Deaf signer, and a deaf oralist. The hearing person refreshes his throat, while the two Deaf people use, respectively, their fingers and their eyes. Regardless their different education, the use of sign language or lip reading, the visual channel is the common ground for all Deaf people. In addition, it is not of secondary importance to remember that this story is a famous tale, not just for the Italian Deaf community. A visual representation of the same story is found in a French collection of a humorous Deaf cartoonist in “Sourd, cent blagues! Tome deux” entitled “How to refresh” presented in this work in the second chapter. That means, that not only this story, with its international breath is able to go beyond nationalities, but also that its message brings the deaf community together, while transmitting the importance of the visual channel and its potentialities for the life of a Deaf individual.

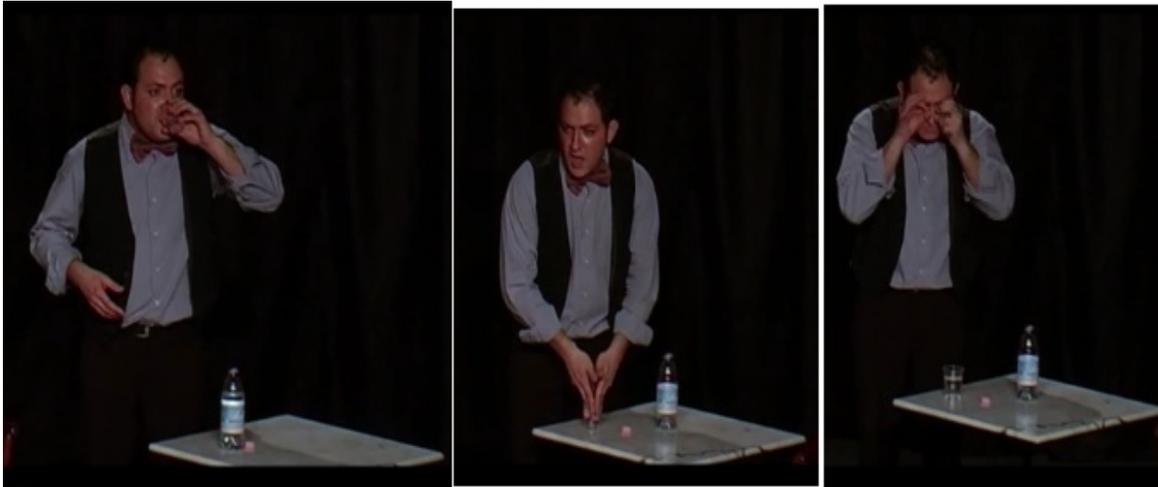


Figure 16. From “One hearing, one signer and one deaf oralist” video 23u. There are three different way to refresh after a long conversation. In the first image we see a hearing person refreshing her throat. In the second picture a Deaf signer refreshes his finger inside the glass. In the last one we see a deaf oralist while puts his eyes inside the glass of water.

All these videos prove how the Italian Deaf humor is deeply connected with the visual perception and the visual logic. It goes in the same directions described for the British, French and American Deaf humor, by supporting with further examples their reflections. Another different way where the visual nature of humor is celebrated can be detected in all imitations and caricatures performed by Caia during the show. As Sutton-Spence and Jo Napoli and Guy Bouchaveau's pointed out, both imitation and caricatures represent a common visual strategy adopted by the Deaf actors. However, while in their papers only some pictures are provided, here we can enjoy the entire performance in several videos. Here is the list of the best imitations made by Caia:

1. “So there is a doctor, hearing parents and a speech therapist” video 14 ;
2. “The doctor's 'What does that mean' video 23a;
3. “Must hear well” video 17a;
4. “The speech therapist“ video 15;
5. “Incommunicability” video 18; (video 18a “The Deaf girl in the disco with the hearing boy”; video18d “The deaf and the two hearing writers”)
6. “Caia at the university. The SW and the written Italian” video 20;

7. “The Italian writing for Deaf and the Sign Writing” video 21;
8. “The old Deaf people” video 23w;
9. “The deaf oralist” video 23v;
10. “One hearing, one signer and one deaf oralist” video 23u;
11. “The launch of rice” video 23e;
12. “The argument with the hearing” video 23t;
13. “Chatting and water” video 23q;
14. “Slaps” video 16.

Caia often imitates hearing people. As we have already seen in the previous humor analysis, doctors are usually imitated with their constant confidentiality and with their snobbish manners (in “So there is a doctor, hearing parents and a speech therapist” video 14; in “The doctor's 'What does that mean' video 23a; in “Must hear well” video 17a). This is an interesting aspect if we consider that, usually, in a hearing joke that has a doctor and a patient as character, the doctor is portrayed as a wise professional who must hear weird and funny situations from his/her patient. Unlikely, in Caia's narration doctors are the butt of the story, especially for the high consideration they usually enjoy from other hearing people (usually parents with a Deaf child). In video 17a “Must hear well” we see doctors while they act weirdly, as they are dealing with a thing instead of a Deaf person's ear. Their manners seem clumsy and not very professional.

A long imitation is dedicated to another professional that has a crucial importance for the Deaf people: the speech therapist (“The speech therapist” video 15). The hearing woman with her nervous and strict way of approaching the sweet child looks ridiculous since the beginning of the story.

Funny imitations about hearing people are also those when they try to approach Deaf people or try to talk with them. In the show we saw the amusing scene at the disco in “Incommunicability” video 18, especially “The Deaf girl in the disco with the hearing boy” video 18a and in video 18d “The deaf and the two hearing writers”. Caia imitates them by using often Italian gestures. In this way we have the opportunity to see the dialogue from the Deaf perspective.

Few seconds of Caia's narration show a very concentrate LIS interpreter at the university in “Caia at the university. The SW and the written Italian” video 20. Also a hearing friend tries to understand the writing of a Deaf person by saying “explain me better” in “The Italian writing for Deaf and the Sign Writing” video 21. From a hearing perspective, looking at that moment made me think “It is true! I have done the same! It is true. Caia would have received the same response from me”. His ability to imitate not only the manners but also the use of hearing's sentences seem very genuine and effective.

In addition, Caia imitates even Deaf people with their manners and attitudes. It is the case of the old people watching the TV without subtitles “The old Deaf people” video 23w.



Figure 17. From “The old Deaf” video 23w. Caia imitates two Deaf old men while they are watching the TV without subtitles.

“The oralist” video 23v focuses on a communication between two Deaf guys, who received an oral education, at the table with other signers. Looking at Caia's imitation we cannot deny that their way of looking at each other, their body and face are very close to a real situation. Here below two moments of this imitation:



Figure 18. From “The oralist” video 23v. A Deaf who receive a oral education talks with another deaf in front of him. He sit down in a very polite way and look carefully to his interlocutor.

In this video we can see the huge difference in behaviors when a Deaf signer communicates with other signers, and when an oralist is with another Deaf person who received an oral education.



Figure 19. From “One hearing, one signer and one deaf oralist” video 23u. On the left side a oralist is looking at his interlocutor, another oralist. On the right side a Deaf signer is naturally communicating with other signers.

In “The launch of rice” video 23e it is nice to see how Deaf people do not behave as

hearing people. Their insecurity and their way to through the rice to the new married couple looks ridiculous.

In “The argument with the hearing” video 23t, we can see how a group of Deaf people behave when a hearing person comes close to talk with them. Deaf people look very confident while the hearing people is portrayed as shy and ensure. The amusing effect is created because it displays an uncommon situation. Usually, in the reality, a Deaf person must approach a group of hearing people with the same lack of confidentiality.

Not only people are imitate in the show. As Bouchaveau explained (see chapter 1.6.1) Deaf actors are able to imitate very well even animals or things. In Caia's show it stands out the imitation of the boiling water in “Chatting and water” video 23q. With his tooth and mouth Caia is able to give us a perfect image of boiling water that is making noise in the pot, while a group of Deaf people are chatting in the kitchen without caring about it.



Figure 20. From “Chatting and the water” video 23q. Caia gives the image of the boiling water thanks to his face expression and the use of classifiers, while the Deaf group and the bride in the kitchen are unaware about it.

Very effective is also the visual comparison between bad Deaf speakers and crying birds performed in “Slaps” video 16. While a hearing comedian might prefer to focus on the annoying sound made by birds, Caia stresses the visual aspects of the desperate birds crying. We see their beaks open and their neck movements with a clear understanding of

their “potential bad sound” .

