

**The Funny Side of Cross-Cultural
Adaptation:
A Grounded Theory Study of the Role of
Humour in the Adaptation Process of
Spanish Migrants Living in Ireland**

By

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Volume I of II

DECLARATION

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A Grounded Theory of the Role of Humour in the Adaptation Process of
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the role of humour in cross-cultural adaptation as an interdisciplinary study in the discipline of Intercultural Studies. A review of existing theories of humour presents the complexity of humour studies, which then links to relevant theoretical models of cross-cultural adaptation. This linking draws out the connections between Humour and Intercultural Studies. The occurrence and relevance of these connections is based on the analysis of primary research data from a study on the role of humour in the adaptation process of Spanish migrants living in Ireland.

Data collection is by semi-structured interview of twenty participants and analysis is by grounded theory using Atlas.ti software. Analysis details their views on the cultural facets of humour and the positive and negative effects that humour may have on the process of adaptation to Irish culture. Results demonstrate that humour is a key factor in the cross-cultural adaptation process. Humour is a powerful intercultural tool, an essential element in the acquisition of intercultural competence and a fundamental part of an emerging intercultural identity.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Affective, Behavioural and Cognitive
BCE	Before the Common Era
CAT	Communication Accommodation Theory
CCA	Cross-Cultural Adaptation
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis
EVT	Expectancy Violation Theory
FNT	Face Negotiation Theory
L2	Second Language
SSTH	Semantic Theory Script of Humour

PART I Contextualisation

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This opening chapter introduces the study by presenting its aim, objectives and research questions, the reasons for this research, its context regarding existing research and the Grounded Theory rationale that underlies its structure. Finally, the chapter provides the reader with a Road Map for the dissertation which accounts for the influence of its methodological approach in the presentation of the study and outlines the contents of each chapter.

1.1 Presentation of the study

This study investigates the role of humour in intercultural communication and the impact of such role in the cross-cultural adaptation process of 21 Spanish migrants living in Ireland. By gaining insight into these processes this project aims to provide a major contribution to knowledge in the scarcely-researched area of humour in cross-cultural adaptation.

The objectives of this study are:

- To gain a better insight into the process of cross-cultural adaptation by examining the specific role of humour within this process.
- To investigate the functions of humour in intercultural communication and the uses of humour as an intercultural tool.
- To study the nature of humour in the development of intercultural competence.
- To make new connections between Humour Studies and Intercultural Studies from an interdisciplinary perspective.

The research questions of this project are:

1. What is the nature of humour in intercultural interactions?
2. What impact does it have in the process of cross-cultural adaptation?

These specific questions relate to studying the role and nature of humour in intercultural communication, the processes underlying humour communication within this context, and their connection to the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

This approach is based on significant socio-cultural reasons for examining the relationship between humour and cross-cultural adaptation. Firstly, humour is an essential aspect of everyday interactions, and such interactions are at the heart of cross-cultural adaptation. However, cross-cultural adaptation brings about new codes and sources for humour that influence everyday interactions and intercultural communication. Secondly, the communicative, social and psychological functions of humour make it a powerful tool in intercultural communication which may minimize or emphasise socio-cultural boundaries and other challenges brought up by cross-cultural contact. Finally, it is vital to state that cross-cultural communication implies a comparison of cultural contexts. This qualitative study will detail intercultural communication between individuals in the socio-cultural contexts that Spanish sojourners and migrants living in Ireland find themselves in.

1.2 Background to the study

1.2.1 Context of research within cross-cultural adaptation studies

This study is concerned with intercultural contact and cross-cultural adaptation. It draws upon and adds to an existing body of research exploring these processes. Most

existing conceptions of cross-cultural adaptation can be grouped in two categories: micro and macro level (Kim 2001). Within Social Science, macro-level inquiries have been common among anthropologists who first defined acculturation as an area of study dealing with ‘those phenomena which result when groups of individuals have different cultures and come into first hand contact with subsequent changes in the original pattern of either or both groups’ (Redfield et al. 1936:149). Micro-level inquiries have observed changes in the target culture as a whole, and sociological studies which have focused on the minority-majority relations in which minority groups are structurally integrated in the political, social and economic systems of the host environment. In the micro level, social psychological studies have focused on the intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences of newcomers (Berry 1997; Kealey 1989). In Intercultural Studies attempts to integrate these complementary perspectives have led to theoretical models such as Kim (2001) and Ward et al. (2001), which explain the adaptation experience of an individual taking into consideration both micro and macro processes and outcomes. Informed by these intercultural theories, this study takes into account such processes.

In addition, at the micro-level most cross-cultural adaptation studies can be categorised depending on the kind of individuals or groups studied, so there is a division between studies of immigrants and refugees who are living in a culture ‘*more or less* permanently’ (Kim 2001:14, emphasis added) and studies of the short term adaptation linked to sojourners who are considered temporary residents (Kim 2001, Ward 2001). This distinction reflects the fact that the adaptive experiences of individuals on long-term and short-term stays are different in significant ways, such as their self-expectations and the expectations placed upon them by the host-society.

However, regardless of this distinction, certain experiences of cross-cultural adaptation are shared by any individual undergoing such a process (Kim 2001, Ward 2001). Also, the distinction between immigrants and sojourners can be quite clear in certain cases but become quite blurred in others. For example, Ward et al. point out that ‘sojourners voluntarily go abroad for a set period of time that is usually associated with a specific assignment or contact’ (2001:21). However, that set period of time can be uncertain or postponed, with many starting their cross-cultural journey as sojourners but becoming long term residents who may or may not have specific plans for leaving or staying. In this context, many individuals or experiences cannot be classified by this categorisation.

Moreover, economic factors such as the mobility within EU member states which do not require residence or working permits for sojourners/ migrants from other EU countries contribute to this grey area encompassing many people who, as one participant of this study said, ‘have a foot on each country’. These issues can be linked to the notion of transnationalism which refers to those ties and interactions linking people or institutions across borders of nation states (Vertovec 1999; 2004); and particularly to the *hybridisation of migrants’ identities*, and which results from migrants’ engagement in the process of constructing identities that transcend national boundaries or maintaining several identities simultaneously to more than one nation (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc 1992). With an intercultural perspective, this phenomenon has been observed in the context of Irish migration by Storch (2008), who links it to migrants’ feeling of betweenness or ‘living between two cultures’ (Storch 2008:14), as well as in a study of Bosnian refugees in Ireland who ‘choose to keep one foot in each place’ (Halilovic-Pastuovic 2007:163). With these

issues in mind, the present study opts for using the word ‘migrant’ as an all-encompassing term that includes all participants who are living and working in Ireland on a temporary, permanent or undefined basis.

1.2.2 Irish migration

The need for cross-cultural adaptation research is particularly salient in the Irish context since the last two decades have transformed Ireland in a paradigmatic case of social transformation (Munck 2011). Firstly, the economic boom which took place from 1995 to 2000 known as Celtic Tiger triggered an abrupt change which led to social, political, cultural and economic changes which turned a perceived ‘monocultural’ society of mass emigration into one diverse globalized society of immigration with 188 nationalities living in Ireland around the year 2000 (Munck 2011). Secondly, the global recession which began in 2008 imposed further challenges to these rapid changes. Now, as Munck point out:

with the Celtic Tiger in the distant past, Ireland is settling into a period of adjustment and no doubt some amount of economic recovery in due course. When a renewed cycle of development occurs, Ireland’s population will be very different to what it was after pre-Tiger (Munck 2011:20)

Empirical studies focused on migration to Ireland in these period of time shed light on the complex process of social and cultural transformation unleashed by these changes by examining issues such as identity, social transformations, and politics (Fanning 2007; Fanning and Munk 2011). These studies can in turn shed light on the experiences of migrants around the world and the wider processes of social transformation. In this context, Ireland provides ‘interesting lessons in terms of economic development, political democratizations and cultural diversity in the 21st century’ (Munck 2011:20).

The present study examines the experiences of 21 Spanish migrants living in Ireland in 2010, and reflects on their cross-cultural experience in Ireland. By examining the role of humour in participants' experiences, the findings of this study contribute to understanding the nature of the transformations underlying these social changes. In addition, the cross-cultural comparison implied in the study of migrants' experiences in the present study is linked to Spanish society and the push factors linked to emigration which has influenced participants' experiences. Finally, although the findings of this study do not represent the rest of the Spanish population living in Ireland, it seems appropriate to point out that 6794 Spanish people were included in the Irish census for 2010 and that this group of immigrants has not been considered in the extant literature of migration to Ireland. In sum, Irish migration entails a remarkable context for the study of humour in cross-cultural adaptation.

1.2.3 Critiques to current approaches in intercultural research: a call for qualitative studies with a novel approach

Recent key critical studies by Chirkov (2009) and Rudmin (2009) have analysed current approaches to the study of acculturation in order to make recommendations for future research. These studies point at the heavy use of quantitative studies within this area of research and explore the reasons for the need of more qualitative studies. For example, Chirkov (2009) offers a critical analysis of the philosophy and methodology of the current research in the psychology of acculturation based on the analysis of 42 articles published between 2001 and 2006. On these grounds, Chirkov suggests that

- The phenomenon of acculturation is beyond the capacity of the quantitative approach applied by the majority of empirical studies.

- There is no attention given to culture in acculturation research and researchers do not have writing models of culture that could guide them in this area.
- The complexity of the process requires diverse thinking about the subject, including a variation of methodological approaches and multi-disciplinarity.

In this context, Chirkov (2009) calls for qualitative interdisciplinary studies of an exploratory nature and points to the need for exploring culture through the analysis of shared ideas, norms and rules that constitute cultural reality and set up the normative meanings of events and actions in the home and home society. The need of an interdisciplinary approach has been highlighted by other authors such as Odenhoven et al. (2006) who point at the need to merge theories and frameworks from acculturation research and social psychology. In addition, Odenhoven et al. (2006) point out the need to take into account transnational contact in models of acculturation.

Although the present study is framed in Intercultural Studies and has a focus on communication, it observes acculturation from an interdisciplinary perspective which accounts for notions linked to social psychology. In addition, it is exploratory in its nature following an inductive interpretative methodology and although it has operationalized the notion of culture by equating it to nationality, this study acknowledges such limitation and explores participants' perception of such notion.

To end this section, it seems relevant to mention the issue of researcher ethics, which is emphasised by Davis et al. (2000) in a review of the approaches to the study of ethnicity in intercultural relations. The authors point out that communication

researchers have rarely reflected seriously on the effects that their ethnic identities might have on what they see and interpret in their study. In contrast, rather than acknowledging the intrusion of researchers' life histories and cognitive styles in their research processes, positivists claims have been rationalized and legitimated by supposedly value-neutral methods of data collection and interpretation. In addition, the authors suggest that participants should be seen as co-producers of knowledge, participating in a study that seeks to understand their experience since they can contribute to the study by providing input that guides the research, the interpretation of the data and its validation. Finally, Davis et al (2000) call for a greater emphasis on researching the lived experience of research participants in intercultural research. As research models focus on individual transformation in intercultural communication, the present study of Spanish migrants answers such call. Moreover, this study has accounted for subjective interpretative nature of the research process, the need for reflexivity and the role of participants as active contributors to the research process. Accordingly, these issues are discussed in greater detail in chapter 2 which explains the methodological approach of the study.

1.2.4 Intercultural theories and humour

Although the specific role of humour in the process of cross-cultural adaptation has not been investigated in detail, the significance of humour in cross-cultural adaptation and intercultural interactions has been highlighted in many intercultural theories such as Ting Toomey (1999,2005), Gullahorn (1963) and Kim (2001). For example, Gullahorn's (1963) and Ting Toomey's (1999) models explain cross-cultural adaptation in terms of developmental stages. Both models include a humorous stage where sojourners learn to laugh at their cultural faux pas and start to

realise that there are pros and cons to each culture; they are able to compare both cultures in realistic terms; they no longer take things as seriously as in the hostility stage and they can look at their own behaviour and reactions objectively (Ting Toomey 1999). However, it can be argued that humour is equally relevant in all the stages of the process as the data analysis and discussion chapters will suggest. In fact, as discussed in chapter 7, Kim (2001) links humour to intercultural communication and intercultural competence. It should also be noted that many studies have focused on international student experiences which began with Oberg's 1960 model; despite being popular has been criticized for not being a comprehensive explanation of intercultural adaptation (Ward 2001). It is overly simplified, and does not allow for the uniqueness of individual experience (Adler, 1975). Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of the significance of humour in these theories points at the significance of humour in daily interactions and draw attention to the communicative, social and psychological functions triggered by humour and hint at its impact in individual and situational variables affecting cross-cultural adaptation.

In addition, recent communication studies have analysed the nature of humour in intercultural communication, pinpointing and examining the communicative functions of humour in this context. For example, in a qualitative study Miczco and Welter (2006) examine affiliative and aggressive humour in relation to intercultural communication concluding that humour aggressiveness is positively related to ethnocentrism but that humour orientation is negatively related to intercultural communication apprehension. In other studies of a qualitative nature, Cheng (2003), Habib (2008) and Bell (2002; 2005; 2007), examine the role of humour in interactions between interlocutors of different cultural background showing the ways

in which speakers collaboratively manage the organizational, interpersonal and ideological aspects of humour in conversations. These studies reveal the use of humour as an intercultural tool due to its communicative functions in intercultural conversations, which are explored in further detail in relation to the findings of the present study in chapter 8. However, these studies, which are based on cross-cultural encounters, focus on non-native speakers' interactions, and tend to set aside any analysis of their process of cross-cultural adaptation or even the role of their first language and culture in intercultural interactions. Bell (2007), who has a clear focus in second language learners, points to this area of research as an area that requires further investigation, an important point for the present study on Spanish migrants in Ireland.

Hofstede (2009) has also observed the relevance of humour in communication due to its communicative, social and psychological effects. He considers that humour is universal and can be related to basic human drives. He points at cross-cultural differences in the process of joking, joke style or a joke's content, though his cross-cultural comparisons rely on jokes remembered by the author or taken from others sources such as Davies (2002). On this basis, the author emphasises that his statements which are based on examples 'should only be taken as invitation for study rather than as a set of conclusions' (2009:1). However, Hofstede (2009) points out that a joke's style and content are related to themes that are salient in a particular culture, and that jokes carry culture as a form of folk tales suggesting that ethnic jokes, which oversimplify stereotypes reveal and reinforce existing stereotypes. Hofstede's (2009) article is limited in its claims as it rests on 'educated guesswork' (Hofstede 2009:12). Nevertheless, it emphasises the relevance of humour

communication in intercultural interactions and the need for more research in the area of humour across cultures.

1.3 Definitions and basic concepts

1.3.1 Defining humour

Even though humour is a common aspect of everyday life, it seems to be quite a problematic theoretical concept to define. Scholars from various disciplines, such as psychology (Goldstein 1972; Martin 2007), sociology (Davies 1998; Kuipers 2006), philosophy (Schopenhauer 1819, Cohen 1999), linguistics (Raskin 1985, Chiaro 1992, Attardo 1994) and anthropology (Apte 1985) have explored the issue of humour. The problems involved in defining humour are such that they have cast doubt on the idea that an all-embracing definition of humour can be formulated (Attardo 1994). Having this in mind, it is nevertheless important to distinguish the common meanings that the word humour comprises which are relevant to the study of humour in any discipline. Humour is a broad term that refers to anything that people say or do that is perceived as funny and tend to makes others laugh, as well as the mental processes that go in both creating and perceiving such an amusing stimulus, and also the affective response involved in the enjoyment of it. (Martin 2007:5). On the one hand, humour relates to the subject of humour and its intended effects. On the other hand humour refers to what is commonly known as “sense of humour”; the aptitude and disposition of mind to recognise humour.

Within humour research, the perspective taken for its definition depends on the purpose for which it is used. In the field of literary criticism for instance, there is a need for a specific categorisation (Lang 1988); whereas socio-linguists have often

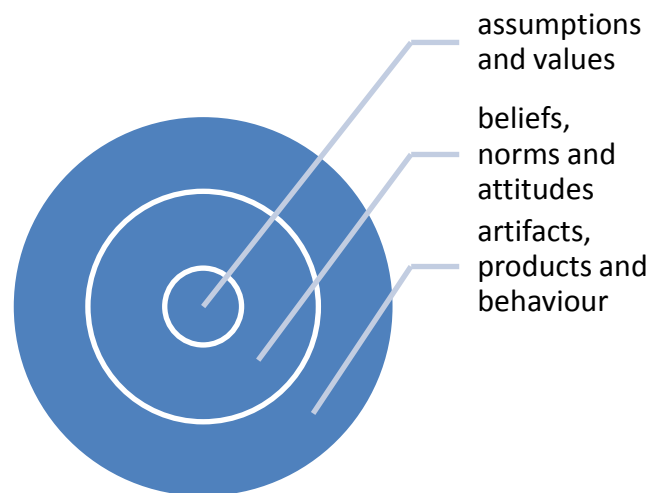
accepted broader definitions, arguing that whatever evokes laughter or is felt to be funny is humour (Attardo 1994). This latter approach means that humour can be deduced from its effect. However, laughter as such is not necessarily a condition for humour and with this in mind, it would be more appropriate to consider humour as whatever is intended to be funny, even if it might not always be perceived or interpreted as such (Attardo 1994). This approach taken within the field of linguistics is very useful for a study of humour and its variable manifestations in different cultures. However, the effects of humour should not be ignored when dealing with communication as there are many instances of humour that do not arise from an intended act (Martin 2007). This fact is particularly relevant in the field of intercultural communication where miscommunication can often lead to unintended humour. Therefore both intention and effect should be carefully examined when observing the nature of humour in cross-cultural situations. In this context, the present study acknowledges the impossibility of an all encompassing definition of humour, but adopts a working definition of humour in order to avoid ambiguity regarding analysis and discussion of findings. This definition, which takes into account both intention and perception, considers humour as both the quality of something to elicit amusement and laughter and the ability to appreciate something as funny. The first definition relates to the subject of humour and its intended effects. It would consider humour as anything funny, witty or amusing that has the capacity to make people laugh. The second definition would deal with what is commonly known as sense of humour; the aptitude and disposition of mind to recognise humour

1.3.2 Defining culture

In the discipline of Intercultural Studies, culture can be defined as the understanding that people have of their universe and their behaviour in that universe. This frame of

reference is a complex pattern of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meanings that are shared to varying degrees by the members of a community (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Anthropologists such as Edward T Hall (1976) have used the image of an iceberg to explain culture. Elements of culture which are easily notice such as clothing, language, gestures, food, music or rituals are represented by the upper portion of the iceberg. The portion below the surface stands for those elements which are not as obvious such as values, beliefs and attitudes. Alternatively, the image of an onion and its different layers is used by other authors (Trompenars 1998, Hofstede 2005) to describe the different layers of culture (see *Diagram 1*).

Diagram 1 The Different Layers of Culture



As illustrated in *Diagram 1*, the outer layers are composed of the artifacts and products as well as patterns of behaviour. The next layer encompasses the beliefs, norms and attitudes of that culture. The middle of the onion represents the underlying cultural assumptions and values. As the most hidden layer, these aspects

of culture are much harder to recognise and understand, but all of the other layers are built upon the centre of the culture onion.

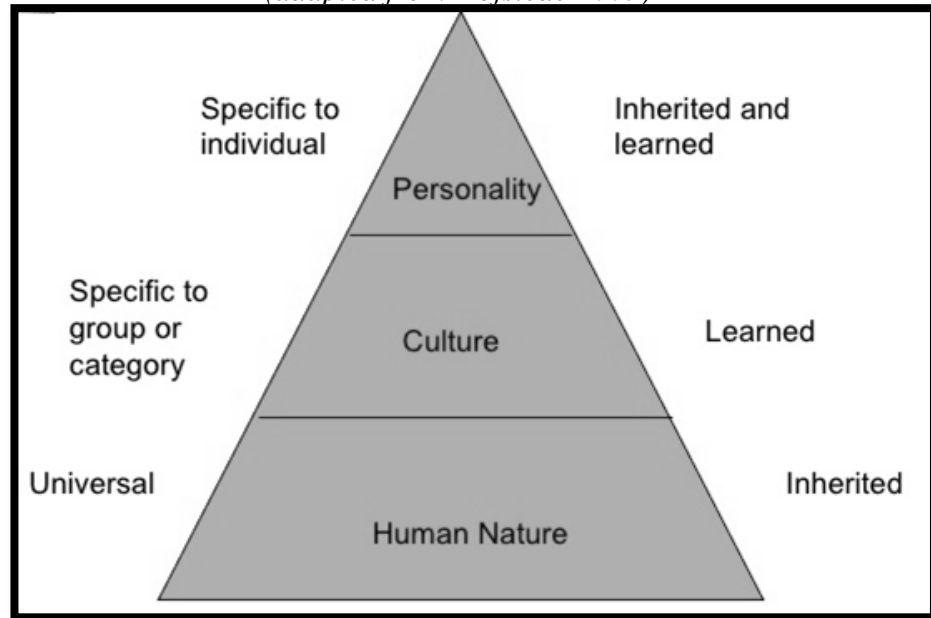
To understand a culture is to comprehend how its underlying values accord with its respective norms, meanings and symbols as it is the underlying set of beliefs and values that drive people in terms of their condition, behaviour and affect (Ting-Toomey, 1999). In the context of this study it can be noted that while humour is an element of the outer layer of culture, it also relies on the deeper layers of culture such as beliefs and values. Hence, to understand humour in relation to culture it is essential to refer its use with a culture's underlying norms and values.

Another relevant feature of culture in the context of this study is that culture can be viewed as the interplay of similarities and differences (Triandis 1995). Human beings share many commonalities but as groups of people or societies exhibit many differences. Culture evolves within each society characterising its people and distinguishing them from others, but most people are not really aware of how culture affects their behaviour until they come into contact with other cultures.

In this context, Hofstede (2005) uses the metaphor of 'collective mental programming' in relation to culture where the 'software of the mind' or how thinking and reasoning, differentiates groups from each other. However, he sees culture as a collective phenomenon derived from one's social environment, and distinguished from human nature on one side and individual personality on the other as seen in *Diagram 2*.

Diagram 2 Culture as mental programming

(adapted from Hofstede 2005)



Nevertheless, these categories are closely interlinked and its borders are a matter of discussion among social scientists (Hofstede 2005). The human ability to feel fear, anger, love, joy, sadness or the need to associate with others and play are part of human nature, which is universal. However, how individuals deal and express these feelings is modified by culture, which is learned and specific to a group or society. In addition, the personality of an individual is unique, based upon traits which are partly inherited, partly learnt, and hence influenced by culture. Although members of a group or society share their culture, expressions of culture-resultant behaviour are modified by individual personality. Hofstede's idea of culture can be linked to the nature of humour due its universal, cultural and individual traits, which are discussed in detail in chapter 8.

1.3.3 Cross-Cultural Adaptation

The term cross-cultural adaptation is rooted in the concept of acculturation, an area of studies rooted in cultural anthropology. Acculturation refers to those phenomena which result when groups of individuals have different cultures and come into firsthand contact with subsequent changes in the original pattern of either or both groups (Redfield, Linton and Herskovits 1936; Kim 2001). This definition refers to the macro or group level of cross-cultural adaptation, and has been the focus of anthropological and sociological studies. At a micro level, acculturation refers to the change in individuals whose primary learning has been in one culture and who take over traits from another culture (Marden and Meyer 1968; Kim 2001). However, the macro and micro levels are closely interrelated and so although the present study focuses on cross-cultural adaptation at an individual level, it takes both levels into consideration and its findings can also be linked to the macro level.

The term cross-cultural adaptation will be used in this study to refer to the process of adapting to a new culture, which is a complex process through which an individual acquires an increasing level of fitness or compatibility in the new cultural environment (Kim 2001). Such a process involves challenges and changes triggered by differences in core beliefs, values, and norms between the home and the host cultures, as well as the sense of social incompetence in responding to the new setting appropriately and effectively (Ting- Toomey, 1999:245). The adaptational approach in Intercultural Studies considers that there is more in the process of adapting to a new culture than just coping with stress and learning social skills. An exchange with another culture may lead to psychological growth and a better understanding of who one is and what one values. Intercultural experiences present individuals with

opportunities for exploring values, traits, attitudes, and identities that they may not have realised if they had not confronted a new socio-cultural environment. In other words, although the encounter with another culture can cause psychological disturbance, it also offers a vehicle for personal growth, an opportunity to develop self-awareness and intercultural sensitivity. This approach which is discussed in further detail in chapter 7 underlies the enquiry of the present study.

1.3.4 Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication refers to the communication process between members of different cultural communities. It involves the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols between individuals to accomplish shared meanings and it is affected by specific cultural factors such as beliefs, values and norms (Ting- Toomey 1999:17). Intercultural communication lies at the heart of the cross-cultural adaptation process, just as communication is the very process through which individuals acquire their original cultural patterns during childhood. Both the quality and the quantity of communication activities undertaken in a new environment are crucial to the success of an individual's adaptation.

1.3.5 Culture and national culture differences

Most people belong to a number of different groups and categories of people at the same time. Hence, the same individual can be associated with different 'levels of culture' including national, regional, religious or linguistic affiliations, gender, age or social class (Hofstede 2005). The concept of culture applies more to societies as developed forms of social organization than to nations established by geographical borders. However, many nations do form historically developed geo-political entities

even if they consist of clearly different groups. Some integrating factors are a dominant language, a national education system, a national political system and even national representation in sports events. On the other hand there is a tendency for ethnic, linguistic and religious groups to fight for recognition of their own identities, if not for national independence (Hofstede 2005). In research on cultural differences, nationality needs to be used with caution. However, it is often the only feasible criterion for classification on a matter of expediency in order to obtain data such as statistics about a population (Hofstede 1997). The present study acknowledges the limitations of using nationality as a proxy for culture, although it is used in the disciplinary context of Intercultural Studies where it is accepted research practice. The cultural diversity of both Spanish and Irish cultures has been taken into account throughout the research process, and it is evident in the findings which refer to participants' tendencies to identify with Spanish culture as well as their conceptualisations of aspects of Irish culture. Specifically, inquiry on participants' recognition of their cultural identity has been sought and is facilitated by the qualitative nature of this study.

1.4 Theoretical perspective, Grounded Theory rationale and structure of the study.

It is clear that any attempt to comprehend the nature of cross-cultural adaptation goes beyond disciplinary boundaries. Within this context, the study of humour emphasises the need for such an interdisciplinary approach as different disciplinary perspectives involved in humour research such as psychology, philosophy, linguistics and sociology can contribute to a better understanding of the role of humour in cross-cultural adaptation.

In addition, the innovative nature of this study calls for the use of an inductive methodology such as Grounded Theory, a methodological approach to the analysis, which allows the researcher to work inductively from the data in order to generate a theory (see Chapter 2 for a detailed explanation). This methodological approach does also ‘allow for the exploration of various theories in different fields and the emergence of new or deeper interpretations of intercultural experiences’ (Sheridan and Storch 2009:1) by examining data detached from preconceived theories. Hence, from a theoretical perspective, the study approaches issues emerging from data with theories from two multidisciplinary fields: Intercultural Studies and Humour Studies. Accordingly, a Grounded Theory methodological approach underlies the structure of the study, which entails that the data analysis chapters precede the literature review, which is itself based on those theories which are most relevant to the research findings. Therefore, these later chapters include not only a literature review but a discussion of existing theories in relation to the findings, which leads to further examination and better understanding of both. As explained by Charmaz (2006:126), the literature review in a grounded theory is written ‘in relation to your grounded theory.’ The following section outlines in further detail the contents of each section and chapter offering a Road Map to this Grounded Theory study.

1.5 Road Map to the study

1.5.1 Contextualisation

Part I contextualises the study by introducing its background in regards to existing literature and the methodological approach to it. More specifically:

- Chapter 1 introduces the study by pointing out its research objectives and relevance in the context of current research. In addition, this chapter

contextualises the study in relation to migration and cross-cultural adaptation studies in general, reveals the scarcity of studies dealing with humour and cross-cultural adaptation specifically, and introduces some empirical studies which have linked Humour and Intercultural studies. It also offers a review of problematic concepts such as humour, culture, intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation providing definitions which encourage consistency and transparency regarding any further references to these concepts. Finally, the chapter accounts for the methodological rationale linked to both research process and presentation of the study, its findings and their relation to existing literature, which concludes with a Road Map for the reader.

- Chapter 2 reveals the methodological framework that contextualises the data analysis chapters. It includes a thorough discussion of the methodological approach taken, which is Grounded Theory, its application to the present research and a reflexive examination of the role of the researcher.

1.5.2 Data Analysis

Part II is dedicated to the data analysis. Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 present the findings of the research. These findings which are grounded in the raw data are presented by using categories and concepts that emerged from data analysis. In particular:

- Chapter 3 focuses on participants' perception of Spanish and Irish humour, their proximity and its impact in participants' cross-cultural adaptation. It focuses on two areas which expose a higher level of distance: humour targets and humour intricacy.

- Chapter 4 deals with participants' perception of Spanish and Irish culture and their proximity with a focus on the role of humour within this context. It distinguishes three areas of analysis: the environment, attitudes and behaviours, and values.
- Chapter 5 focuses on participants' perception of cross-cultural differences in interactions between Spanish and Irish people including differences in communication style and content which influence humour communication and can have an impact on both intercultural interactions and on cross-cultural adaptation.
- Finally, chapter 6 examines participants' use of humour in intercultural interactions and its consequences in their cross-cultural adaptation by presenting a theoretical model of the processes involved in humour communication in the context of intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation. The findings presented in the chapter point at the development of humour competence as both an essential attribute for effective intercultural communication and a descriptor of cross-cultural adaptation. These ideas, grounded in the data analysis are further developed and discussed in relation to existing theories in the next part of the study.

1.5.3 Discussion

In line with a Grounded Theory study, Part III discusses the findings from a theoretical perspective and draws a conclusion to the study. Chapters 7 and 8 revisit the research questions and discuss the findings by examining them through the lenses of relevant Intercultural and Humour theories. This discussion offers insights to both the research findings and the discussed theories. In addition, these chapters

contextualise the study within two complex areas of research and pinpoint its contribution to this field, which is further discussed in chapter 9. In these terms:

- Chapter 7 examines the findings with regard to the intercultural theories. This discussion highlights the role of humour in intercultural interactions and its impact in cross-cultural adaptation.
- Chapter 8 contributes to further insights of the findings by examining them in relation to humour theories, paying special attention to the communicative, social and psychological aspects of humour communication in the context of intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation.
- Chapter 9 concludes the presentation of the study. It reviews its contents, evaluates the research findings, discusses its contribution to existing research and identifies areas for further study.

Overall, the structure of this study follows a Grounded Theory approach as it delays discussion of theory until after data gathering and analysis. This Road Map thus signals this ordering of the study from a grounded Theory perspective.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

"It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts."

Arthur Doyle (1891:2) *Sherlock Holmes*

"There is a difference between an open mind and an empty head"

Dey 1999:251

2.1 Intro

This chapter provides a discussion of the methodological approach adopted for the research. The chapter starts with a discussion of the natural history of the research, followed by the reasons behind the choice of qualitative research. Next, the chapter focuses on the specific interpretative methodology used in this study: Grounded Theory analysis. This is followed by a discussion of the research procedure and the use of Grounded Theory methods applied to the study. After that, the chapter deals with the limitations of the research, a discussion of the challenges faced by the researcher and the need for reflexivity in qualitative research.

2.2 Natural History

I developed a personal interest in humour in communication after living in Ireland for six years and experiencing the ups and downs of cross-cultural adaptation. As a central part of everyday communication, humour and joking are an essential part of my interactions with people regardless of their ethnicity or nationality. Being a fluent speaker of English, language limitations have been a rare cause of frustration since I moved to Ireland. However, after living in Ireland for a period of time, the realisation that I could not use humour in a conversation with Irish people the same

way that I used it in a conversation with Spanish people became somewhat frustrating. Was this a lack of communicative competence? Why did I have a problem expressing my humour if I did not have a problem expressing myself in other ways? Would I ever be able to express myself in Ireland the same way I did in Spain? As a source of frustration, these issues were somewhat getting in the way of a sense of complete adaptation to my new society.

The above reasons lead me to research humour and cross-cultural adaptation in my MA dissertation. The research I carried out for that study suggested that the fact that within an Irish cultural context I cannot express my humour in the same way I do in a Spanish context is not in itself a sign of non-adaptation. The frustration that this issue was causing me was, however, such a sign. It is due to language and cultural issues, and not my own limitations, that certain features of the humour I share with Irish people would never be the same as with Spanish people. Accordingly, the way I express my humour with people from other cultures or nationalities, including Spanish speaking-ones, may differ in nuances to the way I express it with people from Spain.

I believe that the resources a person has to communicate humour vary depending on context, such as work, family, friends, etc. However, I do not see this fact as a limitation to intercultural communication, but, quite the opposite, as I now see this range of resources as a trait of one's unique intercultural competence and identity. My MA dissertation offered an interdisciplinary overview of the role of humour in cross-cultural adaptation. It examined the positive and negative effects that humour can have in cross-cultural adaptation from social, psychological and linguistic perspectives. The modest dimensions of the study did not allow major contributions to this subject, but proved that this line of research which connects humour and

intercultural studies, can not only contribute to Intercultural Studies and the understanding of cross-cultural adaptation but also to Humour Studies and the understanding of the nature of humour.

2.3 A qualitative approach to the study

Qualitative research refers to any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedure or other means of quantification (Strauss and Corbin 1990). According to Silverman (2005), qualitative researchers search for details in people's interactions and understandings, while quantitative researchers seek detail in certain aspects of correlations between variables. Ragin (2004) points out a key difference when he mentions that quantitative researchers work with a few variables and many cases, while qualitative researchers rely on few cases and many variables.

Other authors have highlighted how qualitative research can provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena as it is concerned with the ways people construct, interpret and give meaning to their experiences (Creswell 1998; Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Flick 2002; Silverman 2000). Within this view, Creswell (1998: 14) has defined qualitative research as:

an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.

In his definition Creswell also emphasises the complex narrative that takes the researcher into the multiple dimensions of a problem and displays it in all of its complexity (Creswell 1998: 14).

Reasons for conducting qualitative research have been outlined by many authors (Creswell 1998, Denzin and Lincoln 200; Flick 2002; Silverman 2000). These reasons validate the choice of qualitative research as the most appropriate approach for the current research study and are as follows:

1. The nature of the research questions:

1. What is the nature of humour in intercultural interactions and

2. What impact does it have in the process of cross-cultural adaptation?

These specific questions call for a study of the role and nature of humour in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation, examining the effects that cross-cultural adaptation may have on a person's use of humour, and vice-versa and aiming to understand the nature of the phenomenon. The nature of these questions calls for a qualitative and exploratory approach to the research, which aims to obtain rich data, and analyse it in an interpretative way which can shed light on these questions.

2. The topic needs to be explored: variables are not easily identified and theories to explain behaviour of participants are not yet available (Creswell 1998).

3. A qualitative study will contribute to existing qualitative research in Intercultural Studies and cross-cultural psychology, particularly as there is a call for in-depth qualitative studies

4. The need to present a detailed view of the topic as the panoramic view that a quantitative study would provide will not shed light to the research problem (Creswell 1998:18).

5. To emphasise the researcher's role as an active learner who can tell the story from a participant's perspective view rather than an expert who passes judgement on participants (Creswell 1998:18)

All these considerations lead towards a qualitative approach for this study, which rather than intending to be statistically representative, intends to explore the experiences of a group of Spanish people living in Ireland and the role of humour within those individual experiences.

2.4 Grounded Theory as research methodology

2.4.1 An outline of Grounded Theory

The intention of a Grounded Theory study is to generate theories from data by working inductively. Strauss and Corbin (1990: 23) provide a concise definition of the grounded theory approach:

A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents...it is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Data collection, analysis and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to an area is allowed to emerge.

Simply put, a Grounded Theory Research study would typically first define the research questions or topics, secondly implement a methodological protocol for data collection, thirdly code the data and analyse it and fourthly generate a theory. Next, subsequent phases would emerge based on generated theories. This may lead to the re-examination of existing data or a new methodological protocol for generating, coding and analysing additional material. This interactive data collection and constant comparative analysis creates increasing

levels of abstraction until a theory is generated. Charmaz (2006: 2) defines this process where:

Grounded Theory methods consists of systematic yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories grounded in the data themselves.

These explicit guidelines are a major asset of Grounded Theory as they show researchers how to follow up interesting data with specific techniques for a methodological process of analysis which includes coding and memo writing. Coding means attaching labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about. Coding sorts the data and aids comparisons with other segments. Memos are analytic notes about codes, comparisons and other ideas. Through studying the data this way, a researcher defines ideas that interpret the data as analytic categories, as he/she precedes categories become more theoretical. The researcher builds levels of abstraction directly from data and subsequently gathers additional data to refine emerging analytic categories culminating in a 'grounded theory' or '*an abstract theoretical understanding of the studied experience*' (Charmaz 2006:4).

Grounded Theory as a methodology was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1965,1967) who aimed to move qualitative research beyond descriptive studies to provide abstract, conceptual understanding of the studied phenomena. Moreover, the developed written guidelines made analytic guidelines accessible. Considering the theoretical and methodological developments of the last four decades, Charmaz (2006) provides new updated guidelines highlighting the importance of their flexibility when taken into practice. She also emphasises the active role of the researcher, and diverting

from the original method of Glaser and Strauss (1965,1967) where the researcher explores reality objectively, Charmaz emphasises that a grounded theory is constructed through the researchers' past and present involvement and the interaction with people, perspectives and research practices (Charmaz 2006). This flexible and updated non-positivist approach is more suitable to the nature, conditions and limitations of the current study as it allows the researcher to aim to see the world as research participants do from the inside, in order to understand how their world-views are constructed. Also, this perspective means that the researcher has to be reflexive and aware of his or her position, ethnicity and any other matters relevant to the research which may influence how the researcher constructs his or her own world-view (Sheridan and Storch: 2009). Moreover, this approach allows the use of key thematic ideas from literature and previous research as points of departure for data collection, which lead the researcher to think analytically and develop ideas rather than limiting or forcing preconceived ideas and theories directly upon the data.

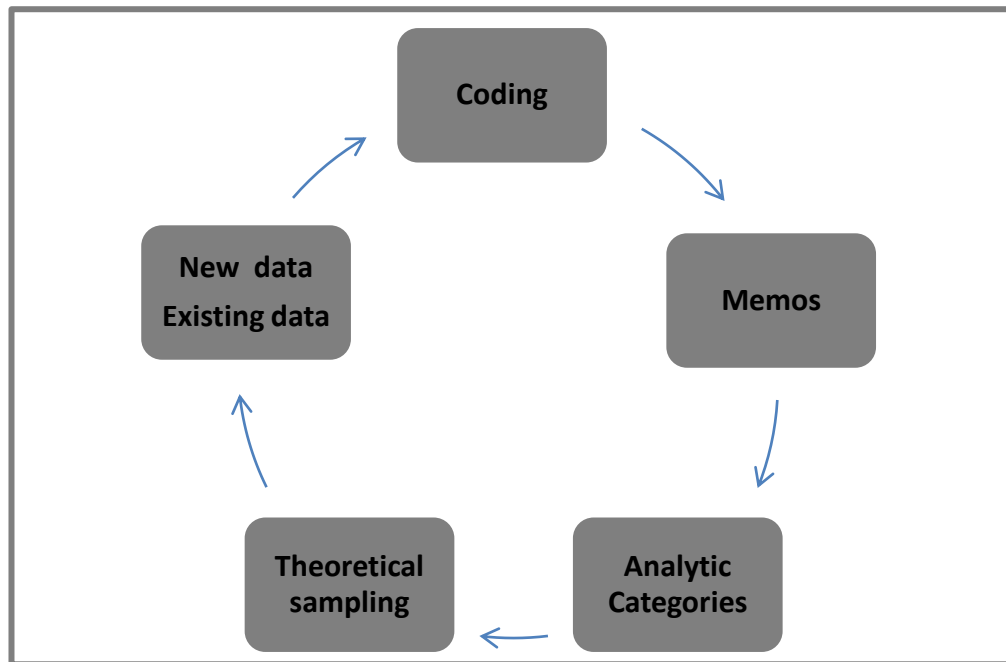
2.4.2 Data analysis in Grounded Theory: process and techniques

The process of data analysis in Grounded Theory is characterised by different methods and techniques which are explained below and include initial coding, focus coding, axial coding, memo writing and theoretical sampling. As illustrated in Diagram 3, these steps take place in a dynamic and cyclic manner, rather than as a linear process with a defined initial and final step.

Open or *Initial coding* can involve word by word, line by line or incident by incident coding. Charmaz (2006) states that it leads the researcher to form the initial categories about the phenomenon being studied by segmenting

information and labelling it. In this stage it is important that the researcher stays close to the data, and focuses on depicting process. Initial coding often leads to *focus coding* (Charmaz 2006) or categorising data by combining initial codes under one heading. A category is a unit of information composed of events, happenings and instances of phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin 1990) and given a short label. Rather than focusing on process, categories stand for phenomena, which are analytic ideas deriving from data (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Diagram 3 *The cycle of data analysis in Grounded Theory*



The next step is *axial coding* where the researcher assembles the data in new ways, identifying a central phenomenon (or category) and returning to the data to explore its properties and dimensions, so creating subcategories. Axial coding explains the where, when, why, how and who of a category (Strauss and Corbin 2008, Chamaz 2006).

The data analysis technique that usually follows coding is *memo writing*. Memos are written records of analysis which are related to the formulation of theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Memo writing is the research process which involves writing down ideas about the evolving theory. It could be in the form of preliminary propositions, ideas about emerging categories, or some aspects of the connections of categories as in axial coding (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Memo-writing is a space to analyse data, codes and categories by comparing them and writing about ideas that foster and reflect the process of comparison, which had already begun during the coding process and which is a key element of Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2006, Strauss and Corbin 2008).