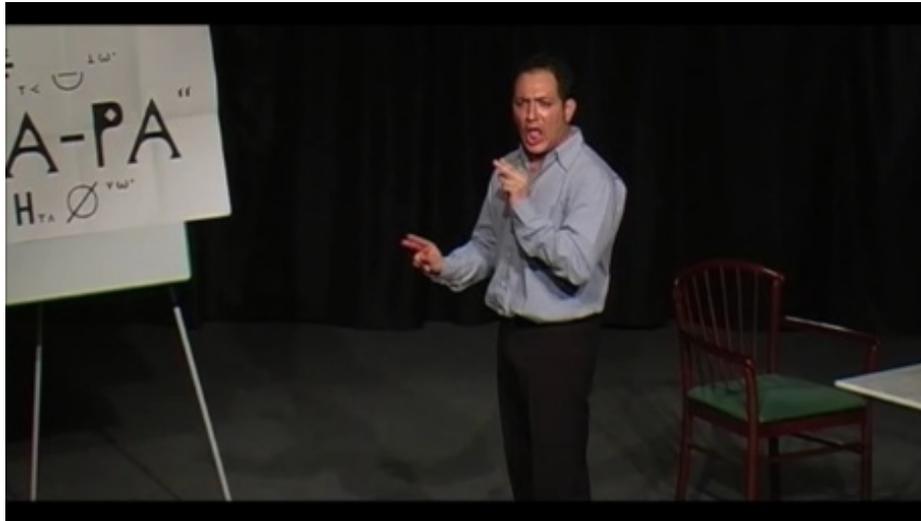


Figure 21. From “Slaps” video 16. Caia imitates birds crying. Deaf signers look similar to them when they try to talk with bad results. Face expressions, use of classifiers are crucial for the creation of the visual image.

The visual nature of humor must be jointed with another important feature in Caia's humor. Even in this occasion, the second main aspect is something that has been already studied by the authors in the humor literature. Caia's performance supports their reflections by giving new examples full of humorous details. It is what Bienvenu called “**humor from a linguistic perspective**”.

The linguistic humor in the “Pa Pa” show will be divided in two main categories with the same words used by Sutton-Spence and Jo Napoli in their paper: humor as a result of the creation of “new and highly visually representative signs” (its essential aspect consists in the way things are signed), and humor created by “playing with the internal structure of signs”.

Here below the list of 8 videos where humor mainly consists on “creating new visual signs”:

1. “The numeric precision” video 3a;
2. “The interruption in speeches” video 5;
3. “Mafia” video 11;

4. “Caia and the example for the sign 'Deaf’” video 13;
5. “LIS and the elegant clothes” video 22;
6. “The pictures” video 23f;
7. “The borderline between Deaf and hearing people” video 23h;
8. “The groom's name sign” video 23o;

In all these occasions humor stems from the ability of the storyteller to use face expressions, exaggerations in gestures, repetition, change of the pace of his signs, as well the use of many classifiers for the creation of images and visual situations. As we have already noticed, it is difficult to find a story with a punch line at the end: a joke structure occurs only in video 23x “The subtitles in TV”. It is the way the entire visual channel is exploited with creativity that creates this kind of linguistic humor.

In video 3a “The numeric precision”, we see how the quick pace of the signs in front of Caia's face gives us the confusion of the information provided. It is a visual effect created by an exaggeration of velocity in signs and their articulation in front of the face.



Figure 22. From “The numeric precision” video 3a. Caia gives the idea of confusion using signs that cover his face.

In “The interruption in speeches” video 5, Caia points out how often Deaf narration in stories is confusing, not linear. With his tongue in plain view, we get the feeling that Deaf

people are not conscious about it, while they change roads and directions. Hands go together with Caia's body in the creation of the image of a street with different directions available to the Deaf person. Keeping in mind this part, if we look at the video “Mafia”, at the min 1.03-1.07 we will find hilarious the way Caia imitates crazy Deaf communication with the final comment of a person that says “More or less” as a way to confirm his observation in video 3a.

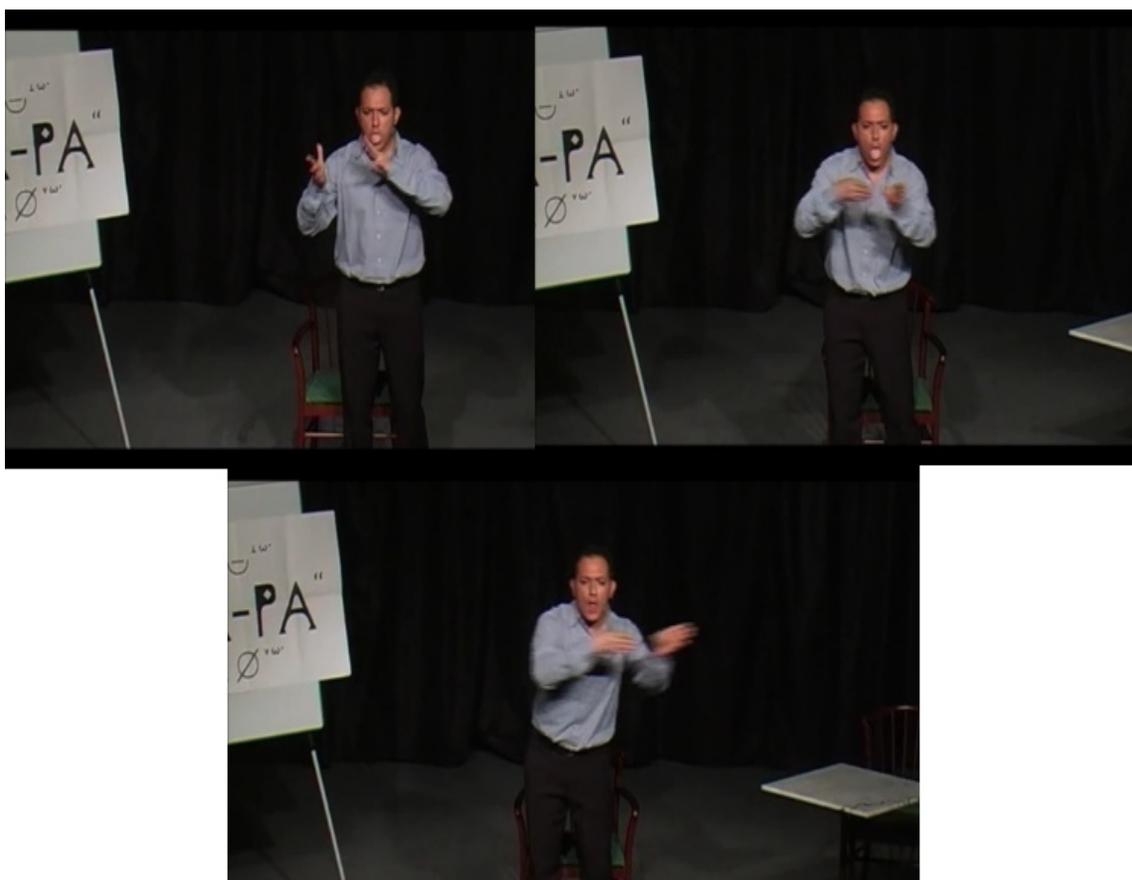


Figure 23. From “The interruption in speeches” video 5. Caia compares a Deaf speech as a Deaf person who goes left and right in the street with no consciousness of what she\he is doing.

In video 11 “Mafia” (as we have previously said for video 4 “Waiting”), we laugh because Caia exaggerates the need of communication. “Deaf people must communicate” is the message of the actor while he signs with a very fast pace always the same sign, such as “signing, signing, signing”. It is the way LIS is articulated that triggers humor, not a punch

line or specific content. As Bergson would say, Deaf people appear like robots with their rigidity and lack of flexibility . Even in this case, Caia facilitates the laughter showing a difference in behavior between hearing and Deaf people when they do not know something. The former do accurate researches, read books with curiosity, while Deaf people signs to each other in a crazy way as much as they can with their signs “How, how how” that displays their curiosity and anxiety to know something more.



Figure 24. From “Mafia” 11. Caia repeats the sign “signing” several times while he turns from his left side to his right side with an unnatural pace and velocity. This Deaf communication looks very funny, as Bergson wrote, because of the repetition of one sign with lack of elasticity and naturalism. Caia reminds us of a machine without life, instead of a person engaged in a spontaneous conversation.

Even in “Yes, that thing” video 8 we have a repetition and the rigidity of a sign that creates an amusing effect. According to Caia the sign “PE” is very used in their conversations because it allows them to refer about something without mentioning it again. This fact makes them look repetitive. As Bergson would say, their repetition seems the cause of our laughter. Their “behavior encrusted in the living” appear a funny exaggeration to the viewer.