Finally, *theoretical sampling* is another fundamental technique that characterises Grounded Theory analysis as it aims to develop emerging theoretical categories by going back to the field seeking new data that will bring about information that is needed to fill those gaps which have become evident during the process of comparison, refine the existing categories and elaborate a comprehensive theory. In order to do so, the above cycle of data analysis should be repeated until categories are 'saturated' and can be no longer developed.

2.4.3 The Place for Literature in Grounded Theory

The use of Existing Literature may be the most polemical issue in Grounded Theory research (Dunne 2008). Glasser and Strauss (1967) argued against engaging with existing literature prior to primary research in order to avoid imposing preconceived ideas based on that knowledge on the analysis of the data. In these terms, delaying the review can encourage the researcher to articulate his/her own ideas (Charmaz 2006). However, many researches,

including Charmaz, provide strong arguments in favour of preparing a literature review before conducting primary research, since disciplinary perspectives can offer researchers points of departure rather than limiting their ideas (Charmaz 2006).

Dunne (2008: 70) outlines some of these arguments as follows:

- A review of extant literature can provide a rationale for the study, including a justification for a specific research approach.
- It can ensure the study has not already been done.
- It can highlight pertinent lacunae in existing knowledge.
- It can help contextualise the study.
- It can reveal how the phenomenon has been studied to date.
- It can help the researchers' conceptual sensitivity.
- It can promote theory development.

In this line of argument it is also essential to consider that all researchers undertake a study with some prior knowledge of existing literature and ideas (Dunne 2008). This brings to question the existence of an optimum point of familiarity with existing literature and how such point can be assessed. The key idea underneath these arguments is that an open mind is not an empty head (Dey 1999), so it is how prior knowledge is used that makes the difference. Such knowledge can be used to inform analysis rather than to direct it.

2.4.4 Choosing Constructive Grounded Theory

The choice of Grounded Theory as an Interpretative method for the current study is based on different reasons. Firstly, Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2006) entails deducing theoretically based generalisations from the data which is a vital

consideration for innovative research. In these terms, the analytic techniques and procedures of Grounded Theory applied to this study promote the development of a theory from data, allowing for the emergence of new or deeper interpretations of the nature of humour in the context of cross-cultural adaptation, as codes and categories are constructed from data and not from any pre-conceived hypothesis (Flick 2008).

In addition, the approach by of Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2006) was adopted for this study due to its flexibility regarding the use analytic methods and its emphasis on the active role of the researcher, which suits the nature, conditions and limitations of this study. Firstly, Constructivist Grounded Theory encourages the researcher to aim to see the world as her research participants do from the inside but also be reflexive about what she brings into the scene. Such an approach fosters the balance between objectivity and reflexive analysis of the research process allowing an inductive approach without detriment to the researcher's involvement in the process. These standpoints seemed extremely important taking into account my proximity to the subject of research as a Spanish person living in Ireland. On the one hand I did not want to impose my preconceived ideas on the research; on the other hand they had to be acknowledged not only as a possible limitation or challenge, but also as a potential contribution to the research.

In addition, regarding the use of key thematic ideas from existing literature as points of departure for data collection, it seemed beneficial to become acquainted with existing literature and take it into account in the data collection process. Mainly, I considered that such an approach would help me think analytically and develop ideas. Also I thought that the limitations imposed by awareness and understanding of existing theories, such as limiting or forcing preconceived ideas and theories directly upon data, could be counteracted by the use of methodological techniques which

fostered the inductive creation of a theory, and by remaining open to new interpretations. In the context of the study, this process involved becoming familiar with two interdisciplinary fields of studies (Humour and Intercultural Studies) in order to increase awareness and understanding of the processes involved in humour, intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation. Due to the scarcity of studies closely related to my topic, this process involved getting familiar with a variety of studies and theories from intercultural, sociological, linguistic, psychological and philosophical disciplinary perspectives which were somehow related to my area of research but rarely concerned with my specific line of inquiry. Finally, I was already familiar with some theories due to my previous studies, but I felt I had to revisit that knowledge to make it more accurate, and become acquainted with other disciplines and approaches to the study of both cross-cultural adaptation and humour. In this context, I considered it important to share that knowledge with my supervisor who is an expert in intercultural studies but not humour studies (I had one supervisor at the time).

Finally, due to my closeness to the participants as a Spanish person living in Ireland, I believed that studying existing intercultural and humour theories would foster reflexivity and helped me become sensitized and seek out data that was beyond the anecdotal. Looking back at these decisions, and taking into account my previous knowledge and experience as a novice researcher embracing such an innovative area of research, I think that, rather than limiting the research, writing a working literature review, and using some of its concepts and ideas during the process of data collection helped me contextualise the study and obtain rich data relevant to the topic of research.

Overall, the need for an inductive approach drew me to select Grounded Theory as a methodology whereas my choice of Constructivist Grounded Theory was heavily based on its capacity to account for a variety of conditions which are linked to the practical nature of research projects, without damaging the validity and quality of their findings. As a novice researcher with time limitations and practical objectives to meet in order to complete a PhD Programme, Constructive Grounded Theory stood out as the most appropriate choice for the current research.

2.5 The research procedure

2.5.1 Participants

Participants of this study are Spanish migrants living in Ireland. In order to carry out an empirical study of the role of humour in cross-cultural adaptation, a group of participants that would provide valid and meaningful data was selected. Such data needed to allow contrast and comparison regarding participants' commonalities as well as differences related to cross-cultural contact. As a starting point it was decided to use nationality as a proxy for culture and select Spanish people who lived in Ireland, which to start with was the only condition to take part in the study. Despite the decision to operationalize culture based on nationality, after taking into account the strengths and limitation of such decision, participants were encouraged to discuss their cultural identity, their thoughts about the concept of *Spanish culture* and their attachment to it.

2.5.2 Methods of data collection and ethics approval

The methods to gather the data for this qualitative research project were the completion of two questionnaires, distributed in November 2009 and December 2009 respectively, followed by a number of in-depth semi-structured interviews which took place from January 2010 to March 2010.

2.5.2.1 Ethics approval

Prior to distributing the first questionnaire this study was granted Ethics Approval from the Research Ethics Committee who approved the distribution of questionnaires together with a 'plain English statement' pointing out the nature of the project (appendix A) and a consent form to be signed by interviewed participants (appendix B). The first form, stated the working title of the project, its affiliation to Dublin City University, the aims and methods of data gathering and the facts about the confidentiality regarding participants' personal details, ensuring them that their names or any other information they wished to omit, will not be used when writing up the study. By signing the second form participants acknowledged their awareness of this information and gave their consent to take part on the research project taking into account the possibility of withdrawing from the interview or the research at any time. The distribution and signing of these forms gave rise to a variety of questions from participants regarding the research process such as what would happen with the recordings, who would hear them or what were the aims of the research. However, such questions seemed to be related to curiosity rather than concern as they led to a casual discussion.

2.5.2.2 Questionnaire 1: Sampling Strategy

The first questionnaire, included in appendix C used a *purposive sampling strategy*, as it was mainly designed to direct the selection process of participants. It contained questions concerning variables such as fluency in English, date of arrival to Ireland and contact with the host community in order to select a valid sample of participants which provided rich data rather than statistical representativeness. Therefore, the criteria to select individuals or groups focused on their ability to provide significant levels of insight for the research. As Creswell (1998) points out good informants

may be selected because they represent meaningful cases with knowledge and experience, are capable to articulate and have the time and readiness to participate. With this in mind, the first sampling methods to contact potential participants were *volunteer* and *snowball* sampling (Creswell 1998). The questionnaires were sent in September 2009 by email to Spanish people that I knew directly or indirectly and who were asked to forward it to other Spaniards who may be interested. The email was accompanied by a brief description of myself as a PhD student and the research project and plain English statement. In January 2009, the 34 questionnaires which were received were analysed in order to select participants and proceed to contact them. The analysis of this qualitative data is illustrated in appendix D. According to the purposive sampling strategy, it was decided to favour selection of participants who were fluent in English as the aims of the research focused on cultural issues rather than linguistic issues, although it seems relevant to highlight that linguistic issues were embraced and studied at any other point of the research process. Another criterion for prioritizing participants' selection was their time in Ireland as it seemed important to have a variety of lengths of stay but also to include a number of participants who had lived in Ireland for several years and could reflect on such experience. In addition, analysis of the data reflected that a considerable amount of respondents (20) were teachers, who mostly interacted and worked with Spanish colleagues on a daily basis. This was taken into account when selecting participants, as it was considered that selecting a wider profile of participants, who were not limited to a similar and quite specific working environment would provide more enriching data. However, taking into account the number of respondents to the first questionnaire and foreseeing difficulties regarding participants' availability and interest in completing a more time consuming second questionnaire, and being

interviewed, all respondents to the first questionnaire were asked to complete a second questionnaire.

2.5.2.3 Questionnaire 2

The second questionnaire (see appendix E), contains specific questions regarding cross-cultural adaptation and the use of humour in everyday communication. These questions are divided across themes drawn from the range of relevant intercultural and humour theories and are prepared so as to elicit thoughts, feelings and concerns of the participants. The collected questionnaires therefore served as a source for data analysis and further theoretical sampling. They did not only provide the researcher with valuable information for data analysis and a lead for future data collection in a grounded theory manner, but most importantly encouraged the participants to reflect on their cross-cultural experiences before the interviews took place. In this regard, the questionnaire proved to be very useful as at the time of the interview many participants acknowledged finding the questions thought provoking and thinking about their content after completing the questionnaire. These reflections reveal the usefulness of combining questionnaires with interviews as complementary methods, as interviewed participants were given a chance to clarify and expand certain comments or thoughts triggered by the questionnaire.

After completed questionnaires were received interviews were arranged. However, as the questionnaires did not arrive simultaneously, in fact a round of reminders was sent to many respondents, the selection of participants was influenced by their response to the second questionnaire in a 'first come first served' basis. So although the criteria of purposive sampling, which was discussed in section 2.5.2.2, was still observed, participants' promptness to sending the second questionnaire and arranging an interview became relevant selection criteria.

Table 1 The 21 selected participants: four significant variables

Name	Gender	Age	Level of English	Years in Ireland
Diana	Female	42	Fluent	7
Nuria	Female	40	Fluent	15
Nicolás	Male	36	Fluent	11
Nadia	Female	24	Intermediate	6 months
Elisa	Female	36	Fluent	2
Antonio	Male	32	Fluent	2
Daniel	Male	35	Fluent	9
Lucia	Female	25	Advanced	2
Nieves	Female	33	Fluent	7
Andrés	Male	33	Fluent	8
Oscar	Male	33	Advanced	4
Hugo	Male	38	Fluent	10
Pedro	Male	29	Intermediate	2
Rosa	Female	37	Fluent	4
Tania	Female	31	Advanced	4
Aurora	Female	27	Fluent	4
Fatima	Female	34	Fluent	10
Susana	Female	42	Advanced	10
Marta	Female	32	Advanced	6
Cristina	Female	34	Advanced	5
Victor	Male	40	Advanced	5

Hence, the final group of 21 interviewed participants was formed progressively and highly dependent on participants' availability and keenness to participate in the research. The profile of the final group of participants is outlined in Table 1, which includes their given false names, age, self-assessed level of English and amount of years living in Ireland at the time of the interview.

It can be noted that there are slightly more female than males (see Table 2 for exact figures).; more than half the participants are between the ages of 30 and 42, which may have been influenced by the age bracket of my first contacts and my own age; and there are slightly more participants who considered their English level as fluent than advanced and only two participants classified as intermediate. However, participants' self-assessment and its subjectivity were discussed during the interview.

Table 2 Figures related to four different variables of participants profiles

Gender		Age		Level of English		Years in Ireland	
13	Female	4	24- 29 years old	12	Fluent	1	Less than 1 year
8	Male	13	30-39	7	Advanced	4	2 years
		4	40-42	2	Intermediate	4	4 years
						7	5-9 years
						5	10-15

Regarding the amount of years in Ireland, most participants had been living in Ireland between 4 and 15 years. The initial objective regarding this variable was to get a group of participants who provided a variety of amounts in order to foster contrast and comparison in terms of such variable. However, the profile of respondents to the first and second questionnaires led to a more random selection. In addition, although the initial idea was to select participants who had been living in Ireland for at least one year, Nadia, who had been living in Ireland for six months, was selected for an interview. Finally, all participants were working professionals and seven of the twenty-one participants were teachers of Spanish as a Second Language.

2.5.2.4 The Interview

The interviews had open ended questions based on theoretically relevant constructs arranged thematically and depending on the answers in the questionnaires. The open-ended format of the interview itself allowed for unexpected and significant issues that may arise. The choice of in-depth interviews was based on the fact that interviews permit in-depth exploration of a topic or experience as they foster eliciting each participant's interpretation of their own experience (Chamaz 2006). The questions aimed for participants to reflect upon their own experiences, but the interview setting allowed the researcher to chase relevant leads as they emerged during the course of the interview. This allows the possibility to obtain data that would be impossible to access through other data-gathering methods like elicited texts or questionnaires only. The first part of the interview was based on participants' answers to both questionnaires, mainly clarifying or aiming to expand on certain issues, so this part was personalised for each participant before the interview (see appendix F for a general interview plan and Appendix G for a personalised interview plan). However, the answers to these questions often led to other comments and topics which were pursued as they emerged. The second part of the interview was based on a list of theoretically relevant constructs regarding cross-cultural adaptation and humour which went beyond the content of the questionnaire (see appendix F). Nevertheless, in many occasions these concepts had been discussed during the first part of the interview. In this context, the list became a useful check list to see which items were added or taken off not only within the process of each interview but also as the interviews succeeded one another and the data analysis overlapped with the data gathering process. For example, questions about the topic of friendship became worth pursuing whereas explicit questions about the role of humour in participants adaptation process proved to be unfruitful.

These changes are reflected in the second part of the interview plan (See Appendix H for a later version of the second interview plan in Spanish).

All the interviews were recorded as agreed by participants. As stated in section 2.5.2.1 some participants asked information about the use of the recordings. However, I hardly perceived any signs of inhibition due to the use of the recorder. Notwithstanding, one participant did ask me to stop the recorder to confide information, whereas others joked about turning the recorder off but carried on with their comments, which often implied criticism towards Irish culture, and insisted that I did not turn it off. The consent form was signed after the interview; incidentally one participant contacted me afterwards to omit a part of her interview from the transcription, which she did not think was relevant to the topic of research. On a reflective note, regarding the process of interviewing, I was pleased to notice participants' openness regarding their opinions and recount of experiences and with time I realised that the 'lightweight' nature of humour as a topic was very conducive to a discussion of many other issues, and encouraged a relaxed atmosphere in which some participants tended to open up. These deviations led to the collection of a large amount of data, some of which, at the time of the interview seemed rather irrelevant. However, parts of that data proved to be very useful during the data analysis process. These reflections highlight the usefulness of recording, despite the possible inhibitions played upon the participants.

2.6 Data analysis: Grounded Theory methods applied to the study

2.6.1 Data analysis interlinked with data collection

In its essence, Grounded Theory implies that the data analysis process and data collection process are in constant interaction with each other. In this study it was decided to gather as much data as possible prior to the process of analysis for

personal reasons which involved that research process had to be put on hold for twelve months. Although the reasons for such pause are beyond the nature of this research, it is relevant to note it as it had major implications in the decision to gather as much data as possible before the research process was paused, which had a clear impact in the processes of data collection and analysis.

In this context, most of the data was collected in a specific period of time and a substantial part of the analysis took place after the data was collected. However, the constant interaction between the processes of data collection and analysis was encouraged in different ways throughout the research. This interaction is clearly reflected the early stages of the data collection process which is discussed in the previous section. In these terms, the analysis of the first questionnaire influenced not only the process of selection but also pinpointed relevant issues to pursue in the process of data analysis. For example, although the questions were very specific and closed in their nature, the option for comments raised relevant issues regarding their self-assessment of their English level or the nature of their contact with the host society. Subsequently, the interpretation of the second questionnaires highlighted further issues to pursue not only within each participant, as their questionnaires were scrutinized and discussed during the interview, but also in future interviews. So, although the process of open coding did not start until sometime after the last interview had finished, the data of each questionnaire was examined and taken into consideration for the interview. In addition, after each interview was completed I reflected on its content by writing a report which highlighted my subjective impressions, thoughts, ideas, issues of relevance to the research project, and self-advice for future interviews. Accordingly, by the end of each interview a large amount of data had been not only generated but scrutinized and reflected upon to

different extents. To recap, at this stage each participant had a file which included the two questionnaires, an interview plan and an interview report.

2.6.2 Transcribing

I started to transcribe the interviews twelve months after the last interview had finished. In this case, transcribing the interviews personally was particularly beneficial as listening to each participant and transcribing the interviews helped me revisit each interview and become familiarized with the data. In addition, as I combined the process of transcribing with data analysis, the relevance of many ideas and concepts and issues to take into account were noted during the transcription process. These ideas were added to each participant's file in a separate document simply called 'ideas triggered during transcription'. As these ideas evolved they became part of conceptual memos such as 'friendship', 'open-mindedness', or 'alcohol' (see appendix I for an example).

2.6.3 Open Coding

During the process of open or initial coding I followed Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Charmaz's (2006) guidelines aiming at staying close to the data. I followed incident by incident coding (Charmaz 2006) naming each incident of data whether or not it seemed relevant to the research. (see Appendix J for a coded questionnaire and Appendix K for a coded interview). Aiming to stay close to the data but reveal the processes underlying the stories told by the participants, I used the strategy of focusing on actions by using gerunds (Charmaz 2006). As the initial coding process evolved and I focused on staying close to the data, the list of initial codes became increasingly large as new codes were continuously created. In the meantime, I was writing separate memos to encourage further analysis and I perceived certain patterns emerging from the data. However, the list of initial codes showed little

repetition. While staying so close to the data, I was creating very similar codes as separated new codes. Consequently, I needed to try to use the existing codes to tag new data without sacrificing any closeness. However, this task proved to be quite difficult due to the hundreds of codes that I had generated after coding approximately ten questionnaires and ten interviews. Accordingly, I spent some time merging similar codes together and renaming them in a way that they could be easily recalled identified. The list of codes in Table 3 illustrates the results of this type of merging and renaming.

Table 3 List of related codes

- recalling difficulties of adaptation {3}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: "suffering" from cultural differences {1}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: alcohol {1}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: being afraid of rejection by the Irish {1}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: feeling different {2}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: feeling discriminated {2}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: feeling isolated {1}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: feeling offended {1}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: feeling rejected {1}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: feeling underestimated {1}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: feeling rejected by other Spaniards {1}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: finding accommodation {3-0}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: getting used to their laid back attitude {3}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: health system {1}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: humour {3}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: identifying the initial phase as the most stressful {1}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: job searching {2}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: language {7}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: making Irish friends {2}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: routine {1}
- recalling difficulties of adaptation: weather and light {3}

The table shows a group of codes which dealt with participants difficulties in their process of adaptation. Whereas at the beginning of the process I would have coded an incident as ‘having difficulties finding accommodation’ or ‘finding accommodation’, after the merging process, if I encountered an incident which was related to difficulties in adaptation it was easy to look for it in the list of codes and identify any similar incidents. This practical step had a significant impact in the process of initial coding as the codes immediately started to reflect emerging patterns which facilitated contrast and comparison. However, I was still careful to remain close to the data and not force new data into existing codes so the process was still part open coding and not focus coding per se.

2.6.4 Focus Coding

After all the interviews were coded, a total of 953 codes were created (see appendix L for a full list of codes). These codes were organised into thirteen categories (see Table 4), which accounted for the patterns revealed by the coding process. The creation of such categories was facilitated by the layout and organization of the initial codes which were often visually clustered in groups. For example the above group of codes ‘recalling difficulties of adaptation’ became an integral part of the tenth category ‘adaptation’, another group of codes ‘disliking certain aspects of Spanish humour’ became an integral part of the second category ‘perception of humour’, and the group ‘pointing out differences between Spanish and Irish humour’ became an integral part of the third category ‘cultural proximity and distance’.

Table 4 List of categories

CATEGORIES
1. Perception of Culture
2. Perception of Humour: Irish, Spanish
3. Cultural proximity/distance
4. Cultural proximity/distance in relation to humour
5. Changing perspective : Changing view of Ireland/Changing view of Spain
6. Perception of one's humour:
7. Intercultural communication: Misunderstandings/Miscommunication
8. Communication of humour (with Spanish/Irish) and Humour miscommunication
9. Language issues
10. Adaptation and Integration
11. Transformation/changes
12. The value of humour/ Positive effects of humour in CCA
13. Negative effects of humour in CCA

2.6.5 Theoretical and Axial Coding

Axial coding involved analysis of these categories in terms of interrelation between them, and theoretical coding involving the establishment of core categories which represent the existing categories underneath them at an abstract and conceptual level, three main core categories were created: culture, communication and transformation. In this process, the existing categories became subcategories as illustrated in Table 5. However, as axial coding continued on, new subcategories were created. Analytic writing which is discussed in the next section was key to such development.

Table 5 Core categories and subcategories

CULTURE	COMMUNICATION	TRANSFORMATION
<p>1. Perception of Culture: Irish, Spanish</p> <p>2. Cultural proximity/distance</p> <p>3. Perception of Humour: Spanish , Irish</p> <p>4. Cultural proximity/distance in relation to humour</p>	<p>5. Intercultural communication: Misunderstandings/Miscommunication</p> <p>6. Communication of humour (with Spanish/Irish) and Humour miscommunication</p> <p>7. Language issues</p>	<p>8. Changing perspective: Changing view of Ireland; Changing view of Spain</p> <p>9. Perception of one's humour</p> <p>10. Adaptation and Integration</p> <p>11. Transformation</p> <p>12. The value of humour: positive effects of humour in Cross-Cultural Adaptation</p> <p>13. Negative effects of humour in Cross-Cultural Adaptation</p>

2.6.6 Analytic writing, theoretical sampling and the development of a theory

Once the three core categories were established, they served as a skeleton for writing the data analysis chapters. In addition, this analytic process incorporated the use of memos as a space for developing ideas triggered by axial coding, exploring and fleshing out the properties and dimensions of subcategories and their interrelation. In this context, the free writing characterised by early memos, became more analytic and structured as it not only expanded the properties of each category, but helped detangle the interconnections between them and structured the presentation of this findings.

Table 6 Heading of memo

Ability to laugh at oneself

Related to:

- Self deprecation
- “Sentido del ridículo”/ self consciousness
- Slagging (other memo)
- Targeting others (other memo)
- “Encajar bromas”/Handling humour (new code)
- Loosing face (new code)

(Codes: differences and similarities: sentido del ridículo, ability to laugh at self, self deprecation, liking/disliking certain aspects of Irish/Spanish humour, examples of liked/disliked Irish/Spanish humour)

Table 6 includes the heading of a memo entitled ‘ability to laugh at oneself’ which reflects its links to emerging or existing subcategories (in bullet points), other memos and initial codes. This memo, included in appendix M, eventually became an integral part of chapter 3. In order to discover and flesh out the nature of these categories and subcategories, it was necessary to consult initial codes, re-group them into working categories and analyse ‘raw’ data as needed. Although the research was open to collect new data if necessary, at this stage the process of *theoretical sampling* took place by going back to existing data in order to refine or flesh out existing categories and only in a couple of occasions participants were contacted by email to clarify and expand on their opinions.

At this point, contrast and comparison happened at different levels including not only within and between codes, categories and core categories, but also within and between participants and groups of participants. The result of that comparison is presented on paper in the data analysis chapters. This process led to an increasingly

more abstract and conceptual level of data analysis, which led to the findings presented in chapter 6. At this stage, comparison and contrast of categories and subcategories revealed the significance of concepts such as cultural awareness, language competence, proximity individual affinities, compatibility or humour competence. The exploration and definition of these concepts and the relationship between them led to the development of the final theory presented in chapter 6.

2.6.7 Discussion and literature review

Once the theory was developed, the literature review was revisited in order to identify those theories which were relevant to the data analysis findings. This theoretical analysis which is presented in the discussion chapters examines the findings of the study and existing literature in relation to each other. However, since the working literature review written prior to the data analysis did not provide a thorough analysis of the findings, theories and studies needed to be searched for and included in the discussion. Accordingly, a new literature review including most of these theories was developed and placed before the data analysis chapters in order to contextualise the rest of the study for the readers.

2.6.8 Computer Assisted Data Analysis

Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was applied to this study in order to facilitate the analysis of the data. Specifically, the use of Atlas.ti was chosen due to its specific support for grounded theory methods. The pros and cons of using CAQDAS have been extensively discussed in literature (Silverman 2005; Creswel 1998; Bringer et al. 2004) some authors have raised concern about the limitations of the use of software which can play emphasis on some aspects of grounded theory while neglecting others (Coffey, Holbrook and Atkinson 1996).

Others highlight the usefulness of these programmes as tools for facilitating analysis which can be used openly and creatively (Kelle 1997).

In these terms, I mainly use Atlas.ti for coding and categorising, but I did not use all functions of Atlas.ti which were designed to implement grounded theory methods, and I combined it with other tools including working on printed documents, or use of word processing programmes in order to write memos or draw diagrams and tables for analytic purposes. However, I found the use of Atlas.ti extremely useful for analysis in terms of managing a large amounts of data, and fostering comparison among and within different units of data by grouping it in different ways by creating different links between existing data, codes and categories and looking at the data from a variety of perspectives that allowed a comprehensive analysis consistent with the complexities presented by the data. In this context, the use of Atlas.ti added speed and comprehensiveness not only to the coding process but also to the development of a theory.

2.7 Limitations

The four main limitations to the research are connected to the generalisability of findings, the data gathering methods, the subjectivity involved in data analysis and the impossibility to prove the theory.

Firstly, the relative number of participants selected for this research added to the use of purposive sampling implies that the findings are not generalisable to the broader population of Spanish people living in Ireland. However, qualitative research is not mainly concerned with scientific generalisation about a certain population, which is based on statistical logic, but rather on a generalisation of data to theory (Yin 1994; cited in Dunne 2009) or a generalisation about the nature of a certain process, which

is based on theoretical sampling (Gobo 2004; cited in Dunne 2009) . In this context, although the sample of participants was selected due to their shared common cultural background of being Spanish people living in Ireland (although all the final participants were living in Dublin), the limitations of such generalisation were taken into account to a certain extent during the research process as participants' individual experiences and circumstances were examined. Within this context, the data was generalized to develop a theory so the findings are related to that specific group of people.

Secondly, 'interviews rely on participants' self reported behaviour and are based on the assumption that interviewees report their thoughts, experiences and behaviour honestly' (Dunne 2009:98). So, although I cannot be certain about participants honesty, such honesty was revealed in different ways during the interview, for example they explicitly acknowledged their inability to answer certain questions, corrected my interpretations of their answers if I was double checking, or showed open criticism to both Spanish and Irish culture often revealing a sense of proximity and assuming that I had a similar perspective, as a Spanish person living in Ireland, and could understand their arguments. However, the data mainly relied on their stories and perception of their own behaviour, rather than the behaviour itself, although hesitation, pauses and laughter were noted and taken into account during the data analysis, where laughter in particular proved to reveal significant information.

In addition, although the research aims at a better understanding of intercultural interactions, the study has focused on participants' perception of such interactions, rather than on this type of interactions themselves. This decision was based on the nature of the initial research questions which despite acknowledging the need to

examine the role of humour in intercultural interactions focused on the role of humour in participants' cross-cultural adaptation process.

Regarding the application of grounded theory methods, it is relevant to mention, that the time limitations of the present study influenced the process of repeatedly going back to the field and collecting new data. Accordingly, the categories were saturated by going back to the existing data in order to refine categories to develop and complete the emerging theory. The present study used the questionnaires to develop a number of themes worth further inquiry before returning to the field to seek new data. As such the methodology is not a mixed methods approach but one developed to work in the spirit of Grounded Theory approach, which is a method to be used for the benefit of discovery, rather than to be followed slavishly (Sheridan and Storch 2009).

Regarding the inability to prove a grounded theory, it is important to take into account that the focus of Grounded Theory researchers is on demonstrating plausible support for them (Taylor and Bogdan 1984; cited in Dunne 2009:99). In this study, this support is in participants stories, and the codes and categories linked to them. The limitations involved in the subjectivity of that process are discussed in the next two sections.

2.8 Challenges

The main challenges I experienced during the course of this research are related to the nature of the research topic including its innovative nature and complexity, the methodological approach and my role as a researcher. Regarding the nature of the research topic, the study of the role of humour in cross-cultural adaptation implied becoming acquainted with two interdisciplinary and complex fields of research

which present a wide variety of disciplinary approaches such as linguistic, philosophical, sociological and psychological. The scarcity of studies of the role of humour in cross-cultural adaptation was an added factor to this challenge. In this context, I spent an academic year becoming acquainted with the literature in humour and cross-cultural adaptation, I attended the conference of the International Society of Humour Studies (Spain 2008) where I could get a taste of the variety and complexity of such a discipline and later the School of Humour Studies in Granada (Spain 2009) where I attended workshops, presented a paper on my research project and got access to a tutorial with experts on the study of humour such as sociologists Christie Davies and Giseline Kuipers who gave me practical advice on this innovative area of humour research.

The challenges imposed by my choice of grounded theory are linked to the uncertainty involved in such an inductive method of analysis, which involves trying to set aside theoretical preconceptions to start with and rely soundly on data analysis for the development of a theory. After I gained confidence on the quality of the data, thanks to the variety of patterns that were emerging from its analysis, the major challenge I encountered was to see beyond the data so I could move on my analytic writing to a conceptual level. This uncertainty can also be linked to the data collection. My questionnaires and interviews were based on my research questions and theoretical principles, but I was not sure if the data I gathered would *fit* those research questions. Accordingly, I needed to stay open throughout most of the research process to the possibility to reevaluating the research questions or gathering more data. Finally, the open approach taken during the interviews, their transcription and the need to stay closer to the data resulted in quite a large amount of data to be managed.

To end, regarding my role as a researcher, the main challenge I faced was to become aware of my own preconceptions as a Spanish person living in Ireland in order to be able to look for data that went beyond my own experience and try to understand participants' experiences and the role of humour in these experiences from a different perspective. In this context, I often encountered experiences and opinions that differ to mine, which implied a double challenge: firstly to see beyond my preconceptions and secondly to try to understand what was underneath these different opinions and experiences without being judgemental. This challenge was manageable thanks to methods and strategies of analysis which encourage the researcher to stay close to the data in order to understand others' perspectives but also to be reflexive about their own perspective and input in the process of research. These reflections are highly related to the need for reflexivity in Grounded Theory which is discussed in the following section.

2.9 Reflexivity

Charmaz defines reflexivity as 'the researcher's scrutiny of his or her research experience, decisions and interpretations in ways that bring the researcher into the process and allow the reader to assess how and to what extent the researcher's interest, positions and assumptions influence inquiry' (Charmaz 2006:188); Finlay (2002:532) simply defines it as 'thoughtful, conscious, self awareness'; and Russell and Bohan(1999) distinguish two issues relating to reflexivity: the context provided by the relationship between researcher and participants, and the subjective nature of research which 'is not an objective rendering of reality'. In this context, subjectivity needs to be taken into account in the research process, which can be achieved by engaging in reflexivity. In this context, reflexivity can be a useful tool to 'examine the impact of the position, perspective, and presence of the researcher' (Finlay

2002:532). Finally, Zhu (2013) points out the reciprocal interaction between research quality and reflexivity stating that ‘good reflexivity enhances research and good research improves reflexivity’ (Zhu 2013:98).

Reflexivity has been applied in different ways to this research from its very beginnings. To start with, the fact that I am a Spanish person living in Ireland has encouraged me to engage in a reflective practice. Particularly, considering the tendency in migration studies to define researchers as insiders or outsiders depending on their nationality; although nuances of such a black and white distinction should be taken into account (Sheridan and Storch 2009).

In this context, I used different strategies to encourage self-awareness of my own perceptions regarding the topic of research, participants and their stories, and the research process:

- Although the design of the questionnaires and interview plans relied strongly on my knowledge of literature on qualitative research, humour and intercultural studies, a reflection of my own experiences had an impact in their design. Awareness of such decisions would later help me distinguish information or topics that may have seemed relevant to my experience but not to my participants’ experience.
- I completed the questionnaires and auto-interviewed myself, so I was aware of my own arguments. However, those arguments have changed and developed through the research process. A process which has had a significant impact in my perception of Irish and Spanish cultures, their humour, my own use of humour, and its role in my cross-cultural adaptation

- I was careful to elaborate the questionnaire and interview questions in a way that I would not inflict my own arguments to those questions or favour an answer that was closer to my arguments.
- I tried to remain as neutral as I could during the interview, and let participants do most of the talking without interfering with my own opinions.
- Although I remained neutral in my opinions, I noticed participants assumptions that we had similar perspectives, which reflected a perceived proximity on their behalf and encouraged openness but I also questioned those assumptions and often asked them clarify what they meant.
- I wrote a report after each interview and transcription in which I described my perception of the participants, their answers and the interview process and I continued reflecting on these ideas in the writing of memos during the data analysis process.
- I challenged my decisions for coding the data to ensure that they portrayed participants' experience and not my own experience or opinions (I found the use of actions and -ing forms particularly helpful for this)
- I reflected on my own experiences as well as participants' to consider possible links between different categories and question my interpretation of the processes and phenomena in the context of such experiences.

Finally, as a result of these efforts to engage in reflexivity, I learnt to 'take ownership' of my interpretations of the data knowing that their subjective nature did not comprise their relevance. In my experience, this final step, which allowed me to develop a theory that was grounded on data, has been the biggest challenge of this research.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a discussion of the methodological approach of the research. Firstly, a discussion of the natural history of the research has outlined the reasons behind this research including the significance of this line of research within intercultural and humour studies. Secondly, the chapter has examined the appropriateness of qualitative research due to its exploratory nature and the use of Grounded Theory analysis as an interpretative method which suits the innovative line of the research as it allows the researcher to work inductively in order to develop a theory from the data. Thirdly, a discussion of the research procedure has detailed the specific ways in which Grounded Theory methods were applied to the study with a *constructive* and flexible approach for the benefit of discovery and taking into account limitations such as generalisability, time and access to data. Such limitations are closely linked to the challenges faced by the researcher which are in turn related to the need for and advantages of the use of reflexivity in qualitative research.

Overall, the chapter has offered a discussion of the processes of data collection as well as the grounded theory approach as it has been applied to the analysis of such data. The following four chapters will present the analysis of the data collected for this study and discuss it in terms of a developing theory.

Part II Data Analysis

CHAPTER 3

Perception of humour: generalising about the characteristics of Spanish and Irish humour

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents participants' perceptions of humour in terms of cultural proximity, as it affects participants' interactions and intercultural transformation since coming into contact with Irish culture.

Firstly, the chapter deals with the content of humour in terms of its recurring targets. Secondly, it deals with humour style by focussing on levels of intricacy. Thirdly, it deals with certain conditions that apply to participants' perception of humour such as predisposition to generalise. Finally, the chapter concludes by assessing cultural proximity between Spanish and Irish humour according to participants' perceptions of humour. This conclusion, grounded in analysis, leads to an understanding of the implications that perception of humour may have in cross-cultural interactions and transformations, discussed in later chapters.

3.2 Targets of humour and the ability to laugh at oneself

3.2.1 The ability to laugh at oneself: self-deprecation and targeting others

The ability to laugh at oneself emerges as one of the main differences between Spanish and Irish humour, as highlighted by seven participants of this study. For example Elisa says:

One thing I like about Irish humour is that they laugh at everything, but especially at themselves in the first place. I find a contrast with Spanish humour here.

The particular difference that she highlights is the fact that in Spain people are not averse to making jokes about an individual which do not take place face-to-face but rather: *Spanish humour tends to laugh at others behind their back.* She contrasts this aspect of humour, which can also be interpreted as possibly entailing an element of cruelty, with the ability of Irish people to laugh at themselves:

The Irish make a lot of jokes about themselves. In Spain I think we find a bit difficult to laugh about ourselves.

In addition, she suggests that there are no limits to situations where humour might arise in an Irish context:

Here they laugh at everything, and when they tell a story about themselves, they do in a special funny way. They have a gift for it. I don't think Spanish people do this as much and I like it.

Overall, Elisa admires the ability of Irish people to laugh at themselves which she has grasped in self-deprecating Irish humour. She thinks Irish people have a tendency and a gift for targeting themselves in humour, particularly through story telling. She also contrasts the Irish ability and tendency for self-deprecation with a tendency in Spanish humour to target others who are not present. According to Elisa, Spanish people find it more difficult to laugh at themselves, so when they joke they tend to target others rather themselves.

At this point, it seems relevant to make a distinction between laughing at oneself through self-deprecation and laughing at oneself when targeted by other people's humour. Like Elisa, eleven participants of this study have recognised a general tendency for self-deprecation in Irish humour which displays their ability to laugh at

themselves by telling stories that ridicule themselves. The following comment by Marta highlights this tendency:

Irish people have a tendency to tell funny stories about themselves, they may be true stories or closed enough to the truth, they exaggerate them to make them funny. I think this is really common.

As such, it is evident that the Irish ability to laugh at their own faults and mistakes through self-deprecation is often appreciated and praised by participants of this study. Eduardo, for example, has also noted this ability to laugh at oneself and considers that this aspect of Irish humour does indeed know no bounds as it is found:

On daily basis, on the radio, on TV, in the streets. They laugh at their own shortcomings and defects and those of their culture. This is something that is worth admiring. We often go to the Comedy Club in the International Bar and we love the way they laugh at themselves.

For eleven participants in this study, self-deprecating humour is an essential characteristic of Irish humour which is present in everyday conversations, on the media and in stand up comedy. Importantly, Eduardo, as well as five other participants also distinguish two main themes for self-deprecation: personal and cultural faults. For example Rosa says:

They are very relaxed, they have no problem laughing at their culture, at themselves, at their stereotypes, there is a tendency to use their culture as a topic for humour often with irony and sarcasm.

Rosa links a relaxed attitude to the Irish ability to laugh at themselves noticing an inclination towards the topic of Irish culture in self-deprecating humour which can nevertheless be filled with irony and sarcasm which seems to point to the use of humour in Irish culture as a way of not only laughing but also critiquing aspects of

their own culture so that self-deprecation also potentially concerns failings in the wider society.

Considering the above, the use of self-deprecation in humour seems to contribute to a positive view of Irish humour by participants of this study as Pedro points out:

People with good humour need to be able to laugh at themselves. In order to target others with humour, you need to target yourself too and accept that others target you.

Pedro's comment brings up the distinction between self-deprecating humour and accepting being targeted by others. However, he makes a connection between the two as he believes that in order to laugh at others, people need to be able to laugh at themselves first, and to accept others people's joke about them. Another participant, Daniel, explains this connection in a different way in the context of Irish humour:

When the Irish laugh at their own personal faults they welcome others to laugh at them, which allows them to laugh at other peoples faults in exchange.

Daniel's reflection highlights the communicative functions of self-deprecating humour . He perceives a fair exchange in Irish humour as self-deprecation involves disclosure of weaknesses and an open attitude towards others' criticism, which in turn permits targeting others. This may foster the perception of Irish people as funny and good humoured people which is shared by fourteen participants of this study.

In contrast to the Irish ability to target themselves in humour, eight participants of this study recognise a preference for targeting others in Spanish humour. This can be noticed in the following comment by Tania:

The main difference between Spanish and Irish humour is that Irish people laugh at themselves and their country and I don't think that

happens so much in Spain. We tend to ridicule something or someone rather than ourselves.

Tania recognises ‘laughing at oneself’ as the main difference between Irish and Spanish humour, recognising a tendency for targeting others in Spanish humour.

This can be noticed on TV, with comedians...Laughing at yourself is perceived as a bit of a weakness.

This idea that that ‘laughing at oneself’ can be seen as a weakness in Spanish culture may proffer some explanation as to why Spaniards may not be as fond of self-deprecation. This idea is linked to the concept of self-consciousness which is discussed in the next section.

Overall, the distinction between Spanish and Irish humour regarding targets of humour and ability to laugh at oneself, can result in a positive view of Irish humour but it can also lead to a rather negative perception of Spanish humour and Spanish culture as we can see in the following comment by Daniel:

Spaniards are fond of cutting criticism. They don't really laugh at their own or other people faults in a healthy way.

Daniel sees a tendency to criticize mistakes or faults rather than to laugh at them; this makes him wary of Spanish humour that targets others, and also question its intentions.

3.2.2 The ability to laugh at oneself: factors inherent to each culture

3.2.2.1 Self-consciousness and inhibitions

In connection to the Spanish tendency for criticism manifested by Daniel, three participants of this study suggest that Spanish people may take things more seriously

or more dramatically than Irish people, which stops them from laughing at them as

Tania says:

For example, my older students that have their holiday homes in Spain said to me “ha, ha, I was in Marbella and such ex minister of Ireland that was caught doing something fraudulent has opened a bar in Marbella, and we went there to see what that was like (laughs).

Tania recalls a situation where Irish people joked about a situation that involved the theme of Irish corruption, a serious matter regarding Irish society. By contrast, when she pictures the same type of scenario in a Spanish context, she cannot imagine it being a source of humour but rather a source of indignation:

In Spain in that situation, people would get angry, they would say “shame on him, he opened a pub and there are so many Irish people around, it is so embarrassing...” They would react differently.

Tania suggests that shame and embarrassment might contribute to the Spanish reaction that she evokes. By contrast, the Irish are able to joke about this type of situation, but this does not necessarily imply that they find it acceptable. In her example, it is clear that Irish people do not approve of the ex-minister’s behaviour. Still, this offensive behaviour can be the subject of a joke in Ireland; it is not offensive enough to protect it from humour. According to Tania, in Spain, this type of behaviour is too offensive to trigger humour. Tania brings up a relevant issue: the grade of offence triggered by something can either prevent it or allow it to be perceived as humorous. Accordingly, offence can play an essential role in self-deprecation and ‘ability to laugh at oneself’ or in this case, to laugh at one’s culture.

As she continues reflecting on the differences between the two cultures regarding their ability to laugh at themselves, Tania confirms the tendency for Irish people to laugh at themselves targeting both their own culture and themselves as individuals:

They laugh at themselves, they have no problem going around with sun burned red faces, in Spain people will put make up on, or stay at home.

In Tania's opinion, under the same circumstances, Spaniards would react quite differently:

I think that's the difference...in Spain we are more proud. They (the Irish) can laugh at their own image.

She suggests that pride or self-consciousness can play an essential role in 'ability to laugh at oneself':

When they drink they can get very messy and then the next day they just laugh about it...and we, well, me, if I did that, I think I would be so embarrassed the next day, I wouldn't joke about it.

Tania evokes a very specific situation where an Irish person is able to laugh at their own behaviour, which in this case is alcohol-induced. As she pictures the situation, she acknowledges that she would be too uncomfortable to joke about this. This is also connected to the social acceptability of being drunk in Ireland. If their behaviour was not socially acceptable, Irish people would not joke about it. Importantly, this example shows how the values, norms and behaviours of a culture do affect the subjects of their humour and whether these are shared by other cultures. According to Tania, certain behaviours are laughable in Irish culture but not in Spanish culture. Cultural values, norms and behaviours appear to affect individual senses of self-consciousness and humour.

The implications of self-consciousness and 'ability to laugh at oneself' were brought up by eight participants in this study, particularly in relation to Spanish culture. This calls for a more detailed discussion on self-consciousness in Spanish culture. 'Sentido del ridículo', a complex feature of Spanish culture, is a typical Spanish trait

linked to being proud (Acevedo 1972). Literally it means “sense of the ridiculous” but can also be understood to signify self-consciousness in the sense of awareness of oneself as the focus of the attention of others, but it also indicates a sense or even a fear of being ridiculed, of being laughed at. These characteristics are evident in Fátima’s statement:

Spanish people are more self-conscious, if you fall in the street, they first thing you say is “God, I hope no one saw me”.

Fátima gives an example of typical Spanish reaction which illustrates Spanish self-consciousness and apprehension to the possibility of being laughed at. In relation to this, when comparing Irish to Spanish people, Fátima ascribes Irish people a greater ability to laugh at themselves:

Yes, I think the Irish are more capable of laughing at themselves, they are better natured, they accept being laughed at, and they are more easy-going.

Fátima attributes this ability to a more relaxed attitude and less self-consciousness on behalf of Irish people. According to six participants of this study, Spaniards are conscious of their image, the way they look, the way they dress. They are generally worried about what others think in this regard, as Nuria says:

In general Spanish people are very self-conscious, I see it in the way they dress more carefully, they are more worried about their image, they are more aware of what others think.

Nuria explains Spanish self-consciousness in the context of image, looks and dressing habits. In comparison, she thinks that Irish people are less concerned about what others think, but she wonders if this is linked to the ability to laugh at oneself:

Here, they are not (self-conscious) [laughter] but I don't know if this has any relevance to being able to laugh at yourself. They just don't seem to care as much about what others think.

Similarly, another participant, Cristina, compares Irish to Spanish self-consciousness as follows:

I think they are more able to laugh at themselves, in Spain as I said before, it's the way we live, if you are dressed a bit different you think your neighbour might look at you funny, and look at the way Irish people dress at night, you can see a chubby girl, or a really fat girl, wearing a miniskirt, heels, a pony tail and happy out, no shame at all...

As Cristina reflects on the Irish ability to laugh at themselves, Spanish and Irish self-consciousness come to the surface. But as Cristina speaks about Irish low levels of self-consciousness, she also questions the implications that this may have in ability to laugh at oneself:

It's not that they laugh at themselves. I guess they have more self-esteem, and less "sentido del ridiculo" because we (Spanish) have a hundred and fifty per cent [laughs].

When Cristina compares Spanish to Irish people, the Irish come up as less self-conscious, having fewer 'hang-ups' and higher self-esteem. Like Cristina suggests, low self-consciousness may not directly result in humour, but it might make people more indifferent to criticism, whether this is humorous or not.

Cristina also links low levels of self-consciousness with high levels of self-esteem. It seems to her that being less worried about other people's perception of one's image is a sign of confidence, an attribute that may also affect 'ability to laugh at oneself'. Despite their expressed uncertainty, Cristina's and Nuria's examples suggest that the Irish, being more confident and less self-conscious, may be less afraid of being a source of amusement, whereas Spanish self-consciousness may contribute to a

greater fear of being laughed at. These issues are not only related to self-deprecation but also to reacting and coping with other's humour.

On the subject of 'ability to laugh and oneself' in relation to self-consciousness, it is worth pointing out that only one participant, Lucía, considered Spaniards to be less self-conscious than the Irish:

They (the Irish) are very self-conscious. I don't see them doing absurd nonsense, if I ask them to sing in class they get really flustered, I think in Spain, it is not that big deal, in my school, it was normal to do things like this...

Lucía's opinion that the Irish are quite self-conscious seems to be based on certain inhibitions that she has perceived in the context of a language classroom (She teaches Spanish as a Foreign Language in Ireland).

Like Lucía, six other participants have noticed that Spaniards are more uninhibited: shouting, singing in public, using body language, making faces. Even though inhibition and self-consciousness are separate matters which may not be necessarily related: Spanish and Irish have a different 'sentido del ridículo'. They are self-conscious in different ways which are inherent to each culture as Nicolás explains:

I think in Spain we have a problem to a certain extent, for example at Carnival, dressing up, singing and dancing in the street, that's no problem, but we do not want to be hurt and we avoid it if we can, for example when we are learning English, people find difficult to make mistakes in public...American or Irish people have no problem saying "dos cervezas" (2 beers)[with a terrible accent] a Spaniard would be more aware of this and he would find it more difficult.

Nicolás's comment suggests that self awareness differs from Irish to Spanish culture: Spanish people may dance, shout and dress up on special occasion without any sign of embarrassment, as for them this is not a challenge to one's self image. However,

he points out, the issue for Spanish people is being hurt or as the Spanish saying goes 'to get your pride rocked' (*'que le toquen a uno el orgullo'*) Nicolás's comment suggests that Spanish pride can make it difficult to laugh at oneself, particularly at faults and mistakes, for example when speaking a foreign language.

According to Nicolás's comment, Spanish pride, manifested as self-consciousness, inhibits communication and possibly cross-cultural adaptation as it has the potential for a Spanish person to not engage in communication or disengage from it when it threatens to create a situation which calls for laughter at one's self and the possibility of losing face and *getting one's pride rocked*.

3.2.2.2 Spanish pride and Irish modesty

Six participants of this study mention 'being proud' to be a Spanish characteristic. Oscar, considers the implications that this may have on the ability to laugh at oneself:

Spanish people can be quite proud. I think they (the Irish) are more exposed to irony and sarcasm...and they are well more able to laugh at themselves. Pride can be an important issue over there. That's my perception. I think Spanish people find more difficult to laugh at themselves.

Oscar's comment backs up Nicolás's opinion, indicating that issues like pride and self-consciousness in Spanish culture can affect one's ability to laugh at oneself. In contrast to the Spanish pride highlighted by some participants of this study, Irish people have been described as 'modest' people by five participants of this study. Aurora explicitly links this Irish modesty to ability to laugh at oneself:

I think both cultures laugh at themselves but Irish people might tend a bit more to target themselves. This may be related to their sense of modesty.

In her comment, Aurora connects an Irish tendency to self-deprecation to modesty, an Irish trait which she admires and which she explains as follows:

I think it is a culture quite modest in the sense of not boasting personal achievements, compared to...Spaniards or Germans.

According to the above, it seems that the ability to laugh at oneself, a characteristic of Irish humour according to participants, is not a reciprocal activity in Spanish engagement with humour as Spanish 'sentido del ridículo' and pride and Irish self-assurance and modesty are linked to self-deprecation and ability to laugh at oneself and one's culture.

3.2.2.3 Proximity versus Distance

In contrast to some of the previous statements, which draw attention to the differences between the two cultures, it is important to point out that five participants of this study emphasised the proximity between Spanish and Irish humour when it comes to laughing at oneself, noticing only certain nuances like taboos or repetition as differences between one culture and another. Despite appreciating Irish self-deprecation and acknowledging issues like self-consciousness and pride four of these participants consider 'ability to laugh at oneself' a quality shared by both cultures. For example, Susana says:

I think both Spanish and Irish like to laugh at ourselves. Perhaps in Spain we have fewer limits, we keep going on and on and on... and may be fewer taboos, but no, I think we are really similar.

Susana's opinion highlights the commonalities rather than the differences between Spanish and Irish humour when it comes to ability to laugh at oneself. She mentions repetition and taboos as differences, which are issues that affect humour style and content, but she stresses the proximity between the two cultures. Therefore, without

contradicting each other, participants views seem to focus on similarities or differences between the two cultures in order to rate their proximity, regarding ‘ability to laugh at oneself’. In sum, the Irish ‘ability to laugh at oneself has caught the attention of twelve participants of this study. These and other participants have tried to compare this capability in Irish and Spanish cultures by bringing up issues such as self-consciousness, pride, self-assurance and modesty as well as humour tendencies to self-deprecation or targeting others.

This section has dealt with self-deprecating humour, a tendency which, according to participants denotes ability to laugh at oneself and one’s own culture. This ability has also been linked with the custom of being targeted by others which is discussed in further detail in the following section.

3.2.3 Targeting others directly: Irish slagging

‘Slagging’ has been identified as an essential characteristic of Irish humour by ten participants of this study. For example, Diana appreciates slagging as a norm of Irish interactions:

Slagging in Ireland is more normalized; it is part of their way of interacting, to joke about each other, to laugh at someone, for example at the way they look, but in front of other people too. People find it really funny, including the person that’s being laughed at.

Diana understands slagging as humour which targets and addresses someone present, normally in front of other people. She also points out that slagging is normally shared by the target of the joke, who is able to laugh at humour based on him/herself. Finally, she recognises slagging as a difference between Spanish and Irish culture:

I don’t think laughing at others is characteristic of Spanish culture, not that directly...and I love it! I find it really funny.

Diana admits to be fond of Irish slagging which she describes as ‘direct’. According to her, Spaniards are not as direct with their humour, they would not slag someone to their face, like the Irish do. This idea is supported by five other participants, and Lucía says:

They are very direct, I find their humour really interesting, striking, the way they love teasing each other, embarrassing each other in front of people, it suits me.

Like Diana, Lucía pinpoints slagging as characteristic of Irish humour and expresses her interest in this particular feature. She highlights a tendency to openly target a person in front of others and she is appreciative of this type of humour. When she compares Irish to Spanish humour in terms of targets she adds:

They (the Irish) tease or slag each other whereas in Spain they tend to laugh at a third party.

Lucía’s idea that Spaniards have a tendency to laugh at others who are not present is shared by seven participants of this study. The Spanish inclination to humour that targets absent people is discussed in the next section; however, at this stage it seems relevant to remark that outside humorous contexts, Irish people are perceived as being far less direct than Spanish people by twelve participants of this study, including Diana:

In Spain people express their feelings and thoughts more directly, they say what comes through their heads without thinking too much about it, here it’s the other way around they think about it first, then they might say it...but most likely they won’t [laughs].

The contrast between their direct humour and their ‘indirect’ communication style, perceived by participants of this study, suggests that Irish people feel ‘allowed’ to be

direct when using humour, since, as Diana reveals, slagging is normalised in Irish culture. Humour, in this case slagging, allows them to say things that they would not dare saying otherwise. This displays two important communicative functions of humour: allowing criticism and avoiding losing face. Hence, Irish slagging and its norms allow Irish people to criticize minimizing the risk of offending the other person by using humour. In addition to this, it could be argued that Irish people use humour, but specifically slagging, as an important tool in friendship development, as the level and intimacy of the slagging tends to be directly proportional to the depth of friendship. That is, the better the friend, the more personal the slag. This way, if someone takes umbrage at a slag, it is an indication that the friendship is not as developed as perhaps the other individual (who made the comment) thought it was. As such, slagging can serve as a (sometimes dangerous) barometer of friendship level. In this sense it is a proxy for self-disclosure, which is the usual indicator of friendship development, as outlined by Social Penetration Theory.

Twelve participants of this study, like Lucía and Diana, have manifested awareness of Irish slagging. This awareness clearly influences intercultural communication, affecting participants' perception and production of humour in their everyday interactions as in the following statement by Nicolás:

It (slagging) is one of the first things I learnt about Ireland, about the way they are, it took me a while to get used to it, that there was no reason to feel offended when someone was telling me something in an offensive way, to realise that they were joking, maybe after a year here, I would say to myself "ok, they are not insulting me I don't have to punch them, I have to get them back with another joke, and a better one" It's like Cyrano de Bergerac, it's something almost literary. Then ok, no problem, let's play that game.

Nicolás explains that becoming acquainted with Irish slagging has been a learning

process. Contact and experience with Irish culture have enabled him to recognize slagging, identifying the humorous intentions of certain remarks that he would have considered offensive in the past if he viewed it wholly from a Spanish perspective. Nicolás's experience shows that not being aware of slagging as a feature of Irish humour can have negative consequences in intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation, particularly when humorous remarks are perceived as offensive which may enhance feelings of difference or isolation. In this context it is important to highlight that in order to share humour it is essential not to feel offended by it to a certain extent. After living in Ireland for about a year, instead of feeling offended by Irish slagging, it seems that Nicolás was attracted to it, perceiving it as a challenge. He now sees himself as able to play the 'slagging game', not only accepting humorous remarks directed to him, but also producing them. Moreover, Nicolás acknowledges being fond of Irish slagging for different reasons: Nicolás recognises two positive effects that slagging may have in everyday interactions: breaking the ice in conversation and projecting a positive image of the person who is slagging. As such, these consequences of slagging can have an impact in intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation:

Firstly, 'breaking the ice' is a communicative function of humour which can play an important role in everyday interactions by facilitating communication and easing tensions. Secondly, the positive image of a person that produces a particular slagging remark such as being intelligent, witty or knowledgeable, is part of a perception of others and it also affects the way people are perceived and perceive themselves. This is an essential factor of cross-cultural adaptation as self-image influences our cognition, emotions and motivation (Ting Toomey 1991). In Nicolás's case, it is clear that he conceives the ability to slag as an intellectual capacity in certain cases.

Consequently, he has adapted this behaviour incorporating slagging to his communication style. By using slagging and showing his ability to make clever remarks, Nicolás may create a positive self-image and project a similar positive image in others. This in turn may contribute to feelings of bonding and fitting in, which are triggered by shared humour, and aid the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

Lucía, illustrates how slagging and being slagged can contribute to this feeling of equality in interactions with Irish people:

For example if I mispronounce a word they may laugh, but they are not mean, it is just a game we play, then I slag their Irish accent and may be tell them that they can't pronounce "bus" (laughs), I don't know... I don't feel that they are laughing at me because I am weaker, that type of humour, just suits me.

Based on the above experiences, it appears that awareness of slagging can have positive effects in cross-cultural interactions with Irish people: enhancing a positive image of others, boosting self-confidence and resulting in feelings of blending in and bonding.

In contrast, unfamiliarity with this aspect of Irish humour can lead to negative effects in cross-cultural communication provoking misunderstandings that can make a newcomer feel insulted or offended which can in turn highlight feelings of isolation. Nicolás who has lived in Ireland for ten years explains how he moved on from these feelings through a learning process. At the time of the interviews, only two participants of this study manifested a rather negative view of Irish slagging, including Nadia who says:

I see it at work; they pick on each other, making jokes. For them it must be normal, but not for me, it calls my attention. I find it quite rough.

Nadia, who had been living in Ireland for eight months at the time of the interview, had witnessed slagging at her workplace, and considered that slagging is a usual practice in Irish interactions. However, Nadia is not completely comfortable with it as she qualifies it as something bizarre and rather aggressive. This perception stops her from sharing that type of humour with her colleagues. It also indicates that adjusting to the norms of humour interaction takes time as she has not been in Ireland long in contrast to Nicolás. Like Nadia, Pedro admits being disturbed by Irish slagging:

Something that I find striking is that I have come across people who make sarcastic or nearly insulting comments to people that they are really not that close to. This might be due to the influence of alcohol more than to Irish character: there are rude people everywhere...

Pedro, who has witnessed slagging in Irish pubs, hesitates whether this behaviour was induced by alcohol use or it is indeed an Irish trait. In any case, he considers it inappropriate and offensive. As Pedro tried to recall this type of humour in contexts where alcohol was not involved he added:

Yes, they (the Irish) do tease each other, but with petty things, they don't take the risk of going too far.

It appears that for Pedro there is a contrast between harmless banter and mean slagging. He considers that there is a limit that Irish people do not normally cross, unless there is alcohol involved, and he is basing this assumption in his own cross-cultural experiences. For this reason, it is important to highlight that Pedro who had been living in Ireland for two years at the time of the interview, stated that his work and social life contexts were dominated by other Spaniards. Apart from the influence of alcohol, which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4, Pedro's

comment raises the issue of limits when it comes to slagging. The border between a joke and an insult in the context of Irish slagging is something that was brought up by five participants of this study including Nicolás who says:

There is nothing I dislike about Irish humour really... perhaps the use of slagging to a certain extreme. I have seen comedians who all they do is 'extreme slagging' with the audience. I think they somehow, corrupt humour. Humour is about sharing rather than offending.

Nicolás, who is fond of Irish slagging, states a dislike for what he calls 'extreme slagging'. According to him, comedians that use 'extreme slagging' abuse the principles of slagging as they forget to engage with the person being slagged, basing their acts in merely offending others. For him, the outcome of this type of comedy is not humorous as it trespasses the limit between joking and offending:

You can offend in a funny way but there is a certain limit, if you go over it, it turns into something else, it is a sign of lack of ability to be funny. I have seen this, to an extreme and this is not something I enjoy. I don't find it funny.

According to Nicolás, extreme slagging denotes lack of ability to be funny contrasting it with proper slagging which denotes wit, intelligence and good humour. Overall participants' experiences and views on Irish slagging bring up an important issue of this feature of Irish humour: the fine line between slagging and insulting. Taking into account participants' perception of slagging, it can be said that this line is drawn by the difference between sharing humour and offending. According to participants' experiences, awareness of Irish slagging can influence the perception that Spanish newcomers may have of Irish humour and Irish norms of interaction, but also individual taste and sense of humour will play an essential role in their acceptance, predilection and use of slagging.

3.2.4 Targeting third parties: the soft spot of Spanish humour

Ten participants of this study recognised a tendency in Spanish humour to laugh at others who are not present. This tendency to laugh at others when they are not present has been highlighted as a trait of Spanish humour disliked by three participants, as Lucía says:

I hate Spanish humour that targets the weakest. They pick on a weak collective, like women, immigrants, the disabled...and they target on them, and I don't like it. It is easy because it is easy to pick on someone who is weaker but I don't like it. (Lucía)

Lucía manifests her extreme dislike for humour that targets a weak collective and which can also be racist and homophobic and potentially hurtful. This type of humour has been criticized by six participants of this study. But, as Lucía explains, Spanish humour that targets others is not limited to collectives, it also attacks individuals:

They laugh at the dumbest person in the class because is not as smart as everyone else, and everyone has a go, again and again.

These negative views and feelings towards Spanish humour that targets others are partly based on comparisons between Spanish and Irish humour as 'targeting others behind their backs' has been recognised as a difference between Spanish and Irish humour by seven participants. Both types of humour are based on other's weaknesses or misfortunes but only the Spanish joke is based on the inferiority of the target. In addition, presence or absence of the target will have different consequences. Irish slagging gives the target an instant chance to react, while targeting others who are not present does not. Moreover, the absence of the target of

humour can have an impact on caution for hurting others by offending or trespassing certain limits in the case of humour that targets celebrities in the media.

Daniel has recognised this pattern in Spanish comedy, which he contrasts to the Irish tendency for self-deprecation:

Many Spanish comedians based their act in laughing at others exclusively whereas Irish comedy is mainly based in self-deprecation.

Nine participants have categorised Spanish humour as hurtful and offensive towards others who are not present. This judgement seems to be fostered by their cross-cultural experiences. For example, Nadia says:

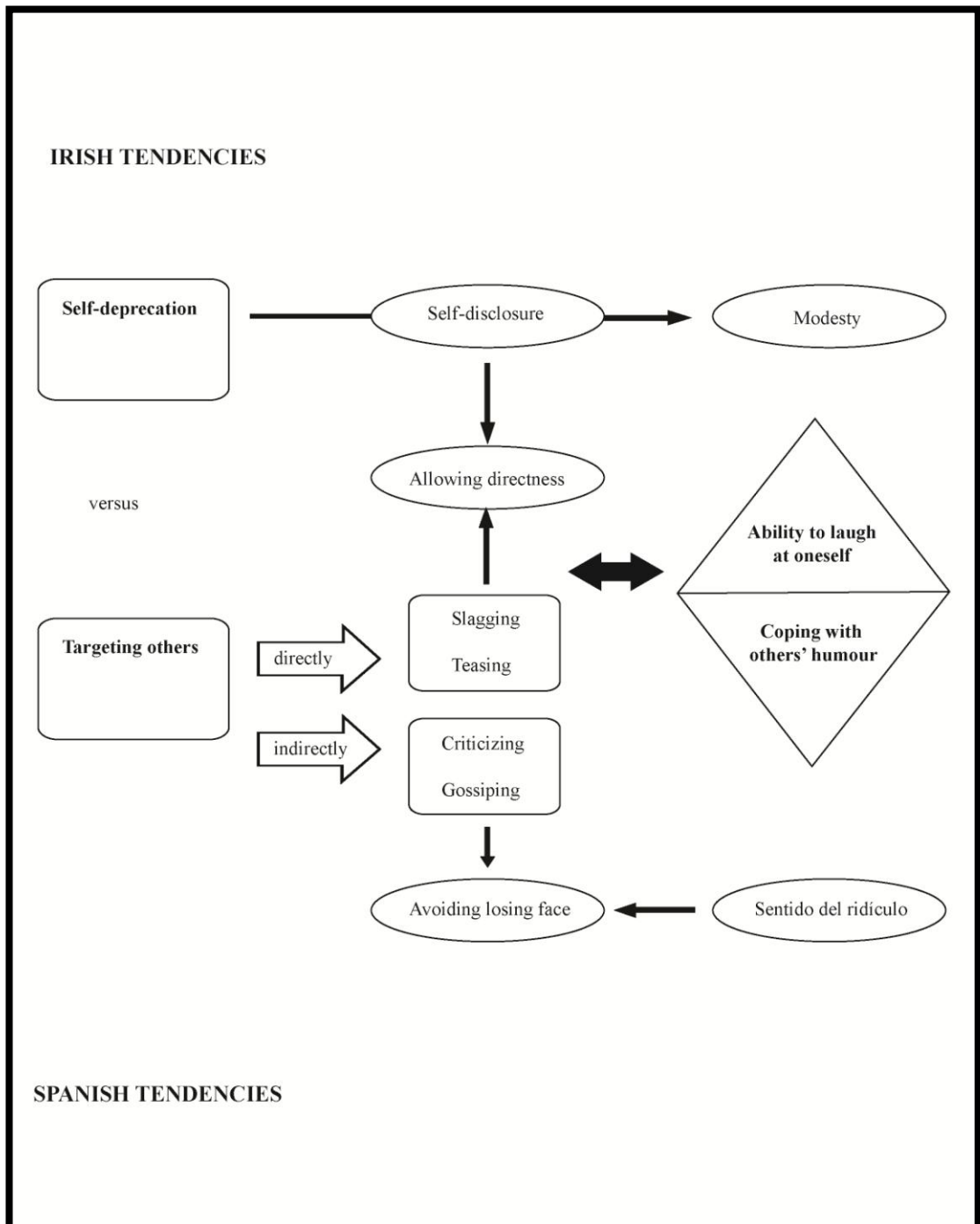
When I go home, I realise that most humour is limited to gossiping and criticising others. I find it quite shallow and offensive.

As Nadia has experienced distance to her hometown, she has become more sensitive and critical to humour which is exclusively based on targeting others. Nadia's perspective is now influenced by her cross-cultural experience. She has become more critical of her culture and its humour. This is a common pattern surfacing from the views of twelve participants of this study, who are willing to pass judgements on Spanish humour for different reasons, a core reason being '*targeting others behind their back*'.

3.2.5 Targets of humour: reasons and consequences

After analysing participants' views on targets of humour, it appears clear that the shift on targets has major implications in the content of humour and its perceived intentions and effects. Diagram 4 represents the different elements which are at stake regarding differences between Spanish and Irish humour in terms of targets of humour: tendencies in each culture (self-deprecation, targeting others directly and

Diagram 4 *Targets of humour in Spanish and Irish culture*



targeting others indirectly), their communicative functions (criticizing, gossiping, self-disclosure), psychological aspects (ability to laugh at self or cope with others' humour), and cultural values attached to it (modesty and '*sentido del ridiculo*' or pride).

Participants of this study have highlighted a tendency for self-deprecation in Irish humour which is balanced by a tendency to target others who are present by slugging and teasing them. This balance contributes to a rather positive view of Irish humour which is perceived as fair and harmless. As regards Spanish humour, participants' views have focused on a Spanish tendency to target others who are not present. As a result, a rather negative picture of Spanish humour has emerged. In the absence of the person being targeted, Spanish humour can come across as unfair and hurtful. Participants' perception of targets of humour have led to a dichotomy between '*harmless*' Irish humour characterised by self deprecation and playful slugging and '*hurtful*' Spanish humour, characterised by targeting others who are not present.

From a different perspective, participants of this study have linked Irish self-deprecation and slugging to ability to laugh at oneself and coping with being laughed at, which is also interlinked with a perceived relaxed attitude towards disclosing self-weaknesses and being the target of humour; a sign of Irish modesty and 'good' humour. In contrast, issues such as pride and self-consciousness in Spanish culture have been linked to an inability to laugh at oneself and reluctance to being the subject of humour. This observation is in alignment with the perception that Spanish humour tends to laugh at others who are not present, sparing them from losing face through humour, whereas Irish humour tends to be self-deprecating or target others directly which allows self-disclosure and directness. The relevance of these functions of humour in the context of the study are discussed further in chapters 6 and 8.

3.3 Intricacy

3.3.1 Spanish ‘easy humour’

Seven participants of this study have manifested an aversion to a certain style of Spanish humour which they categorise as ‘*easy humour*’:

There are a lot of rude comedians with no talent, a lot of easy humour for an easy audience, no offense. (Oscar)

For Oscar, ‘easy humour’ reflects a lack of talent in Spanish comedians. It is tailored for a certain type of audience which he does not identify with:

I recall seeing Los Morancos on TV and seeing the audience laughing hard, and I cannot understand how they find funny something so stupid and vulgar. I find it really strange.

Six participants of this study, like Oscar, think that easy humour reflects a lack of wit. They despise the lack of intellectual quality of its content as does Lucía:

In Spain they joke more about really ordinary things, easy jokes, with no social or political content. That hideous type of humour like Torrente or Los Morancos, it is easy, it has not been put any sort of thought, it is just a stupid nasty joke.

Lucía believes that the content in Spanish humour is more mundane than in Irish humour, a difference which has been noted by three participants of this study.

In addition to exposing lack of wit, ‘easy humour’ is characterised by relying on vulgar content as Pedro says:

Spanish humour can be very easy, vulgar and uncouth. Los Morancos, Cruz y Raya...I used to like them as a kid but now, I don't find it funny at all.

With age, Pedro has moved on from *easy humour* and is no longer fond of it. His experience is an indication of the evolution of a person's sense of humour through time and experience.

Finally, three participants of this study have brought up another feature of *easy humour*: targeting the weakest.

I hate easy humour that ridicules the weakest, it is simple, easy, they attack drug addicts, people with issues...if it is someone like a politician who can defend himself it's OK but making jokes about drug addicts for the sake of it it's not. (Lucía)

For Lucía, targeting weak groups of society through humour is not only an easy option but is also incorrect and offensive. For her, and two other participants, this type of humour is too offensive to be amusing. Lucía's comment links *easy humour* with humour that laughs at others behind their back. To sum up, seven participants of this study have pointed out their disapproval of a trend in Spanish humour labelled 'easy humour'. This trend is characterised by its content which reflects lack of wit either by being, mundane, vulgar or targeting others who are defenceless.

3.3.2 Nonsense humour: a Spanish weakness

Spanish tendency for easy humour which lacks wit and intellectual effort has been highlighted by seven participants of this study. Some of these participants have criticised this trend of humour for different reasons. But four of these participants admit to having a soft spot for *easy humour*. For example, Rosa says:

They are more ironic and sarcastic, in Spain we are more direct, Faemino y Cansado, for instance, they used to say bizarre things like 'Vaya mierda la nocilla de dos sabores!' ['two flavours Nutella: what a piece of shit!'], this is not ironic at all...but it is funny or Pedro Reyes, quite bizarre, or just silly. I have not seen this kind of thing here.

Despite recognizing her dislike for explicit humour, Rosa admits to have laughed at Spanish comedians whose discourse is quite plain. According to her, it is the ordinary content of these acts what makes them amusing:

They make a really mundane act to appear really funny, and you laugh because you see it from another perspective.

Five participants of this study have highlighted a Spanish trend for this kind of nonsense humour which seems to lack any coherence. Their attitudes towards it range from despising it to enjoyment. Nicolás explains how he enjoys this type of absurd humour, although he cannot find a justification for it:

None-sense humour is more popular in Spain. There is a love for silly absurd humour, we all enjoy it but we cannot explain why.

Nicolás believes nonsense humour to be more popular in Spain. For him, fondness for this absurd or nonsense humour appears to be a common weakness of Spaniards, which he cannot rationalize. Nicolás makes a very valid point as it is its illogicality that makes this type of humour work. However, the rationale behind this nonsensicality is explained by incongruity theories which are discussed in greater detail in chapter 8.

Another participant, Andrés, explains the use of nonsense humour in the context of interactions among Spanish people:

(In Spain) you are not trying to make a witty remark, sometimes you go out with friends and you say such stupid things that it is really not a competition to see who makes the most ingenious remark.[laughs]. I think it is more relaxed in that sense. It's a bit different, yes.

For Andrés, the use of nonsense humour marks a difference in interactions among Spanish or Irish friends. With Spanish people, he feels at ease to say silly things

which make no sense but can turn out to have a humorous effect. However, he does not think this type of humour works in Ireland. This view complements the idea that conversational Irish humour is based around witty remarks. In this context, the use of nonsense humour can feel inappropriate. This impression might affect the use of humour in cross-cultural interactions as new-comers, like Andrés, might adjust their humour to suit their interactions with Irish people, once they understand these differences.

Another participant, Aurora, declares she is not a fan of *nonsense* Spanish humour, which she highlights as a cultural difference between Spanish and Irish humour:

Spanish humour can be really silly and childish. I think Irish people would be stunned by the kind of things some Spanish people laugh at.

Aurora shows aversion to humour which is based on nonsense. She is clearly familiar with it due to its popularity in Spanish culture, which she seems to despise. However, she believes Irish people are alien to this type of humour. For Aurora, this absence is another strength of that contributes to her fondness of Irish humour, which she particularly admires '*because is more subtle*'.

3.3.3 Irish wit and other admired qualities of Irish humour

Participants' views of *easy* Spanish humour can have a significant impact on their perception of Irish humour in terms of intricacy. Accordingly, simplicity and subtleness have been pointed out as the main differences in quality between Spanish and Irish humour by participants of this study such as Elisa:

In general I think Spanish sense of humour has a different focus, it is more direct, simpler, and sometimes there is a predisposition for easy jokes. Irish humour is more subtle, more ironic, sharper.

Elisa recognises a general predominance of directness and simplicity in Spanish humour which contrasts with a prevalence of subtleness and irony in Irish humour. This contrasting view is shared by six participants of this study who emphasise different nuances of Spanish humour which signal their directness and simplicity. For example Lucía says:

Jokes in Spain are easier to get, they are simpler, but here they are more intricate, they have to do with something you said the day before, and you have to think to understand them...

Lucía sees a difference in the content of conversational jokes between Spanish and Irish culture. She perceives Irish jokes as more intricate as they involve more thinking for both the person making the joke and the listener. Elisa, supports this vision about conversational humour in Irish culture:

I think they are very sharp, they think, you are talking and the Irish person is thinking 'What can I say here?' , I don't know, they make so many sharp comments, and say so many remarks, that you say 'How did they think of that?... and they love it, they are always trying to say something ingenious.

Elisa has perceived a conscious effort in her Irish interlocutors to make clever humorous comments in their conversation. She believes they cannot resist trying to be witty and she admires the results of their effort, which comes across as natural to them.

Six participants of this study, like Elisa and Lucía, agree that Irish humour is more intricate than Spanish humour due to its wittiness. It is clear that this kind of humour based on witty conversational remarks requires a higher effort on behalf of all interlocutors. Nevertheless, these six participants enjoy making this effort and admire the Irish endeavour for it. This enjoyment might have a positive effect in

their daily interactions and their involvement in conversations with Irish people, which is further discussed in chapter 5.

Humour subjects constitute another characteristic, which according to three participants of this study denotes differences in intricacy between Irish and Spanish humour.. Three participants of this study perceived the use of rather mundane matters in Spanish humour which they contrast with prevalence for political or current affairs in Irish humour. As Nuria says:

Yes, I think it is more intelligent, because of the subjects, more than anything else, maybe it is because of the type of people I know here...In Spain I think is more simple, that is why it is easier, the subjects are more mundane.

For Nuria, Irish humour involves higher levels of awareness and use of certain subjects that require and denote greater intellectual abilities. According to this, awareness of current affairs would be vital for using humour in cross-cultural interactions in Ireland whereas lack of awareness would result in feelings of inadequacy, a negative social effect of humour which can also affect cross-cultural adaptation.

Moreover, Nuria questions if her impression is due to her personal social environment in Ireland. This highlights the influence of participants' environment and their awareness of this influence in their opinions about Irish and Spanish humour: a relevant issue to take into account in the analysis of participants' perception of Spanish and Irish humour in a cross-cultural context (See section 3.4 for further discussion).

Explicitness as opposed to *subtleness* is another disparity which according to five participants distinguishes Spanish and Irish humour. For example Oscar compares Irish and Spanish humour as follows:

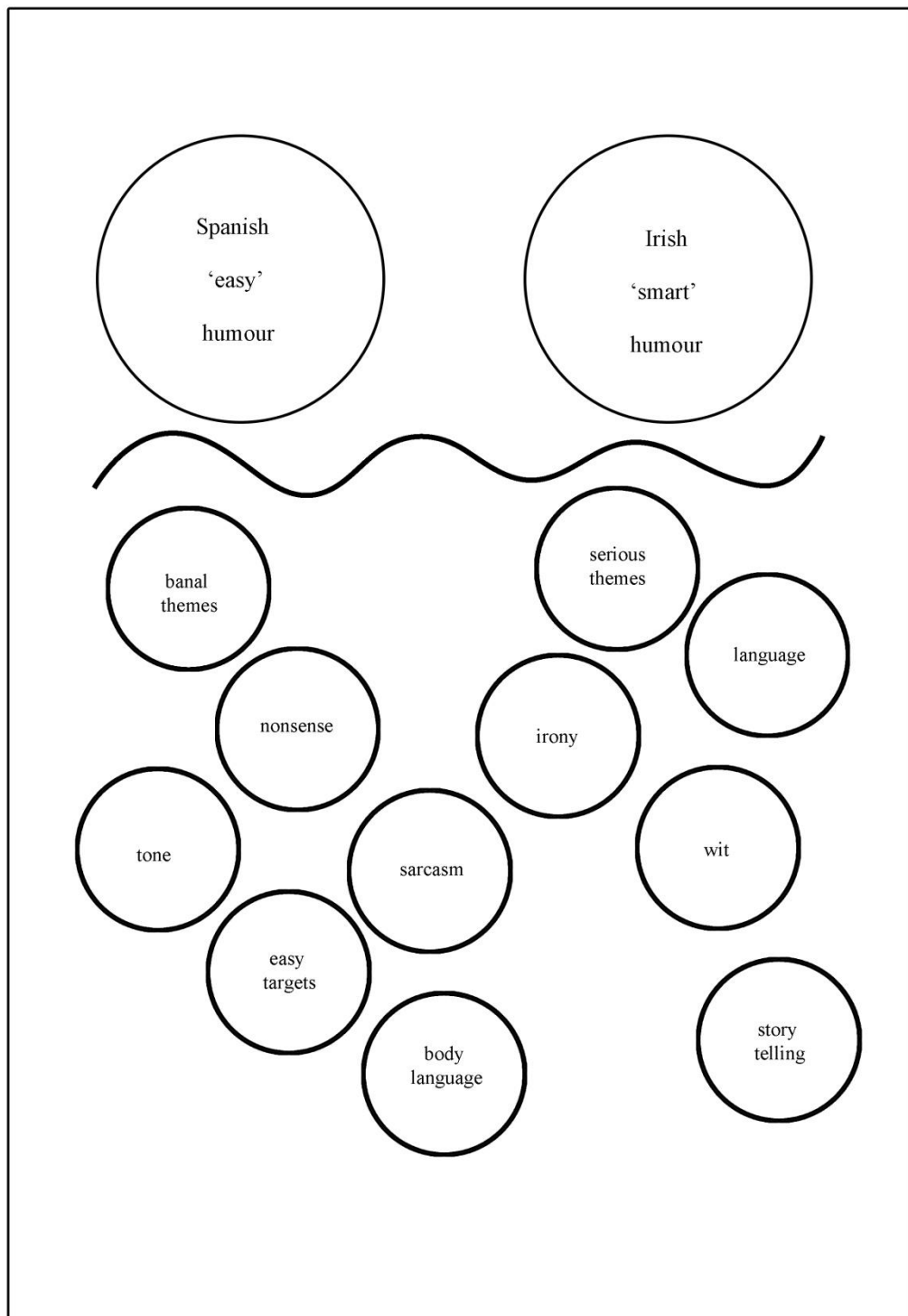
I get the impression that in Spain, humour is more vulgar, there are good comedians who are not, but overall I think Spanish humour is cruder. Here is more ironic, more sarcastic, more subtle.

For Oscar, irony and sarcasm produce more subtle humour. Six participants of this study, like Oscar, perceive a lesser use of these figures of speech in Spanish humour, which results in a more explicit discourse. According to these participants, this lack of subtlety is particularly highlighted in Spanish ‘easy’ humour which is characterised by its rough or vulgar content. In this context, subtleness is an admired quality of Irish humour which contributes to its overall perception as a more intricate type of humour. In contrast, explicitness in Spanish humour is viewed with disapproval by four participants of this study.

3.3.4 Simplicity versus Intricacy

Overall, seven participants of this study have highlighted intricacy as a difference between Spanish and Irish humour. These participants consider Spanish humour to be less intricate in its content and their views are based on both comedy acts and everyday interactions. On the one hand, they perceive a contrast between the existence of ‘easy’, effortless and nonsense humour in Spanish culture which they have not come across in Irish humour. Although, it is important to take into account their exposure to Irish humour in comparison to Spanish humour. On the other hand, they highlight a prevalence for wit, irony and sarcasm in Irish humour, which results in a more subtle and clever humour. These distinguishing facets between Spanish and Irish humour are illustrated in Diagram 5.

Diagram 5 *Intricacy versus Simplicity. Distinguishing Factors between Spanish and Irish Humour.*



The small circles in the diagram represent facets of humour which, according to participants, are more present in Spanish humour (as outlined on the left) or Irish humour (on the right). Despite their existence in both Spanish and Irish humour,

reliance on some of these aspects brings to the surface the contrast between Spanish ‘easy’ humour and Irish ‘smart’ humour. These considerations hint at the challenges involved in mastering a type of humour which requires language competence and knowledge of Irish culture and society.

Finally, it is relevant to point out that one participant of this study, Pedro offers a divergent view regarding Spanish and Irish humour in terms of their intricacy:

I think Irish humour is more daft, I am sorry to say it, but that is how I feel, but sure, I don't know a wide spectrum of Irish people, so I don't dare to judge them for the few specimens which I deal with [laughs].

In contrast to any other participant of this study, Pedro perceives Irish humour to be plainer than Spanish humour in its content. However, he diminishes his ability to generalise by acknowledging limited contact with Irish people. This consideration leads to the final section of this chapter which deals with participants’ awareness of cultural, regional and individual differences which affect Spanish and Irish humour.

3.4 Terms and conditions: participants’ attitudes towards comparing and generalising.

This section discusses participants’ uncertainties in making generalisations in relation to Irish and Spanish humour. In this context, participants’ ideas are based on their knowledge and experience of Irish and Spanish culture. Five participants of this study have explicitly stated their awareness of the impact that their knowledge and experience of Irish culture has in their opinions, particularly as they question their own knowledge of Irish humour. For example Oscar says:

It is difficult to compare because I am not sure how much I know about Irish humour so you have to take that into account.

Oscar acknowledges an imbalance in his ability to compare Spanish and Irish

humour. He somehow feels that his lesser general knowledge of Irish humour invalidates his judgement, despite this being his lived experience. For three participants this imbalance is characterised by their lack of familiarity with Irish media, whereas three different participants, like Nicolás, point to their limited contact with Irish people, or the type of rapport that they have with them:

I cannot give details about their humour because I don't have that much contact with Irish people.

Notwithstanding their knowledge and experience of Irish culture, some participants find it difficult to generalise about Irish and Spanish humour for different reasons. Heterogeneity and regional differences within each culture are highlighted by five participants of this study, for example Tania says:

To be honest, I think Catalan humour is different to other Spanish humour, from Galicia, or from the Basque country, from Madrid...others which I am not that familiar with...I think in Spain, due to the cultural variety and the size of the country, humour is not as homogeneous as in Ireland.

Finally, regarding different aspects of their humour perception, five participants state their preference for highlighting individual differences rather than making general statements that compare Irish to Spanish humour. For example Diana makes the following comment regarding irony and sarcasm:

I think it depends on the person, I am thinking of an Irish friend who is really ironic and very sarcastic, then I am thinking of a Galician friend who is really, really ironic in his humour. I don't think I can distinguish between one country and the other, it depends on the person.