In “Mafia” video 11 another humor situation appears from minute 1:47 to 1:56. Caia decides to use a sequence of all signs that involve a circular movement, like “technology in progress”; “languages”, “LIS” in order emphasize the connection with the sign in ASL

“America” (which requires a circular movement). This visual connection of all those circular movements has a linkage in Caia's point of view. The use of the ASL sign “America” is already established in the Italian Deaf community because\thanks to the new technological era where languages get influenced by each other. According to Caia, the incorporation in LIS of the sign “America” in ASL brought to the loss of the original LIS sign for “America” that was more connected with the Italian history and culture. As we can see in the first picture below the sign “America” is superficially used by Italian Deaf people that got influenced by other languages (second pictures) and by the development of new technology, without giving importance to their cultural heritage of their sign language. Once again, it is the way LIS is articulated that makes us laugh and also understand Caia's opinion.

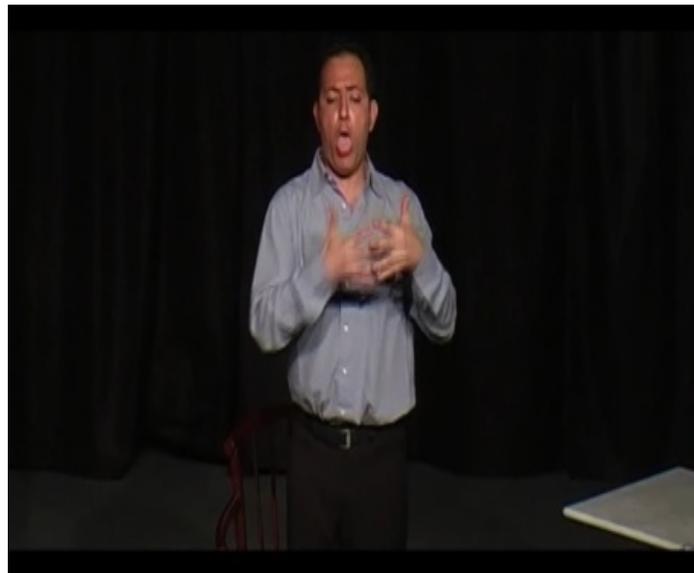


Figure 25. From “Mafia” video 11. Caia signs “America” with a tongue with plain view as a way to stress the superficiality or the confusion by the Italian Deaf people who prefer the ASL sign instead of their LIS sign, more connected with those past events happened in Sicily.

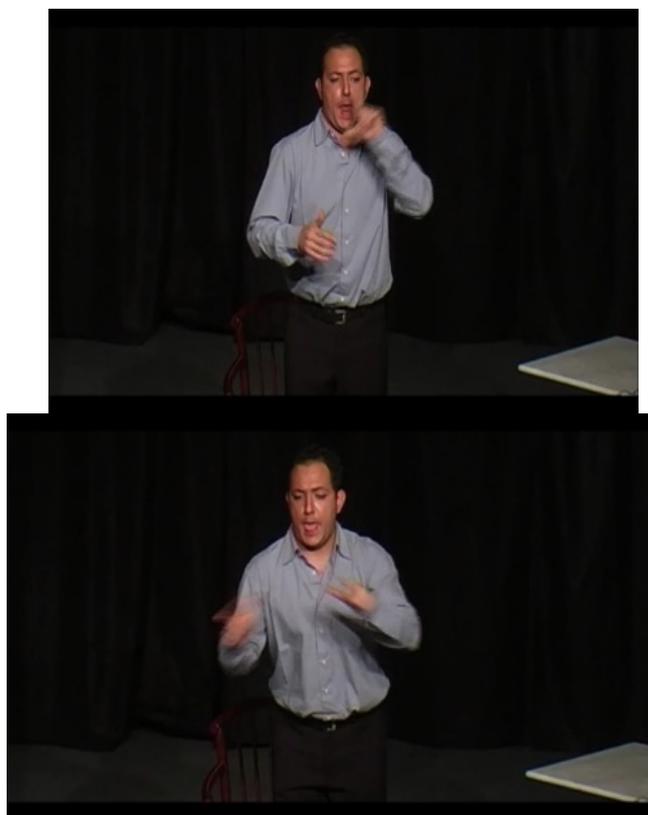


Figure 26. From “Mafia” video 11. Caia signs “languages” and “LIS” stressing their circular movements in a sloppy way. This lack of clarity in the way signs are articulated emphasizes the confusion, the lack of identity by the Italian Deaf people once they enter in touch with other cultures, languages in this technological world.

“Caia and the example for the sign 'Deaf’” video 13 proposes a different way to articulate the LIS sign “Deaf” without using hands. His proposal ends up being a simple head movement that has nothing to deal with the creation of a new sign. His idea just reminds us of the physical channel that makes sign language possible: our entire body is sign language. This humorous solution, a rigid head movement creates amusement for its absurdity and paradox.

Something similar also happens in “The groom's name sign” video 23o, where Caia makes up a name sign for the groom. The groom wants to have sex with his wife and the name sign refers to his genitals. His name sign appears to be funny because it involves the use of legs instead of the the presence of hands classifiers. Again the physical channel overcomes the linguistic domain.



Figure 27. From “The groom's name sign” video 23o. The involvement of one leg instead of using finger's configurations to describe the groom's genitals.

In “LIS and the elegant clothes” video 22 the linguistic strategy is complex and a visualization of the video is mandatory to understand what we are trying to analyze. Ironically, Caia signs that the use of LIS and body involvement create problems to Deaf people when they wear elegant clothes. Because they are constantly moving sports clothes fit them and their form of communication much better. Their elegant clothes appear in disorder as two letters L collocated in a way that they cannot match to each other.



Figure 28. From “LIS and the elegant clothes” video 22. The classifier L, used for the sign “elegant” and for the sign “LIS” here creates a connection with the disordered Caia's shirt.

Caia expresses this message playing with the traditional signs “elegant” and the sign LIS with an emphasis on their common configuration L. The disorder of Deaf clothes is communicated with two L classifiers that display the lack of asymmetry, as it is the case of Caia's shirt.

A similar situation appears in “The pictures” video 23f where the C configuration for the signs “pictures” and “take pictures” are connected with a C classifier that highlights the rectangular shape, the frame of a picture. Because the married couple was taking many pictures in different positions even the sign “picture” becomes distorted with two C classifiers articulated in an anti-symmetric way.



Figure 29. From “The pictures” video 23f. The classifier C is used to visually connect the sign “picture” with several poses adopted by the married couple for their album.

In “The borderline between Deaf and hearing people” video 23h Caia is talking about the difficulty of integration between hearing people and Deaf people. The problem mainly pertains the inability to speak the language of the others. What seems a balanced situation turns out to be a huge difference. In this contradiction lies the linguistic humor and the irony of the speech. Caia uses two signs that have a phonological similarity such as “slaps” and the LIS sign that can be translated in English with a paraphrase “they don't know how to get closer so they leave things as they are”. Both signs are articulated with the B

configuration and the space of their articulation (close to the mouth). However, if we analyze what Caia says, we can understand that the similarity is not very balanced. He says that Deaf people “already know the hearing world”, they must get slapped on their lips in order to speak well and communicate with the hearing world, while hearing people just do not care about knowing the Deaf world (“they don't know how to get closer so they leave things as they are”). The humor strategy, here, is based on the fact that two similar signs display at the end their diversity in contents.

Interesting in this regard is what Walker wrote in her introduction about the angle of vision of minorities (Walker, 1988: XXII)

At the same time, whereas all groups in a society are aware of the values, beliefs, and behaviors that are promoted by the dominant culture, those belonging to the dominant culture do not generally have the same awareness of the attitudes, habits, and experiences of those excluded from or oppressed by it.





Figure 30. From “The borderline between Deaf and hearing people” video 23h. The first two images show the articulation of the sign “slap” with the B configuration. The third picture shows the other sign “they don't know how to get closer so they leave things as they are” that has a B configuration as well. A phonological similarity between these two signs helps Caia to create an apparent connection between the hearing world and the Deaf world.

The other aspect in “humor from a linguistic perspective” that Sutton -Spence and Jo Napoli identified in their investigation goes under the title “playing with the internal structure of signs”. The show “Pa Pa” presents three beautiful examples that match with this category. Here the list:

1. “Caia's education as a commuter” video 7;
2. “The digital hearing aids” video 17;
3. “The disable hand” video 23r.

In “Caia's education as a commuter” video 7 Caia creates a new sign, such as “growing up as a commuter” from the South of Italy to the North. A new sign is created thanks to the incorporation of the sign “growing up” with its gradual vertical movement into the sign “to commute”. In this way the visual idea of elevation in stature (growing up) goes together with the long span of time of Caia's experience as a commuter. This linguistic strategy is related to the fact that it is connected with the lie of its contents. Caia didn't commute everyday from his parents' house to the Institute. Like many Deaf children, he had to leave his family to study in a Institute for the Deaf far from their provenance. Caia' seriousness in the narration gives more credibility to his lie.