Overall, eight participants have revealed their reluctance to generalise about cultural features of humour. This reluctance is rooted in their experience of Irish and

Spanish culture. For some participants their limited knowledge impedes their ability to generalise whereas for others their experiences shift their focus to regional and individual differences. The links between these circumstances and participants' cross-cultural interactions and transformation are amplified further in chapters 5 and 6.

3.5 Conclusion

This first chapter of data analysis provides a discussion of participants' perception of Spanish and Irish humour. The focus of this discussion has been the relevance of participants' perceptions in their intercultural interactions and in the adaptation process which they undergo as Spanish migrants who are living in Ireland. Analysis of participants' opinions, experiences and ideas of Irish and Spanish humour and the interrelation between the two has drawn attention to those issues and their foremost impact on cross-cultural adaptation. In this context, three main areas of focus have built up from the data: humour targets, humour intricacy and circumstances affecting participants' perceptions.

Within these three areas, the analysis of participants' feelings about cultural proximity and distance has revealed a range of complementary perspectives. In line with the data, special emphasis has been paid to those issues which expose a higher level of distance: humour targets and nuances of humour intricacy:

- Regarding humour targets participants perceive a higher tendency in Irish humour for self-deprecation and humour that targets others directly, which has been linked to communicative functions such as self-disclosure and direct criticism, psychological traits such as ability to laugh at oneself and cultural values such as modesty.

- Concerning Spanish humour participants' opinions point at a pronounced tendency to target third parties, which has been linked to communicative functions such as criticizing or gossiping, psychological issues such as self-consciousness and cultural values such as pride.
- Regarding humour intricacy participants perceive greater popularity and use of a more intricate humour in Irish society, which is characterised by their content and use of the language. In contrast, participants' opinions have highlighted popular tendencies in Spanish humour which imply a less intricate use of humour in both content and style.

In this context, participants of this study have highlighted certain trends of Spanish and Irish humour uncovering a variety of inclinations and antipathies towards these tendencies. Nevertheless, participants' opinions regarding both content and style of humour reveal a focus on their admiration of certain aspects of Irish humour as opposed to a more critical attitude towards negative aspects of Spanish humour.

Overall, this chapter of data analysis provides a picture of participants' perception of Spanish and Irish humour based on the subtle differences in both content and style, which reflect the complexity of those issues which are at stake in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation. The next chapter continues exploring these issues with a focus on participants' perception of Spanish and Irish culture and their societies.

CHAPTER 4

Participants' perception of Spanish and Irish Culture

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reveals participants perception of Spanish and Irish culture and the existing cultural proximity or distance between the cultures. Firstly, the chapter deals with *the environment*: the external conditions which participants of this study highlight as characteristic of Spanish and Irish culture. Secondly, the chapter deals with *attitudes and behaviours*: ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting which represent Irish and Spanish people according to participants' perception of both cultures. Thirdly, the chapter discusses cultural *values*: the principles or qualities which participants of this study consider to be worthwhile in Spanish and Irish culture.

The chapter's discussion is focused on a comparative analysis of participants' views on Spanish and Irish culture in terms of those characteristics which they personally like and dislike and those features which according to them highlight similarities or differences between the two cultures. Finally, the chapter concludes by assessing participants' general perception of cultural proximity between Spanish and Irish culture, leading an appreciation of the impact that perception of culture may have in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation, which is further discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

4.2 The environment

This section deals with distinctive external factors, which according to participants of this study, characterise the settings of Irish and Spanish culture. These factors include geographical features and social issues which have been highlighted by

participants based on their knowledge and experience of Irish, Spanish and other cultures they may be familiar with.

4.2.1 The weather effects in people's wellbeing: personality, lifestyle and mood.

Ten participants of this study have pointed out the weather as an obvious difference between Spanish and Irish culture. According to them this distinction has significant consequences in each culture and their people. Susana, a participant of this study explains such consequences as follows:

The weather is a really important factor that distinguishes different cultures: it shapes people's way of life in different countries. Perhaps that is why Irish people are more relaxed, less open and less expressive. Limitations to open air activities, hours of dark in the winter, cold weather, rain, lack of sunshine, they are important factors to choose certain activities instead of others. It also makes you feel less active. Spanish people are more open, more explosive, we are more communicative in our interactions.

Susana highlights two main implications that the weather has in people. On the one hand, the weather affects their lifestyle by dictating their choices for leisure activities. On the other hand, it affects their character. According to Susana, Irish people are more calm and reserved whereas Spanish people are more fiery and open. This is reflected in their interactions and communication style, particularly as regards their directness, effusion and body language.

4.2.1.1 The weather and people's personalities

Four participants have drawn attention to the effects of the weather in people's nature, linking Spaniards ability to manifest their joy of life to sunlight exposure. Pedro adds an interesting remark regarding the effects of the weather on people's character:

To a certain extent, the weather influences peoples character, but this is a little rubbish here, Irish people have quite a Mediterranean character,

they are warm to start with, even if it is superficial, or in the pub, but it is pleasant, you are smoking outside and people talk to you, it is nice. I have heard them being called 'the Latinos of the North'. They know how to break the ice, it reminds me of the south (of Spain), but yes, the weather affects people's habits, that's for sure.

Pedro acknowledges the effects of weather conditions in people's lifestyle but he questions its effects in Irish people's character based on his daily interactions. According to him, Irish people have a 'warm' nature which reminds him of the south of Spain. Pedro finds people approachable, friendly and talkative: features which add value to interactions with Irish people.

4.2.1.2 The weather and people's lifestyles

Seven participants of this study, like Pedro, have highlighted the impact that meteorological conditions can have in people's lifestyle finding the Spanish weather more inductive for outdoor activities. For example, Marta says:

I like the idea of living in Spain because of the weather, it is not very original but it's true. There are more things to do.... Well, here if you look for it, too, but in Spain there are more possibilities to do things outdoors. It is easier, you don't have to look for them; they just come up.

For Marta, the fact that Spanish weather allows easy access to a wider range of outdoor possibilities is a plus of Spanish culture, making Spain a more appealing living environment. For five participants, like Marta, the difference in weather conditions between Spain and Ireland has implied a change in their lifestyle and their quality of life: planning outdoor activities requires a bigger effort, they do less and feel less active. They dislike the restrictive outcomes of Irish weather, which as Nadia says '*forces people to stay at home or mainly go to the pub*' as a place to meet others or engage in leisure pursuits.

4.2.1.3 The weather and people's moods

Another participant of this study, Nicolás, takes a different angle when reflecting on the effects of the weather on people's personality, shifting the focus to a psychological perspective, to wellbeing:

The weather is one of the constant things I dislike about Ireland, the lack of light, I think it affects your personality and your mood. It affects your wellbeing.

For Nicolás, the weather is a clear negative factor of Irish culture which affects people's wellbeing. Five participants of this study have manifested their dislike of Irish weather due to its effects in their own mental state. For example, Diana, says:

The weather affects me, the lack of light, specially. In December, it is five o'clock and I am more tired than in the summer, then the usual, if after five days of overcast skies the sun comes out, I feel happier, yes, the weather does affect me.

Diana recognises the effects of the weather in her mood, admitting to finding the winter months difficult due to lack of light and to feel an improvement in her mood with exposure to sunshine. In this context, the weather is one of the most difficult things which six participants of this study report having to cope with in their experience of Irish culture as it affects their lifestyle and their mood. For example Nuria says:

I got quite used to it, out of a hundred percent, I think I got used to it seventy percent...but this winter I am getting quite fed up, there is a limit (laughs) or the last summers have been just horrible. But yes, I am used to it now. At the beginning I used to cry, I used to open the curtains and cry, now. I don't mind.

It is clear that Nuria views the weather as quite a negative factor of Irish culture. However, her statement depicts how she has evolved to a point where Irish weather no longer strikes her mental state as it used to. Throughout fifteen years of

acquaintance with Irish weather, Nuria has managed to internalise this aspect of Irish culture to a certain extent, learning to cope with it. Despite the weather conditions, which do not allow for as much of an outdoor life as she would prefer, Nuria manifests being really happy with her current lifestyle in Ireland: a lifestyle that suits Irish environmental conditions.

4.2.1.4 Escaping from the ‘bad’ weather

Regarding weather conditions and its effects in people’s wellbeing, it is appropriate to mention that three participants of this study have highlighted the weather as a negative factor of life in Spain finding difficult to cope with high temperatures in the summer. This feeling as Andrés notes contributes to a positive outlook on Irish weather:

I love the summer here as I cannot stand temperatures of 30 degrees and over.

In Andrés’s hometown, temperatures higher than 30 degrees are common from May through September making it a less ideal home than Dublin for him, at least one third of the year. In line with this view, Susana, a participant who plans to move back to Spain pinpoints the extreme temperatures of Spanish summers as the one element of life in Spain which she will find difficult to readapt to. However, one of the main reasons for Susana to move back to Spain is Irish weather conditions, particularly the lack of sunshine and sun. This ambivalent perspective contributes to Susana’s plan to move back to Spain but spend long periods of time in Ireland.

Like Susana, seven participants of this study, have manifested their desire to move out of Ireland in the future based on weather conditions. For example Lucía, who

plans to leave Ireland in the near future, says:

If I stayed I would become really fed up with the weather, the first year I was fine but now I am fed up. I would not stand it. The problem is that there is no perfect country...[laughs].

Lucía admits her current exasperation with the Irish weather, predicting that it would only increase if she stayed in the country. For her the weather is a negative aspect of Ireland which prevents it from being an ideal home country. However, she can see the comical side of it, admitting that ‘*there is no perfect country*’.

4.2.1.5 Weather and humour: ‘A mal tiempo, buena cara’ (If the weather is bad, smile back)

Five participants of this study laughed at Irish weather conditions at some stage in their interviews; another participant pinpointed it as common topic of humour. This is a clear example of using humour to face negative circumstances. In this context, a participant of this study, Eduardo, emphasises the importance of seeing the funny side of adverse conditions including the weather by quoting the Spanish saying ‘*A mal tiempo buena cara*’. Ability to joke and laugh about weather conditions reflects a positive outlook, which, in turn, will have a positive effect in cross-cultural adaptation. On the contrary, focusing on the negative effects of ‘bad’ weather conditions will contribute to a negative outlook which will also impact cross-cultural adaptation. At this point it is relevant to mention that ten participants of this study have not acknowledged a negative impact of the weather on their lives in Ireland. One participant, Victor, who has been living in Ireland for 5 years, affirms his neutral feelings about the weather:

It (the weather) really does not affect me. If it rains, I put a rain coat on [laughs].

It is clear that Victor is not as sensitive to the weather conditions as other participants of this study. This brings to question the factors that determine the effects of the weather on people's mood or mental wellbeing and whether their experience of previous living environments and their meteorological conditions is one of these factors.

Finally, it is important to remark on the effects of people's mood in their use of humour and vice versa which links the weather to humour matters: people in good mood are more willing to see the 'funny side' of things and seeing 'the funny' side improves people's mood.

4.2.2 Citizens welfare

4.2.2.1 Social and public services

Eight participants of this study have mentioned the quality of social and public services as a negative aspect of Irish culture. Six participants have criticized Irish infrastructure which affects citizens' quality of life, and five participants have highlighted their disappointment with Irish health care. For example, Rosa says:

I would like to have a better health system; I think the Irish system is expensive and bad. I don't trust it... I didn't expect to have the need to keep visiting my doctor in Spain, in fact, not just the doctor, the dentist too, and I have chatted to other Spaniards and they all go to the doctor and the dentist in Spain... I think this is something which we find difficult to adapt to.

Rosa, clearly disappointed by the quality and cost of health care in Ireland, feels the need to be attached to the Spanish health system. According to her, and four other participants of this study, this is a common need among Spanish people living in Ireland who, instead of adjusting to the Irish system, rely on the Spanish health system because it '*is cheaper and better*'. This behaviour is a clear instance of

`geographical in-betweeness´ where migrants act as citizens of their new country and their country of origin as it suits them. In this context, five participants of this study acknowledge that contact with Irish culture has brought appreciation for certain aspects of Spanish public services, which they took for granted when living in Spain. In addition, six participants manifest a stoic attitude characterised by *‘reirse por no llorar’* (laughing to avoid crying) as they laugh at the shortcomings of Irish social and public services regarding their quality and cost. For example, Nicolás laughs at his own use of sarcasm to complain about the cost of gas and electricity in Ireland: *‘the bills for the gas and electricity in this country are just hilarious’* Another participant, Eduardo laughs as he comments:

I ride a motorbike and I know certain path holes by heart, it’s been years, but you really need to know them in order not to kill yourself.

Eduardo is laughing at the poor conditions of Irish roads, which come across as rather objectionable, causing a black joke about deaths on the road. Nicolás and Eduardo’s comments exemplify the use of humour in adverse conditions, which is discussed in further detail in chapter 6.

4.2.2.2 Crime and safety

Six participants of this study have highlighted safety as a positive aspect of Irish culture. Ireland, a country with lower crime rates than Spain, is felt as a safer place to live, which contributes to citizens well being and quality of life. Three participants mention how they found the absence of gated windows striking, or the fact that people may leave their front doors open in certain parts of the country.

Lucía, a participant of this study, compares her feelings of safety in Dublin and in her home town, Barcelona:

I feel much safer, over there I feel the need to be more cautious, in the underground, in the street, here you can see drug addicts, or alcoholics but they are usually not aggressive towards you, and I used to live in Talbot street, next to a methadone clinic, and they never said anything to me. Yes, I feel more at ease here.

Lucía, among five participants of this study believes that there is a clear difference between life in Spain and Ireland in relation to personal safety.

4. 2.2.3 Noise and traffic

Seven participants of this study have highlighted noise exposure as a difference between Spain and Ireland characterised by higher levels of noise pollution from traffic, construction, other types of noise in public and private spaces, and louder tones in people's conversations in general. This difference is particularly noticed when they visit Spain, as they need to readjust to this noisier and louder environment. For some participants like, Diana, this *'is so ridiculous that is actually funny'*: the lack of familiarity to louder tones and noises can make them come across as rather comic in certain contexts, but it can also be overwhelming and contribute to feelings of strangeness. These participants appreciate having a quieter living environment in Ireland, pinpointing noise pollution as a negative factor of life in Spain.

However, four participants have highlighted lack of traffic noise in the streets as an aspect of Irish culture, which they are now accustomed to, but which they found striking at first, admitting feeling nostalgic about previous noisier Spanish

surroundings and about a more aggressive driving style. In this context Susana, jokes about Irish people's driving habits:

At a Dublin crossroads, there is car in Nase, and they'll give it the right of way.

Susana recalls being frustrated by the extreme precaution of Irish drivers, something which she has become accustomed to, but still finds ridiculous, as her sarcastic comment denotes. In contrast, Andrés praises the manners of Irish drivers:

I live in a cul de sac, leading to a busy road, every morning I just wait until someone lets me go, it never takes more than two or three cars; In Spain, this would be impossible. I would never leave my street if I wait for someone to let me go [laughs]

For Andrés, the contrast between Spanish and Irish driving customs highlights the consideration of Irish drivers as a positive aspect of life in Ireland. His comment also denotes a change of behaviour to fit his new environment: he waits for someone to give him the right of way. However, he depicts the unsuitability of this behaviour in a similar situation in Spain, which would lead to ridiculous results: *not being able to drive out of one's own road*. Andrés's example shows how inadequate behaviour can lead to frustrating situations. However, awareness and familiarity to cultural differences allows newcomers to adjust their behaviour and expectations of others behaviours, and also to make comic cross-cultural comparisons that trigger humorous reactions and relief frustration. Finally, it is relevant to point out that driving implies interaction with other drivers and pedestrians as well as with signs, traffic lights and rules of the road. According to four participants, Irish drivers are more cautious, laidback and considerate than Spanish drivers. These differences match up to those of other types of interactions discussed in detail in chapter 5.

4.2.3 History, folklore and landscape

4.2.3.1 Celtic origins and Irish landscape

Six participants of this study have pointed to Celtic folklore as an attractive facet of Irish culture, whereas five participants have emphasized their fondness of the Irish landscape. Three participants were interested in Irish folklore and Celtic traditions before they moved to Ireland, which contributed to a positive predisposition to Irish culture, while others felt engaged after some contact with these traditions. Celtic mythology, literature and Irish music are most emphasised by participants, who are particularly fond of the strength of some traditions in some parts of Ireland as well as the general pride that Irish people have of Irish culture, particularly as regards their Celtic origins. In addition, two participants, from the northwest regions of Spain (Galicia and Asturias) identify with Irish people and their Celtic origins as these are strongly engraved in their own cultures. For them, this commonality has in no doubt contributed to a positive predisposition to Irish culture.

Regarding the Irish landscape, participants' opinions reveal two different perspectives which contribute to their view of the Irish landscape: one is similarity to their home environment, particularly if they come from northern Spain; another one is contrast, particularly if they are from the mid, south or eastern parts of Spain. As with Celtic culture, two participants reveal being keen on Irish landscape before they came to Ireland, which for them was a positive factor in their predisposition to Irish culture as they felt enthusiastic about being in contact and discovering Irish landscape.

4.2.3.2 Spain: a country of many cultures

Seven participants of this study have emphasised their fondness of cultural variety within Spain: landscape, food, architecture, history and folk traditions all of which

can differ slightly or drastically from one region to another. For these participants, these different cultural nuances within the geographical limits of Spain contribute to the cultural richness of the country. In addition to this, despite cultural differences, five participants acknowledge recognising a common ground between all cultures within Spanish territory, which contributes to their feelings of identification with Spanish people from all regions. At the other end of the spectrum, and regardless of their political views, four participants revealed feeling alien to certain aspects of Spanish culture which are not rooted in their own culture. For three participants, this feeling strengthens identification with their regional cultures, whether these are felt as regional or national cultures, as opposed to 'mainstream' Spanish culture. For three participants, this feeling lessens the importance of cultural differences as dictated by geographical borders as they tend to identify with 'European', or 'Latin' people' or with other categories that live aside people's nationality. The implications of these feelings of identity in participants' cross-cultural adaptation are discussed in further detail in chapter 6.

Finally, in the context of this study, it is important to mention that three participants, who are from the northern regions of Spain, have highlighted the difference between northern and southern humour, whereas three Catalan participants, have pinpointed the difference between Catalan and Spanish humour. Four of these participants have manifested detachment to 'southern' or 'mainstream' Spanish humour, which they have only encountered in Spanish mass media. However, it is important to highlight that participants of mid and southern areas of Spain have also expressed their dislike for the same type of humour which they categorize as 'easy' humour as discussed in detail in chapter 3.

Overall, seven participants from all areas of Spain have highlighted the poor quality of comedy shows shown on Spanish TV, which leads to the next section of this chapter: the media.

4.2.4 The media

Eight participants of this study highlight the mass media as a difference between Spanish and Irish culture. They bring into account several aspects which distinguish Spanish and Irish media. Firstly, five participants have highlighted a difference in the content of the news as they perceive a more international focus in Spanish media in contrast with an inward focus on Irish media, in which most of the news are relevant to Ireland only. These participants acknowledge preference for the Spanish press which they follow, mainly online and which suits their interest in international or European affairs rather than focusing on national or local issues. Secondly, seven participants have highlighted the poor quality of Spanish media, particularly TV, but also radio and press. According to them Spanish media is overruled with poor quality programmes including reality shows, ‘gossip’ shows and biased political debates *‘none of which require any intellectual effort on behalf of the broadcasters and the audience’* as Eduardo points out. In this context, it is relevant to point at the use of humour in these TV programmes, which is characterised by *‘easy humour’* that targets third parties; in this case celebrities, politicians and interviewees of reality shows, exploiting rather vulgar or mundane matters. Fátima, a participant of this study, says she finds *‘gossiping programmes vulgar and not funny at all’*. It is clear that she does not care for the content of these programmes and cannot identify with the type of humour they produce. Moreover, ten participants believe that there is an equal significance of comedy shows on Spanish and Irish TV; although Spanish

TV channels give preference to ‘easy humour’, whereas Irish TV has a greater focus on stand up comedy which, according to participants is generally characterised by better quality. However, three participants acknowledge an increasing use of stand up comedy on Spanish TV which is significantly influenced by American TV.

According to these participants, American influence on Spanish TV is also reflected in the popularity of American series, including comedies, and the making of Spanish series. For example Pedro says:

The series are the same (in Spain and Ireland), and now you can see more stand up comedians in Spanish TV, some of them are good, and also these awful reality shows with artificial laughter, I guess this is coming from America too.

However, it is important to highlight that there is a greater exposure to TV shows from USA and Britain in Ireland, mainly for language reasons. In this context, exposure to British Media including British comedy is a key difference between Spain and Ireland, whereas the popularity of American series is a common ground in both cultures.

4.3 Behaviour and attitudes

4.3.1 Lifestyle

4.3.1.1 Leisure and alcohol consumption

As discussed in the previous section, participants of this study have highlighted the impact of the weather on people’s lifestyle, particularly regarding their leisure activities. According to seven participants, there is a wider range of spare time possibilities in Spain including outdoor and indoor activities, while there is a greater tendency to plan indoor activities in Ireland. In this context, six participants of this

study have highlighted the prevalence for indoor gatherings in Ireland, which is often characterised by alcohol consumption:

Spare time in Ireland is limited to indoor spaces, quite often involving alcohol. I also get the impression that Ireland is more similar to the US, where having a good time is linked with spending money. In Spain, at least in my experience, people have more varied spare time possibilities: going to the beach, to the countryside, on day trips, or even going for a drink or something to eat, which does not imply ending up having four pints! (Aurora)

Aurora highlights the dominance of alcohol in Irish people's spare time as a difference between Spanish and Irish culture as she believes Spanish leisure activities not to be as strongly connected to alcohol consumption. She also perceives a greater tendency towards consumption by Irish people in their spare time. Like Aurora, four participants of this study appreciate the prevalence of simpler activities in Spanish leisure, which gives them the impression that Spanish people do not need to spend as much money for their entertainment. Overall, ten participants of this study have manifested certain aversion to the role of alcohol in Irish culture. They recognise alcohol as the centre of social interactions, including family and work events, which can be striking coming from Spanish culture where the moderate use of alcohol is normalised, particularly among adults. Diana explains her view on the differences in use of alcohol dictated by the cultural norms in each country:

In my city people drink and get drunk but here is more normalized, old people drunk in the street or in the pub during the day, even old ladies...when I arrived first, I worked in a pub for a week and I still remember being really shocked because at a 21st birthday party, the grandmother was so drunk she could not go to the toilet...

Diana, among four participants of this study, admits that she still finds it striking seeing older people intoxicated by the use of alcohol. She pinpoints age as a

difference between Spanish and Irish culture regarding alcohol abuse, a factor which has been highlighted by five participants. For example Nuria says:

I feel that it is nearly expected of you to drink a lot to be “normal” and I don’t think that is right. Young people are under the impression they have to get plastered to have a good night out. This also happens in Spain but I think you grow out of it- you don’t here.

For Nuria, as nine other participants the norms and behaviour regarding alcohol use form a clear dividing line between Spanish and Irish culture.

In addition, regarding the importance of alcohol in Irish culture, six participants of this study have brought attention to its effect in their personal habits. Four participants admit that their use of alcohol has increased since living in Ireland, a fact which none of them value as they manifest resentment for not leading a healthier lifestyle. However, two participants who do not drink alcohol reveal feeling alienated or pressurised to drink. Rosa, a participant who is allergic to alcohol explains that although she feels integrated to Irish society *‘this is something that comes up every time there is a work event’*. In this context, she not only feels the necessity to explain herself for not drinking, but she feels uncomfortable witnessing how her colleagues’ behaviour changes as they continue drinking through the evening:

They are not friends, they are colleagues and I find it very awkward, I prefer not to get involved.

In this context, it is clear that Rosa distances herself from Irish culture in relation to alcohol consumption. Moreover, three participants have pinpointed the occurrence of aggressive behaviour induced by alcohol as negative factor of Irish culture. This is something they find striking, unnerving and difficult to get used to. However, they

point out that this behaviour is an exception to the norm as *'Irish people are otherwise really kind and friendly'* (Oscar).

It is relevant to mention that four participants acknowledge finding certain aspects of Irish people relationship to alcohol amusing. Accordingly, they recall teasing Irish people about this facet of their culture or finding the use of alcohol in certain contexts strange and amusing, which they did not expect such as work events, funerals and family gatherings. However, two participants have drawn attention to the occurrence of humorous reactions among Irish people, triggered by behaviour which is induced by alcohol consumption. They recognise their inability to see the comical side of this behaviour. This difference is derived from the different cultural codes around the use of alcohol and its acceptance in both Spanish and Irish society. In this context, for certain Spanish newcomers unacceptable behaviour induced by alcohol might be *'too embarrassing to be funny'* (Tania).

Finally, it is important to mention that five participants have highlighted Irish pub culture as a positive and enjoyable aspect of Irish culture. In this context, they appreciate the role of the pub as a social venue, the generally friendly atmosphere, the possible mix of generations and people from different backgrounds in the same pub, and the accessibility of live music in Irish pubs.

4.3.1.2 Leisure and entertainment: cultural events

Participants of this study expose an array of contrasting opinions about differences between Spanish and Irish culture in terms of cultural events. On one hand, three

participants lament the lack of accessibility to the arts in general. For example Elisa says:

'There are many theatres and a lot of concerts, but in Spain there is a better offer and pricewise it's more accessible to everyone, including young people'

At the other end of the spectrum, four participants highlight the accessibility of cultural events as a positive aspect of Irish culture, which they particularly enjoy. For example Eduardo says:

'I love the amount of cultural activities on offer, concerts, theatre, festivals, comedy...'

In this context, it is important to take into account the individuality of each participant perspective regarding their personal interests, their experiences of Irish culture, and their previous experiences. For example, Elisa has lived in Barcelona, whereas Eduardo comes from a smaller city in Spain. However, this dichotomy is not supported by the profiles of all participants who praise or criticize the accessibility to cultural events in Ireland. For example, Andrés, who lived in Barcelona before moving to Ireland, highlights Dublin's accessibility to cultural events as a positive aspect of Irish culture which contributes to his current lifestyle as he is now able to attend more cultural events. But Daniel's and Andrés's vision is also connected to their view on the balance between work and leisure which allows them to take part in these events, as examined in the next section.

Finally, four participants, like Eduardo, mention their fondness for stand up comedy clubs, which they have developed over their years in Ireland. They recognise stand up comedy as a bigger phenomenon in Ireland and praise the accessibility to comedy

events which offer a wide range in size and style. For example, Eduardo, enjoys the familiarity of comedy clubs in small venues like pubs where comedians have a chance to interact with their audience, something which is rather unusual in Spain, although three participants have pointed out the increasing occurrence of comedy clubs and stand up comedy shows in large Spanish cities like Barcelona.

4.3.1.3 Work

Eleven participants of this study have pinpointed significant differences between employment and working conditions in Spain and Ireland. Their opinions are based on their general knowledge of employment regarding working opportunities and working conditions in Ireland and Spain, and on their own working experiences in Spain and Ireland.

4.3.1.3.1 Work possibilities

Seven participants of this study consider work possibilities to be greater in Ireland than in Spain. In this context, it is relevant to notice that the data was collected in 2010, a time where both Spain and Ireland were feeling the effects of an economic recession. Moreover, sixteen participants of this study moved to Ireland in the years prior to the recession from 1989 to 2007. In their observations, these latest participants denote awareness of the differences between the Celtic tiger years and the recession. For example, Nuria says:

I love living here because Ireland has allowed me to develop as person. When I got here just before the Celtic tiger I was only a student doing my PhD, but I realised that there were a lot of opportunities to develop my career in Ireland that would have not been available to me in Spain.

Like Nuria, ten participants in this study appreciate Ireland for the opportunities they have found to develop professionally, which, according to them, did not exist in

Spain. Participants, like Nuria, who arrived to Ireland in the boom years are aware of the favourable circumstances they encountered compared to recession times. However, participants of this study, who are arrived in Ireland after 2008, share this positive view of Ireland regarding work opportunities. For example, Pedro who arrived in Ireland in 2009 says:

Ireland is offering me what I could not get in Spain: possibilities to develop professionally through work.

Fátima, a participant who has lived in Ireland for ten years, explains in more detail the difference between Spain and Ireland:

I used to work in Spain as a receptionist and I think if I had stayed there I would still be a receptionist. In Spain you need contacts to start off, then you don't get the kind of training you get here, so if you don't know someone there is not much else you can do. I see it in my friends, they are stuck, and there are not as many opportunities. Here if you are good, you can progress, they trust you, they give you opportunities, and they train you...In Spain they don't encourage professional development within work.

For Fátima, working conditions are the main reason not to go back to Spain, particularly regarding possibilities to progress within a career. Six participants share the feeling that opportunities for work progression in Spain are more difficult than in Ireland, which makes them appreciative of past and current opportunities in Ireland and cynical about the idea of working in Spain. This negative vision is not only fostered by work opportunities but also by the working conditions in Spain.

4.3.1.3.2 Working conditions

Fourteen participants of this study have manifested discontentment about working conditions in Spain. Salaries, working hours, legal rights, recognition and strong hierarchies are the main reasons for their complaints.

For example Lucía says:

I don't like the way people are treated at work and salaries can be ridiculous, I know life is more expensive here but in Spain life is not that much cheaper, the minimum wage is a rip off, an insult.

According to Lucía, Spanish salaries are worse than their Irish equivalents. According to her minimum wages are not enough to make a living and make it very difficult for young people to become independent. Four participants agree with Lucía, adding that even better positions above the minimum wage cannot compete with their Irish counterparts regarding the standards of earnings. In addition, three participants point out that there is less support for young entrepreneurs in Spain, which closes off this alternative for many young people.

Regarding workers rights four participants of this study feel that employees in Spain are often abused. As Elisa says, *'they have all the responsibilities and few rights.'* According to these participants, employees are expected to fulfil tasks on time with little consideration of the time they would need to complete them, and they are expected to work unpaid overtime:

In Spain, when you work overtime you don't get paid for it, here you do. There you have to do it to keep your job. (Tania)

Tania explains that the different conditions between Spain and Ireland regarding employees and employers expectations about working overtime is something which concerns her when she contemplates the option of moving back to Spain.

Other legal rights mentioned by participants as commonly overlooked by Spanish employers are recruitment policies, including interviewing procedures, and precarious or non-existent work contracts. It is worth noticing that comparisons

between working conditions in Spain and Ireland triggered participants' laughter in five interviews. For example, Susana laughed after saying:

In Spain I worked from age seventeen to thirty, but legally I had only worked for four years in total, not even. Here I arrived in 2000 and in 2010 I have worked ten years, legally!

Susana's experience reveals a contrast between Spanish and Irish working conditions, highlighting the occurrence of precarious working conditions in Spain. Despite disapproval of these conditions, Susana is able to laugh at this contrast. Another participant, Elisa also laughed when comparing working conditions in Spain and Ireland: *'this is Europe'*, she said laughing. Elisa also laughed as she recalled being asked inappropriate questions in interviews in Spain such as plans for having children or having a partner. For participants like Elisa and Susana who have experience better standards of working conditions in Ireland, certain situations, which are not uncommon in Spain, can now seem outrageous, but they are also so ridiculous that they trigger humour. This is yet another case of *'reirse por no llorar'* (laughing in order not to cry) where participants laugh at negative circumstances.

In addition, four participants of this study feel status and hierarchies are much stronger in Spain. In this context, young people do not receive the same recognition or opportunities they may attain in Ireland. Tania explains this:

I think it is very hierarchical, it is very difficult to climb the ladder, if you are young and you want more responsibility, you cannot prove that you are worth it, it does not matter. I think it is much more difficult than in Ireland. Here they value young people, the system is more flexible, a young person can have a high position, women as well, which is really interesting, in that sense I think Spain is more conservative: if you are young it is really difficult to compete, work wise.

Regarding women rights, participants, consider that sexist behaviour and attitudes are common practice in the workplace in Spain, particularly in the private sector. In contrast, they praise the common practice of equal rights and opportunities for women at work in Ireland. For example Rosa, who works in a private corporate environment, says:

I get the impression that men and women are equally valued at work and that there are more opportunities for women here.

Overall, participants' opinions depict Spanish working conditions as being far behind Irish conditions. As a result, they appreciate Irish conditions, which according to eight participants allow a greater balance between life and work in Ireland.

4.3.1.4 Life and work balance

Eight participants of this study believe that Irish people enjoy a healthier balance between work and personal life compared to Spanish people. They appreciate the Irish approach to work and their ability to 'switch off' and prioritise their personal life when necessary. For example Rosa says:

I enjoy living in Ireland because I can have a better balance between work and personal life. I have a 9 to 5 job and it lets me have the rest of the day for my studies, my hobbies and for my partner. This gives me quality of living.

Rosa who has years of experience working in Spain and Ireland, appreciates having a fixed time for finishing work which allows her time in the evening for her personal life. She contrasts this scenario to her experience of office hours in Spain, where 'time to go home' can become a blurred concept, particularly in the private sector.

Ten participants share the impression that Spanish people have more pressure at work and find it more difficult to delimit specific boundaries between work and personal life. As Nuria explains, this scenario makes it very difficult to combine work and family:

If you work for the public sector, it is ok, but in the private sector...it is complicated. Also the time tables, people finish late in the evening and here you finish at five, may be six, in Spain people have dinner later so they have more time to work...and they do.

Difficulties and expectations around considering and getting time off work form another distinguishing contrast between Spanish and Irish working culture which, according to two participants fosters imbalance between work and family, as Rosa explains:

One of the things I particularly like about Ireland is how easy it is for women to take time off work to look after their children, to take a career break, to ask for a day off work for personal affairs...this are very pleasant things.

Rosa values certain conditions, which are commonly enjoyed by Irish working people. For her, such conditions add to work/life balance and quality of life.

4.3.1.5 Daily habits: times, routines and food

Seven participants of this study have pinpointed times and routines as main difference between Spanish and Irish culture. Although typical Spanish and Irish timetables have both changed in the recent years; school, office, public spaces, businesses, shops and leisure facilities have different timetables, which impact on people's daily habits. As discussed in the previous section working hours are normally longer in Spain. Typical office hours are from 9 to 8, with a two hour break for lunch, whereas office hours in Ireland are 9 to 5. Routines around meals

are also different; meal times in Spain are normally later. Lunch is an important meal which requires a longer break in Spain. Although, 'siesta' time has become a myth, at least for working people, the day is broken into two, and dinner does not occur until nine or ten in the evening; as a result, business, shops, restaurants and other facilities are open until later, people go home later, and they go to bed later. In this context, six participants of this study, believe that Spanish people '*stretch*' their days more, although participants show different preferences for Spanish or Irish timetables for different reasons, which affect people's way of life. Three participants, like Nuria, prefer the Irish model as hours of work are shorter but more focused and less time is 'wasted' during the day. Four other participants admit finding it difficult to adapt to Irish timetables, particularly in the evening, as they find the opening hours of shops and leisure spaces such as cafes, cinemas, theatres or pubs frustrating.

Regarding meal times participants' opinions also reveal a variety of preferences and adaptive behaviours to Irish culture as participants feel the need to follow Irish patterns or decide to adhere to Spanish timetables or, alternatively, they create their own suitable ones. Regardless of their approach, mealtimes are felt as a clear difference between Spanish and Irish culture. However, participants' opinions show more concern over the quality of food and the importance given to it, as these are considered to have a bigger impact in people's quality of life than the actual schedule. In this context, eleven participants pinpoint food as a main difference between Spanish and Irish culture. For example, three participants have acknowledged being struck by Irish eating habits such as '*their sweet tooth and the little consumption of fish despite being an island*' (Rosa), something which triggered laughter in four interviews. But rather than highlighting Irish 'bad' habits,

participants' observations focus on the positive aspects of Spanish food culture: the importance and amount of time given to meals, the accessibility to fresh produce and good quality foods, and the variety of Spanish gastronomy. In this context, thirteen participants of this study are nostalgic about Spanish food and are disconcerted by the effort required to follow a varied and healthy diet according to Spanish norms.

4.3.2 Dress habits

Dress habits deserve a special attention in this chapter as they have been pinpointed as a striking aspect of Irish culture by sixteen participants of this study, who recall being 'stunned' by certain ways of dressing, particularly Irish women in winter:

I'm surprised by the little clothes they wear in the winter: low cleavages, little sleeveless dresses, no tights, with handbags as their only mean of shelter... they must have plutonium in them! [Laughs]and I am there wearing three layers, hat, scarf and gloves...

Rosa, who has lived in Ireland for eight years, still finds certain dress habits which she associates with Irish women striking. As she cannot relate to their custom of wearing so few clothes in cold weather, she feels alien to Irish women who dress this way. Six participants of this study, including Rosa, have acknowledged their inability to comprehend this trend of dressing, which is mainly characterised by being 'underdressed' according to low outdoor temperatures. In addition to inappropriate winter dressing habits, five participants of this study have pointed out that Irish women have a tendency to 'overdress' and 'overdo' compared to Spanish women in terms of jewellery, make up or wearing heels. On the other end of the spectrum, five participants have reported their amusement at 'girls who wear pyjamas' outdoors, a Dublin phenomenon which also catches the attention of Irish

people including film makers and academic researchers as such women would be associated with certain parts of Dublin which would not be affluent (Tracy 2010).

Disparity in dressing habits is something that seven participants of this study find difficult to become accustomed to regardless of their time spent in Ireland. However, participants do recognise the superficiality of their comments and although they acknowledge these habits as ‘strange’, this incongruity seems to trigger more humour than frustration as twelve participants pinpoint it as an ‘amusing’ aspect of Irish culture which they often laugh about, particularly, but not exclusively, with non-Irish people:

I still get shocked when I see it, to be honest [laughs], it is something you will never do and you say for god sake, how can someone do this [laughs]... it strikes you and you laugh about it... (Daniel)

Eduardo’s comment reveals important aspects of the nature and role of humour: triggered by an incongruity, which comes across as shocking, humour releases tension and takes away disapproval.

4.3.3 Different attitudes

4.3.3.1 Irish laidback attitude and its consequences

One of the aspects that participants of this study have highlighted as a positive trait of Irish culture is the relaxed attitude of people, which contributes to the creation of a rather tranquil living environment:

Irish people have a relaxed and easy-going way of living, something that is difficult to find in developed countries. (Oscar)

Six participants of this study, like Oscar, appreciate the relaxed attitude and behaviour of Irish people; according to them, they create a relaxed atmosphere, a slower pace of life and a respectful environment. In this context, such relaxed

manners appear to have a positive effect is in newcomers' cross-cultural experience, creating a pleasant and welcoming atmosphere. Accordingly, five participants admit to have been positively surprised by the relaxed attitude of Irish people at the beginning of their cross-cultural experience in Ireland. However, four participants have pointed out that this virtue can turn into a flaw as one gets acquainted with Irish culture as *'this charming laidback attitude becomes a rather passive attitude'* (Aurora). Despite appreciating Irish laidback attitude, thirteen participants of this study, like Aurora have highlighted the negative aspects of this Irish trait, linking it to conformism and lack of efficiency. In this regard, five participants of this study perceive Irish people as less proactive than Spanish people when it comes to accepting or rejecting circumstances which they perceive as wrong. Andrés explains this point of view with the following example:

They can be too relaxed at times, for example the other day we were in a party and it came up that gay people cannot donate blood in Ireland and nobody knew about it, and they were really angry about it, so I asked them "are you going to do anything about it?" and they said "no, are you?" and I said "yes, I have contacted them and I have called Spain and I found out that is not the same over there.." and my friend said "this is Ireland, you need to give it a bit of time.... And to me, the fact that "things have to take their time", I am not keen on that, if they are wrong, things have to be done now!...also, when it comes to demonstrations, they are not active at all, with the Iraq war for example, there were like four of them in the streets, and that was a lot for Ireland so this "being a lot for Ireland" I don't approve of it.

Andrés admits to get annoyed by the relaxed attitude of Irish people in contexts where, according to him, acting is more worthy than passively complaining. Andrés is fond of this laidback attitude in certain contexts and admits to relate to it at times, but he finds it difficult to tolerate Irish laidback attitude in situations that require proactive change. Five participants share Andrés's feelings of annoyance triggered

by this attitude of *'moaning but no acting'*, something they see as a sign of conformism and acceptance of inadequate services or unfair situations.

In addition, six participants of this study have linked this laidback attitude to lack of efficiency at work, something they particularly dislike when it affects their own work. For example Oscar says:

It can be frustrating that things are not done properly at first, they do quick fixes, time is wasted with unproductive meetings or procedures, it bothers me and I get the impression that they are not very efficient.

Like Oscar, five participants of this study find that this characteristic 'Irish laidback attitude' affects their work, particularly when they have to work in a team and meet deadlines, which can be frustrating. Another participant, Elisa explains how she has tried to adapt to this laidback attitude, but after three years of working with Irish people, she still finds it very difficult. For her, this has been the greatest difficulty in her cross-cultural experience. She believes Spanish people to be *'more self-demanding, more reliable and to be better at getting things done'*. According to Elisa and four other participants, lack of efficiency in services also affects their daily lives outside work as they feel they cannot rely on either public or private services regarding postal, transport and health systems.

Overall, participants' opinions and experiences make clear that a laidback attitude towards work can cause frustration. However, two participants acknowledge that there are certain benefits to this general scenario, as they find it easier to pursue opportunities and progress their careers within a less competitive scenario. In this context it is also important to link pace of work and efficiency with work pressure, which according participants of this study is lower in Ireland, as discussed in section 4.3.1.3. In connection with laid back attitudes, five participants commented on the

shared stereotype of Irish and Spanish people as being lazy. Three participants acknowledged being offended by Irish people mentioning this stereotype regarding Spanish people:

When they tell me about the 'siesta', and living things for 'mañana' I feel like telling them, 'wait a second because I am going to fill you in what I think of Irish people' [laughs] (Elisa)

Overall participants have reported frustration due to laidback behaviour on behalf of Irish people. Nevertheless, as Elisa's statements shows, participants are able to laugh at these situations, particularly when they recall them with time distance. This brings to attention the use of humour to laugh at difficult situations from the past which were 'not funny at the time', which accordingly helps to release stress created by difficult situations and move on.

4.3.3.2 Minding other people's business

According to the participants of this study, Spanish people are generally 'nosy by nature', they enjoy talking about others and 'minding others business'. Nine participants have highlighted their dislike for this Spanish tendency which they mainly notice when they visit Spain, particularly in their daily interactions with friends, family and others, and in the media. Eduardo says:

'You can notice it as soon as you get to the airport (in Spain), people stare at you, they check you out'

Eduardo feels that Spanish people have a tendency to observe others openly with little concern for their feelings. His cross-cultural experience in Ireland makes him more aware of this and he feels judged as he believes *'they are looking at what you are wearing, what you have, what you do not have...'* In Eduardo's opinion this

attitude is connected with 'envy' as it fosters a situation where people compare themselves with others, or to criticize others if they are different.

For eight participants, a major proof of Spaniards 'nosy' tendencies is the popularity of 'gossiping' TV shows and magazines; something they acknowledge as despising:

People are very noisy in other peoples' lives. You just have to turn the TV on, it is all gossiping. I know you have magazines like that here, but they haven't taken over like in Spain. It's just everywhere (Fátima)

Six participants of this study, including Eduardo and Fátima, feel that Irish people are not as 'nosy' as Spaniards, they appear to be less inquisitive about other people's affairs: staring, criticizing or gossiping about others seems to be less popular in Ireland than in Spain. In addition, five participants believe that Irish people are less intrusive in other peoples' lives in direct interactions because *'they ask less personal questions'* and *'they keep their opinions to themselves'* more than Spaniards do. A factor to take into account is that the majority of participants' relatives and close family live in Spain, so their daily interactions with Irish friends and acquaintances might not prompt as much intrusiveness as interactions with family or very close friends. However, participants' opinions are also based on observations of Irish acquaintances and friends and in their interaction with their families. Also, three participants of this study are related to Irish people.

Overall, five participants are appreciative of having 'more space' in Ireland as they feel people are more respectful of personal limits, and less opinionated about personal issues which their Spanish friends and relatives would not hesitate to interfere with. As a consequence, four participants admit to feel less pressure to follow certain social patterns which may not be their preference and to justify to others their choices or priorities. As Marta says: *'in Spain you need to explain every*

single choice you make' Personal choices or circumstances about issues such as settling down, having children, buying a house or getting a 'proper job' are some of the issues participants feel relieved not having to battle about in their daily interactions. These opinions are strongly based on the contrast of pressure participants feel when they visit Spain and find themselves involved in these kind of debates,

4.4 Values

4.4.1 Bonds: friends and family

Five participants of this study have pointed out the importance of friends and family as a similarity between Spanish and Irish culture. They consider that that family and friendship ties are strong in both cultures. However, participants' opinions on friendship and family reveal significant differences in the nature of these bonds.

4.4.2 Friendship

According to participants the major differences between Irish and Spanish friendships are intimacy and contact. Based on their experiences, four participants of this study question whether Irish friends can become as intimate and open with each other as Spanish friends can:

They are very friendly but I don't think it is easy to get closer. I can only see it from the outside but I wonder if they can get as intimate as we do.
(Elisa)

Elisa who has been living in Ireland for three years acknowledges that she does not have any close Irish friends, so she questions her ability to comment on Irish friendship. However she has the impression that Irish people are more reserved when interacting with friends. This feeling is shared by four participants of this study who

categorize intimacy and openness among friends as a positive aspect of Spanish culture, which is more difficult to achieve in Irish culture.

Another ‘major’ difference mentioned by three participants are the norms regarding keeping in touch with friends. A participant of this study, Cristina, explains her view on what she calls ‘*Irish style friends*’:

I think friends in Spain are different, I have this Irish friend, who, ok, it's all great when we are together, but then she says "I'll call you tomorrow" and she calls me three months later...and that's fine, she is busy and I know it's normal for her, but it is not for me, I'm getting used to it, I take it as a common thing, but I would not do it, and I don't think a Spanish person would do it... you get used to it, I used to get really upset, but I can see it is normal. I don't like it, because it is not in my nature but I accept it as normal.

Cristina, who has been living in Ireland for eight years, explains the pitfalls with the concept of Irish friendship. She has learnt to recognize as acceptable certain norms around staying in touch with friends which she believes are characteristic of Irish friendships. However, she acknowledges disliking them and being unable and unwilling to internalise them. Three participants have reported being disappointed by the irregularity of Irish friendship which Cristina links to their relaxed attitude.

In contrast, it is important to highlight that six participants of this study reveal a focus on individual differences rather than cultural differences when it comes to friendship. For them, the nature of the nuances drawn by cultural difference has no effect in the quality of their friendship. The importance of participants’ experiences of Irish friendship in relation to their cross-cultural adaptation is however, discussed in greater detail in chapters 5 and 6.

4.4.3 Family

Four participants of this study have pointed out the importance of the family as a common ground between Spanish and Irish culture. For example Rosa says:

Both cultures are oriented toward the family; due to the influence of the Catholic Church we have similar backgrounds: men used to go to work and women used to stay home bringing up large families.

Rosa recognises similarities between Spanish and Irish orientations toward bringing up a family which she believes are rooted in the Catholic background of both cultures. Although she admits that the present situation is rather different as large families are no longer common in either country, she believes that this resemblance of the past contributes to Irish and Spanish people value of the family and the strength of its bonds.

Nevertheless, five participants have picked up some differences in the nature of family relations in Spain and Ireland. For example, Irish people are positively perceived as more independent and less willing to rely on their families. For example, three participants point out that young Irish people are eager to move out of their parents' houses early, whereas in Spain it is not uncommon for young people to live in their parents' home when they are in their twenties or thirties or until they are ready to settle down and start their own family. Although the depressed economic situation has had a major impact in this trend, forcing young Spanish people to stay with their families, according to two participants, the value of independence has a major role in this trend of behaviour. In addition, two participants who are bringing up their children in Ireland believe that Spanish parents rely more on their own mothers to look after children. This is something which, according to them, does not seem to happen in Ireland, not only because of

geographical distance but also because as Anna says *'the grandparents have their own live and value their independence'*. These impressions relate to Hofstede's study regarding Spain and Ireland's scores on the study's dimension of collectivism versus individualism, where Spain is a more collective society than Ireland and reliance on family is stronger than in Ireland, a more individualistic society, where the focus is shifted to individual needs or those of the nuclear family.

Other differences related to the family are based on interaction: sharing feelings, respecting or interfering with another's decision. As with friends, four participants perceive a greater sense of intimacy and openness among Spanish families, whereas Irish people appear to be more respectful and less open about their feelings or certain topics. These issues, which are not exclusive to the family, are explored in depth in the next chapter, which deals with cross-cultural interactions and cultural proximity/distance between Spanish and Irish interactions.

4.4.4 Religion and conservative values

Five participants of this study recognise the strong influence of The Catholic Church as a significant commonality between Spanish and Irish culture, which is manifested in various ways such as the strength of family bonds. However, participants see the influence of the Church as a commonality of the past, whereas according to nine participants the current influence of religion in Spanish and Irish societies is a source of significant differences.

Religion has been pointed out as a striking aspect of Irish culture by seven participants of this study. They recall being surprised by certain behaviours which denote religious devotion. According to them, Irish people follow certain traditions and rituals related to the Catholic Church which are no longer popular in Spain, particularly by young educated people in urban contexts: attending mass, committing

to lent or making the sign of the cross are some of the external signs that come across as striking or amusing to these participants. They differ from their expectations of Ireland as they had assumed attitudes towards religion would be more similar to those of Spaniards. In this context, it is important to highlight that both Spanish and Irish culture are stereotyped as being very religious, so it is quite interesting that participants were surprised to encounter behaviour that corroborated this stereotype.

In addition to pinpointing religion as a difference between Spanish and Irish culture, six participants highlight it as one of their most disliked aspects of Irish culture and report being overwhelmed by the influence of the Catholic Church in many current affairs such as politics or education. For example Andrés says:

In certain aspects, the country seems really retrograde: different rights for same sex couples, the presence of the Catholic Church in so many public areas, the complete prohibition of abortion. I don't think young people think this way, but then I have seen some people who do and it still surprises me.

Five participants like Andrés, believe that the current influence of the Catholic Church places Ireland in the past and fosters retrograde attitudes towards current issues such as abortion and homosexuality and maintaining the traditional married family with children as an exemplary model. Participants find this attitude particularly upsetting when it is presented by educated young people, as they compare them with Spanish young people, who according to them have a more progressive attitude towards these issues.

To end, on a positive note, two participants have linked the popularity of charities as a constructive influence of religion in Irish society. They believe Irish people are quite willing to give their time and donate their money or belongings to charity,

something which is not as common in Spain. As pointed out by Lucía, wide opportunities for volunteering offer young people a chance to gain experience and newcomers a possibility to meet people and practice the language. Still, she admits to disliking the fact that most charities have religious connections.

4.5 Laughing at culture: amusing aspects of Spanish and Irish culture

Along these chapter participants' opinions and experiences have highlighted a number of cultural differences between Spanish and Irish culture. These differences have revealed participants preferences, likes and dislikes about certain aspects of both Spanish and Irish culture. In the context of this study it is relevant to point out that participants of this study have manifested or acknowledged the use of most of these aspects as topics of humour.

Firstly participants have identified as amusing aspects of Spanish and Irish culture related to the environment, attitudes, behaviour and values, acknowledging to have laughed at some of these aspects either by themselves, with co-ethnics, other foreigners or Irish people. Secondly, as participants were discussing differences between Spanish and Irish culture during their interviews, the discussion of certain topics triggered humour and laughter. The different contexts in which this kind of 'ethnic' humour takes place are discussed in chapter 5. However, this chapter has made clear that the perception of contrasts between two cultures can raise humour, even when this contrast depicts a rather negative picture of either culture, in which case participants of this study have revealed their ability to '*reirse por no llorar*' or laughing when facing negative circumstances. The nature of humour in these circumstances is discussed in chapter 6.

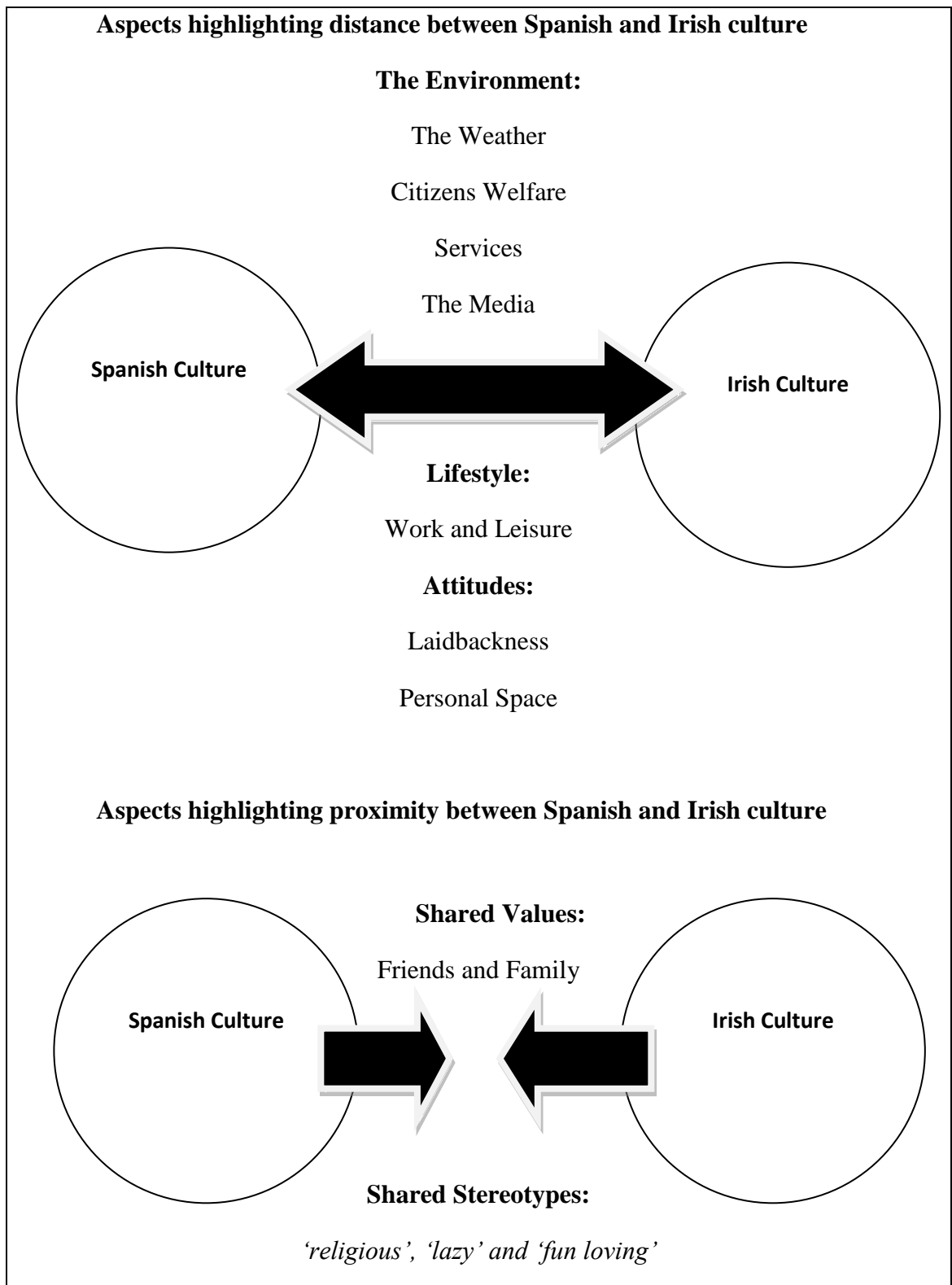
4.6 Conclusion

Firstly, this chapter has revealed that some participants of this study have experienced the need to adapt their lifestyle to conditions of their new environment such as the weather or their social welfare as Irish residents. These new conditions can impact the well-being of Spanish new-comers, and depending on their experiences, can contribute to their perception of Ireland and Spain as desirable places of residence. In addition, participants' experiences of Irish culture have contributed to their knowledge and fondness of Celtic traditions and folklore but also to appreciate those of their culture of origin under a different light through contrast and comparison.

Secondly, participants' opinions on behaviour and attitude have drawn attention to those aspects which according to them distinguish Spanish and Irish culture (see Diagram 6). These opinions take into account their own preferences for certain aspects of the two cultures and evaluate the impact that these aspects have on people's lives in general and on their own cross-cultural experience in particular, as they affect their lifestyle and interactions with others.

Finally, participants' views have brought attention to personal bonds and religion as core values which are shared in Spanish and Irish culture. However, within these values a series of different nuances depict a certain distance between Spanish and Irish culture, as the latter stands out to participants for its prevalence of conservative values and a greater distance in interactions between friends and family. This latest issue leads to the next chapter, which deals with the topic of interaction in Spanish and Irish culture in the context of participants' cross-cultural experience in Ireland.

Diagram 6 *Distance versus Proximity between Spanish and Irish culture*



Overall, this chapter has revealed those issues which, according to participants of this study determine cultural distance or proximity between Spanish and Irish culture; it has discussed those aspects which participants like and dislike about Spanish and Irish culture based on the comparison of the two cultures, and it has pointed out the consequences that these issues and aspects may have in participants interaction with Irish culture, including the trigger and value of certain humorous reactions on behalf of participants. These consequences are discussed in detail the following chapters.

CHAPTER 5

Interaction: proximity and distance between Spanish and Irish culture

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on cultural differences in interactions among Spanish or Irish people by analysing participants' views of proximity and distance between Spanish and Irish culture regarding the norms that rule communication in each culture.

Firstly, the chapter deals with differences in communication style such as body language or conversation manners. Secondly, the chapter moves on to differences in the content of interactions, including predominant limits and taboos. Finally, the chapter deals with the role of context in interactions, such as familiarity among interlocutors.

Participants' views on the prevailing tendencies in interactions in each culture are analysed throughout the chapter with a focus on the impact that cultural differences may have on their own interactions with Spanish and Irish people. Similarly, special attention is paid to the impact that these cultural differences might have in the use of humour in both cultures.

5.2 Communication style

Regarding communication style, manners and volume are noticed as major differences by participants of this study. For ten participants their experience of Irish culture has brought a new light to their view of Spanish ways of interacting. They now perceive Spanish people as loud and bad-mannered and they admit to be struck by Spanish communication style when they visit Spain, needing to readjust to their 'home' environment. In this context, five participants of this study, acknowledge

feelings of strangeness, finding that interactions with friends and family in Spain can be 'tiring' for example Lucía says:

'They all talk at the same time, there is no respect for turns, if you want to be heard you just have to speak louder, I get fed up with this'

In contrast, Irish people are perceived as good-mannered in their interactions, a facet appreciated by twelve participants of this study who believe that Irish politeness has contributed to make them feel welcomed in Ireland from the very beginning of their cross-cultural experience. In addition, Irish people are perceived as good listeners who give their interlocutors a chance to talk. This has important implications in cross-cultural interactions with Irish people, particularly when interlocutors' mother tongue is different to English as signs of attention and chances to talk or ask for repetition are key to ease interactions, as Lucía points out:

I like it because it gives me a chance to talk with the limited fluency I have, because they could easily talk over me, but I notice that they give me a chance.

Expression of feelings and emotions is another difference, which according to six participants distinguishes Irish and Spanish interactions. According to them, Spanish people express their feelings and emotions more openly than Irish people. This is reflected in their communication style which is more direct and effusive, being characterised by a stronger use of body language. For Susana, a participant of this study, the best sample of cultural differences in expressing emotions through body language is represented by Irish dancing:

You just have to look at Irish dancing [laughs], it really stroke me when I first saw it, there is a lot of strength, old people have fought a lot, they are warriors, holding your arms like that says a lot, if a Spanish person can not move her arms it would go mad, I think this dance tells you a lot

about their character: a lot of strength, a lot of movement, but other than that no expression... We are more expressive, more communicative.

For Susana Irish dancing represents the contrast between Spanish and Irish needs of expression, since Spaniards would have difficulty interacting without expressing themselves through their body language and facial expressions.

In the context of the present study, it is relevant to recall that participants have highlighted the impact of communication style differences in humour recognising a greater reliance on body language, facial expressions and sounds in Spanish humour, whereas these elements are not as essential in Irish humour, where the use of language can stand on its own. As discussed in chapter 3, these differences contribute to perceive Irish humour as more subtle and intelligent than Spanish humour, which, according to participants, can be rather obvious.

In the context of general interactions, seven participants believe that Spaniards' communication style can come across as loud, abrupt and bad-mannered. Three participants jokingly point out that Irish people might get the impression that two Spaniards engaged in conversation are arguing when they are merely expressing their opinions with no argument involved. For five participants, this way of interacting, reflects their passion for whatever the topic is at stake in a conversation: an aspect of Spanish culture which they acknowledge missing while living in Ireland.

Finally, it is relevant to point out that five participants have felt the need to adjust their communication style in their interactions with Irish people. This adjustment involves manners and volume, but participants' opinions have focus in the need to adjust their tendencies and expectations for directness, expressing feelings and avoiding confrontation; issues which affect not only communication style but also

the content of conversations and its limits, which is discussed in the following sections of this chapters.

5.3 Cultural boundaries in daily interactions: expressing feelings and avoiding confrontation

Six participants of this study pinpoint expressing feelings and avoiding confrontation as two major correlated differences between Spanish and Irish culture, for example Diana believes that '*expressing anger*' is the core difference between the two cultures. She believes that in Spain there is more freedom to express anger in public because it is better accepted:

I notice a big difference in the way that Spanish people express anger, in the street, with our family, with friends, whereas Irish people don't usually express it because it is not culturally accepted...for example if an Irish person is annoyed by you walking in front of him, he is usually not going to make a big deal, he might say 'thank you very much', a bit passive aggressive, it is different...

Diana's example, which illustrates the differences that she perceives between Spanish and Irish culture in the cultural norms regarding anger expression in public, also exemplifies the use of humour, in this case sarcasm, to express criticism; something which participants of this study have recognised as characteristic of Irish culture. Like Diana, five other participants of this study believe that Irish people can be reluctant to express negative feelings and opinions in order to avoid confrontation. They are aware of this cultural difference between Irish and Spanish people, who, as Diana points out have little thought about the reactions that their comments may trigger:

Spaniards would say it, then think of the consequences, they (the Irish) think about the consequences, and then may be, they say it. [laughs]

Diana laughs at the comparison between Irish and Spanish people, which depicts Irish people as rather cautious compared to Spanish people who speak up regardless of the consequences of their comments. In this sense, Diana, like five other participants, believes that she has learnt to control her impulses when it comes to expressing anger in public. In addition, seven participants believe that Spaniards tend to be more direct and straight to the point than Irish people. In fact, four participants acknowledge to have found difficult to come to terms with this difference, particularly at work as they expected to have more accurate instructions, more defined roles, or to give and take criticism more openly. Three participants acknowledge to have caused conflicts or misunderstandings for being too direct at work. For example, Andrés recalls a situation where he criticized a colleague's idea in a meeting, proposing an alternative. Andrés says that he came across as opinionated and demanding for emphasizing the negative outcomes of his colleague's idea. In addition, Andrés believes that his ideas were not appreciated due to his behaviour. After this experience, Andrés has adjusted his behaviour at work and tries to tone down his opinions, in order to be more effective and avoid conflicts with his colleagues as he believes that *'when you see that your behaviour is not working in your favour you need to change it'*.

In contrast, three other participants who are aware of cultural differences regarding directness in communication, acknowledge remaining as direct as possible in their communication style, particularly when there is an issue. For example, Antonio says that he believes in being *'polite but direct'* at work in order to save time and effort. He also points out that expressing feelings like disappointment or irritation, can lead to frustration. In this context, nine participants recognise a greater reluctance to openly complain or demand things directly. For example Susana believes that her

colleagues admire her for ‘speaking up’, whereas Hugo is aware of his reputation for ‘being a fighter’ among his Irish wife’s family:

If we are in a restaurant and the service is dreadful, they complain among themselves, but if I try to make a complain to the manager they say ‘oh leave it, don’t make a scene’, they moan, but they don’t do anything about it!

Susana and Hugo’ opinion connects directness in communication with non-conformism: But whereas Hugo admits that he finds difficult to accept these cultural differences, Susana acknowledges that ‘it is just not in their nature’ and she believes that whereas Spaniards would find frustrating not expressing their complain, Irish people are ‘just not that bothered about it’.

Overall, participants’ experiences reveal that expressing anger in public or provoking direct confrontation can lead to awkward situations. Accordingly, some participants like Diana acknowledge to have adapted their behaviour and communication style in Irish interactions, whereas other participants, like Antonio, choose explicitly to keep their direct communication style, despite its consequences. In any case, it is clear that awareness of these cultural differences is essential in cross-cultural communication between Irish and Spanish people, as even if newcomers choose expressing their anger or being direct, they would know what reactions to expect from their interlocutors and they would need to come to terms with the uncertainties of a less direct communication style. This difference highlighted by the data can be linked to Hofstede’s (2010, 2013) cultural dimension of ‘uncertainty avoidance’ and it is consistent with his findings, which suggest a substantial distance between Spanish and Irish cultures regarding uncertainty avoidance.

In relation to uncertainty, four participants point out that, lack of directness in interactions with Irish people can cause uncertainty about offending Irish interlocutors. As Oscar explains:

Now that I think about it, I probably have offended Irish people with my humour, but because they don't say, I never knew [laughs]

Oscar's comment is essential as regards the role of humour in communications. Only through familiarity and contact with Irish culture he knows that joking about certain topics might have offended his Irish interlocutors, even though he did not get any negative feedback at the time. This lack of feedback can have an effect on the adaptation process of new-comers, particularly if they are used to a more direct communication style, as it requires a greater effort to pick up people's sensitivities.

In the context of the present study, it is relevant to highlight that participants of this study recognise Irish humour as more 'direct', particularly in the case of slagging which is based on targeting someone present. In this context, it is important to consider not only that the use of irony or sarcasm aids indirectness, but also that humour can be used as a tool to express criticism. These considerations hint at a connection between the tendency for slagging in Irish humour and the otherwise general lack of directness in Irish communication style. In this context, the use of humour can be a useful tool to express criticism in Irish interactions as it spares interlocutors, who are able to laugh at themselves, from losing face. As a result, humour can become a useful intercultural tool in communication, allowing newcomers to express criticism without offending their Irish interlocutors.

5.4 Communication content: recurrent themes in daily interactions

Participants of this study have pinpointed differences between the content of Spanish and Irish interactions which can be sorted in three different categories : superficial themes, serious topics, or personal affairs.

5.4.1 *Superficial* themes: celebrities and sports

Regarding superficial themes, participants of this study have pinpointed gossiping and sports as common themes in both cultures, but they have highlighted different nuances in the use of these topics in both cultures. Regarding gossiping about celebrities, six participants deplore the excessive importance of these topics in Spanish media and daily conversations. Although these topics are also present in Irish conversations and in the media, these participants believe that they are not as central as in Spain. In this regard, three participants acknowledge being unable to follow conversations based on current celebrities affairs when they visit Spain. For example, Andrés explains how he has felt the need to explain to his friends his lack of both knowledge and interest in Spanish celebrities:

The other day they were trying to explain to me who somebody was, I don't even remember the name, and I said I did not know her and they were trying really hard to update me, and I had to convince them that I really did not know and that I did not care! [laughs]

Regarding gossiping about friends and acquaintances, it is important to mention that participants of this study believe that there is a greater tendency to criticize others in Spanish culture. As discussed in chapter 3, these two tendencies have important effects in targets of humour, which also has a direct effect on humour content.

Another difference highlighted by participants is the role of sports as a topic in interactions. Four participants believe that the importance given to football in Spanish culture is disproportionate. According to them, it is more difficult to avoid

this topic in Spain as the popularity of football is constantly reflected in the Media and daily conversations. In addition, three participants, disapprove of the negative effect that this sport can have in people who take their team really seriously, which can lead to serious arguments or negative feelings derived from disappointment which they consider out of proportion. Pedro, a participant of this study, compares Spanish and Irish people in this regard:

They (the Irish) get sad or annoyed when their team loses, but half an hour later they are acting as if nothing had happened, in Spain, some people get really depressed about negative results. It's unbelievable.

Pedro's comment raises an important element in the context of this study which is 'sportsmanship': an attitude which may impact people's ability to laugh at themselves.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that four female participants have highlighted 'clothes' and 'shopping' as a central topic in Irish conversations among women, finding the recurrence of this topic rather excessive. For them, their own inability to engage in this topic of conversation contributes to feelings of strangeness, whereas the impossibility of having other topics of conversation with some women highlights an underlining difference that impedes bonding, as Tania points out:

I can talk about shoes, or clothes to my friends, but our conversations are not limited to that.

Another participant, Nuria shares this idea about Irish women acknowledging that there are some people with whom she can only talk about two things: children and clothes. In the context of this study, it is important to suggest that shared interests and values, which are reflected in topics of conversation, can contribute to feelings

of bonding, and are also key to sharing humour, which in turn, may trigger further feelings of bonding.

5.4.2 Serious themes: politics and current affairs

Participants' opinions have drawn attention to the importance of current affairs and politics in both Spanish and Irish culture. For some participants, like Nuria, knowledge of these topics is essential in Irish interactions as they '*constantly come up in conversation*'. In addition, Nuria believes that there is a greater focus on current affairs in Irish humour:

Spanish people use the television a lot as a source of jokes and humour, so if you haven't seen that particular programme you don't know what they are talking about... for example Chiquito de la Calzada [Spanish comedian] a few years ago. Also, Spanish humour uses more sexual content or innuendo, while the Irish humour is more about current affairs and politics.

Nuria distinguishes recurring topics of humour which are different in Spain and Ireland. She highlights an influence of the media in both Spanish and Irish humour, but for her current affairs and politics, play a major role in Irish humour whereas Spanish people rely on more frivolous TV programmes such as comedy shows in their everyday humour. This idea supports the impression that Spanish humour is more trivial than Irish humour as explored in chapter 3. Regarding politics a topic of conversation, it is relevant to notice that five participants perceive a more relaxed attitude towards political affairs in Ireland, pointing at the '*constant feelings of anger*' in political debates in Spain, both in the media or in private conversations, while participants, like Tania express feelings of relief for being able to stay away from politics while in Ireland:

I am not interested in politics. Here it is easy to stay away from it, in Spain it's always on your face

According to Tania, politics are less present in her daily conversations in Ireland. However, it is important to point at Tania's personal circumstances as the majority of her interactions are with non-Irish people. Moreover there is a possibility that her interlocutors do not expect her to be up to date or involved in Irish politics.

In connection to politics, it is important to mention that four participants have perceived reluctance from Irish people to give personal opinions about controversial topics such as Northern Ireland and abortion. Although these subjects are not perceived as conversational taboos, participants are surprised by the lack of attention they are given. Elisa, a participant of this study, explains how she has '*given up the topic of Northern Ireland in conversations with Irish people*' due to the vague replies she has obtained in past conversations. Regarding the topic of abortion, two participants find remarkable how little it comes up in conversation or in the Media and how when it does, as Oscar states, '*people seem to be quite neutral about it*' leaving aside the pro-life movements. In this context, it is important to consider that this perceived lack of involvement may be another sign of cultural differences in expression of feelings or confrontation avoidance.

Overall, it is clear that 'anger expression' has an effect in the different ways that Irish and Spanish interlocutors approach certain conversation topics such as football or politics. This may have an impact in the contrast between the emphases that appears to be put on these topics in Spanish and Irish daily interactions. Also, regarding controversial topics, it is important to consider that Irish interlocutors may have a less direct communicative style and be more reserved about disclosing personal opinions. This reluctance contributes to the idea that Irish people are more protective of their personal space, which includes exposing feelings and emotions as discussed in the following section.

5.4.3 Intimate thoughts and feelings: being open versus opening up

Twelve participants of this study perceive Irish and Spanish people as having similar attitudes in their interactions with others; being talkative, sociable, friendly and open to strangers are communalities highlighted by these participants, who appreciate these similarities and their positive effects on their cross-cultural adaptation process:

*I really appreciate how open and chatty they are, it reminds me of home, that warm character, it is really helpful when you have just arrive'
(Pedro)*

Nine participants, like Pedro, think that it is easy to make first contacts in Ireland, which contributes to feeling accepted in Irish society at the beginning. However, participants' opinions distinguish between being open to meet new people and experience new cultures, as they believe the Irish to be, and opening up, since five participants reveal difficulties in getting 'deeper' relationships that go beyond those first encounters and become closer to their Irish acquaintances and friends. This issue, which stops participants from 'penetrating' Irish society', is related to the concept of friendship.

Regarding friendship, participants reveal their need to have friends to share thoughts, feelings and worries, something which they find difficult to achieve in their Irish interactions for different reasons such as difficulty to talk about intimate issues as

Tania suggests:

It's easy to meet Irish people to go out, to have a good laugh with them the difficulty is to become closer to talk about things that are more serious to you, more intimate.

Tania's comment suggests that humour facilitates first encounters with Irish people as it contributes to break the ice and triggers the feeling of being welcomed and

connected to people. She also believes that sharing humour '*contributes to feel comfortable around people*', and she connects intimate friendship to humour as she believes '*it is easier to laugh with someone who you know really well*'. In this context, Tania believes that her use of humour is more spontaneous, intimate, and genuine when interacting with Spanish people, and she relates this to the quantity and quality of her friendships; acknowledging that she has more Spanish than Irish friends.

The concept of friendship plays an essential role cross-cultural adaptation and in the context of this chapter, it is important to highlight the effect that intimacy has in cross-cultural interactions as six participants feel that Irish people have a stronger sense of their privacy, and are more cautious of sharing intimate feelings and emotions, which participants' opinions depict as a stronger boundary in Irish interactions.

This difference in the content of interactions can highlight distance, and trigger frustration as participants feel unable to establish closer relationships with Irish people where they can speak openly about their feelings without triggering awkwardness. By contrast, three participants acknowledge finding easier to establish closer relationships with their co-ethnics as it is easier to open up and feel trusted as their interlocutors confide more intimate thoughts and emotions, which creates deeper bonds.

According to four participants, another example of this '*stronger sense of privacy*' is reflected in reluctance to talk about sex, which is considered a stronger taboo in Irish culture and its humour. Eight participants believe that there is a stronger tendency for sexual content in Spanish interactions and in Spanish humour. Cultural differences

in taboos, such as sex, have a significant impact in the content of interactions in each culture and in their humour, and are discussed in detail in the following section.

5.5 Taboos in Irish culture and Irish humour: sex, religion and other risky subjects

5.5.1 Sex

Sex is by far the main taboo that stands out in participants' perception of Irish culture and humour. Ten participants have observed an avoidance of sexual references in Irish humour and Susana says:

Sex is a huge taboo in Ireland. I have never come across an Irish person that has made a sexual joke in conversation.

Susana's experience highlights sex as a taboo. Her statement is remarkable, particularly taking into account that she has been living in Ireland for ten years. However, it is important to highlight that Susana is referring to conversational humour, which may vary from comedy humour in which the limits of taboos may be trespassed with less difficulty by professional comedians such as Tommy Tiernan, Des Bishop and Dylan Moore and other Irish comedians who deal explicitly with taboos such as sex in their acts. Moreover, even though Susana acknowledges having close Irish friends, it is also important to at least consider that Irish people may modify their humour and avoid making jokes about certain topics, like sex, in the presence of a foreign national, for fear of being misinterpreted. According to four participants of this study, the recurrence of sexual references in Spanish humour is explained by the occurrence of sex as a topic in everyday conversations in Spain. Other participants have explained the reasons for the Irish reluctance to joke about sex in different ways. For Elisa, it is a matter of respect:

Here they are more respectful, they are more cautious, it's difficult to make a sexual joke in those terms.

Taking a different angle to explain the taboo of sex in Irish humour, Daniel, doubts that the Irish avoid joking about sex due to respect:

I don't think that Irish people are thinking so much about other people's reaction when they avoid joking about sex. They are simply uncomfortable with it themselves, so they don't use it as a topic.

Daniel brings up a relevant point: there is a difference between refraining from making sexual references due to respect to others or due to personal reasons. In the first instance, context will play a role in the strength of the taboo, which may change in different situations or with different people such as friends, family or acquaintances. In the second instance, the taboo will travel along with a person regardless of context; according Daniel, this later instance makes sex a strong taboo in Irish culture and Irish humour.

5.5.2 Religion

Religion is another humour taboo which has been recognised as a difference between Spanish and Irish culture by five participants of this study, and Nicolás says:

Humour is more restricted here. The limits are stronger. Take religion for example, due to their culture, their education, making a joke about God or about Jesus would be a much bigger issue here. In Spain, it really doesn't matter!

For Nicolás the topic of religion exemplifies the existence of stronger taboos in Irish humour compared to Spanish humour. For him, the root of this taboo is in the strong influence of religion in Irish culture, particularly in education. Nicolás's comment implies that Spanish culture is not as strongly influenced by religion, which allows it to be a theme for humour. Another participant, Rosa endorses this view:

Religion is a taboo. They are very Catholic. We have been there, but not anymore, we are tired of the church and do not have that kind of respect for it. They are still very respectful.

Rosa draws attention to the church and its role in both Spanish and Irish culture. For her, the Irish church instigates a strong respect which its Spanish counterpart has lost. Seven participants of this study share Rosa's view. Tania gives specific examples that support this vision:

Religion, is a difficult subject, I have never heard anyone joking about Catholics and Protestants, they take this very seriously, ...or even the scandal of the priests, in Spain there would have been a boom of jokes, I didn't see it here. ..In Spain anything can be the subject of a joke, here they are more reserved.

Tania provides two examples which contribute to her idea that religion and the church are strong taboos in Irish humour. Referring to the Catholic sexual abuse scandals in Ireland, Tania is certain that this appalling news would have been the source of numerous jokes in Spain. Overall, Tania, like five other participants of this study, expresses her belief that Spanish humour has as little concern for religion as it has for any other subject.

5.5.3 Humour and political incorrectness: tragedies, misfortunes, disabilities and all the rest

The Catholic sexual abuse scandals in Ireland have been brought up by three participants of this study as a potential source of jokes in Spain. This example combines the three major taboos of Irish humour, as perceived by participants: sex, religion and tragic events. The use of tragic incidents as a source of humour is categorised by six participants as a difference between Spanish and Irish humour. For example Aurora says:

Spanish humour can be quite sinister, I am thinking of jokes about bombs, terrorism, people, murderers, rapers. I think an Irish person would find this shocking...well I find it shocking [laughs]

Aurora believes that humour based on tragedies such as rape or murder is not uncommon in Spanish culture. She believes that this type of black humour can be quite shocking, predicting it would disturb Irish people who are not as exposed to it. Four participants of this study highlight their dislike for black humour which shows no respect for any tragic events. For example Diana says:

I don't like Spanish black humour that is based on human tragedies, especially if the event is quite recent. I still remember the case of the Alacer girls [three teenagers who were sexually abused and murdered in the 90s]: it is just bad taste and not funny.

However, for four different participants, this type of joke is merely a sample of the lack of limits in Spanish humour:

In Spain we make jokes about everything... sexual, even pornographic, black, cruel, hyper black, Irene Villa in the 90s [a victim of an ETA terrorist attack, who lost her arms and legs in a bomb explosion]...everything really, the biggest tragedy can be turned into a joke, but here... no way! (Pedro)

Pedro highlights the possibility of any tragedy to be targeted by humour. He perceives this kind of joke as proof of the lack of thematic taboos in Spanish humour. For him, the absence of taboos is an evident characteristic of Spanish humour. This absence, allows for a context in which there is no need to be politically correct:

In Spain humour is politically incorrect, more than in Ireland, I think good humour is against political correctness, well it doesn't need to be, there is good 'white' humour but yeah, it is better [laughs].

According to Pedro political correctness has no role in Spanish humour. Although he can appreciate the quality of politically correct humour, which has no risk of

offending anyone. For him, the lack of political correctness is a valuable facet of Spanish humour. Like Pedro, four participants of this study appreciate the lack of restrictions in Spanish humour. For example, Aurora states:

I like the possibility of laughing at anything, with no taboos, no need to be politically correct, no need to be cautious about offending others.

Despite considering Spanish black humour disturbing, Aurora admires the lack of limits in Spanish humour which reduces concerns about offending others with politically incorrect humour. This lack of restrictions would have an impact in conversational humour as Spanish interlocutors seem to ignore the possibility of offending others and the implications of this difference in intercultural communication are discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

In addition to this, participants that admire the lack of taboos and political correctness in Spanish humour highlight the ability to perceive the funny side of a joke leaving aside the seriousness of its subject as crude as it might be:

We are more insensitive, in Spain they target everyone and everything: mental disabilities, abortion...it is not correct..but it is just a joke. Take a magazine, like “El Jueves”[a satirical magazine], you couldn’t have that here (Andrés).

According to Andrés, Spaniards are more exposed to humour which is based on solemn topics and is politically incorrect in its essence. Greater exposure to this type of humour makes Spaniards less sensitive to the use and abuse of grim topics in humour. The fact that *‘It is just a joke’* allows such topics to be treated in a lightweight manner. It is a clear instance of humour serving as a protective shield for offensive content: one of the aggressive functions of humour.

Andrés mentions ‘*El Jueves*’ (*Thursdays*) as an example of humour with no limits, which according to him would not be feasible in Ireland. ‘El jueves’ is a satirical weekly magazine published in Spain characterised for its extremely politically incorrect humour. Its contents are mainly black and blue humour comic strips which target anything and anyone. Five participants of this study have linked this magazine to the subject of taboos in Spanish humour. For example Nicolás says:

Humour is used to talk about things that you can't talk about in any other way, even the king in ‘El Jueves’.

Nicolás indicates that humour can serve as a communicative tool to the media, allowing them access to criticize impregnable personalities like the king. He draws attention to another aggressive communicative function of humour: allowing reference to taboos and controversial issues. It is clear that this function of humour plays an essential role in Spanish humour, permitting it to target any person or topic and overruling all norms of political correctness.

5.5.4 Irish comedy and taboos

It is evident that certain taboos such as sex, religion and tragic events are perceived to be stronger in Irish culture by participants of this study. In this context, humour can become an extremely valuable communicative tool that allows the speaker to mention and overcome these strong taboos. Three participants have perceived this in the context of Irish comedy:

I thought Irish humour was respectful of things such as sexual abuses but I heard about a comedian that uses this as the subject of his show... but he is a comedian. I think regular people would not joke about this (Diana)

Diana brings up the distinction between the contents of conversational humour and stand up comedy. In the context of a comedy club, it is possible for an Irish comedian to ignore taboos and limits that ordinary people would respect. For example, Gareth Stack is an Irish comedian who has based various stand-up shows around the topic of sex abuse by the Catholic church in Ireland. Nevertheless, according to the views and experiences of participants of this study, despite the existence of Irish comedians that have based their acts on politically incorrect humour with no respect for taboos or limits, Spanish people are generally more familiar with this type of humour which can be heard or read in the media and everyday conversations without raising much controversy or attention. In contrast, Irish comedians who use taboos topics in the mass media tend to provoke a stronger reaction which can lead to a debate stirred up by the media. For example, the comedian Tommy Tiernan is known for raising this type of controversy by bringing up topics such religion, disabilities, sex abuse or the holocaust on TV programmes with large numbers of viewers. In this context, exposure to humour that defies taboos and political correctness appears to be a major difference between Spanish and Irish culture.

5.5.5 Awareness of taboos and its implications

Among participants of this study, the level of awareness of the cultural norms that either permit or prevent the use of taboos in humour can have an impact in their interactions with Irish people. Oscar, for instance, regrets having targeted the Irish church in his jokes:

I have regretted making some jokes about the pope, the bishops, the paedophile priests.... it is quite possible that I offended some people. I would not do it now, unless I knew the person well.