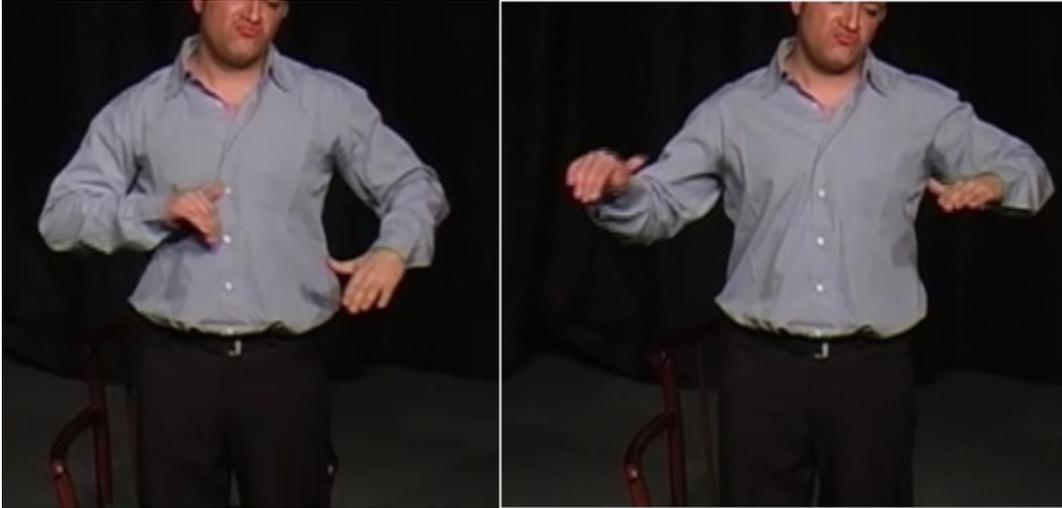


Figure 31. From “Caia's education as a commuter” video 7. The creation of the sign “growing up as a commuter” is articulated with the right hand that gradually goes up with its movement. The left hand articulates the verb “growing up” as a way to stress the connection with the new sign. In this way Caia highlights the long span of time of his experience as commuter from Sicily to the North Italy. The information provided about his personal childhood is a lie which is well built with details and a serious tone.

In video 17 entitled “The digital hearing aids” we see the creation of a new sign for the word “stupid/ignorant”: Instead of articulating it on the forehead as the traditional sign requires, Caia does it in front of his mouth as a way to stress the ignorance of the Deaf character for his “inability to speak”. The humor stems from the modification of the tradition sign “ignorant” in its space feature (forehead space\ mouth space).

In addition, this funny sign is even more amusing if we keep in mind what Caia said about the exclamation “How stupid” in video 12 “Caia and the sign 'Deaf” where he pointed out that Deaf people use this expression very often and with a different nuance in meaning in comparison to hearing people, who find the word very offensive. The fact that in this specific contest (video 17) Caia uses it too toward another Deaf person, makes us remember that he said before: he is Deaf too. He is one of them. He expresses himself in the same “Deaf way”.



Figure 32. From “The digital hearing aids” video 17. The new sign “ignorant” is articulated close to the mouth instead of its traditional location, close to the forehead. Caia is narrating the story of the guy who is enthusiastic for his new digital hearing aids. He is happy because he can detect the sound of the car's engine. According to Caia he is simply ignorant because the noise was created by the fact that in the car there was a novice driver who forgot to switch from the first gear.

The video “The disable hand” video 23r is the last and the most clear humorous example of a sign created thanks\with sign language and its “internal structure”. Caia invents the sign “disable hand” as a response to the common idea that Deaf people are disable because they are not able to hear \speak. The traditional sign for “disable” is produced with a B configuration of both hands that seem to cut the two forearms, while the new sign simulate the cut of both wrists. The sign refers to hearing people who have amputated hands because they do not know how to sign in LIS.



Figure 33. From “The disable hand” video 23r. The new sign created by Caia as a humorous response to the idea that Deaf people are disable because they cannot hear or talk well. The sign shows that hearing people have amputated hands. What is even more empowering of this sign is the fact that in the show the sign is articulated by a hearing guest at the wedding who discover by himself the limits of his hands. By looking at Caia's face we can see how the hearing person looks surprised by his own discover.

The third aspect that characterizes Caia's humor is **the use of the mainstream hearing language**. It is a specific use of language that appears as a form of rebellion. Because this feature was not found in other studies of Deaf humor, it could be considered as a specificity of Caia's performance. Instead of performing a hearing character while he\she utters some “offensive” sentences, Caia prefers to insert in his narration some of those “hearing sentences” as they really were his personal opinion in the story. Thanks to the ability of the actor, a bias in gains a different nuance: a negative label turns out to be an empowering response against discrimination. In other terms, this aspect of the show can provide specific examples of what M. J. Bienvenu described as “Response to oppression” (cf chapter1, above). Theories of superiority and relief theories should find in these moments of revenge interesting material for their statements. This technique occurs in the following videos:

1. “The sick deaf people” video 3b;
2. “The annoying deaf people”, video 3c;

3. “Caia and the sign 'Deaf “ video 12;
4. “The deaf and the two hearing writers” video 18d;
5. “The argument with the hearing” video 23s;
6. “The difference between Deaf and hearing during the buffet” video 23;
7. “Deaf, hearing people and noise” video 23k;
8. “Greetings” video 23y.

The most clearest example of this strategy is performed in video 3b “The sick deaf people” where the concept of signers as “disable or crazy people” is visually displayed by Caia in a exaggerate pace and with signs that cover his face as they are random gestures, instead of being the expression of language. The fact that he translates the sentence in LIS gives power to Sign Language, as a real language that can express everything, even hearing insults. Another example that we have detected has been explained in our previous analysis of “The annoying deaf people”, video 3c, where a narrow-minded hearing perspective is uttered in LIS and implicitly criticized with wit. In that video Caia seems to reply to the prejudice that “deaf people are annoying” by saying that Deaf children were not annoying: it was the educational system provided to them which was not adequate to their needs. Caia with his final punch line (“Italian grades”, video 3d) about his bad marks in Italian invites us to consider a wider frame of observation before judging people's lives.

“Caia and the sign 'Deaf', video 12 is another good example of this humor strategy. In this video, he says that “Illness spreads everywhere” because nobody is hearing in his and his girlfriend's family. What should have been a negative aspect, thanks to Caia's narration, becomes a positive element: all members of the family have something in common. In “The deaf and the two hearing writers”, video 18d the Deaf guy wants the hearing guy to keep offering free drinks. He plays with the patronizing behavior of many hearing people who approach Deaf with pity. In order to have free drinks the Deaf guy says that he can prove his sickness as a Deaf person with extreme conviction.

Another sentence that hearing people use when they refer to the Deaf is that “Deaf people are touchy”. Caia decides to use this sentence during his narration with nonchalance while

he is describing two different approaches between a Deaf person and a hearing one. Caia signs “The Deaf is touchy” during the argument between a Deaf guest in the kitchen and his hearing guest in video 23s “The argument with the hearing” and in video 18d “The deaf and the two hearing writers” at the second 0:33, when the Deaf guy tries to explain the hearing that, regardless his deafness, they can still communicate with each other. A touchy behavior seems more of an intelligent response to the weird reaction of the hearing person, who after his spontaneous question to the Deaf turns out to say “Oh nothing,nothing!” just because his interlocutor is Deaf. Caia remarks the contradiction in giving to the Deaf the opportunity to express his point of view with these words “Why nothing, nothing, if you asked a question? If you ask me a question don't say nothing”.

The same strategy is even sharper in its empowering intent when Caia decides to act as a pig because hearing people at the wedding think that Deaf guests are like pigs. Deaf people are considered impolite in their manners while they eat at the buffet table (see in “The difference between Deaf and hearing during the buffet” video 23). In this case Caia doesn't use some “hearing sentences of words” but a real visual performance to denounce the mainstream ideas about Deaf behavior. This choice makes things funnier, as well empowering for the Deaf community.



Picture 34. From “The difference between Deaf and hearing during the buffet” video 23. Caia visually performs the idea of the hearing guests at the wedding about Deaf manners: Deaf people are noisy and eat like pigs.

This is exactly what we can see in “Deaf, hearing people and noise” video 23k, where hearing people complain about the noise made by the Deaf guests in the kitchen. The noise is compared to many broken arms and bones by hearing guests, who were sitting outside chilling out for a while. Caia shows us this image by making the complain of the hearing ridiculous and exaggerated. In the last part of the show “Greetings” video 23y Caia confirms to the audience that Deaf people are genuinely sick because they take three hours to leave the house of the new married couple. His detailed description of the “goodbye scene” shows how hilarious and funny Deaf people are when they can be themselves and stay together. Again, a negative opinion is twisted into a positive feature.