When it comes to the use of taboos in humour, Oscar, who has lived in Ireland for three years, has adapted his behaviour to his knowledge of Irish cultural norms. He recognises religion as a sensitive theme in Irish culture and avoids using it in humour. However, Oscar explains that he would still use this topic with close friends. It is clear that Oscar tailors his humour according to the nature of his interactions. He is aware of religion as a taboo in Irish humour. Despite this, he feels free to joke with his close Irish friends about religion, either because he does not mind teasing them or because he knows that they will not be offended. In this context, Oscar brings up another relevant issue: the perception of new-comers is affected by the nature of their interactions with Irish people, whether these are mainly with colleagues, acquaintances or close friends. A different participant, Nadia, who has been living in Ireland for less than one year offers a slightly different view:

I don't really know their taboos so in case of doubt I prefer to avoid the topic. The biggest taboo I see is religion. I get the impression that they are very religious so I do not make any comments.

Due to her lack of knowledge, Nadia has chosen to be cautious with her use of taboos in humour. Although Nadia has Irish colleagues and acquaintances, she does not have any Irish close friends. The nature of Nadia's interactions might affect her perception of Irish humour. On one hand, she feels the need to be cautious with her humour; on the other hand, it is possible that her Irish interlocutors are cautious around her.

5.6 Context and norms of interactions

It is clear that context plays an essential role in both style and content of interactions. As it has been revealed throughout this chapter, it is important to take into account where interactions take place such as work or home and who are the people involved:

strangers, acquaintances, colleagues, friends or close friends. Participants of this study reveal to have different expectations to match different situations. However, some participants reveal to have noticed differences between Spanish and Irish culture regarding the cultural norms that rule interactions in different contexts. Accordingly, their expectations of behaviour regarding style and content of communication have changed during their years in Ireland, and in some cases participants have also adjusted their own behaviour to become functional. Such is the case of participants like Antonio or Andrés, who realise that colleagues in Ireland tend to be less direct and avoid confrontation, or Diana or Fátima who have learnt to tone down their anger expression for their Irish acquaintances. Regarding interactions with friends, participants' opinions have pointed out differences in disclosure of feelings or in the use of certain topics which are considered more intimate and might be inappropriate among Irish friends.

Finally, the context of interactions is essential regarding humour themes and taboos as the more formal the situation, the more cautious its interlocutors would tend to be, whereas the more familiar the interlocutors are the less cautious they would need to be. Overall, participants' experiences reveal that awareness of these differences can contribute to effective communication, avoiding misunderstandings and awkward situations.

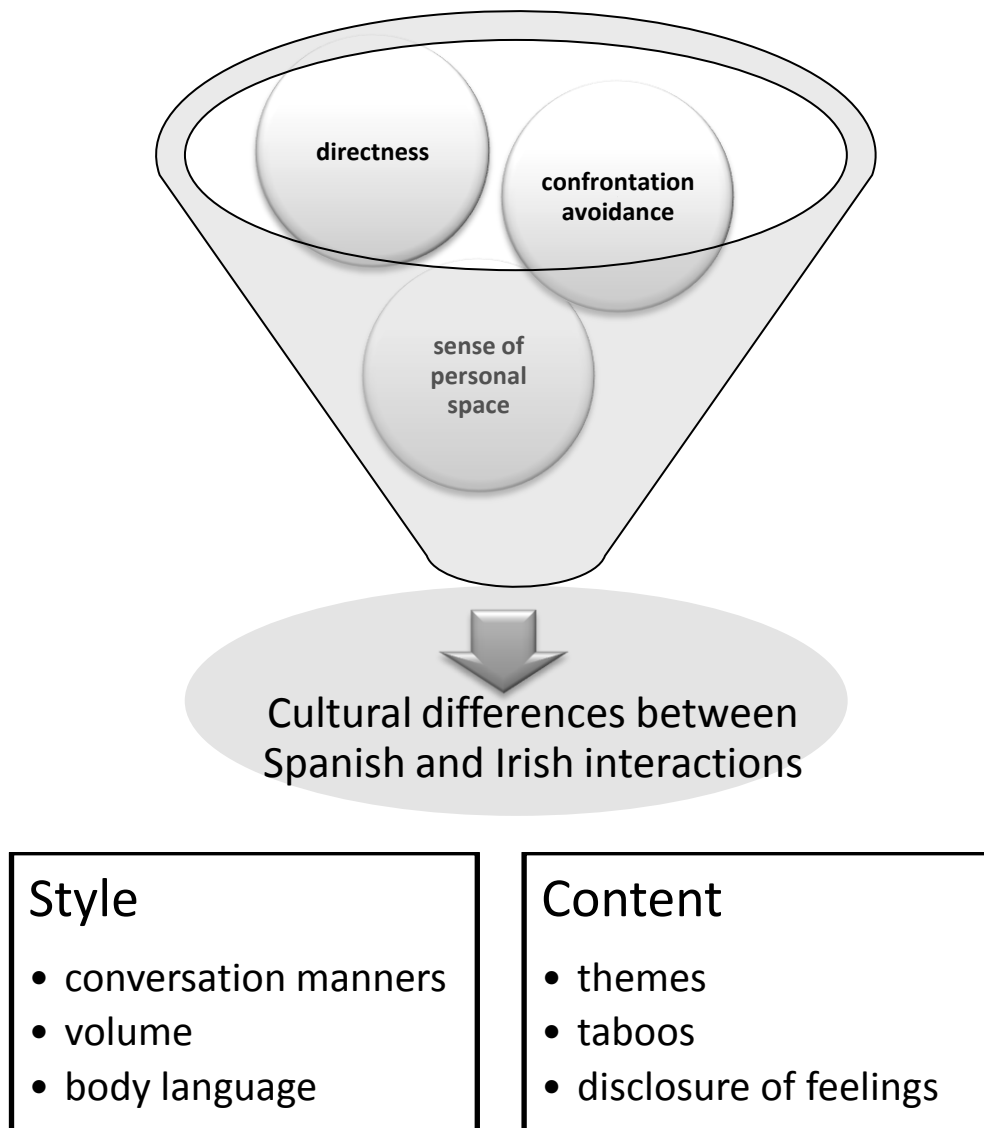
5.7 Conclusion

Participants of this study perceive certain proximity between Irish and Spanish people regarding their interactions: being talkative, sociable, friendly and open to strangers are communalities appreciated by some participants who highlight their positive effects in cross-cultural adaptation. However, participants have also

highlighted major differences in the nature of Spanish and Irish people's interactions, which concern both communication style and content.

These differences radiate from three main categories, as represented in Diagram 7: directness, confrontation avoidance and sense of personal space. According to participants' opinions, Spanish communication style tends to be more direct, relying on tone and body language. This directness is also perceived in the content of interactions as Irish people are thought to avoid straightforwardness in communication, particularly when it is linked to avoiding confrontation and exposing or invading personal space by expressing individual feelings and emotions. As a result, Spanish people are viewed as candid, impulsive and less cautious in their general interactions; while Irish people are perceived as more reserved, respectful and concerned by other people's reactions. In this context, humour can become a useful tool for expressing feelings or communicating criticism, which may be linked to the popularity of slagging in Irish culture. In this context, boundaries and taboos in interactions are perceived as sturdier in Irish culture. Stronger taboos which are intrinsic to Irish culture result in humour which tends to obey political correctness, avoiding offending others with controversial subjects. However, nuances such as context and the nature of humorous interactions can play an important role in reinforcing or allowing those taboos. By contrast to Irish humour, participants of this study perceive the absence of taboos as an evident characteristic of Spanish humour. Different aspects of this lack of taboos have been both criticised and valued by these participants, which reflects the existing variety of individual preferences when it comes to humour.

Diagram 7 Cultural differences between Spanish and Irish interactions



Overall, participants' opinions on communication style and thematic tendencies in Spanish and Irish culture and their humour tendencies reveal clear differences. Participants' knowledge and perception of these differences can affect their behaviour in intercultural interactions as they may choose to adjust their behaviour to their Irish interlocutors in order to avoid awkwardness. The implications of these differences in participants' intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation are discussed in detail in chapter 6 and 7.

CHAPTER 6

Humour, intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines participants' use of humour in intercultural interactions and its consequences in the process of cross-cultural adaptation. The structure of the chapter follows a model developed as part of the data analysis that represents the processes involved in humour communication in the context of intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation (Diagram 8). Firstly, the chapter examines the major factors affecting participants' use of humour in intercultural interactions: *language competence, cultural proximity and awareness* and *personal affinities and compatibility*. This discussion reveals the impact that these factors can have in intercultural interactions, fostering effective or ineffective humour communication. Secondly, the chapter deals with the nature and consequences of humour communication and miscommunication paying special attention to the communicative, social and psychological functions of humour in intercultural interactions, and its use as an intercultural tool. Thirdly the chapter analyses how such functions can trigger positive or negative responses that affect cross-cultural adaptation leading to adaptive changes that can lead to the development of humour competence as an essential part of intercultural competence. To conclude, the concept of *humour competence* is explained as an integrative part of the dynamic process of cross-cultural adaptation

6.2 The role of humour in intercultural communication and its effects in cross-cultural adaptation

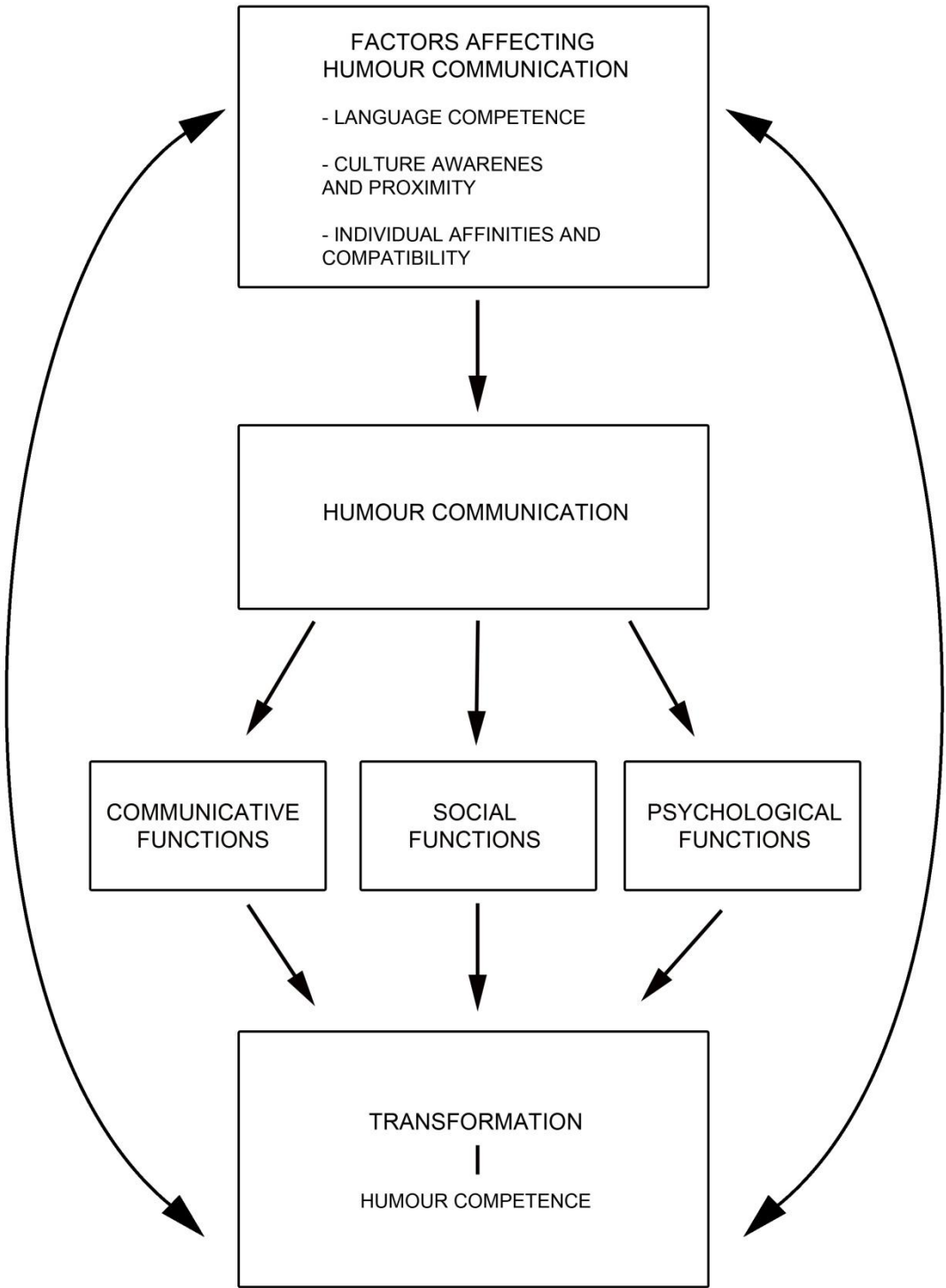
Analysis of the data points out language competence, cultural awareness and proximity, and individual affinities and compatibility as the major factors affecting

the quality of humour communication in intercultural interactions Language competence and cultural awareness improve participants' ability to understand and communicate humour, whereas cultural proximity and individual affinities can imply a shared perspective that improves their chances of sharing humour with other interlocutors, as it can affect the content of their humour and their preferences for different humour styles. Finally, compatibility refers to the interlocutors' use of humour, which can compensate for differences in a way that makes humour work. For example, shared experiences can become the subject of humour; shared values can define the fine borderline between humour and offense, and exposure or fondness for self-deprecation or sarcasm can affect their humour style or expectations and tolerance for others' humour.

Both effective and ineffective humour communication can trigger some of the positive and negative communicative, social and psychological effects of humour. For example, humour miscommunication can create tension, highlight differences, and trigger separation and feelings of inadequacy. In contrast, effective humour communication can ease tensions, highlight similarities and trigger bonding and feelings of adequacy, which makes humour a powerful tool in intercultural communication.

Experience of effective humour communication and also miscommunication and awareness of the positive and negative effects of humour can lead to adaptive changes which can improve the quality of participants' use of humour. For example, it can lead them to avoid certain subjects or to use it as a strategy to overcome miscommunication. In turn, cross-cultural adaptation can affect participants' ability to overcome and cope with humour miscommunication, which can minimize or reverse its negative effects.

Diagram 8 The role of humour in intercultural communication and its effects in cross-cultural adaptation



This dynamic process of transformation leads to the development of participants' humour competence meaning their ability to use humour effectively in intercultural

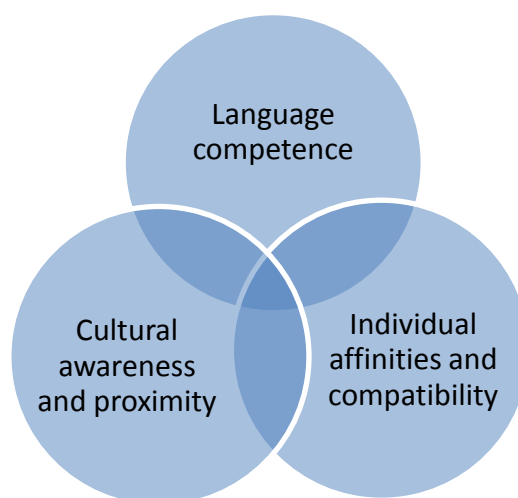
interactions. Such competency encompasses elements from the three factors that result in effective or ineffective humour, but it also contributes to them with new skills such as the ability to focus on individual affinities in order to communicate humour. In this context, humour competence becomes an integrative element of cross-cultural adaptation which enables participants' to alter the factors that result in effective or ineffective humour communication.

6.3 Factors affecting humour communication

As seen in the dynamic process model presented in diagram 6, there are three major factors, namely, *language competence*, *cultural proximity*, and *personal affinities* which interact in relation to the specific contexts in which intercultural communication takes place. As such, participants evaluate the quality of their intercultural interactions by taking into account three major factors: *language competence*, *cultural awareness* and *cultural proximity* between themselves and other interlocutors and *personal affinities* and *compatibility* between themselves and other interlocutors (see *Diagram 9*)

These factors are key elements to understand the process of cross-cultural adaptation in the context of the present study, not only because they affect intercultural communication, including humour communication, but also because they reflect the development of newcomers' use of humour within this process. Finally, it is fundamental to take into account that these three factors are interlinked in their nature and their functions constantly overlap in communication. For example, cultural awareness is intrinsic to language competence and individual affinities can derive from cultural proximity and language competence.

Diagram 9 Major factors affecting humour communication in intercultural interactions



6.3.1 Language Competence

In this study the concept of language competence stands for the ability to communicate effectively in a specific language. This ability can be hindered by language shortcomings characteristic of non-native speakers, which can affect the quality of their interactions. This study highlights language competence as a major distinguishing factor of humour communication since analysis of the data reveals that language limitations can determine the quality and quantity of participants' use of humour in intercultural interactions based on their ability to express and understand humour.

6.3.1.2 Language competence and ability to convey humour

All participants of this study experience language limitations in English, but their nature and impact in humour communication vary depending on their language competence, which has a direct impact in their ability to express humour. For example, participants with intermediate and advanced level of English experience an

imbalance between their ability to express humour in English and Spanish, which inhibits their use of humour in general.

I can't adapt my humour, I can't get to that level, I'm satisfied enough if I can somehow transmit my nonsense humour. (Pedro)

My humour is different because I have less capacity to express it so it is simpler. (Nadia)

Nadia and Pedro reveal an overall difficulty in expressing humour due to their language skills in English. This difficulty triggers a tendency for simplicity in their humour in general, regardless of whether it is based on universal, linguistic and or cultural content.

By contrast, fluent participants can be more specific about these limitations, which show a deeper awareness of these limitations, but also suggest a less obvious gap between their ability to express humour in English or Spanish which puts linguistic humour at the core of such imbalance as illustrated by these comments:

I don't have the same resources to express myself in English, I still cannot tell a story and make it sound really interesting...make it more comical, use humour better, express nuances, exaggerate, make it dramatic...(Oscar)

I can laugh as much with Irish people, but I cannot make as many jokes as I can in Spanish, it is my ability to express, to add nuances, accents...or to say things that are impossible to translate.(Fátima)

Because we are not native speakers, we might need more words than required, maybe we cannot be as specific or precise, as English language can be, there might be an expression that you don't know, and you need to take the long way around it to say the same thing, but, that's ok, it does not really hinder interactions, you might lose the momentum to make a joke, but this is part of any interaction. (Hugo)

These fluent participants point at their individual difficulties to trigger humour such as using of comic devices based on language like word-play and irony or

transmitting certain comical nuances with their use of English, for example impersonating accents or using colloquial idioms, slang and popular sayings. In addition, their limitations in vocabulary affect their ability to be more precise, which results in the need for more words, circumlocutions and explanations, which can ‘distress’ the flow of conversation and the timing for effective conversational humour.

Finally, fluent participants who assess their ability to express humour as similar in both languages still acknowledge certain limitations but minimize their impact in humour communication. Their language competence helps them to switch codes and to overcome their limitations, with minimum impact on the quality of their interactions. This balances out their ability to communicate humour in English and Spanish.

I’m still learning, I think I’ll always be, sometimes I’m stuck for a word, but I can get by without it, it rarely affects my humour, I don’t think so. (Diana)

I can usually say whatever I want somehow and I no longer have any issues to express my humour in English, not really (Nuria)

Participants with similar capacity to express humour in English and Spanish have achieved a high level of competence in English which has a direct impact in that ability to communicate humour, which is particularly evident in their use of linguistic humour as this participant’s statement points out:

The possibility to make linguistic jokes is very different in each language, it is not better or worse, but you need to be very competent in the language to get to this point (Nicolás)

Nicolás’s statement reveals a high level of language competence that enables him to produce linguistic humour of similar quality in English and Spanish. The differences

in his use of linguistic humour are dictated by the nature of the language itself, and not by his language limitations.

6.3.1.3 Language competence and ability to understand humour

Participants' competence in English is a crucial aspect of their ability to understand humour and their language skills have a direct impact on their tendency to laugh at other people's humour. It is clear that newcomers' or non-native speakers' ability to understand humour evolves as their language competence increases, and they develop skills that improve their level of English in general and their listening comprehension in particular. These involve language skills such as vocabulary knowledge or acquaintance with Irish English accents and cultural awareness, such as familiarity with the content of conversation, as both types of abilities are interlinked in effective communication.

In this study, participants show that their tendency to understand others' humour increases as their language competence improves, going from feeling lost in conversations at their lower level, through finding it difficult to follow group conversations, to miss occasional remarks that can be easily overcome with explanations. This process is illustrated by the following remarks from participants of this study:

I'm often lost in conversations... and I am just happy if I get a vague idea of the theme of a joke (Pedro)

When I am in a group and people are not talking to me directly sometimes I can get lost and if they are joking with each other I often miss the jokes (Elisa)

I remember at the beginning at work, during breaks they would be joking and laughing and I would not get it, I could not follow, and I used to think 'my goodness!', but now, I can't even relate to it. (Diana)

These participants reveal how their level of English affects their ability to understand humour differently. Pedro, whose level of English is intermediate, acknowledges a great difficulty following conversations which is highlighted by his ability to understand conversational humour. Elisa, whose level is advanced, points at her difficulty to 'get' humorous remarks when her interlocutors are not engaging with her directly. In contrast, Diana, who had fluent English when she arrived to Ireland, recalls difficulties to understand conversational humour as a challenge of the past. It is clear that her ability to understand humour and her language competence have developed during her years in Ireland improving her use of humour interactions with Irish people.

It is clear that non- native speakers' limitations regarding their ability to understand humour become less significant as their language competence develops. This development has a direct impact in their strategies to overcome their inability to understand humour. As their language level develops their need to ask for explanations decreases; however, their confidence in their use of English enables them to ask for the necessary explanations. In contrast, at the lower levels, participants tend to be more self-conscious of their need to ask for explanations which can be demanding for their interlocutors and disrupt the flow of conversation, which is crucial for conversational humour as illustrated by these participants' remarks:

*They are good people and they try to help but I know it can be a pain..
(Lucía)*
*Now I have no problem asking, at the beginning it's worse, because you
don't understand so much. (Nuria)*

Lucía shows awareness of her need for extra attention, while Nuria's comments reveal the contrast between asking specific questions and acknowledging complete uncertainty, which can lead to long explanations. In this context, non-native speakers may opt for avoiding explanations. Nevertheless, it is worth remarking that their personality and the context of interaction will affect their ways of dealing with humour miscommunication.

6.3.1.4 Language competence, attachment and the need to translate

Analysis of the data of this study suggests that progress in language competence implies different needs towards translating humour, which can be linked to differences in individual rapport with Spanish and English. In this context, participants who acknowledge a higher impact of their language limitations in their abilities to communicate humour show a higher need to translate or transfer their humour from Spanish into English. This need represents the requirement for greater effort to express their humour, which implies not only a less spontaneous use of humour, but the feeling of inability to show an important part of their personality: their sense of humour. In this context, awareness of language limitations to communicate humour can reinforce further attachment to Spanish, linking it to successful interactions and highlighting difficulties of intercultural interactions in English, which can in turn highlight the differences between Spanish and English speakers. These are two comments from participants of this study have highlighted their need to translate humour from Spanish and its consequences:

Most funny things I can think of are impossible to translate, so I use humour les. (Oscar)

My humour comes out more easily in Spanish, especially if I'm tired. I don't need to translate or make an effort.. (Fátima)

For Oscar, the need to translate affects not only his use of humour, but his general communication as he believes that original nuances can get lost in translation, and sharp or elaborate interventions can easily become blunt. Fátima's attachment to Spanish is revealed in the effort required to communicate her humour in English. In this context, she regards her use of humour in Spanish as '*more spontaneous*'.

In contrast, participants who have similar aptitudes to communicate humour in interactions with Spanish or English speakers, minimizing the implications of their limitations as non-native speakers show a more spontaneous and effortless use of humour, characterised by their ability to adapt to their interlocutors in intercultural interactions. Such ability implies not only less need to translate humour, letting go of the need to translate humorous remarks of linguistic or cultural context which are linked to Spanish language and culture, but also better skills to translate such remarks when they decide to do so. This is due to both their competence in English and awareness of Irish culture which have helped them to develop a spontaneous use of English that enables them to express their sense of humour to English speakers in Ireland. This ability is the result of '*the development of a sense of humour in English*'; an *in vivo* concept coined by Nuria, a participant of this study, which implies the development of a bond with English that is reflected in the use of humour in intercultural interactions in Ireland. Nuria and Diana's experiences illustrate this process:

It took me 4 years of living in Ireland to develop my sense of humour in English language to a point where I could be understood and people found my humour funny. (Nuria)

I remember finding it frustrating because it was a part of my personality that I could not express, but now I have no issues at all. (Nuria)

You can't translate humour literally, it doesn't work. I remember doing it in the past. Now, I don't really need to translate really but if I have to I

can adapt things to Irish or Spanish people, or I can tell them that something is impossible to translate, if I am laughing at something, like a funny email, and they ask me to translate it, but this just happens occasionally. (Diana)

Nuria and Diana have learnt to express their sense of humour in English in a spontaneous way. The quality of their humour is no longer based only on the language they speak. Nevertheless, Diana shows awareness of the difficulty to translate humour, pointing out the need to adapt it to get an effective translation. This is a skill which she has developed as part of her language competence, but which she does not need to use as often: a sign of her spontaneous use of humour in English. At this stage, it is relevant to mention that language and culture are closely interlinked and the difficulty to translate humour derives from both language issues and cultural content. The impact of cultural awareness in humour communication is examined in detail in the next section.

6.3.2 Cultural awareness and cultural proximity

In this study cultural awareness refers to individual knowledge and experience related to a specific culture, whereas cultural proximity entails the degree of similarity or difference between different cultures. These two concepts are closely interrelated. For example, awareness of cultural proximity or distance contributes to cultural awareness of both the culture of origin and the target culture. The next section discusses how these two factors affect participants' use of humour in intercultural interactions and its role in participants' adaptation to Irish culture.

6.3.2.1 Cultural awareness

Analysis of the data of this study suggests that awareness of the target culture promotes effective humour communication in intercultural interactions in two major ways. Firstly, awareness of the target culture can encourage participants to use

humour according to the cultural norms and values involved in interactions in Irish culture, including communication style and humour tendencies. Increased awareness can lead to changes in participants' expectations and modification in their own use of humour, for example some participants tend to avoid politically in-correct humour and the use of certain topics or taboos that can be offensive or lead to miscommunication, as discussed in detail in chapter 5. In contrast, lack of awareness of cultural differences can lead to miscommunication and misinterpreted humour, but it can also make participants overcautious with their humour.

Secondly, cultural awareness increases shared knowledge between participants and their interlocutors, improving their chances of sharing humour of cultural content and their ability to communicate and understand other people's humour. In contrast, lack of awareness of Irish culture limits the amount of topics and cultural references that can trigger humour in intercultural interactions as these two participants experience:

I can laugh at more things with a Spanish person, things that I don't share with an Irish person. (Antonio)

I share more codes with Spanish people, like references to certain characters, which I do not share with Irish people. I can't help it because I have lived many more years in Spain than in Ireland. (Aurora)

I speak good English and I can understand everything and say whatever I want, but I still have more fun with Spanish people because we have so many things in common, so many references, things that don't need to be explained..(Nieves)

These participants highlight the importance of sharing a cultural background in order to share humour as people from the same culture share knowledge attached to that culture. An imbalance between these participants' knowledge of Spanish and Irish

culture affects the quality of their use of humour and highlights differences between intercultural interactions and interactions with co-ethnics.

In this context, humour in interactions with co-ethnics is less restricted regarding its cultural content and can be regarded as more spontaneous, whereas intercultural interactions require an added effort to overcome limitations imposed by unshared cultural knowledge, for example interlocutors can adapt humour content or use explanations, but this strategies can affect spontaneity and humour effectiveness. In addition, participants' attitudes towards limitations caused by lack of cultural awareness can also influence humour communication and its impact in cross-cultural adaptation, for example focusing on the negative effects of limitations can highlight difficulties and differences, fostering attachment to humour with co-ethnics, whereas appreciation of intercultural interactions as an opportunity to share cultural knowledge can loosen participants of that attachment and help them integrate new knowledge that can be useful in humour communication:

We come from the same roots and, and sometimes there is no need to explain something, we just think or know what others think, based on our culture. (Nieves)

There might be things that you can share with a Spanish person but you can't share with an Irish person. Obviously, there are things that nobody here has heard of, for example a 'empanadilla' [a typical Spanish pie, which also makes reference to a famous comedy sketch by two Spanish comedians in 1985] [laughs]. You can laugh, an Irish person won't. We have shared certain folklore that we don't share with Irish people, for that same reason an Irish person might make a comment about something that a comedian said years ago, like 'Brutus, Brutus ghali', something like the empanadilla joke, and you don't get it, so you need to learn their tradition too..., you do your research and if you like it, you keep it. (Nicolás)

Nieves focuses on the relevance of a shared cultural background for effective communication, which implies a greater difficulty and effort in intercultural

communication. Nicolás points to this difficulty and effort as an overcoming limitation and an opportunity to interact and learn, adding that sharing cultural knowledge through intercultural communication *'become second nature to people [newcomers] that have been here a long time'* and *'it is just another excuse to interact'*. Nicolás and Nieves give different value to shared cultural awareness and proximity in their interactions: although both acknowledge the challenges of cultural distance, Nicolás focuses on his ability to overcome it and sees these challenges as an opportunity to learn for all interlocutors. In addition Nicolás reflects ability to adapt his humour, whereas Nieves shows a greater attachment to using humour based on shared cultural knowledge.

Finally, analysis of the data suggests that as participants increase their awareness of Irish culture, the imbalance between their awareness of origin and target culture becomes less evident in intercultural interactions. Moreover, cultural awareness increases participants' abilities to overcome limitations by helping them to suit their humour to their interlocutors, switching codes, basing their conversational humour in shared knowledge or sharing cultural humour without losing its humorous intention through adaptation. These skills are essential for newcomers' humour competence as part of their intercultural competence:

You learn to 'change the chip', you can joke about things that you share, our experiences are different and I can't transfer that, topics, characters, references to a specific culture, a specific society, I would need to explain and so you 'change the chip', and it's the same when I go to Spain (Hugo)

You learn to adapt humour because sometimes it doesn't translate, it doesn't work if you translate it literally or if you explain it, because of the cultural elements, so you need to change it a bit to keep it funny, but sometimes you just have to let it go (Diana).

Hugo focuses on his ability to suit the content of his humour to his interlocutors based on shared knowledge and experiences, which bypasses the need for explanations. Likewise, Diana reveals the ability to *'let go'* of cultural humour that can be lost in translation but she also reveals the ability to adapt cultural content without losing its humorous effect. Her comment illustrates participants' tendency to consider the effort of adapting cultural humour and predict its results. In addition, both Diana and Hugo believe that their ability to communicate humour is similar with Spanish and Irish people, which suggests that their awareness of Irish culture can provide information and skills to either fulfil or avoid that task without a major effect in the quality of their humour.

6.3.2.2 Cultural proximity

Cultural proximity between Spanish and Irish culture involves cultural similarities and differences regarding their values, attitudes and behaviours (chapter 4). In this context cultural affinities can lead to mutual understanding between Spanish and Irish people, due to a similar world-view reflected in their ways of interacting and communicating humour. Such understanding which can foster effective humour communication is increased by common experiences and shared knowledge as discussed in the previous section.

In contrast, cultural differences can lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings where humour can be unappreciated or unintentionally offensive, for example by the use of taboo topics, or direct humour. This contrast highlights the importance of newcomers' awareness of cultural differences, since unawareness of similarities can be compensated by cultural proximity in intercultural interactions. Nevertheless, awareness of cultural similarities can have a positive impact in

communication and cross-cultural adaptation by fostering a sense of identification and bonding.

Analysis of the data of this study shows that participants' awareness and experience of cultural differences can lead to adaptive changes and internalisation of Irish culture. These changes affect humour communication regarding its content, in participants' choice of themes; and style, in their tone or body language. In addition, participants might adapt their own humour tendencies such as their use of absurd, offensive, direct or black humour. In this context, some participants tend to adapt their use of humour to their interlocutors depending on their cultural background, and some participants reflect an internalisation of Irish culture, which becomes evident when they visit Spain:

When I go to Spain, I am shocked at my friends humour, I tell them 'How can you say that?', it can be brutal, but I probably used to do it myself. (Nadia)

Sometimes, my friends [in Spain] tell me that my humour is Irish, because I am too sensitive or too sharp [laughs] (Diana)

I like self- deprecation and I use it all the time, you just have to look at my Face-book page. I have picked it up here but now it's part of me. (Nicolás)

I wouldn't use slagging in Spain the same way that I do here, only with really close friends. (Nicolás)

I am more cautious here for sure, in Spain I am less careful of what I say or if I shock people because I know it's going to work or at least it is not going to offend them...For example, I don't use black humour here. (Andrés)

Nadia and Diana reveal changes in their humour as they have become detached and more sensitive to certain tendencies in Spanish humour which they now perceive as cruel. In this context, Diana believes that her use of humour comes across as 'foreign' to her family and friends in Spain. Likewise, Nicolás believes that his

humour has changed due to his contact with Irish culture, which has fostered a tendency for self-deprecation in all contexts. In contrast, he is able to readapt his use of slagging to Spanish interlocutors to avoid misunderstandings. Likewise, Andrés shows ability to adapt his use of humour to Irish or Spanish interlocutors.

It is clear that internalisation of cultural differences can lead to feelings of detachment toward Spanish culture as illustrated by Diana and Nadia's comment. However it can also lead participants to feelings of nostalgia and attachment to Spanish culture, particularly if they have a strong preference for a Spanish tendency. In this context, awareness of cultural differences regarding use of humour can change participants' expectations, which may have a positive effect in their interactions, but they might opt for maintaining their original behaviour, attached to Spanish culture and manage its potential for miscommunication and misunderstandings in their intercultural interactions. In this regard, participants' extent of adaptation or attachment relies on different factors such as their personality, their own sense of humour, the context of their interactions and its implications. For example they may choose to adapt their behaviour in certain contexts, such as work, but retain it in others such as interactions with close friends as these participants point out:

I have to be careful with my humour at work, when I am with friends or partying I can take the risk (Andrés)

I don't adapt my humour, some people don't get it and that it's fine, sometimes I know I will make a joke that nobody will get it, that it would sound too silly, or un-PC to Irish people but I still make it. (Cristina)

Andrés and Cristina are aware that their humour can be unsuccessful or offensive in intercultural interactions. However, they choose to 'take the risk' and accept its

consequences. Nevertheless, Andrés opts for adapting his use of humour in formal contexts and work where he prefers to avoid the negative consequences of humour miscommunication.

Analysis of the data suggests that Participants' use of humour can reveal their individual and unique proximity to Spanish and Irish culture and their humour tendencies. Such proximity, which is subject to change along the ongoing process of cross-cultural adaptation, varies depending on different factors such as each individual's cultural identity. Such discussion goes beyond the scope of this study. However, participants' individual preferences towards Spanish and Irish humour can affect humour communication and participants' tendencies to accept differences, adapt their humour and identify with people from a specific culture. This latest facet of cultural proximity is discussed in more detail in the next section.

6.3.2.3 Cultural proximity, 'mutual sympathy' and individual affinities

Analysis of the data draws attention to the concept of 'mutual sympathy' as an essential element taken into account by participants to assess the quality of humour communication. Accordingly, participants refer to a sense of 'connection', mutual understanding or 'complicity' (*'complicidad'*) that can exist between interlocutors and can both lead to humour and be encouraged by it. This feeling derives from underlying individual affinities, which become manifest through communication. In this context, individual affinities and 'mutual sympathy' can facilitate humour communication and trigger its bonding effect. Individual affinities are similarities between people which can result in 'mutual sympathy', and cultural proximity can result in individual affinities between people from similar cultural backgrounds, becoming an asset for humour communication.

Analysis of the data suggests that the value given to cultural proximity by participants in order to assess the quality of humour communication can be linked to their use of humour in intercultural interactions and their adaptation to Irish culture. In this context, participants' value of cultural proximity as a crucial factor in the quality of their interactions can be related to a tendency for socializing and developing friendships with co-ethnics:

I get on better with Spanish people that have been here a while, because I share more with them. I have good Irish friends, but my closest friends are Spanish and I tend to socialize with them. (Daniel)
My closest friends are Spanish. I have Irish friends but my rapport with them is not as intimate. It is a cultural difference. (Cristina)
I laugh more with Spanish people, our humour is more similar, and it is easier to click, and to bond. (Cristina)

Daniel relates his tendency to bond with Spanish people to a common cultural background which includes the cross-cultural experience of living in Ireland, whereas Cristina explains such tendency with cultural differences regarding the concept of friendship. However, her tendency to bond with other Spaniards can also be linked to her tendency to empathise with their humour, which can foster such bonding.

Regarding humour and friendship, the asset of a shared cultural background that can foster cultural humour is added to the mutual knowledge that comes with friendship and can lead to a more personal, spontaneous and intimate humour. In contrast, lack of close Irish friends inhibits awareness of Irish culture and Irish humour at this level of intimate interaction:

It is connected to intimacy, you can laugh more easily with someone that you know well, rather than someone you don't... if I had more Irish friends I would know more about their humour (Tania)

The development of Tania's circle of friends has been influenced by her proximity to people who share her experience of being a migrant and a non-native English speaker in Ireland. As her comment suggests, she is aware of the negative impact that this has in her awareness of Irish people's humour. In addition, a tendency to socialize with co-ethnics and people who are not Irish can trigger the use of humour based on their perspective of Irish culture and the incongruities triggered by it. Such humour, based on cultural comparisons, can be a means of releasing tension created by cultural differences. In addition, it can have a bonding effect, and contribute to developing personal relationships influenced by cultural proximity. However, it can also foster criticism towards Irish culture, highlight cultural differences, and encourage predilection for Spanish culture, particularly in the case of interactions with co-ethnics. Such tendencies can be linked to poor adaptation or a perception of not feeling welcome. Nevertheless, the data points at a distinction between superficial criticisms based on lack of awareness of Irish culture and humour that is based on cultural awareness of both Spanish and Irish culture. Aurora's own experience illustrates such difference:

At the beginning it used to annoy me that kind of criticism based on lack of awareness, but now I am in a phase where I feel like sharing certain thoughts with Spanish people. Things I cannot share with the Irish. I feel comforted by Spanish people that have been here a certain amount of years... I can laugh at situations characteristic of this country, this culture...and also about Spanish culture. I feel free to criticize both cultures, sometimes people have different ideas and start arguing. But it is usually quite funny...also a bit like a therapeutic session.

Aurora's comment highlights the role of humour as a tool for criticism among co-ethnics, but she suggests that this type of humour can be more evolved due to the cultural awareness of interlocutors and their tendencies to compare and criticise Spanish and Irish culture equally. However, she shows an attachment to interactions

with co-ethnics, which points out a need to release ideas or emotions triggered by cultural differences with people who can relate to her.

But leaving aside humour that targets Irish culture, affinity to other cultures can be manifested, and developed in the use of humour in intercultural interactions. In this context, humour that works can create or reinforced a felt proximity towards a specific culture by highlighting similarities and minimizing differences. However, humour that does not work can highlight differences and foster distance to a specific culture. The following comments illustrate these effects:

I think humour can be very bonding, because people come from very different contexts and there are lots of things that are very different, but may be humour is universal, I don't know, I have Korean friends who... I think their sense of humour is very similar to Spanish humour...we find the same things funny, we laugh at the same things. I think our character is very similar, and I have noticed mainly through humour (Nadia).

Culturally speaking, I have more in common with French people, but in general terms I connect better with Irish people, and I get on better in this country (Antonio).

I remember feeling at home [because of Irish people's humour]... I can make that judgement because I compare it to me experience in Germany. I felt frustrated because I was often offended by their humour (Aurora).

Nadia highlights the bonding effect of humour as it is a universal pleasant feeling that everyone can related to. The intricacy involved in shared humour makes that connection highlight similarities between interlocutors that were perceived as different. In addition, such similarities can be perceived as cultural proximity which can foster a positive feeling towards people from that culture. Aurora and Antonio's comments point out a contrast based on a cross-cultural comparison. Their experience of French and German culture highlighted their cultural distance towards those cultures, whereas their tendency to share humour with Irish people fostered a sense of cultural proximity.

6.3.3 Individual affinities

6.3.3.1 Individual affinities, cross-cultural adaptation and humour competence: a shift of focus

Some participants' ability to generalise about their tendencies to share humour and bond with people from a specific cultural background can be contrasted to other participants' tendency to prioritize the role of individual affinities for successful humour communication. Instead of generalising about a specific cultural background, a focus on individual affinities is characterised by the importance given to shared knowledge and experience, based on each individual identity, and each individual rapport rather than on interlocutors' cultural background. Analysis of the data suggests that a shift of focus from cultural proximity to individual affinities can reveal progress in participants' humour competence, as it reflects the ability to balance out cultural differences that can affect humour communication, and account for other factors which are necessary for effective humour communication, as illustrated in Diagram 10.

To start with, this shift of focus, which can evolve through the process of cross-cultural adaptation, can be a sign of having overcome limitations imposed by lack of cultural awareness and linguistic competence, which allows participants to value each individual humour style, and transmit their own style spontaneously despite cultural and linguistic differences, as Antonio points out:

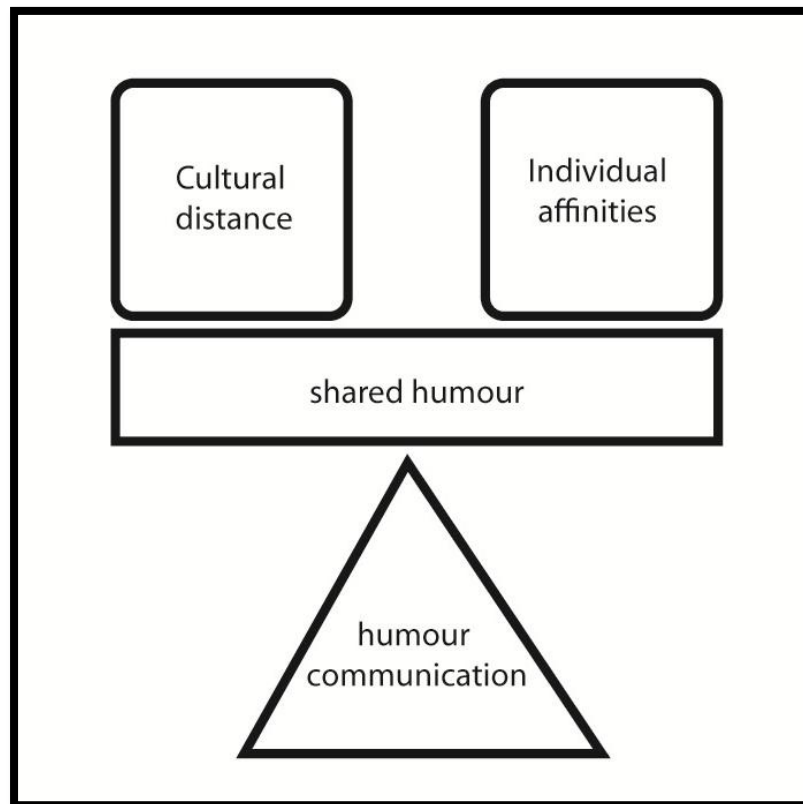
People might or might not get my humour and I might or might not get theirs, but it does not depend on their nationality, I guess it mattered at the beginning, because of the language and things like that but not anymore.

Antonio highlights the relevance of other factors, such as individual affinities regarding humour tendencies. However he highlights the importance of language

competence, and possibly cultural awareness in order to fully appreciate others' peoples humour and express his own. In his case, the development of such competences is linked to a shift of focus.

Diagram 10 *Balance created by Individual Affinities and Cultural Differences*

A focus on individual affinities can balance out cultural differences affecting humour communication.



In addition, this perspective agrees with the intricacy of humour in intercultural communication, taking into account the concept of humour communication and cultural proximity. In the first place, although individual affinities can be triggered by cultural proximity, shared humour cannot be triggered by cultural proximity alone, which brings to question the different factors that trigger humour in different individuals. In the second place, although the concept of nationality has been used in

this study as a proxy for cultural background, there are many factors in play regarding cultural proximity between interlocutors such as their cross-cultural experiences, their upbringing, education, or social status. Consequently, instead of generalising about a specific cultural background, a focus on individual affinities is characterised by the importance given to shared knowledge and experience, based on each individual identity, and each individual rapport rather than on interlocutors' cultural background alone. Auroras' comment illustrates this point:

The people I get on best with are the people who make me laugh most, but they can be Irish or Spanish. I don't see any differences.

Aurora correlates humour to the quality of her friendships, but she is unable to distinguish the quality of humour based on whether her friends' cultural background is Spanish or Irish.

Finally, within the data, a focus on individual affinities can be linked with a tendency to socialize, bond and develop intimate relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds, which are essential aspects of cross-cultural adaptation and integration.

6.3.3.2 Individual affinities, compatibility and sense of humour

Leaving aside individual affinities and 'mutual sympathy', compatibility between interlocutors' personalities and senses of humour can be another essential factor for humour communication. This implies that humour communication can be effective even if their interlocutors' senses of humour are different but complement each other in a specific situation. Individual sense of humour is the ultimate component of humour communication, and each individual sense of humour has multiple

components that determine what triggers humour in that particular individual. Due to the intricacy of the concept of sense of humour, a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the individual characteristics of participants' sense of humour in intercultural interactions is beyond the scope of this study. However, analysis of the data highlights certain components of participants' sense of humour that can benefit intercultural interactions by fostering 'mutual sympathy' and 'compatibility'. For example, participants' preferences for different humour tendencies or styles are essential to share humour with their interlocutors and analysis of the data suggests that some participants have undergone a transformation in those preferences, which have led to an improvement in the quality of humour communication in their intercultural interactions. For instance, participants' who have developed a fondness of self-deprecating humour or slagging report an improvement of humour communication, which suggests that their use of humour has become more compatible with their interlocutors, fostering shared humour and minimizing miscommunication and misunderstandings.

In addition, analysis of the data points out two main features of individual sense of humour, which can have a significant impact in intercultural communication: the ability to laugh at oneself and the ability to cope with others' humour. In this context, the process of cross-cultural adaptation can encourage participants' development of these two abilities by for example, fostering a change of perspective towards self-deprecating humour or humour that targets them directly. Regarding one's ability to laugh at oneself, analysis of the data suggests that ability to laugh at one's mistakes can play an essential role in intercultural interactions. For example, this type humour can happen spontaneously in intercultural interactions when participants' behaviour has lead to miscommunication or misunderstandings. In this

context, self-deprecating humour can help participants' saving face, easing tensions and foster a relaxed atmosphere. Moreover, the ability to see the comical side of intercultural miscommunication or stressful situations can contribute to a positive outlook that can impact cross-cultural adaptation, minimizing its difficulties and adding a sense of enjoyment to the process. For instance, the comical side of stressful situations or misunderstandings can become apparent afterwards, in which case humour might relieve the stress created by the situation, or help minimize its importance. In this context, Diana, a participant of this study, recalls a comical anecdote about a stressful experience which took place when she arrived to Ireland for the first time:

I got on the bus and I could not understand the bus driver, then I started to see signs in gaelic and I panicked as I thought 'I don't believe it, they must speak Irish instead of English'. When I met my contact here, and I told her, she told me that it was the Irish accent, and we started laughing, I was kind of relief.

It is clear that Diana's ability to laugh at the incongruity of her experience triggered immediate relief when it was disclosed, but it also reveals a positive attitude towards facing the difficulty of the need to become accustomed to an Irish English accent.

Another participant, Oscar, gives an example of a comical anecdote derived from a pronunciation mistake:

I was going around Dublin looking for work, and I was saying 'I am looking for a yob', and in one supermarket, the guy took me to the dairy department [laughs], to show me a Yop [yogurt drink brand], it was quite funny.

Oscar points out that he was able to see the comical side of this incident at the time, and suggests that being able to laugh at misunderstandings is 'a healthy way of coping with shortcomings'. These instances reveal the role of humour as a tool for

easing up interactions, releasing tension, and avoiding frustration in favour of a positive attitude that can foster learning.

Regarding participants' ability to cope with humour that targets them, the data links participants' ability to cope with humour that targets them with its likelihood to have an offensive effect, regardless of its intentions as illustrated by Cristina's comment:

They may have tried to offend me or tease me but I tend to take things easy, sometimes my students in school make fun of my accent, but what can I do, I'm Spanish, it's just an accent.

In this instance, Cristina's ability to cope with humour is reflected in her reaction of indifference towards humour that targets her. Participants' reactions to being targeted by humour include feeling offended, feeling indifferent, enjoying the humorous remark, and accepting it as a common form of Irish humour in the case of slugging, or as a sign of friendliness. These reactions depend on different factors such the context of the interaction, the relationship between interlocutors, participants' cultural awareness, their individual sense of humour, their personality or their mood. Regarding humour that targets Spanish culture, the data highlights the importance of context in order to trigger offense or indifference. For example, participants can feel slightly annoyed about humour based on Spanish stereotypes, like laziness, However these types of comments tend not to affect them when they come from close friends who are teasing them or strangers who, as Aurora, a participant of the study points out, '*are just being rude and ignorant*'. In contrast, Rosa, a different participant, expresses her annoyance when her Irish colleagues mention 'Spanish laziness', particularly taking into account that they work together.

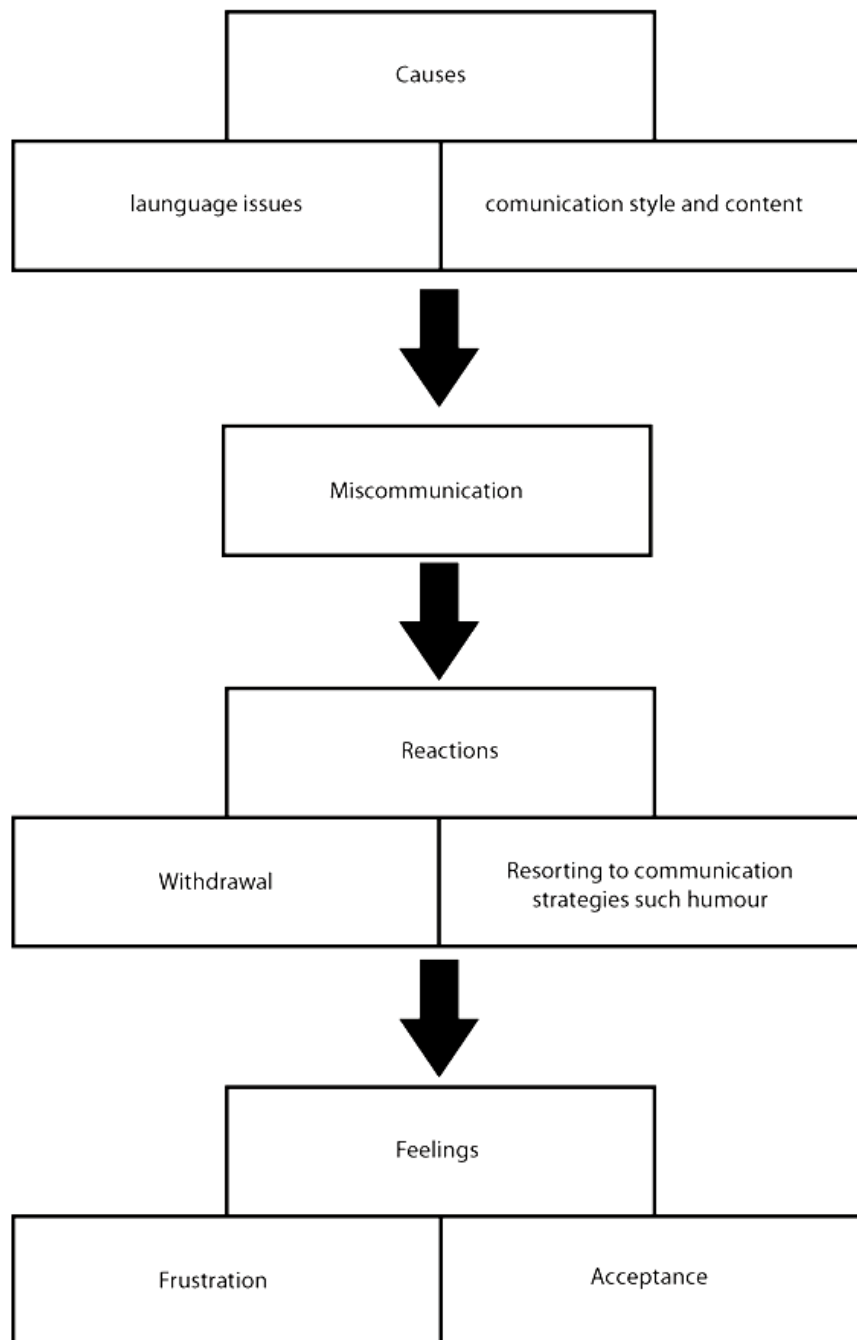
6.4 Humour communication, humour miscommunication and humorous miscommunication in intercultural interactions

Any form of communication relates to the delivery of a message and a person's perception of that message. Effective communication is the process through which a message is passed to the intended recipient and it is understood by him or her, thus eliciting the required response. Humour communication implies that this message is perceived by any of the interacting parties as humorous. In these terms, effective humour communication means that the recipient's perception and response to the message matches the intended humorous effect of the sender, which is normally revealed by a sign of amusement, such as laughing or smiling. In contrast, miscommunication is the failure to communicate adequately, which implies that the perception and response of the recipient do not agree with the intentions of the sender. In this context, humour miscommunication is the failure to communicate humour, and elicit amusement, whereas humorous miscommunication implies unintended humour in which a message is perceived as humorous. In addition, miscommunication itself can be perceived as humorous or lead to situations that can elicit humour. The next sections explore the occurrence of humour miscommunication and humorous miscommunication in the context of this study, including its main causes, and triggered reactions and emotions, as illustrated in Diagram 11.

6.4.1 Reasons for miscommunication in intercultural interactions

Analysis of the data shows that, in the context of this study, the major culprits of miscommunication are language issues, cultural awareness, communication style and content. Miscommunication triggered by language issues can derive from both poor

Diagram 11 Humour miscommunication in intercultural communications: main causes, reactions, and triggered feelings



Language issues and cultural differences can cause humour miscommunication, which can lead to different reactions, including humour and result in feelings of frustration or acceptance.

comprehension and oral skills. However, it is important to highlight that inability to communicate and understand humour can also be derived from lack of cultural knowledge and language skills, as these two factors are closely interrelated.

Moreover, poor comprehension can affect newcomers' ability to understand humour, which can be revealed to their interlocutors by their immediate reactions. In addition, poor comprehension can result in detachment from a conversation. In this context, miscommunication becomes apparent if the detached person shows an inadequate response. For example, if they fail to smile or laugh at humorous remark or if they laugh or smile in inappropriate contexts. In addition, poor comprehension can lead to inadequate assumptions and trigger humour in the receiver. If such perception is manifested by laughing, miscommunication would become apparent to the other interlocutors, and depending on their reactions, the person laughing might realise it too. In this context, participants recall being the only person laughing in a conversation due to misunderstandings based on poor comprehension.

Regarding the impact of oral skills in humour miscommunication, it is also important to notice that inability to convey humour can derive from both lack of language skills or cultural awareness. In this context, humour miscommunication is often rooted in participants need and/or inability to translate humour, particularly if it has cultural or linguistic content, which they cannot adapt. However, language mistakes and lack of cultural awareness can trigger unintended humour or lead to humorous misunderstandings. In addition, humour miscommunication can happen despite perfect comprehension. This type of miscommunication, which manifests differences in humour perception, highlights individual differences that go beyond language competence and cultural awareness, and can be attributed to each individual sense of

humour. However, analysis of the data tends to point to cultural aspects that can affect interlocutors humour style and content, and lead to miscommunication.

Regarding communication style, the major cause of misunderstandings, according to the data, is participants' own communication style, which can be perceived as offensive, aggressive or too direct. However, this style can also be perceived as comical and trigger humour unintentionally as the following comment by Susana illustrates:

'I have adapted a little but sometimes I am still very direct or abrupt and sometimes I think they like it, they find it amusing'

Susana acknowledges a transformation in her communicative style due to prolonged contact with Irish culture (she has lived in Ireland for ten years). However, experience of triggering humour by striking her interlocutors seems to encourage that behaviour occasionally. In addition her comment points out that cultural distance can trigger humour both intentionally and unintentionally. Nevertheless, regarding humour miscommunication, participants communication style can make their humorous' remark come across as too abrupt, offensive, or intrusive, which impedes their interlocutors from perceiving the original humorous intentions. For example, two participants recall feeling misunderstood by Irish friends, when they made negative comments like 'rubbish', or 'shut up'. Aurora remembers an occasion when she offended a friend, who was explaining a problem, by saying 'that is so sad':

He took it quite literally, I had to explain myself, I was taking for granted a 'complicity' that I did not get.

Aurora explains that, although she was not joking, there were humorous tones in her comment, which she failed to communicate. However, she suggests that this misunderstanding is representative of a cultural difference, as a Spanish person

would have picked up her intention due to their familiarity with these types of abrupt or sarcastic comment. Accordingly, Aurora acknowledges that she tends to be more cautious in interactions with Irish people, adapting this facet of her humour.

Miscommunication rooted in content is mainly related to themes and taboos, (explored in detailed in chapter 4), and targets of humour (explored in detail in chapter 3) as cultural differences can affect humour perception and trigger unintended reactions such as displeasure or irritation. Incidentally, a major cause of humour miscommunication is Irish people direct humour style which is manifested in slagging. Such style which can offend newcomers when they are unaccustomed to it is explored in detail in chapter 3. However, it is relevant to point out that offense from Irish slagging is rooted in the rapport between the interlocutors, who are considered too distant to make such direct remarks. Whereas misinterpretation of participants' direct remarks based on their abrupt or aggressive style tends to happen among closer friends.

Whatever the reason of miscommunication, it is clear that inadequate responses, can result in further miscommunication, if they are misinterpreted by the original speakers, who can perceive that their humour is not welcomed, or that they are being laughed at or not taken seriously, in the case of unintended humour. This highlights the impact that humour miscommunication can have in intercultural interactions, compared to other types of miscommunications, as the visual signs that accompany humour make it difficult to go unnoticed.

6.4.2 Dealing with miscommunication: reactions and strategies

It is clear that humour miscommunication can have an impact in intercultural interactions. But the scope of that impact and whether it affects interactions in a

positive or negative way relies significantly on the reaction of the interlocutors. The data suggests that interlocutors' reactions to miscommunication can be influenced by different factors such as personality, language competence, context of interactions or importance given to the mis-transmitted information and its consequences, for example if misinterpreted information can affect a personal relationship or if it is work-related. In addition, cultural tendencies can become apparent in interlocutors reactions to miscommunication. In this context, the data points at two main cultural tendencies that characterise Irish people's behaviour around miscommunication: their tendencies to avoid confrontation and to tolerate uncertainty.

Firstly, a tendency to avoid confrontation can hinder participants' perception of misunderstandings that have been triggered by participants' humour. In this context, participants' realisation of the misunderstanding can often rely on cues from their interlocutors' behaviour, rather than coming from an explicit acknowledgment, as Pedro comment illustrates.

Sometimes you can notice on their faces, or they change the subject, or there is an uncomfortable silence.. and you say, oh, oh, something went wrong...yes, it has definitely happened to me, but I can't remember anything specific...Irish people are like that, they don't ask for explanations, they change the topic quickly, oh, oh, and it is just the way they are.

Pedro explains different ways of picking up misunderstandings, which according to him, are usually resolved by changing the topic of conversation. It is clear that the effect of Irish people's ability to tolerate uncertainty combined with their tendency to avoid confrontation can become apparent in their reactions. In this context, the importance of reading cues such as facial expressions or a change of topic becomes essential to perceive misunderstandings, which may otherwise pass by unnoticed. According to the data, familiarity with these cultural differences can foster

perception of misunderstandings and it can also affect participants' reaction once the misunderstanding is perceived as they tend to go along with their interlocutors' behaviour and make no explicit notice of misunderstandings, instead of asking for clarifications which can make their interlocutors even more uncomfortable. In addition, perception of misunderstandings triggered by newcomers' humour can have an impact in their awareness of Irish culture, which can foster adaptive behaviour regarding their use of humour and facilitate intercultural interactions. In contrast, this learning process can be hindered by misunderstandings that go unnoticed.

Regarding miscommunication triggered by other people's humour participants' reactions can be classified in two main categories: acknowledgment and disregard. In the first place participants try to clarify the miscommunication by asking for explanations. In the second place, participants may move on from the subject or pretend that they have understood by either smiling or pretending to laugh. In this context, the data suggests an evolution in their choice of strategies to overcome miscommunication, as these two comments illustrate:

Before I was more afraid of asking or asking five times if I needed it, right now, it doesn't matter, if I don't understand something I ask, I have lost that fear.(Diana)

I don't mind asking, before it was more complicated admitting that I did not understand, because there was a lot I didn't understand, so I used the technique of the smile [laughs]. (Nuria)

Diana and Nuria show a change in their reaction towards miscommunication which is correlated to their language competence, and their ability to understand humour. Both participants have developed self-reliance on their ability to understand humour by means of explanations, which highlights the role of self-awareness and

confidence in the choice of strategies. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight again the role of other factors in participants' choice of strategies, such as context or personality. For example, Nadia, who is been in Ireland less than one year and who is not fluent in English points out that she tends to ask for repetition as many times as she needs to, whereas Pedro, who has been in Ireland two years and whose English is intermediate, points out that his personality prevents him from pretending to have understood something he has not:

No, they normally notice because my face is like the wall [laughs], I can't laugh if I don't find something funny, no, no, I can't be bothered.

Pedro's unwillingness to modify his reactions is in contrast with Nuria's and other participants who point at their tendency to compromise with a fake laugh or a smile in order to please their interlocutors or keep a low profile.

Regarding humour misunderstandings, participants' reactions towards humour that has offended varies from confronting their interlocutors to ignoring them. In this case, the data suggests that participants' choice depends mainly on the context of each interaction and their personality. However, some participants reveal a change in their reactions towards offensive humour, opting for avoiding direct confrontation and expressing their feelings in a more indirect style such as using sarcasm or targeting the other person with their humour. Consequently, humour can be a useful strategy to overcome tensions created by miscommunication and misunderstandings. For example, if an instance of miscommunication is perceived as humorous by all interlocutors, the tension can be realised and its final impact can turn out to be positive. In addition, miscommunication and misunderstandings can become comical only in retrospect: a late reaction which can contribute to participants' adaptation,

promoting learning and a positive attitude towards their own cultural ‘faux-pas’
These and other communicative functions of humour are discussed in detail in section 6.5.

6.4.3 Dealing with miscommunication: attitudes and emotions

Analysis of the data relating to humour miscommunication can trigger two main long term emotions in participants: frustration and overcoming frustration through acceptance. Such emotions, which can affect participants’ adaptation to Irish culture, can be linked to participants’ attitudes towards their abilities to understand and communicate humour. Acceptance reflects a positive attitude towards miscommunication which can derive from two different perspectives. Firstly, participants, who are not fluent or who have arrived to Ireland more recently, tend to accept miscommunication as part of a learning process. Accordingly, they accept their limitations as learners and expect their abilities to understand and communicate humour to improve in the future. Secondly, participants who consider themselves fluent or have been in Ireland for a greater number of years (more than five) accept humour miscommunication as a normal element of any interaction, focusing on external factors that extrapolate to any type of interactions. In contrast, participants who feel frustrated focus on their personal limitations within the context of intercultural interactions, high-lightening their irritation towards their inability to understand and communicate humour, particularly if it is related to language issues. In addition, another factor that can add to that frustration is participants’ interest in communicating humour effectively in order to reveal a part of their personality which is significant to them.

Immediate emotions triggered by miscommunication, such as embarrassment, irritation, indifference or enjoyment can vary greatly within each participant

depending on the context of each interaction. However, their general attitude towards humour miscommunication tends to be consistent in each participant, although it can be varied during different phases of their adaptation process. For example, eight participants recall feelings of frustration as an issue of the past, linking them to previous shortcomings which they have overcome. By contrast, three participants report moving from acceptance towards frustration. For example, Cristina, who has lived in Ireland eight years finds it difficult to accept that her ability to express humour will not get to the level of a native speaker, whereas before she accepted it and hoped it would improve with time. In addition she points out that although she is capable of understanding Irish people's humour she has difficulty '*to see the funny side of it*' and tends to laugh more with Spanish people. Her attitude reveals not only frustration from her ability to communicate but also resignation to humour miscommunication and detachment from Irish culture.

6.5 The role of humour in intercultural communication: communicative, social and psychological effects

Analysis of the data highlights a close interrelation between the communicative, social and psychological effects triggered by participants' use of humour in intercultural interactions. Such effects can have sociological impacts that can foster or hinder social integration and trigger psychological effects that can aid or impede cross-cultural adaptation. Discussion of the data analysis has pointed out different ways in which humour can affect communication, social integration and psychological well-being. The following sections recaps and discusses these effects in order to reveal their impact in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation and the role of humour as a powerful intercultural tool.

6.5.1 Communicative and social functions of humour

Analysis of the data highlights different ways in which humour can aid intercultural communication. To start with, humour can create a good atmosphere, ‘breaking the ice’, and facilitating first encounters by giving signals of acceptance and making participants feel welcomed and liked. In this context, six participants have brought attention to the positive impact of humour in their interactions with Irish people. For example, Vicky recalls feeling accepted as she was teased humorously by her Irish housemates and their friends when she moved to Ireland:

I remembered that they used to tease me, and this is related to humour, they made me feel good, feel normal.

Marta points at humour playing an essential role in intercultural interactions. According to her, it makes interacting more enjoyable, it creates a good atmosphere and makes people feel comfortable, and it promotes bonding:

It makes other people like you: if you laugh at other people’s humour or make them laugh, they would like you more, you cannot do this on purpose, but the truth it is that it works.

In this context, humour can contribute to participants’ enjoyment of intercultural interactions, fostering engagement in conversations and encouraging further interaction.

Moreover, humour can help participants overcome limitations regarding their communication skills, helping them or allowing them to project a positive image and a part of their personality, which they may have difficulties in projecting as Lucía’s comment suggests:

I think I use it more, I try harder, because I want to be accepted and it is a way of communicating that I am fun.

Lucía's tendency to use humour in intercultural interactions is linked to her limitations to express herself in English. For her, effective use of humour is a way to show her personality, and she is willing to make the effort because she wants to be accepted. In addition, humour can create a feeling of 'connection' or mutual sympathy among interlocutors and facilitate bonding through intercultural interactions by highlighting similarities between interlocutors, emphasizing proximity and minimizing the significance of cultural distance.

Additionally, humour can help ease tensions that can arise in intercultural interactions due to miscommunication, which makes it a powerful strategy to overcome miscommunication and misunderstandings. Finally, humour can allow criticism, without offending other interlocutors or making them lose face. This function makes humour a valuable intercultural tool in the context of this study, since humour can allow directness which can otherwise create tension in Irish interactions. Overall, these communicative functions of humour highlight the positive role that humour can have in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation. Humour can contribute to participants' communication skills and help them function effectively in intercultural interactions which can contribute positively to their adaptation process. In addition, effective use of humour can promote social integration by highlighting similarities and facilitating bonding.

In contrast, humour miscommunication can have a negative impact in communication. It can highlight differences among interlocutors which can be linked to cultural distance, and foster detachment from Irish culture or attachment to Spanish culture; Humour miscommunication can create or add to existing tension, creating awkward situations in which interlocutors lose face, if they failed to

transmit or understand humour or offend each other unintentionally; It can highlight inadequacy in a very clear way compared to other types of miscommunication, due to the evident signals of inadequate responses to intended or unintended humour; and its repetitive occurrence can lead to withdrawal from intercultural interactions.

Overall, humour can affect communication negatively, exposing participants' inability to interact with others. This experience can further their attachment to Spanish language and culture and foster interaction with co-ethnics or other newcomers, which can hinder integration to Irish society. In turn, these interactions can encourage the use of humour that targets Irish culture, promoting further bonding among co-ethnics and other newcomers but separation from Irish people and detachment from Irish culture.

6.5.2 Psychological functions of humour

Humour can clearly affect a person's mental and emotional state by triggering emotions such as joy and amusement, and humour communication can trigger different emotions that can have immediate effects in intercultural interactions such as embarrassment, irritation or pleasure. In addition, analysis of the data points at longer term effects that affect the quality of participants' intercultural interactions and their process of cross-cultural adaptation. For example, humour can foster a positive outlook that can promote well-being and be used as a 'defence mechanism' to face difficulties not only within intercultural interactions, as ability to laugh at oneself can turn around or minimize the negative feelings that can be triggered by ineffective communication; but also in the general context of cross-cultural adaptation as stressful as it can be as these participants comments point out:

I use it more here, like Irish people 'a mal tiempo, buena cara' [Spanish saying meaning 'if the weather is bad, smile back'] (Daniel)

I think I use it more here because I need it more, to survive, to be happy. (Susana)

If it was not for humour, things would seem harder ('todo se haria cuesta arriba.) (Nadia)

These participants point out the beneficial effects of humour in their well-being and attitude towards cross-cultural adaptation. It is clear that they use it as a tool to face and overcome and compensate for the difficulties of cross-cultural adaptation. In this context humour can trigger encouragement and foster adaptation. For example, the ability to laugh at misunderstandings derived from language limitations or cultural differences can not only minimize its negative effects but also foster learning and promote language competence and cultural awareness.

In addition effective use of humour can contribute to a positive self-perception and the feeling of adequacy, which can help participants to accept their limitations, minimize their significance and have a positive attitude towards miscommunication. In this context, participants' use of humour can affect the perception they have of their ability to interact with Irish people, and to function and integrate into Irish society:

Things are easier when you can use humour, it's easier to get on with people and to become part of a group. (Nuria)

Nuria's experience points at humour competence as an essential factor for integration. In her experience, her development of humour competence, changed the way she related to people and to Irish society. In contrast, experience of being offended by humour or experience of miscommunication triggered by inability to communicate, understand or share humour can trigger negative emotions such as

frustration, inadequacy, discontentment and discouragement towards the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

6.6 Cross-cultural adaptation: humour adaptation, adaptive changes and the development of humour competence.

Cross-cultural adaptation is a psychological process that facilitates newcomers' ability to function adequately in the new culture. Throughout cross-cultural adaptation, newcomers go through a series of adaptive changes that affect their ability to communicate effectively with people from the new culture, which is known as 'intercultural competence'. In addition, cross-cultural adaptation is a dynamic process, which means that intercultural competence is not only the result of the process, but a factor that allows its continuous development. Analysis of the data reveals that the transformation that comes with cross-cultural adaptation can be linked to the development of participants' ability to use humour in intercultural interactions, and that such ability, termed humour competence in this study, can be an essential component of their intercultural competence. Likewise, humour competence is part of a dynamic process, which makes it not only the result of a process, but a factor that allows its continuous development.

Analysis of the data points out that the development of participants' humour competence can be reflected in their tendencies to adapt or modify their humour in intercultural interactions. Such tendencies are also affected by adaptive changes that can impact the major factors in the quality of humour communication in intercultural interactions: language competence, cultural awareness, cultural proximity, individual affinities and compatibility. In the first place, a development of their language competence improves their ability to understand and communicate humour; in

addition, this development can be accompanied by an increased attachment to English, which is reflected in a spontaneous and gratifying use of humour.

Secondly, their cross-cultural experience can affect their cultural awareness cultural proximity to Irish culture, which can impact their individual affinities with their interlocutors, improving the possibilities of shared humour. In addition, their proximity to Irish culture can have an impact in their perspective or world view which is characterised by the ability to sympathise with others. This change can affect participants' expectations regarding others' humour, which can stop it from being offensive and lead to adaptation of their own humour, in order to improve the quality of their interactions. In this context, some participants tend to adapt the style and content of their humour based on perceived cultural differences, such as those affecting their tone and use of taboos or politically incorrect humour that can offend their interlocutors. Furthermore, some participants reveal an internalisation of certain aspects of Irish culture, which is also reflected in a use of humour that respects cultural differences. However, such respect is made without conscious effort, which also reveals a spontaneous use of humour. In this context, participants' use of humour can become more agreeable with Irish humour. For some, such agreement can be easily broken if necessary, for example in other interactions with Spaniards; but others reflect internalised changes that reveal a change of their humour preferences, which are now more compatible with Irish humour and Irish culture. This leads to the question of the impact of cross-cultural contact in participants' individual sense of humour as well as the impact of their individual sense of humour in the adaptive changes they may go through. For example, some participants were fond of Irish humour even before they arrived to Ireland, whereas others are more

reactive to adaptation because they believe that their sense of humour is not suited to Irish humour which is too elaborate or based on teasing or slugging.

Finally, regarding their sense of humour, some participants' reveal an evolution in their abilities to laugh at themselves and cope with others' humour. Although such development can be due to other experiences unrelated to participants' experience of Irish culture. Analysis of the data suggests that participants' cross-cultural experience and their exposure to Irish humour can encourage the development of participants' abilities to laugh at themselves and cope with others' humour, which can be essential assets not only for the quality of their intercultural interactions but also for the cross-cultural adaptation process.

6.7 Humour Competence

In the context of the present study and its findings 'humour competence' can be defined as the ability to use humour effectively in intercultural interactions. Analysis of the data suggests that participants' humour competence is revealed not only by the adequacy of interlocutors' responses, but also by a spontaneous use of humour.

As diagram 12 demonstrates humour competence entails a combination of skills which are part of the major factors affecting humour communication in intercultural interactions such as individual language competence, cultural awareness, cultural proximity, individual affinities and compatibility regarding sense of humour.

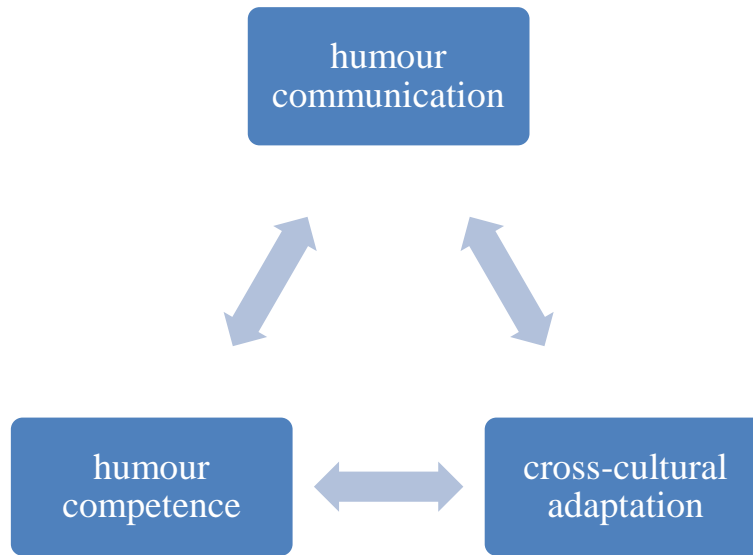
However, humour competence is characterised by other skills that complement these factors and minimize the limitations brought up by language issues, lack of cultural awareness, and cultural and individual differences. These include the ability to sympathise with others, and focus on individual affinities in order to communicate humour; the capability to use humour as a communicative tool that can benefit intercultural communication, and help overcome limitations and reverse miscommunication and the ability to play down humour miscommunication in intercultural interactions and accept it as natural element of any type of interaction.

Diagram 12 Factors Affecting Humour Communication



Analysis of the data suggests that, as part of a dynamic process, the development of humour competence improves the quality of humour communication in participants' intercultural interactions, increasing their chances to share humour in a spontaneous and satisfying way.

Diagram 13 *The Interrelation between Cross-Cultural Adaptation, Humour Communication and Humour Competence*



In turn, this type of interaction influences and reflects participants' adaptation to Irish culture and their integration into Irish society, revealing the way they relate to its members, which can make humour competence a descriptor of cross-cultural adaptation. This dynamic process is based on the interrelation between humour competence, humour communication and cross-cultural adaptation as illustrated in diagram 13.

6.8 Conclusion

In the context of this study, there are three major interrelated factors that can affect humour communication in intercultural interactions: language competence, cultural awareness and proximity, and individual affinities and compatibility. Cross-cultural adaptation involves a personal transformation characterised by different adaptive changes that lead towards the development of the ability to use humour in intercultural interactions or humour competence. Consequently, during cross-cultural adaptation, participants need to adapt their humour due to limitations imposed by

lack of language competence and cultural awareness tend to lessen up as they develop such competences. In addition, their cross-cultural experience can affect their cultural proximity to Irish culture and their individual affinities and compatibility with their interlocutors. Moreover, their individual sense of humour can undergo changes regarding their individual preferences for different humour styles and their abilities to cope with others' humour and laugh at themselves.

In addition, adaptive changes can be encouraged by participants' experience of the communicative, social and psychological effects that can affect intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation and make humour a powerful intercultural tool, and an essential component of participants' interactions and cross-cultural adaptation.

It is clear that cross-cultural adaptation can affect the major factors of humour communication, contributing to the development of participants' humour competence. However, although humour competence is shaped by the three major factors, it also complements them as it helps participants to compensate for limitations in each of those factors. In this context, humour competence becomes a major factor affecting humour communication in intercultural interactions.

This chapter has examined the intricacy of humour communication in intercultural interactions in the context of participants' process of cross-cultural adaptation by examining the dynamic interrelation among all the factors and effects that are involved in humour communication. Such examination highlights the role of humour in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation, and the development of humour competence as an essential attribute for effective intercultural communication and a descriptor of cross-cultural adaptation.

The next chapter will discuss existing Humour and Intercultural Theories that can bring to light the findings of this data analysis, and highlight its relevance in the context of existing research.

Part III Discussion

CHAPTER 7

Linking Data to Intercultural Theories

“Yo no soy mexicano. Yo no soy gringo. Yo no soy chicano. No soy gringo en USA y mexicano en México. Soy chicano en todas partes. No tengo que asimilarme a nada. Tengo mi propia historia.”

Carlos Fuentes (1996:294)

7.1 Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of different studies that have dealt with the study of culture in the context of intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation. Within the abundance of studies dealing with both intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation, this theoretical overview is limited to those theories which have been considered most relevant to contextualise the present study taking into account its research objectives.

The fact that this literature review is located after the data analysis chapters is in keeping with Grounded Theory studies, where the discussion of theory is delayed until after data analysis. Accordingly, this chapter offers a review of existing intercultural theories and a discussion of the data analysis findings under the light of relevant theoretical models of intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation. This analysis brings light to the findings in order to answer the research questions of the study, which are:

1. What is the nature of humour in intercultural interactions, and
2. What impact does it have in the process of cross-cultural adaptation?

Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the chapter does not offer a comprehensive review of these theories but rather a discussion of those theoretical components that are relevant to the finding in the context set by these two questions. However, the study of the nature of humour in connection with both existing theories and data analysis findings can confirm the validity and usefulness of these theories, call attention to certain aspects which are not confirmed by the findings, or point at those gaps flagged by the findings. In turn, this type of analysis can highlight the relevance of the findings, contextualise them within existing theories, highlight their limitations and point at potential areas of research for future studies.

The chapter encompasses a discussion of six different theories: the first three theories focus on intercultural communication, highlighting the role of humour in such a context. The fourth fifth and sixth theories focus on the process of cross-cultural adaptation, which contextualises the significance of humour within that process. Each of these sections starts with a theoretical overview of each model pointing out its major strengths and criticism. This overview is followed by an analytical discussion of the relevance of each model in relation to the present findings.

7.2 Theoretical Models of Intercultural Communication

The following three theories are linked to the study of intercultural communication, which lies at the heart of cross-cultural adaptation. In this context, this chapter's discussion starts with an added focus on the process of intercultural communication, in order to examine the role of humour within cross-cultural adaptation.

7.2.1 Burgoon's Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT)

7.2.1.1 Theoretical Overview

The key idea of Expectancy Violation Theory is that communication is an exchange of information which can violate the expectations of another person which will be perceived either positively or negatively depending on the liking between the two people. Burgoon (1993) considers that individuals anticipate the people they interact with to behave a certain way, so that when people violate those expectations, an individual interprets, and evaluates their communication behaviour, whether it is verbal or nonverbal, and the feelings this behaviour arises:

Expectancy in the communication sense denotes an enduring pattern of anticipated behaviour. These expectancies may be general- pertaining to all members of a language community or particularized-pertaining to a specific individual (Burgoon,1993:30).

Burgoon (1993), considered that people evaluate communication with others with a negative or positive regard, based on their expectation of the interaction and their opinion of the communicator.

Expectancy violation theory first focused on the expectations of personal space, but is now expanded to both verbal and nonverbal behaviours. The theory claims that personal space expectations are influenced by two factors, 'the social norm and the known idiosyncratic spacing patterns of the initiator' (Burgoon and Jones, 1976:132). The distance that people are used to in situations, which varies in every culture, is their social norm. However, idiosyncratic norms are defined by knowledge of an individual's unique interaction style (Burgoon, 199:31). Most people never pay attention to details like this until they are deviated from their norms. However, some expectancy violations are evaluated positively while others are interpreted in a negative way, and this process depends on both the interpretation given to the

behaviour and the desirability or evaluation of that behaviour (Burgoon and Walther, 1990:237).

Expectancy violation theory aims to explain both nonverbal and verbal expectations as people react differently to communication behaviours and violations can be negative and positive depending on the interactants' opinions of each other. When a positive violation is communicated by a high-valence source, who is viewed as potentially able to reward or punish the receiver, the outcome will be more favourable and vice versa (Burgoon, 1993). Every human interaction either defines or conforms to expectations. However, an individual's reactions depend highly on the degree of discrepancy.

Of relevance in the context of the current study is Pitts' (2007) 15-month ethnography of student sojourner adjustment, which has a focus on language and the development of intra and intergroup relationships. According to this study, applying Burgoon's (1978) expectancy violations theory suggested that much of the adjustment stress experienced by the student participants in the study is the result of unmet expectations in four major areas: Academic/language expectations, social expectations, cultural/value expectations, and travel/cultural experience expectations. In an effort to manage the stress resulting from unmet expectations, students routinely engaged in 9 types of talk: advice, superficial introductory talk, information sharing, comparison, *humour*, storytelling, gossip, complaint, and supportive talk (Pitts 2007). The interesting findings regarding humour are that for some students:

- The first reaction to any expectation violation was to joke about it, make light of the situation, or just laugh.
- Like several other communication patterns, humour was an all-purpose solution to almost any expectancy violation.
- Humour was an especially common reaction to expectation violations that created embarrassing situations.
- Humour dispelled stress related to academic and language challenges, social foibles, and/or cultural blunders.
- Humour was a communicative response that occurred both in the moment of an expectation violation, as well as later in friend or group setting.

Humour offset the stress of an unexpected outcome by offering an immediate, face-saving response, as well as a point of conversation in future settings.

Overall, Pitts (2007) notes that:

‘Students bonded through being able to share a laugh over embarrassing or disappointing situations. The more embarrassing things that happened to a person, the more likeable she was, as long as she was willing to laugh at the situation, because it showed her vulnerabilities and good natured way of dealing with a violation’
(Pitts 2007: 17)

As Pitt’s (2007) findings suggest, EVT can be quite revealing regarding the role of humour in both intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation. These findings point at humour not only as a valuable communicative tool in intercultural

interactions but also as a tool to deal with embarrassing or disappointing situations and make light of them. Burgoon's (1993) theory and Pitt's (2007) findings are discussed in further detail in the following section.