The forth aspect that characterizes Caia's humor is another feature that did not receive mention in the previous Deaf humor literature: Caia uses **subtle, implicit humor full of criticism towards the hearing world**. It pertains the style of narration with a specific selection of words and visual nuances in language. In these occasions Caia prefers a more accommodating, cover way to express his opinion, instead of using an overt and dry message against the mainstream culture. At this regard, Nancy Walker wrote her personal point of view about women writers over 150 years of their humor writing in America in “American women's literary humor from colonial times to the 1980s. Redressing the balance.”. Her reflections might be something that we could also apply to Caia's humor strategy:

Consequently, the degree to which aggression and hostility are over in particular woman's humorous expression depend on the degree of gender equality permitted in her society, as well as on her audience and on those who control the dissemination of her humor. For example, as Apte's research confirms, women are generally more free to ridicule men and make sexual jokes when the audience is exclusively female than they are when it is mixed.

Because of the constraints on women's expression, which in most cultures have included taboos against women's appropriation of sexual subject matter and language, women's humor has been described as more gentle and genteel than men's, more concerned with wit than derision, more interested in sympathy than ridicule, more focused on private than on public issues. These attributes, along with women's greater reliance on verbal devices of understatement, irony, and self-deprecation, have enabled women to mask or defuse the aggressive component of humor making, thereby minimizing the risks, involved in challenging the status quo (Walker, 1988: XX-XXI).

From an outsider point of view, the problem with this feature is that because of its implicit nature, the humorous effect could not be detected or totally ignored by hearing investigations that focus on Deaf humor. Because of the presence of a double-level of analysis, those implicit comments could be considered as simple descriptions with no humor, missing in this way the real intentions of the author².

The aim in this work was to identify those moments of subtle humor that occurred in the show. At least in two stories of the show this technique is very evident:

1. “The digital hearing aids” video 17 (in connection with video 17a “Must hear well”);
2. “Pus in the eyes and in hearing ears” video 19;

Let's start with video 19 “Pus in the eyes and in hearing ears”. Here Caia uses double edge-irony. In the scene he describes the Christmas lunch with his relatives, by focusing on the moment when he was dancing with his cousin. He tell us that the aunt said “Stop this music, stop dancing”. Then he signs “Being Deaf I don't understand her. I made a research, I am Deaf but I am like them. I am Deaf that's for sure. I made this research looking in the ears of hearing people like my fatty aunt, and I've understood what?”. What we see, here, is a shift in the narration from the aunt's words during the Christmas party to a scientific discover about the difference in hearing and Deaf ears. Then the performance ends with no reference at all to the lunch with hearing relatives. If we don't carefully analyze his performance, the story will probably look only a bit messy and weird. No irony or wit strategy would be appreciated. What seems a possible interpretation is that Caia doesn't feel

² According to Walker the implicit humor is something that we can find since in the first published woman poet, Anne Bradstreet, who was born in 1612. Bradstreet “adopts an overtly deferential tone about her work to appease her potential critics, but at the same time, the irony with which she presents her anomalous position as a woman poet serves to undermine both the seriousness of her apology and the logic of the patriarchal attitudes that would deny women minds, voices and talents in anything other than domestic work”(Ivi: xxiv).

Anne Bradstreet 's double irony is evident since at the beginning of her writing “The Author to her book” in “The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America”:

Thou ill-form'd offspring of my feeble brain,
Who after birth did'st by my side remain,
Till snatcht from thence by friends, less wise than true
Who thee abroad, expos'd to publick view;

confident to openly criticize hearing people, especially if they are relatives or members of the family. “Being Deaf I don't understand her” is a humorous sentence that highlights that Caia is on purpose playing the part of a person who cannot listen and understand what is going on in the surroundings. The “fat aunt” feels uncomfortable to see him dancing, but Caia doesn't say it openly. However, we receive his real opinion when he says “I made a research, I am Deaf but I am like them”. There is no reason to make him stop dancing because he is Deaf: he is like his cousin that after the lunch wants to have a little bit of fun. If we understand this, we will also appreciate in a different way his provocation about the scientific difference in ears between Deaf and hearing people. Maybe Caia didn't hear his aunt's words but he could see, understand what was really going on: the aunt felt ashamed of Caia's desire to dance with his cousin. The story is not a description of a Christmas lunch with the family that degenerate in a funny scientific discovery. It is the narration of a hearing person making Caia feel different from the others because of his Deafness. It is a witty and clever response to the hearing sense of superiority that stands out in some daily occasions in the life of a Deaf person.

In another occasion, video 17 “The digital hearing aids” and video 17a “Must hear well”, the use of implicit humor against the hearing world.

Caia makes his position clear, but only at the end of the story as it was not possible to make his statement before. Since the beginning, he makes us believe that the butt of the joke will be the Deaf guy with new digital hearing aids. And during the entire story we laugh at the Deaf guy for his misunderstandings. Instead of replying to a simple question “what time is it?” he keeps talking with the hearing person about his ability to hear and about the price of the new hearing device. He looks to us naive, ridiculous, and even snobbish when he refuses to listen to Caia's information about LIS. His happiness appears ridiculous too, when he looks impressed by the sounds of his surrounding, while he cannot have a real conversation with people at the end. He is also called “stupid\ignorant” by Caia. Only at the end of the story and of our laugh, Caia says that it is the doctor's fault. The tone is serious and the shift of topic does not have any humorous effect. It seems at this point that we have watched the entire story from a hearing perspective. It is only from that moment to the end of video 17a

that we finally see Caia's opinion. He gently sits down on a chair (as often hearing people do in his show), talking about how many Deaf people are negatively influenced by hearing expectations and rules. Then doctors are imitated while they put hearing aids in an ear without any care. They treat the person as she/he were not human, when they push with strength the device inside the ear. Caia likes to stress that the hope of the doctors is that the Deaf person will hear very well, as the Deaf guy in the story. As Pirandello would say, in this story Caia displays that it is the frame that is wrong (doctors, the hearing idea that Deafness means only “not being able to hear”), and not the Deaf guy, who is the accomplice, the victim, as well the person with whom we all laughed at for a while.

The two stories are not the only occasions where this specific use of the language is used. Caia expresses his opinion in an implicit way with another strategy that I called “finger strategy” in the second chapter of this work. He suddenly interrupts his narration, looking at his finger with a concentrated gaze as he is not the storyteller of the show anymore. In these few seconds of visual silence, he doesn't say something as he would like us to do the thing for him. Because we have already explained each single video in the previous chapter, here it will be presented the simple list where this strategy appears. In general it has always with the same intent: Caia remains silent to visually warn the audience that something is missing, which should be said, noticed. What is missing, though, is more a celebration of visual potentialities of the Deaf rather than a critic of some hearing behavior. Or in other terms, in these occasions Caia highlights the visual weakness of the hearing world without saying it, but showing it.

1. “The launch of rice” video 23e;
2. “The buffet” video 23g;
3. “The light in the kitchen” video 23j;
4. “The hearing workers and the alarm clock” video 23n;
5. “Chatting and water” video 23p.



Figure 35. From “Kisses in the church” video 23d. Caia uses the visual “finger strategy” in the second picture. It is an interruption of his speech as a sort of warning to the audience that something will be missed, not expressed. Maybe it is a visual strategy to make the audience think about what he had already said. In this specific case the reference is to the priest who does not watch the new couple while they kiss at the end of the wedding celebration in the church.



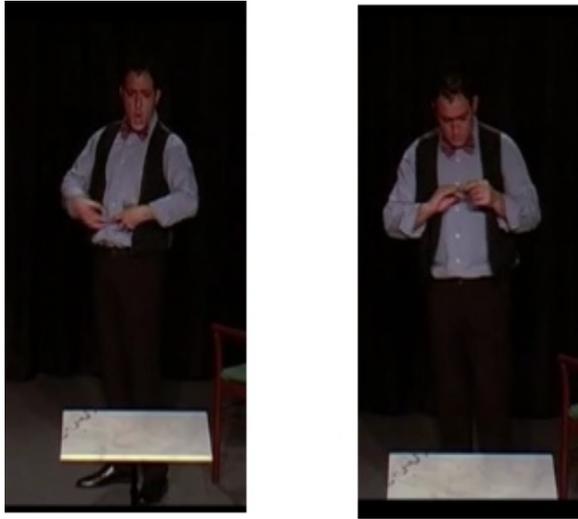


Figure 36. From “The buffet” video 23g. In the first two pictures we can see a sequence of actions made by the Deaf guest at the wedding: they are very hungry and they look at the banquet with desire. In the third and fourth pictures Caia describes how hearing guest behave, by saying that they are very hungry. He specifies with irony that “it’s the same” of what Deaf people do with the consequent “the finger strategy”. What he doesn’t say is that hearing people and Deaf people do not behave at the same way. He doesn’t need to tell us this: he shows us the difference.

In “The hearing workers and the alarm clock” video 23n the “finger strategy” seems a direct critic to the hearing world which is not curious, interested, or simply does not care about how Deaf people live. The question made by his coworker is a clear demonstration about it.



Figure 37. From “The hearing workers and the alarm clock” video 23n. In the first image Caia is referring to the flashing alarm that is on the table, which helps Deaf people to wake up, as well to

warn that the telephone is ringing. With the “finger strategy” he wants to stress that hearing do not know anything about these materials. No surprise, that they asked to him how he was able to woke up in the morning to come every day on time at work.

Caia's subtle and implicit humor is something that would need more investigation. It would be interesting to know, for example, the reasons of this strategy that influenced Caia during his narration. Why a discrete message from a member of a minority would have been more effective, strategic if expressed with vagueness rather than with an open challenge to the ruling hearing system? It might be related to the mixed audience of hearing and Deaf spectators attending in his show. The fact that both “insiders” and “outsiders” constitutes Caia's audience might have influenced his style in the storytelling as well his script. The hope is that new researchers will contribute with valid reflections and speculations for a better understanding of this element of subtle and implicit humor.

The last aspect that has been detected in Caia's humor is related to the functions of humor. This area of investigation involves reflection that usually come from the fields of sociology, anthropologist, psychology while they focus on the recipients of humor, the dynamics between of small or big groups, the social and cultural contest where the humor phenomenon occurs . In “Dead jokes and sign language humor” Sutton-Spence and Napoli wrote a paragraph about it with the title “What is Deaf humor for” where some reflections about the functions of Deaf humor (see 1.6.3) has been reported . Also, in the Bienvenu's contribution Deaf humor is often considered by the author like a “response to oppression” that appears another way to classify humor for its functions. At this regard, I decided to detect in Caia's performance the main functions of humor. With the information gained from the Deaf humor literature, I detected three functions that could go under the umbrella of “what is Deaf humor for?” in the Caia's show. A similar vocabulary to Sutton-Spence and Jo Napoli has been used with the intent of creating a more organic and compact area of reflections. In “Pa Pa” show humor is used with the aim of:

1. Showing negative or less-desirable aspects of the Deaf culture.
2. Supporting the in-group, by attacking the out-group
3. Laughing *with* the Deaf members of the community, bonding with them.

One aspect adopted by Caia in his performance consists in showing negative or less-desirable aspects of the Deaf culture. It is a very interesting strategy that seems to facilitate his relationship with the audience, instead of keeping distance from it. “We are all Deaf” is often the sentence that follows or precedes his critic of the Deaf community. In this way, the audience becomes protagonist in the show without feeling the entire responsibility for the negative aspects described in the stories thanks to the feeling of being “one of them”. On the other side stimulates, Caia makes the members of the community revisit and reflect upon their negative manners or behavior. Caia criticizes the Deaf for educational purpose. Walker (1988: XXIII) writes something similar about the use of humor by women against other women as a strategy to stimulate them to reflect upon the patriarchy: “The use of humor by women against women, when it is used to advance ideas that might conflict with those of the male establishment about women's roles and prerogatives, represents a step toward empowerment rather than capitulation”.

This strategy detected in “PA-PA” was only mentioned by Sutton-Spence and Jo Napoli (2012: 313) without examples or other details about it: “Deaf humor may also attack the in-group in order to show up the less-desirable aspects of the culture”. Here, their reflection receives support with some explicative examples.

In Caia's show four videos that can support the previous literature:

1. “I don't trust you”; video 9;
2. “Sign Writing” video 10;
3. “The Deaf girl at the disco with the hearing boy” video 18a ;
4. “L'indennità di comunicazione” video 23q.

In the video 23q “L'indennità di comunicazione” Caia criticizes Deaf people for using that money improperly: instead of using it to pay the interpreting service or for other communication facilities, Deaf people prefer to spend it for vacation or to buy cars, televisions or other consumption goods. Another example where Caia, as a Deaf person, feels free to display bad Deaf manners is “Sign Writing” video 10, when he imitates those native signers who do not care about knowing anything about linguistics in LIS for the simple reason that they are native signers. Video 9 “I don't trust you” goes in the same

direction when Deaf people are portrayed as insecure interlocutors who prefer to trust hearing people's statements instead of those signs articulated by the Deaf.

The second function that appears in Caia's show and that was mentioned by Sutton-Spence and Jo Napoli is the creation of humor as a way to support the in-group, by attacking the out-group, that the most of the time can be identified with hearing people. Humor attacks those who are against LIS, or those who consider Deafness as the inability to hear, deprived by its cultural nuances. Some of them are aggressively ridiculed and portrayed like idiots or simply ignorant. As the well-known actor and comedian Hal (Interview, March 2005) claims "I most of humor that Deaf people like is based on hearing people making idiots of themselves". However, in this regard, the kind of audience that attend the show has crucial importance: it may influence the style, the facial expression of the actor when reaching the butt of the joke. In a mixed audience of hearing and Deaf people, the Deaf storyteller might be more discrete and indirect in his attacks and critics, but this is not always the case. Bahan (2006: 45) reports an interview of an anonymous Deaf performer, who aims to share common stories among Deaf people with the audience, regardless of the fact that this could make hearing people upset:

I remember after one performance where I was telling various stories about Deaf people overcoming odds and portraying hearing people as ignorant and sometimes as losers, several hearing people would come up to me and remark that I hated hearing people.[] I can easily decide to drop telling these stories and modify my stories to make them happy, but I will not do that, because my stories are from my culture. I will tell it as it is whether they like it or not.

Because we do not know Caia's audience during his performance, here we can only provide some examples in his show where this aspect occurs.

Here the list of the videos that contains this feature:

1. "So, there is a doctor, hearing parents and a speech therapist" video 14 ;
2. "The speech therapist" video 15;
3. "The Deaf girl at the disco with the hearing boy" video 18a;
4. "The deaf and the two hearing writers" video 18d;

5. “The doctor's 'What does that mean'. video 23a;
6. “The hearing workers and the alarm clock” video 23n;
7. “The argument with the hearing” video 23s;
8. “Greetings” video 23z.

In “The speech therapist” Video 15, Caia's narration bring us to take the side of the patient child, while the speech therapist method of teaching appears to us not effective at all for the education of the Deaf child. At the end of the story her steady and hysterical behavior as well her blind commitment was not rewarded either by the Deaf child or by the hearing society in her dreamed international conference. Her manners appears ridiculous while she spits everywhere on the table. On the contrary, the child looks patient and sweat.



Figure 38. From “The speech therapist” Video 15. The patient Deaf children while he follows the speech therapist's instructions.

In “So, there is a doctor, hearing parents and a speech therapist” Video 14 at the seconds 11-18 we laugh seeing hearing people act in a weird way. We see the contrast between Italian hearing parents worried for their child's deafness while they gesticulate “there is no, there is no sense of hearing”, and the doctor with his confident posture while he utters his

words “the situation is not so terrible, not so tragic”.



Figure 39. From “So, there is a doctor, hearing parents and a speech therapist” Video 14. Caia imitates the doctor that is reassuring hearing parents about their child's Deafness. He maintains his eyes closed with sense of confidence and psychological distance from their anxiety and concerns.

Again in “The doctor's 'What does that mean'. Video 23a, Caia belittles doctors for their authority and confident attitude. Instead of admitting that they don't remember the result of $2+2$ they prefer to reply with irritation and sense of pride that the question is unclear and annoying.



Figure 40. From “The doctor's 'What does that mean'. Video 23a. In the left side we see a Deaf person asking to the doctor the sum of $2+2$ with curiosity. On the right side we see the nervous reaction of the doctor while he replies to the unusual question “What does that mean two plus

two?”.

Also hearing approaches to Deaf people seems ridiculous, as they are inspired by fear for diversity. That is what happens to the hearing guy at the disco (Video 18d) when he comes to know that he asked a question to a Deaf person. His words “O nothing, nothing” after he asked the question display a weird hearing behavior as well his fear to approach a person “different” from his\her expectation.

Also in this video, at the end there is another funny occasion where hearing people are portrayed in a hilarious way: when the Deaf guy leaves the disco to go home without say anything to the two hearing boys, who keep writing to each other believing that the other person is Deaf. The audience see two hearing people writing to each other with no reason anymore. We laugh at hearing's ingenuity, while we appreciate the wit of the Deaf guy, who turns out to be the winner of the scene.

In “The Deaf girl at the disco with the hearing boy” video 18a the hearing boy gets mocked by the Deaf girl because, even though she had already explained to him that she is deaf, he thinks that their inability to communicate is caused by the loud music. His ingenuity and lack of information about the “existence of Deafness” is something that the deaf girl tries to cope with only for a while. Then, she starts talking too him just to tease him. The situation gets absurd. We laugh when we see that the hearing guy tries to speak louder to improve their communication with no results. We laugh when he cannot understand anything but pretend to understand the “non-conversation” in any case. The hearing person here is the clear butt of the joke. After all his attempts, the Deaf girl does not even accept his courtship. Caia tells us that it was because of his bad skin full of pimples, adding insult to injury.

A further example is provided by Caia in the video 23s “The argument with the hearing”. He describes the boring way adopted by hearing people to approach a Deaf person. Hearing people just say “is everything ok?” with thumb up, without any sort of variation throughout the years. “The hearing workers and the alarm clock” Video 23n gives another interesting example full of cultural tips. Caia wants to communicate that hearing people are ignorant

because they do not know anything about the Deaf world. His coworkers believe that he sleeps with an interpreter every night in order to get up on time in the morning at the factory. Because they saw the interpreter with him at the workplace, they thought that she was also sleeping with him. Caia explains everything to them at the end of the story. The entire show ends (Video 23z) in a way that could summarize this second humor aspect summarized here: a hearing person loses a verbal fight with the Deaf guy with whom he had an argument before. Deaf people are the winner thanks to their sensibility and smart comments.

By using the words of a Deaf person we should summarize this humorous strategy as follows:

What right do hearing people have to impose on us the dominance of their world? What is even worse, there are Deaf people who strongly uphold hearing world values on us Deaf people. They go around saying you have to learn to speak because it is a hearing world. It's strange because while they use that phrase, they are denying their own existence as a Deaf person. If the world is not theirs, then who are they?

I am proposing for us all to go out and say, 'Hell, it's our world, too!' Of course I cannot deny the fact that there are more, many more, hearing people than there are Deaf. But I can and will deny them the right to claim the world (Bahan, 1989, pp. 45-7).

The third and last function in the show that could go under the label “What is Deaf humor for?” is the use of humor to laugh *with* the Deaf members of the community, like Marc Renard did in his cartoons, instead of laughing *at* them. Humor is perceived as a way to facilitate solidarity with the others and to bond with the others. As we can see in “PA PA” Caia shares with the audience some personal experience that go beyond his individuality to meet beliefs, attitudes and frustrations of the Deaf world and its entire culture. It is what Gloria Kaufmann (1988) in her introduction defines as “the pickup humor”, an important element of feminist humor:

Feminist humor is richly various, but a dominant undercurrent is the pickup, an obvious reversal of the putdown. [...] Such humor is a healthy contrast to mainstream humor, most of which seems to knock people down or to laugh at people who are already down. Laughs come from a perceived superiority of the hearer or reader to the character ridiculed. Pickup humor, however, is based on

equity. Through it, we do not laugh *at* people, we bond *with* them (Kaufman & Blakely, 1988: 16).

Caia wants to inform; make people conscious of what Deaf people had to go through in their childhood, their education, their daily lives; he wants to stimulate and challenge Deaf behavior and their pride to be Deaf and signers. His show can be seen as a therapy for some people who found in his performance their problems, concerns and identity. As Bienvenu (1994: 16) pointed out “Humor is one way people share their perceptions of the world, express different levels of intimacy, and find comfort in knowing that others share their beliefs and their sense of humor”. Several videos can be chosen from the show as examples of this perspective. In general, moments of cohesion are created when Caia uses the two signs “pa pa”, while he also introduces the sign “we” or “Deaf people” giving an explanation of what he is talking about. On these occasions common Deaf behavior is described by Caia in a funny way: things should be done in a way, but Deaf people behave in a different one. In this perspective humor is based on some expectations that the Deaf seem to ignore or not consider as possible options. We see what they were suppose to do and what they really do, indeed. Deaf manners brake our expectations by creating laughter. This is what happens in:

1. “The numeric precision” video 3a;
2. “Waiting” video 4;
3. “The interruption in speeches” video 5;
4. “Yes, that thing” video 8;
5. “The Deaf and the bar tender” video 18c;
6. “Greetings” video 23y.

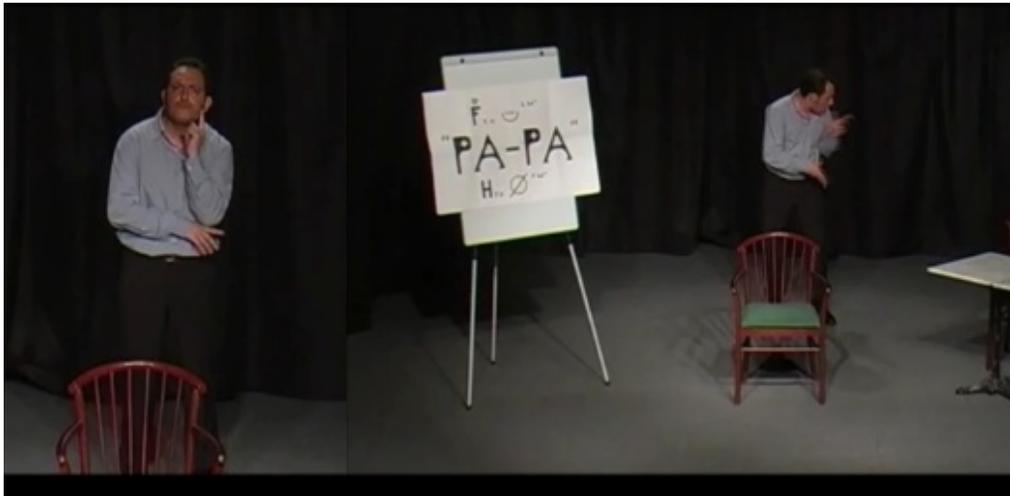


Figure 41. From “Waiting” video 4. On the left side we see what usually people in the audience do while they wait for the entrance of the actor. On the right side we see what Deaf people do: they communicate to each other as much as the occasion allows them to do. The opportunity to attend a show performed by a Deaf performer is an exiting and rare atmosphere.

For example, they should have left the house of the new married couple when the woman asked for it (as hearing guests did in few minutes) while they left the house after three hours because their engagement in conversation seemed more important. They should be able to wait in silence instead of constantly talking to each other when Caia leaves the show for few moments. They should be more precise in their conversation, but they often give vague information. They should avoid the vulgar sign “buttock” with that kind of high frequency that they naturally use. All these Deaf manners are performed in a way that makes Deaf people laugh to themselves, while at the same time identifying or not with those situations. Theories of relief would probably talk about a moment of relief of tension when common laws “imposed” by the ruling hearing society are substituted by the Deaf manners. As Margaret Mead said about laughter:

Laughter is one of the easiest human responses to evoke by someone saying what everybody is feeling but nobody has expressed it or is quite willing to say it in that way. It isn’t that the remark is wrong to make, but that there is discrepancy between what is correct to express and what everybody feels. The discrepancy is the thing that produces the laughter. People laugh when the cork is pulled from the bottle (1952:6).

Caia has this direct explicating role during his humorous narration. He presents himself as a sort of scapegoat for the Deaf community as well a simple member of the Deaf community. It is in this frame of mind that we can really appreciate the title of the show “PA PA” and all the cultural tips that it conveys with humor and irony: Deaf people do it their way, which is funny.

Our synthesis of Caia's humor is here concluded. “Pa Pa” show has proved to be an important contribution to the current humor debate about Deaf humor. With all its humor strategies it has provided support to the current literature with new examples and materials to analyze. Four main features has been detected in the show:

- The visual nature of humor
- Humor from a linguistic perspective
- The use of the mainstream language
- The adoption of implicit and subtle humor.

In addition, three main functions of humor seem to characterize the Deaf LIS performance:

- Showing negative or less-desirable aspects of the Deaf culture
- Supporting the in-group, by attacking the out-group
- Laughing *with* the Deaf members of the community, bonding with them.

All these aspects received in this chapter an explanation with specific references to the videos. In this way the “Pa Pa” show took part of the humor discussion, making the Italian Deaf community at the center of the scene. The hope now is that new studies will participate to enrich and advance the current reflections and investigations, in a debate that still counts on sporadic surveys and theoretic frameworks.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

This work wanted to be a specific contribution to the current debate about humor, by turning the light on Deaf humor and its potentialities as a form of expression and communication. The little literature available in this area (chapter 1.6) comes from the fields of Linguistics in Sign Language and Deaf Studies that has reported examples of jokes or famous humorous stories among the Deaf community, general reflections, and also many pictures of imitations, caricatures of people, inanimate things and animals. A different position was taken by Rutherford where in her paper (1.6.4) she decided to focus on a single joke, by investigating all linguistic and cultural nuances that were deeply connected with the humorous text. However, in the whole literature about Deaf humor no references to the main traditional theories of humor were founded. The authors that delved with Deaf humor (1.6) seem to have operated their analysis with material that comes from studies of Deaf folklore (Deaf lore), Deaf culture, Sign language studies, rather than from established theories in the humor panorama. This is particularly evident in the analysis of the joke provided by Rutherford where jokes theories or linguistic theories did not receive any consideration in it.

My investigation moved from the conviction that this gap must be reduced. Because of the specialist knowledge that Deaf humor studies require, those who knows Sign Language and Deaf culture should be the main protagonists involved in this challenge. Their agenda should work on creating a more stimulating and participating debate that questions other fields of humor with the aim of creating a more solid theoretical background in the area of Deaf humor studies. At this regard, the humor analysis of Caia's show attempted to accomplish this goal when that was possible, by recalling theories of humor that has been elaborated in the past without any connection with the field of Deaf Studies, Deaf culture

and Sign Language. That's what happened in several moments in Caia's performance where many expressions of humor strategies has been detected thanks to the indication offered by Bergson in "Le rire". Looking at videos 4-8-11-18a-18d-23s we relied on Bergson's explanations about the technique of exaggeration, the strategy of repetition, the reciprocal interference of independent series, as well what he defined the "the comic element in forms to that in gestures and movements" .

However, the interdisciplinary sensibility that guided this work received less consideration when there was the necessity to create a transparent and fruitful connection with the previous surveys in the Deaf humor literature. In fact, this work had the necessity not only to find a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that could support a humor analysis in a Deaf performance, but also the need to connect with interlocutors who could interpret and understand Deaf humor thanks to their expertise in Deaf culture and Sign Language. At this purpose Caia's humor analysis followed step by step the recent debate started by Sutton-Spence & Jo Napoli, Bienvenu, Rutherford, Bouchaveau. The topics that has been investigated in Caia's show has been already studied by the these authors. Also, at this purpose it has been used the same terminology adopted in the previous literature in order to create a common ground and a more organic field of study.

This is what occurred with the choice to focus on the functions of humor. Sutton-Spence and Jo Napoli wrote a significant paragraph entitled "What is Deaf humor for?", where several functions of humor were listed or described. Caia's humor analysis tried to follow their indications, providing three main aspects that occurred in the performance under the same umbrella "what is Deaf humor for":

1. Showing negative or less desirable aspects of the Deaf culture;
2. Supporting the in-group, by attacking the out-group;
3. Laughing *with* the Deaf members of the community, bounding with them.

The same happened with the focus on two aspects of humor already described in the other studies, such as "the visual nature of humor " and "humor from a linguistic perspective". Caia's show provided many examples in both features, by enriching the recent debate and the discussion with multimedia materials and new reflections.

For what concern "humor from a linguistic perspective" the tripartition provided by Sutton-

Spence and Jo Napoli was the most important point of reference for our analysis, as it can be noticed in the lists elaborated in chapter 3. The hope is that their linguistic classification and all Caia's signs and examples in support of it would be maintained and studied with more accuracy in the next investigations.

Another possible option to that tripartition could be to adopt Bergson's distinction between “the comic *expressed* and the comic *created* by language” in his reflections about “The comic element in words” that has been summarized in chapter 1.2. A classification about Deaf humor created *by* and *thanks* to sign language might be an interesting way to classify linguistic humor in the next analysis because it will represent an important step toward a meaningful dialogue between the fields of Deaf studies and those related to humor's literature.

In addition, other potential connections between “humor from a linguistic perspective” and other more general theories of humor (that we described in the first chapter) could concern an analysis of the Veatch theory (see chapter 1.5) and its concept about how our personal moral values in language and its malformation can influence the perception of humor phenomena. Here the specific excerpt:

Many people are likely to see plays on grammar as unrelated to any kind of moral System — especially linguists, who often view language as an affectless intellectual System (no coincidence!). Language is often thought of as a purely cognitive System, and for this reason, puns and linguistic humor are often proposed as counterexamples to the present theory. [...] On these grounds, humor based on linguistic malformation appears to fit with the present theory, since it is indeed true that a moral violation may be perceived to occur. People have moral opinions about language: they think it ought to be a certain way, and they care about it (199-200).

If we consider Caia's performance it would be interesting to investigate how his linguistic humor is perceived by the Deaf audience in relation to the “moral value” that influence their humor perception and appreciation. In other terms, the different proficiency in LIS in the Italian community could be a crucial factor to determine how “the proper way” of using LIS and Italian, as well its violation for a humor effect can really affect the sense of humor of the audience.

Also, the linguistic game played by Caia could provide support, as Attardo pointed out (1994: 50), to Relief Theories if they intend the linguistic frame, where humor operates, in

terms of relief of freedom from linguistic rules, from the rigidity of the proper language and from the principle of Cooperation elaborated by Paul Grice. In a more general contest, the hope is that Sign Language with the potentialities of its visual-gestural channel will enter soon in the next reflections about “humor *in* language” in the most traditional theories of humor, enriching with its peculiarities the current debate.

However, these few proposals here suggested should be taken in consideration in the next studies of Deaf humor keeping always in mind what Rutherford pointed out, such as the fact that the linguistic perspective can be deeply appreciated only if we are able to go beyond the linguistic game with Sign Language, where Deaf culture lies with its complexity. For example, the Caia's invention of the sign “disable hand” is a funny creation that hits the mind and the emotions of the audience only if the new sign is inserted in the contest of oppression experienced by the Deaf. The new sign “disable hand” represents an empowering response to the hearing prejudices toward diversity that cannot be separated by the linguistic game operated thanks to sign language. “Humor from a linguistic perspective” represents a crucial form of communication that is able to celebrate the pride for Sign Language as a form of creative expression, as well to reflect the conflict and the shadows between the hearing world and the Deaf one.

If the visual nature of humor and the use of linguistic humor were two features already encountered in the previous Deaf humor literature, two other aspects has been found in Caia's performance with no references in the previous analysis. The first humor strategy consists in the ironic use of pejorative hearing sentences toward the Deaf, like “annoying deaf people”, “touchy”, “they use gestures like animals”, “sick people”, “they eat like pigs” “they are noisy” during the narration. This strategy has been described in the analysis as “use of the mainstream language”. It is an interesting aspect that can be understood only if investigated within the Italian contest of the Italian Deaf community. In Italy sign language is not recognized by the government as a real language. LIS is still labeled as rude gestural code that does not have the same linguistic and semiotic features of spoken languages. If we keep this situation in mind, we will understand that the use of those sentences in LIS is an empowering moment for their language. Sign language can denounce hearing discrimination, while also making Deaf members proud of their languages and of their

visual potentialities. It is even more powerful when hearing prejudices and offensive words become a visual performance, like for the sentences “eating like pigs” “Deaf people are noisy”. An offense expressed by language is translated in a visual reality thanks to Caia's body language ability. He creates visual situations of those hearing prejudice, by making “the hearing complain” less offensive and more ridiculous, stupid. In all these occasion it stands out how the visual-gestural channel is celebrated with humor and pride by the Italian actor.

The second and last main aspect that characterizes the show is the use of subtle humor. Important at this regard were the reflections of several authors, mentioned during the analysis of Caia's, because their contributions helped to detect this kind of humorous form of communication. It is the case of the analysis made by Lawrence W. Levine (1977) ad Langston Hughes (1966) for their elaborations about Black culture and consciousness, and Apte Mahadev (1985) for his anthropological study of laughter. However, Nancy Walker with her interest in American feminist humor can be considered the main point of reference for the analysis of Caia's language. Her reflections about double-edge irony and about the subversive language adopted by women leaded the interpretation of Caia's narration. The hope is that this humorous strategy in language will be better investigated in other Deaf humor performances to understand what bring a Deaf storyteller to adopt a subtle, less aggressive humor strategy. Is it the position, “a little a part position“as a member of a minority culture that triggers this specificity in language, or is it a pragmatic response to the type of audience that attend a Deaf performance to influence the use of a more implicit language? What other reasons can influence the storyteller?

With all proposals, questions, and problems that this work has highlighted, the hope is that new and more studies in Deaf humor will enrich and strengthen this new area of investigation. It would be another step toward the comprehension of the beauty of the Deaf world and all its shadows that only humor with its creativity can bring to light. This work tried to accomplish this challenging goal as many theoretical investigations about humor might have done: it started staggering with a messy ball of thread, such as with the awareness that humor would have been a difficult conundrum to disentangle. It continued with more confidence by finding some red threads that facilitated the seam of some

theoretic key words in the Deaf humor field. It finished with the smiling recognition of the limits of my disable hands.

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