7.2.1.2 Linking Data with Theory

7.2.1.2.1 Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT), humour and intercultural interactions

The application of EVT to the findings of this study sheds light on the research questions of this study in two different ways. Firstly, EVT calls attention to those patterns found in the data, which point at an evolution in participants' expectations of humour in intercultural interactions, including their own limitations and abilities and other people's use of humour. This evolution characterised by the development of more culturally appropriate expectations, points out the development of participants' humour competence. Secondly, EVT highlights the role of humour in intercultural interactions as an outcome to cope with the stress brought on by unmet expectations: in the short term humour helps newcomers to manage these expectations during intercultural interactions, make light of the situation, and save face when expectancy violations have led to misunderstandings or embarrassing situations. In the long term, unmet expectations can be a source of self-deprecating humour, and help re-evaluate situations and enjoy a cross-cultural experience by playing down difficult situations. The connection between EVT and the current findings are explained in further detail in the next sections.

7.2.1.2.2 Expectancies: types, patterns and criteria

In her Expectancy Violation Theory, Burgoon (1993) points out that expectancies denote an enduring pattern of anticipated behaviour, which can be general, pertaining to all members of a language community or individual (Burgoon 1993). In

this context, expectancies can be classified in two categories, category-based expectancies, which result from the knowledge of the group to which a person belongs, and target-based expectancies, which result from the knowledge of a particular individual (Olson et al. 1996). Analysis of the data points at the existence of such patterns in the context of participants' expectations of others' behaviour in intercultural interactions. For example, at the general level, participants' perception of Irish culture and their awareness of certain cultural differences affect their expectations of Irish people's communication style and the content of their conversations in general. In this context, most participants expect Irish people to be less direct and avoid confrontation. However, at the individual level, participants' show that they can adjust these expectations to interactions with a specific person, for example a friend, whose communication style is more direct or who is fond of controversial conversation.

According to Burgoon (2005), all cultures have communication expectancies which are the guidelines for human conduct that carry associated anticipations for how others will behave. In the context of cross-cultural adaptation, such communication expectancies would be part of a newcomers' cultural awareness. Accordingly, analysis of the data of this study, suggests that participants' level of cultural awareness has a direct impact on their target-based expectancies and whether these tend to be met in intercultural interactions. Thus, participants' perception of Irish culture and awareness of cultural differences is a key determinant of their expectancies of Irish people's behaviour. Within this framework, their perception of Irish humour and awareness of cultural differences affecting Spanish and Irish people's use of humour will construct their expectations of Irish people's humour at a general or category-based level.

In addition, at an individual or target-based level, the data suggests that the quality of participants' relationships with their interlocutors has an essential impact in their expectations of each individual interaction. In this context, some participants are reluctant to generalise about the quality of their interactions and use of humour based on the cultural background of their interlocutors and revealing a tendency to avoid stereotypical expectations and a focus on individual expectancies. This shift of focus, discussed in chapter 6 reveals *flexibility* in participants' expectations which tend to be defined by knowledge of an individual's unique interaction style. Such *flexibility* can contribute to participants' intercultural and humour competence, as their expectations take into account other relevant factors besides ethnic background, which are based on their knowledge of their interlocutors. Nevertheless, this distinction does not cancel out the relevance of cultural awareness regarding social norms and expectations of others' behaviour in order to communicate effectively. In fact, participants who tend to focus on individual expectancies also show a high level of cultural awareness, which allows them to communicate effectively in intercultural interactions as their expectations are met since they are aware of others' expectations at a category-based level, but they are also aware of the limits of such general expectations.

In contrast, participants' who rely on category-based expectations tend to have less intimate bonds with Irish people, which is a clear limitation to their awareness of Irish culture and its humour as it limits their experience of a more intimate use of humour. However, self-awareness of these limitations can also impact participants' tendency to generalise and their reliance on category-based expectations as some participants are cautious about generalising due to lack of knowledge. These participants' reveal having a void of expectations in certain contexts, which becomes

particularly evident in their use of humour which they perceive as a slippery ground. This encourages them to act with further caution because as Nadia, a participant, points out they *'do not know what to expect'*. This attitude points at the significance of assessing one's cultural awareness and the impact that cultural differences regarding social norms can have in others' expectations of behaviour. In this context, participants' awareness of their *void of expectations* can contribute to the quality of their interactions, for example if they avoid offending their Irish interlocutors with topics that may be offensive to them. However, such an attitude highlights shortcomings in their use of humour in intercultural interactions, which participants need to modify in order to develop their intercultural and humour competence. This highlights the importance of cultural awareness in participants' ability to develop adequate category-based and target-based expectations which will contribute to their intercultural competence and their humour competence.

7.2.1.2.3 Cultural awareness, category-based expectations and humour communication

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 reveal participants' perception of Spanish and Irish humour and culture paying particular emphasis on cultural differences, which can impact humour communication. Awareness of these differences in the social and cultural norms that are attached to Spanish and Irish culture can be an essential factor in humour communication, as later explored in chapter 6. Analysis of the data reveals that cultural awareness transforms participants' expectations of other uses of humour. In addition, cultural awareness can affect participants' use of humour, which they may modify in order to meet others' expectations. In both cases cultural awareness can help participants to manage other's expectations, avoiding misunderstandings and fostering effective humour communication. The criteria of such awareness can be

aligned with participants' perception of Spanish and Irish humour, in order to explain its effects in humour communication in terms of participants' expectation.

Firstly, the data reveals the significance of participants' expectations regarding humour targets. For example, cultural awareness has lead some participants to expect the use of self-deprecating humour and slagging in their interactions with Irish people. These expectations can have a positive effect in their interactions, facilitating humour communication, particularly in the case of slagging, which, as the data reveals, can come across as unkind or offensive behaviour when unexpected. In addition, according to the data, awareness and familiarity with self-deprecation and slagging, which are perceived as characteristic of Irish culture, can encourage newcomers to use these types of humour which can meet other's expectations. However, if others did not expect the newcomer to have such humour competence, using this type of humour in an effective manner can also violate their expectations in a positive way, bringing interlocutors closer by triggering some of the positive effects of humour such as bonding and highlighting similarities.

Secondly, regarding humour intricacy, the data reveal that through contact with Irish culture many participants have become accustomed to certain characteristics of Irish humour which they perceived as subtle, ironic and witty. In this context, due to cultural awareness, participants expect Irish people to use dead pan humour or to be less expressive when communicating humour. Such expectations have an essential impact in participants' interactions, since they become more in tune with others' use of humour, which may have otherwise have gone unnoticed. In addition, some participants tend to adapt their own humour in order to meet others' expectations,

restraining their use of explicit and nonsense humour in order to avoid miscommunication (as discussed in chapter 3 and 6).

Finally, cultural awareness has an essential impact in participants' expectations regarding the content of humour in Irish interactions, particularly in relation to taboos, which are felt to be stronger in Irish culture. In this context, many participants expect Irish people's humour to be more politically correct and avoid taboo topics such as sex and religion. Accordingly, they tend to adapt their humour accordingly in order to avoid offense. However, when these expectations are violated or unmet, participants tend to be positively surprised by Irish people's unexpected use of humour and appreciate it because it feels familiar or because they identify with it, which encourages a positive valence of the violation. In addition, participants' expectations regarding the use of taboos vary greatly depending on context, such as whether they are dealing with comedy humour or conversational humour. Moreover, intimacy is a major factor affecting the use of taboos in intercultural interactions. In this context, participants tend to be less observant of Irish norms with closer friends, either because they know they will not be offended or because they want to provoke them.

These data reflect the dynamic and intricate interaction of category-based and target-based expectancies involved in intercultural communication. Such intricacy can be further increased by the nature of humour in intercultural interactions, as effective humour communication, relies on others' expectations, like any other type of communication, but it often plays with them and defies them. In this context, humour can be considered a form of expectancy violation itself, which is discussed in detail in the next section.

7.2.1.2.4 Expectancy violations and humour communication

Unmet expectations produce a cognitive arousal, and trigger an interpretation-evaluation sequence that helps individuals cope with it (Afifi and Metts 1998). Analysis of the data suggests that during cross-cultural adaptation newcomers develop category-based expectations regarding Irish people's use of humour. Such development can be based on the reinforcement of existing categories such as a preconception of Irish people being witty, ironic or playful or on repeated violation of existing expectations; for example participants who did not expect Irish humour to be as direct as it can be through use of slugging, tend to modify their expectations as they experience this form of humour and accept it as a norm in Irish humour as discussed in chapter 3.

Analysis of the data has highlighted different ways in which expectations tend to be violated due to linguistic and cultural issues which are often interlinked. In this context, language plays a very important role in expectancy violation, for example, participants' expectations of their own language competence can be violated through humour communication and language issues can lead to humour miscommunication. However, unexpected failure to communicate or understand humour is often linked to cultural elements which are intrinsic to the language in use, which is often the case when participants are unable to transfer humour from Spanish into English as seen in chapter 6.

In addition, analysis of the data highlights the weight of lack of cultural awareness and cultural distance as a source of expectancy violations regarding humour communication. In this context, the data points out common sources of unmet

expectations experienced by participants in the initial stages of their cross-cultural experience. These are related to *humour targets* such as self-deprecation and slugging; *intricacy*, such as the use of nonsense humours; and *content* such as themes and taboos. In this context, participants' expectations were violated as they experience ineffective and/or inappropriate use of humour.

These findings corroborate the idea that repeated exposure to expectancy violation can lead to reassessment of expectations (Pitts 2009), which illustrates a learning process that indicates an evolution in participants' intercultural competence and humour competence as participants learn to re-interpret violations and develop new expectations that tend to be met.

In addition, a key component of EVT is the notion of violation valence, or the association the receiver places on the behaviour violation, which can be interpreted positively or negatively. In this context, participants' own sense of humour and personal preferences regarding humour styles will play an essential role in the valence of such violations. For example, some participants who had no preconceptions about Irish humour when they arrived to Ireland were pleased to encounter certain humour tendencies such as self-deprecation and slugging because these types of humour suited them (see chapter 3). In addition, as stated in the previous section, participants can be pleased to meet Irish people who defy their category-based expectations; by for example, being politically incorrect, using taboo topics or explicit humour. In these cases violation of participants' expectations is valued positively, which is revealed in effective humour communication. In contrast, violation of expectations is evaluated negatively if humour is ineffective or considered inappropriate. This is particularly evident when participants were

offended or offended their Irish interlocutors. For example, some participants who were offended by slugging evaluated Irish people's behaviour negatively as they considered their humour inappropriate, or participants who used taboo topics in order to trigger humour felt that their humour was not welcomed by their interlocutors, which highlighted existing differences between them.

7.2.1.2.5 Unmet expectations and humour

According to Burgoon (1978), the interpretive and evaluative response to a violation produces communication outcomes, and analysis of the data points at the use of humour as a communication outcome that is used by newcomers in order to cope with violations of their expectations in their intercultural interactions. For example, participants recall reacting with humour to expectancy violations that lead to humorous misunderstandings. This might have happened during the same interaction, either as an immediate reaction to the expectancy violation or once the misunderstanding is resolved. In this context, it is important to highlight the function of humour as stress reliever and a face-saving response in communication. For example, participants recall laughing at instances where their misuse of English led to miscommunication if, for example, their interlocutors understood 'shit' instead of 'sheet' or 'bitch' instead of 'beach' or 'yop' instead of 'job'. In these cases, a response which involved humour, relieved the tension of the situation, and allowed them to save face by laughing at their own mistakes. In addition, it is essential to consider that humour can derive from contradiction and incongruity (), which also explains the occurrence of humour as a reaction to expectancy violations. However, it is important to observe that contradiction and incongruities can leave aside humour

and lead to other reactions such as confusion or offense, which would have a negative impact in intercultural communication.

Moreover, analysis of the data points at humour as a delayed response to unmet expectations experienced by participants in intercultural interactions. In this case, participants tend to laugh at misunderstandings, miscommunication or embarrassing situations when these are remembered in tranquillity. In this context, humour can help newcomers re-interpret and re-evaluate experiences, which can not only release the stress created by such situations, but also contribute to create and refine new expectations.

Finally, analysis of the data calls attention to the use of humour based on unmet expectations in the context of interactions with co-ethnics as something particularly common in the initial stage of cross-cultural adaptation. In this context, participants recall sharing experiences which reflected unmet expectations due to cultural distance, lack of language knowledge and cultural awareness (see chapter 6). In addition, analysis of the data suggest that although participants share these experience with Irish people as self-deprecating humour, they tend to share them with co-ethnics or people from other cultures who can share a similar perspective of the unexpected behaviour. However, in this context, humour can also be linked to *complaint* about Irish culture on the grounds of unmet expectations due to cultural differences, which can on the one hand realise stress brought up by unmet expectations (Pitts 2009), but on the other inhibit cross-cultural adaptation by fostering a negative attitude towards Irish culture (see chapter 6).

These findings concur with Pitts (2009) conclusions that through communication humour can manage the stress brought up by unmet expectation, helping newcomers

save face in embarrassing situations and serving as a point of future conversations among co-ethnics.

7.2.2 Face Negotiation Theory (FNT)

7.2.2.1 Theoretical Overview

This intercultural theory is based on the concepts of face and conflict. Cultural norms and values influence and shape how members of cultures manage face and how they manage conflict situations. Originally focusing on conflict (Ting-Toomey 1985), face-negotiation theory (FNT) has been expanded to integrate cultural level dimensions and individual level attributes to explain face-concerns, conflict styles, and 'facework' behaviours. The theory argues that conflict is a face-negotiation process whereby individuals engaged in conflict have their situated identities or faces threatened or questioned (Ting-Toomey 1999). Face is a 'claimed sense of favourable social self-worth that a person wants others to have of him' (Ting-Toomey 1999:187). The concept of face is therefore about identity respect and other identity consideration issues within and beyond the actual encounter episode. Facework refers to the specific verbal and non-verbal behaviours that people engage in to maintain or restore face loss and to uphold and honour face again. Face loss occurs when an individual is being treated in such a way that expected identity claims in a conflict situation are challenged or ignored. A face threatening episode is an identity expectancy violation episode. It can be recouped via conflict styles and facework strategies (Ting-Toomey 2005:73).

Intercultural conflict takes place when cultural group membership affects factors that also affect a conflict process with a member of a different culture on either a conscious or unconscious level. The cultural membership differences can include

deep level differences such as cultural beliefs and values or the mismatch of applying different norms and expectations in a particular conflict scene. Conflict can be either an explicit or implicit interpersonal struggle process that entails perceived incompatible values, norms goals face orientations, interaction styles and/or outcomes between two independent parties in an emotionally frustrating situation (Ting-Toomey 2005:72).

The theory assumes that face and facework are universal but how an individual frames the situated meaning of face and enacts facework differ from one cultural community to the next given that:

1. People in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in all communication situations.
2. Face is especially problematic in emotionally vulnerable situations when the identities of the situated communicator are called into question.
3. Cultural variability dimensions (Individualism/Collectivism and power distance) shape facework.
4. Individualism/Collectivism shapes preferences for self-oriented facework versus other-oriented facework
5. Power Distance shapes members preferences for facework.
6. The cultural variability dimensions and the individual, relational and situational factors influence the use of particular facework behaviour.

7. Intercultural facework competence refers to the optimal integration of knowledge, mindfulness, and communication skills in managing vulnerable identity-based conflict situations appropriately, effectively and adaptively.

In addition to the above assumptions, the theory relies on five core axioms:

1. Face orientations or concern: self, other, or both
2. Face moves patterns: saved, maintained or upgraded
3. Facework interaction strategies to save face
4. Conflict communication styles and
5. Face content domains

Based on the above assumptions and axioms, face negotiation theory (Ting- Toomey 2005) enunciates 24 theoretical propositions that account for the relationship between culture, face concern, conflict styles and individual level factors. The original theory was validated in empirical cross-cultural studies such as Oetzel and Ting Toomey's (2003) and was updated by the author in 2005. The perspective of this theory which focuses on the importance of face is quite valuable in order to examine the impact of humour in intercultural communication and the role of humour as a facework strategy. In addition, Ting-Toomey's theory is based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions of collectivism and power distance claiming that people from collectivist/high-context cultures manage face and conflict situations in a different way than people from individualistic/low context cultures. Accordingly, these two dimensions are discussed in further detail in the following section.

7.2.2.1.2 Hofstede's dimensions of national culture

In an attempt to establish a universally applicable framework for classifying cultural patterns, Hofstede (1991; 2005; 2010) has identified five dimensions of culture: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long term orientation. According to Hofstede (2010), each dimension presents an aspect of a culture that can be measured relative to other culture. However, this discussion will focus on the first two dimensions only, as they are directly relevant to Face Negotiation Theory (Ting Toomey 1985).

Hofstede's account of Spain's and Ireland's values is based on scores from 2010. These scores pinpoint differences between Spanish and Irish culture, which would influence intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that these scores reflect an overall average and, as warned by Hofstede (2010), individuals would not be expected to fit that average exactly. Indeed, to expect so would be stereotyping. Hofstede's cultural dimensions can be a useful tool for cross-cultural analysis as they reflect the complexity of cultures and, importantly for this study, cross-cultural interactions. The first dimension, power distance is:

the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequal'. (Hofstede1991:28).

Power distance is reflected in the hierarchical organisation of companies, the respect that is expected to be shown by the student towards her or his teacher and the belief in society that inequalities among people should be minimised, or that they are expected and desired. Spain's (57) and Ireland's (28) scores suggests differences

which, as the analysis of the data suggest, affect Spanish newcomers' adaptation to a less hierarchical culture particularly in the context of their work and career (See chapter 4 for a further discussion).

Regarding the second dimension of individualism/collectivism:

individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty' (Hofstede, 1991: 51).

At a score of (70) Ireland is an individualistic culture whereas Spain (with a score of 51), is more collectivist in comparison. The contrast reflected in this comparison would influence interpersonal interactions. Hence, this cultural difference is discussed in section 7.2.2.2.4 in the context of Face Negotiation Theory and its link to the present findings.

7.2.2.1.3 Validation and critiques to Hofstede's research

Hofstede has been critiqued by some scholars whereas others rely on his findings with confidence. The main critique is the reference made to generalisation of culture and the existence of national cultures. Mc Sweeney (2002) criticizes the little influence of variations within national cultures such as age, gender or social class, as despite Hofstede's acknowledgment of such variations, which he calls layers of culture, he dismisses their importance on a national level arguing that 'gender, generation and class cultures should be described in their own terms, based on special studies of such subcultures' (Hofstede 1991:17). However, these layers form the very variation within national cultures and affect the interaction between people

of these cultures. Finally, Schwartz (1990) critiques the individualism and collectivism divide as he did not consider the polar divide to be helpful. For example, Schwartz (1990) considered that there are values which are held by individuals and groups such as the concept of wisdom or social justice and peace which are both individual and group values and so do not exist as polar opposites.

Nevertheless, numerous cross-cultural and intercultural studies have used Hofstede's dimensions. Within quantitative studies, Bond (1987) has explored and validated Hofstede's dimensions in the context of Chinese values, whereas Oudenhoven (2001) validated them in a ten nation study. In particular, individualism and collectivism have been the basis of a vast body of research (Triandis 1995; Kagitcibasi 1997; Oyserman et al. 2002). In addition, based on a meta-analysis of 60 empirical studies, Merkin (2013) lends support to Hofstede's dimensions of culture despite critiques and the presentation of other models. Moreover, regarding individualism and collectivism, other intercultural studies have used this dimension as two different constructs related to many different factors (Kim et al. 1996; Ward, Bochner and Furham 2001). Whereas Hofstede's research has an 'etic' or culture-general approach to the study of culture, which examines two or more cultures from the outside, these studies have a culture-specific or 'emic' approach which explores a culture from the inside (Gudykunst et al. 1996). The present study acknowledges the relevance and usefulness of Hofstede's (2010) dimensions within this framework but does not regard the scores of his studies as absolute assumptions. This point is expanded in the following section in relation to the data and a discussion of FNT (Ting Toomey 1988, 2005).

7.2.2.2 Linking Data with Theory

FNT (Ting Toomey 1988, 2005) explains intercultural communication in terms of face negotiation. Its theoretical perspective can help understand the role of humour in intercultural interactions by analysing how people negotiate face through humour communication. In addition a better understanding of humour communication can contribute to the theory by pointing out the effects of humour in face negotiation, which make humour communication a potential context for face loss, as it is often linked to embarrassment, but also a powerful strategy for face negotiation.

7.2.2.2.1 Face negotiation in humour communication

Humour that works has a positive effect in people's perception of others and in one's self perception. In this context, humour communication can play an important role in maintaining a positive face when humour is shared in interpersonal interactions. For example, such connection can denote personal traits such as wit, positivity or the ability to laugh at oneself and send out positive signals to interlocutors; for instance, laughing at someone's joke is a sign of liking their humour and sharing a similar sense of humour, which denotes proximity. Moreover, in the context of intercultural interactions understanding and communicating humour effectively can be appreciated as a reflection of newcomers' host communication competence, including language competence and cultural awareness, and it can also be understood a sign of cultural proximity (see chapter 6). Hence, these outcomes of effective humour communication contribute to creating, maintaining or restoring a positive face of oneself and others. In this context, analysis of the data has pointed out that some participants' use their humour differently in intercultural interactions in order to maintain a positive face and be accepted.

By contrast, humour which does not work leads to face loss in different ways. The findings of this study highlight different ways in which participants' face can be lost through ineffective humour communication. Firstly, humour miscommunication can reveal to both themselves and others that their abilities to understand and communicate humour are inadequate, which may be due to language limitations or lack of cultural awareness as seen in chapter 6. Secondly, it can highlight differences in sense of humour which can be associated with cultural distance and lead to feelings of strangeness and attachment to the culture of origin as discussed in chapter 6. Thirdly, it can denote negative personality traits such as being too serious, blunt, rude or cruel, particularly when interlocutors feel offended, targeted or treated unfairly, which were all analysed in chapter 3 and 6.

In addition, self-face can be damaged if participants are disappointed by their own ability to communicate or understand humour, particularly if this is associated with linguistic competence, cultural awareness or cultural proximity. In this context, participants' expectations regarding their own humour competence and host communication competence are essential in the result of self-face-loss. According to the findings, there is a distinction between humour miscommunication which is accepted by participants as 'part of the process' and humour miscommunication which is disappointing and frustrating, which highlights the impact of attitude in face-loss. A development in such attitudes, as suggested by the findings in chapter 6 implies an evolution in participants' tendencies to lose face due to humour miscommunication.

In any case, experiencing face loss due to humour miscommunication can have a negative impact in intercultural interactions by adding tension to them as interlocutors feel awkward or embarrassed. In this context, it is no doubt that some

participants view humour as a slippery ground and opt for playing safe in intercultural interactions in order to save face, particularly if they are not close to their interlocutors. At the same time, it is possible that their interlocutors also opt for a similar attitude and adapt their humour reciprocally. In any case, experiencing face loss can lead participants to adaptive changes which help them maintain their face and the faces of others in intercultural interactions.

Accordingly, some participants adapt their humour in different ways such as copying the style of Irish people, or avoiding certain topics and humour styles which can be risky or which, in their experience, do not work with Irish people. In addition, some participants believe that their use of humour is more frequent in intercultural interactions due to this desired to be liked and accepted, whereas others tend to use it less in order to avoid face loss because they do not want to offend people or come across as rude or mean. Both cases reflect participants' efforts to maintain face during humour communication, which raises a question around the consequences of such efforts in participants' use of humour in intercultural interactions. These consequences depend on whether their ability to adapt their humour allows them to use it as frequently as in interactions with co-ethnics or if their adaptation leads to a diminished use of humour. This diminished use is because participants avoid certain characteristics of their humour but are unable to replace them with more suitable ones. In contrast, the ability to adapt humour in a spontaneous way, which is an essential aspect of newcomers' humour competence, is also key to maintain or project a positive face through effective humour communication.

7.2.2.2.2 Saving face after humour miscommunication

As part of FNT, *facework* comprises verbal and non-verbal messages that help maintain and restore face loss or uphold and honour others' face. The theory

distinguishes between face restoration, which is concerned with self-face and face giving, which is concerned with others' face. Analysis of the data has brought to the surface the most common strategies used by participants in order to restore their own face and give others face after humour miscommunication. One of these strategies consists of blaming language and/or cultural differences as seen in chapter 6. In this context the face loss from not getting others' humour or not being able to communicate one's humour can be reduced by the excuse of not being a native speaker, or not being Irish. In turn, this same excuse can give face to newcomers' interlocutors who can blame external causes for ineffective humour communication. However, the findings also point out that these reasons for humour miscommunication, which can save loss in some circumstances, can also lead to farther face loss if participants are disappointed by their humour competence as explained in chapter 6.

According to the findings, this strategy can also be used when humour miscommunication involves offence. However, there are two main reactions (or *facework* strategies) when face is lost through unintentionally offensive humour. Firstly participants may apologise or clarify the reason for such offense in order to restore their face. Secondly, they may avoid acknowledging it and try to move away by changing the topic. Their own choices vary depending on their personality and the situation, but some participants associate their tendency to avoid explicitness or confrontation to their interactions in Irish culture, mainly because they recognise that tendency in Irish people and they adopt it in order to prevent farther face loss or gain face. These findings agree with Ting Toomey's Theory (2005) which considers that face concerns vary depending on situational, individual and cultural differences.

7.2.2.2.3 Humour as a face negotiation strategy: self-deprecation and slagging

It is clear that humour can lead to situations which lead to losing face. However, humour can also be used a strategy for saving face, which is one of humour's communicative functions (). In the context of FNT (Ting Toomey 2005), humour can serve as a *preventive strategy* or as a *restorative strategy*), which can aim at saving self-face or giving others face. Analysis of the data has highlighted two different ways in which humour is used as a *facework* strategy: laughing at oneself or laughing at others.

Firstly, analysis of the data reveals the value of laughing at oneself as a preventive and restorative strategy. For example, using self-deprecating or disparaging humour that targets others can be used a preventive strategy which creates a positive face, since ability to laugh at oneself and coping with others humour is often viewed as a positive quality. In addition, displaying such abilities can minimize the chances of losing face if we are the focus of situations which normally lead to face loss such as being the centre of attention in embarrassing situations. For example, if participants reveal the capacity to laugh at their own mistakes, such as language limitations or cultural *faux pas* this may not only create a positive face but also make them '*immune*' to others criticisms or targeting humour. Accordingly, laughing at oneself is an essential restorative strategy to restore face in face loss situations. For example the data reveals the value of laughing at oneself when targeted by others humour, which can help counteract its negative effects such as criticizing, segregating or highlighting differences. In addition, analysis of the data has revealed that participants' ability to see the comical side of an embarrassing or awkward situation, such as those created by miscommunication or misunderstandings, has helped them restore their face during intercultural interactions.

Regarding others face concern, self-deprecating humour can be used to prevent face-loss or restore others face, for example minimizing the scope of their face-loss by sharing a related self-deprecating story. In this context, self-deprecation can become a face giving strategy, which often involves self-effacement (Ting Toomey 2005). Analysis of the data highlights the value of Irish people's use of self-deprecating humour in intercultural interactions, which can prevent or restore face loss if newcomers become the focus of face-loss situation. Furthermore, some participants attribute contact with Irish self-deprecating humour to an evolution in their self-face concerns, which have been positively affected by an increased ability to laugh at themselves as seen in chapter 3.

Secondly, as regards slagging and targeting others, targeting others with humour can be used as a strategy to prevent and save face, mainly by withdrawing attention from one's face loss by targeting others. This scenario can be illustrated by the use of slagging, which can become a reciprocal activity that switches the focus of face-loss between interlocutors. In essence, slagging involves embarrassing and humiliating others in public, in fact it is others' face-loss that makes slagging humorous. However, slagging can be used as a mutual face saving strategy by allowing interlocutors to criticize others directly without offending them. In this context, slagging can prevent the person slagging from losing face and coming across as rude or negative and minimize the face loss in the target. These functions of slagging highlight the role of humour as an intercultural tool in Irish interactions, particularly taking into account, that Irish interlocutors may have a tendency to avoid direct criticism, which can damage the face of both the person criticising and being criticized. In addition, this distinction highlights the importance of cultural

awareness because if these norms of interaction are not understood by newcomers, they may experience face loss by feeling inadequately attacked from slugging as discussed in chapter 3, or misunderstood, when criticizing someone directly, as seen in chapter 6. Humour is therefore a useful *facework* strategy, since Irish people's communication style is not as direct outside humour communication.

7.2.2.2.4 Cultural differences and face negotiation

FNT explains how individualism and collectivism value patterns influence the use of diverse conflict styles in different cultural situations (Ting-Toomey and Chung 2012). The premise of the theory is that individualistic cultures are more self-face oriented and have a more dominating conflict style whereas collectivistic cultures are other or mutual face oriented and avoiding or integrating styles. Existing literature on cultural variables (Hofstede, 2001) suggests that Irish culture is more individualistic than Spanish culture. According to FNT, such difference should be noticeable in a stronger self-face concern and a more dominating conflict style. Nevertheless, this prediction is contradicted by the data for different reasons. Firstly, the findings of this study suggest a contrast between Irish modesty and Spanish pride which is correlated to another contrast between Irish people's facility to laugh at themselves and Spanish people's self-consciousness or '*sentido del ridiculo*'. Analysis of the data suggest that, pride and self-consciousness are indicators of a higher self concern self-face concern compared to modesty and ability to laugh at oneself, although it is important to consider that self-deprecation can be a self-oriented strategy. Secondly, the findings suggest another existing contrast between an Irish tendency to avoid conflict and a Spanish tendency to face it. However, regarding humour communication the data suggests that Spaniards are mutual face-

oriented, which is shown in a less direct humour that takes greater care not to embarrass others in public.

In contrast, Irish humour seems less concerned about others faces, particularly regarding the use of slugging, which, nevertheless can also be used as a strategy for saving others' faces by sparing them from facing direct criticism. Although, these cross-cultural comparisons are limited to the context of this study, and hence based on analysis of participants' opinions and experiences, they bring to question the impact of individualistic and collectivistic cultural values in face concerns and facework strategies. These inconsistencies between the data and the theory regarding the implications of cultural variables in *facework* may be due to the inconsistency of those very same variables and the many factors underneath them such as pride, modesty or self-consciousness. Moreover, it is important to take into account that the differences between a culture whose individualistic and collectivistic values are contrasting such as Japan and the USA (Oetzel and Ting-Toomey 2003) may be more evident than those of cultures whose individualistic/collectivistic tendencies are not as contrasting.

To finish this section, it is important to mention that in her updated FNT (Ting-Tomney 2005, Ting-Toomey and Chung 2013), Ting-Tomney takes into account the diversity of individuals within one culture and highlights the importance of individual personality factors such as independence or interdependence and situational factors such as in-group and out-group communication. This distinction is very valuable when examining the role of humour in face negotiations. For example, analysis of the data emphasises the importance of context for humour and

participants' humour tendencies among other situational and personality factors that can cause humour to give or lose face.

7.2.3 Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

7.2.3.1 Theoretical Overview

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) focuses on the attuning of communication behaviour by a speaker to a conversation partner (Gudykunst 2005). CAT suggests that speakers use strategies of convergence or divergence to signal their attitudes toward each other. Convergence involves changing linguistic and/or paralinguistic behaviours, such as language, dialect, tone of voice, and so on, to be more similar to a conversation partner. According to CAT, a person converges to seek approval, enhance comprehension, or to show solidarity with their conversation partner. The more a speaker converges to their partner, the more favourably the person is likely to be evaluated by the listener. Conversely, divergence is used by a person to emphasize differences from their partner. Adjustment of communication behaviour is based on the perception that an individual has of the conversation partner's communicative behaviour.

In intercultural encounters, attention to the communication behaviours of the conversation partner involves attending to the perceptions of the other's *interpretive competence* or the partner's ability to understand. Concern for the other's ability to understand should result in the use of *interpretability strategies*. These strategies include modifying the complexity of speech such as: decreasing diversity of vocabulary or simplifying syntax, as in 'foreigner talk'; increasing clarity by changing pitch, loudness, or tempo; or selecting appropriate conversational topics

which stay in ‘familiar areas’ for the other person (Gallois et al., 1988; 2005). The arguments of this theory can be related to the use of humour in intercultural communication, suggesting not only that humour communication is influenced by interactants’ use of accommodation strategies, but also that humour can be used as an accommodation strategy, and this is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

7.2.3.2 Linking Data with Theory

CAT explains communication in terms of interlocutors’ approximation strategies and whether they involve accommodation, in order to make other interlocutors closer, or non- accommodation, which emphasises interpersonal and intergroup difference and can result in friction (Gallois et al. 1995, 2005). Analysis of the data points out the relevance of such strategies in humour communication. For example, non-accommodation, whether it is conscious or not, can result in misunderstandings caused by the use of humour style or content which cannot be appreciated by other interlocutors or may be perceived as inappropriate due to cultural differences. However, as pointed out by the findings, non-accommodation can result in intended or unintended humour due to interlocutors’ perception of an incongruity.

Nevertheless, the findings confirm that accommodation is often a determinant of harmonious intercultural interactions, and can facilitate humour communication. In this context, the findings highlight the significance of approximation strategies used by both newcomers and host-society members. For example, analysis of the data has pointed out Irish interlocutors’ tendency to take into account participants’ skills which may imply simplifying their speech by adapting their speed, vocabulary and the topics that they use. It may cause them to simplify or ‘censure’ their use of

humour, offering their interlocutors a modified version of their 'usual' humour. These accommodation strategies are often positively appreciated by participants, particularly in the initial phases of adaptation. However, the data also points out the possibility of underestimating the abilities of non-native interlocutors which can have a negative effect not only in the actual interaction but also in cross-cultural adaptation, particularly if newcomers are frustrated by these experiences. In addition, the findings suggest that exposure to an accommodated version of Irish people humour can affect their perception of Irish culture and Irish people's humour, which implies a deficit in their cultural awareness: an essential element of their intercultural and humour competence.

Regarding participants' own use of accommodation strategies, the findings illustrate participants' tendencies to adapt their humour to converge to their conversational partners taking into account different factors such as their shared cultural background or individual affinities. In this context, participants' tendencies to use accommodation strategies during intercultural interactions can result in longer term adaptive changes where participants incorporate certain cultural tendencies to their use of humour, which they may need to 're-accommodate' when they visit their home culture. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the dynamism of the theory is confirmed by findings; for example, participants' choice of non- accommodation strategies regarding their communication style and use of humour may lead to Irish interlocutors to accommodate theirs as seen in chapter 3, 4, 5 and 6.

7.3 Theoretical models of cross-cultural adaptation

The following three theories are specifically linked to the study of cross-cultural adaptation. Hence, the focus of this chapter discussion shifts from intercultural

communication, an essential part of cross-cultural adaptation, to cross-cultural adaptation as a whole process.

7.3.1 The Stress-Adaptation-Growth model

7.3.1.1 Theoretical Overview

Rather than a recovery from culture shock, Kim (1988, 2005) sees cultural adaptation as a complex and dynamic process where stress /adaptation experiences bring about change and growth (Kim 1988), which is a continuous process of engaging and disengaging with the new culture. In the process of cultural adaptation individuals encounter situations that do not match expectations. This would create stress which would lead to a defensive reaction or a drawback; an individual then creates an adaptive response that will bring a change, which would be a contribution to adaptation. Rather than using a linear, stage model of adaptation. Kim (1988) presents the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic as cyclical and continual ‘draw-back-to- leap’ progression involving the three stages of the model: stress, adaptation and growth. Kim’s (1988, 2005) Stress-Adaptation-Growth model is the first to specifically take language immersion and communication into account in its application as Kim asserts that adaptation actually occurs through communication and the building of social networks (2005) and that cultural immersion is generally positively related with fluency in the language of the host culture (2005). This model maintains that migrants acquire host-cultural practices through acculturation; while simultaneously, deculturation, or the ‘unlearning of some of the old cultural elements’ occurs (Kim 2005: 340). Through both of these processes, Kim suggests that an adaptive change to a state of ‘maximum possible convergence... to those of members of the host culture’ (Kim 2005: 340) leads to the overall goal of the intercultural experience: assimilation.

There are two major limitations to take into account regarding Kim's (1988, 2005) model:

- Firstly, it is important to consider that the model assumes that assimilation is the overall goal of intercultural experience, which has been questioned specifically by Berry (1997). Such critique is of relevance to this study of Spanish people living and working in Ireland.
- Secondly, ease of cultural adaptation may not be positively related to the level of immersion in the host culture. Indeed, the more sojourners interact with host nationals, the more their perspectives on cultural frameworks and identity will be challenged, and the more potential they have for experiencing culture shock (Rohrlich & Martin, 1991). However, this would also imply an increase in cultural learning which would have a positive impact on long term adaptation (Ward et al 2001) which is discussed in the following section in relation to the findings.

7.3.1.2 Linking Data with Theory

Analysis of the data agrees with Kim's (1988,2005) model of cross-cultural adaptation in presenting cross-cultural adaptation as a complex dynamic process where stress adaptation experiences bring about change and growth (Kim 1988). Analysis shows that participants' difficulties to communicate with the new environment lead to a defensive reaction or drawback followed by an adaptive response that brings an adaptive change. For example, participants' lack of humour competence has led to stressful situations triggered by misunderstandings or miscommunication, which has brought adaptive changes in their use of humour. However, data analysis highlights the impact of participants' evaluation of the source

of that stress in order to activate an adaptive change; depending on different factors such as whether they view it as a necessity or an option. Although participants' expectations may undergo an adaptation, it is possible that they choose to retain their original behaviour. Nevertheless these circumstances may result in growth characterised by an increased ease with the environment, their cultural origin and their transformation.

In contrast, participants' adaptation of their behaviour may not result in such growth if they feel frustrated or resentful towards the environment that induced such change, the cultural origins that are linked to the original behaviour, or their own transformation. These findings highlight the tension created by acculturation and deculturation may not necessarily lead to assimilation. In this context, although assimilation may be logical in terms of a model, analysis of the data highlights that not everyone will want to assimilate and that the conscious choice of not assimilating may also lead to growth, whereas assimilation may not. These considerations manifest the intricacy of the factors which are at stake in the process of adaptation and the impact of any variation in these factors. The six dimensions of Kim's (2001) integrative theory which are discussed in the following section account for such factors in further detail.

7.3.2 Kim's Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-cultural

Adaptation

7.3.2.1 Theoretical Overview

Intercultural communication refers to the communication process between members of different cultural communities. It involves the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols between individuals to accomplish shared meanings and it is affected by the

specific cultural factors such as beliefs, values and norms. (Ting-Toomey 1999:17). Intercultural communication lies at the heart of the cross-cultural adaptation process, just as communication is the very process through which individuals acquire their original cultural patterns during childhood. Both the quality and the quantity of communication activities an individual undertakes in a new environment are crucial to the success of her adaptation. Consequently, Kim's Integrative Theory places communication at the heart of the adaptation process. It also identifies the structure of cross-cultural adaptation by locating six key dimensions and factors that facilitate or impede the adaptation process for all new-comers:

- The first dimension, central to the adaptation process, is personal communication: the cognitive, affective, and operational factors of the newcomers' host communication competence that travels with them in their adaptive journey.
- Through the second dimension, host social communication, strangers (Kim's term) participate in interpersonal and mass communication activities of their host culture.
- Ethnic social communication, the third dimension, emphasises the role of distinct, sub-cultural experiences of strangers with their co-ethnics.
- Interacting with the personal and social communication dimensions are the conditions of the new environment, the fourth dimension, including receptivity and conformity pressure of the host environment, as well as the strength of their ethnic group.
- The fifth dimension is the stranger's own predisposition in terms of preparedness for change, ethnic proximity and adaptive personality, which

sets the basis for the development of personal and social communication activities.

All these dimensions influence the adaptive changes in intercultural transformation, the sixth and final dimension. This transformation comes from a series of internal changes toward a better functionality in the host environment as well as psychological health, and changes that result in the development of an intercultural identity.

All the elements in this interactive model work together in the adaptation process as factors that play a part in intercultural transformation. Out of this interface arise the psychological experiences of stress, adaptation and growth that are part of the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Based on her previous adaptation model (1988) and her Integrative Theory, Kim defines the nature and general principles of the process of cross-cultural adaptation and highlights the importance of communication within the process as follows: Cross-cultural adaptation involves both acculturation (new learning) and deculturation (loss of some aspects of original cultural practices) with the possible outcome of assimilation. Underlying cross-cultural adaptation is the stress-adaptation growth dynamic which brings an intercultural transformation. Intercultural transformation is manifested in increased functional fitness, psychological health and intercultural identity.

Intercultural transformation facilitates and is facilitated by host communication competence and by participation in host social communication activities, whereas extensive social participation in ethnic social communication activities can detract from, and is potentially deterred in turn by intercultural transformation. Moreover, environmental conditions and pre-dispositional conditions influence and are

influenced by a stranger's intercultural transformation (Kim 2001:89). Influenced by all these factors and experiences, new-comers advance toward intercultural personhood, a condition in which they are at ease with the host environment and its cultural patterns, their cultural origins and their ongoing transformation (Kim 2001). These factors in Kim's (2001) theory help predict the success and failures in cross-cultural adaptation. However, it is important to bear in mind that each individual case is unique and some dimensions may be more pertinent than others to each case. Another fact to bear in mind is that the relationship between host social communication or ethnic social communication may not be that clear-cut, particularly in diverse societies, where newcomers may interact with groups formed by host-society members and other newcomers, including co-ethnics, at the same time. Again, each individual's goals and circumstances need to be taken into account, as for example, an individual may wish to maintain ties with two different cultures and have for example two places of residence or work based in two different countries, which is linked to the idea of transnationalism. Indeed, the need to take into account transnationalism in the design of models of cross-cultural contact, due to the multiplicity of ties that link people across national borders has been noted by Odenhouven et al. (2006). This idea is linked to both the findings and Kim's theory in the following section.

Overall, Kim's work (2001) has been praised for the succinct presentation of an integrative model (Schaetti 2002). In these terms, Kim's Integrative theory offers an intercultural and communicative approach to the study of cross-cultural adaptation which places intercultural communication at the heart of such process. This approach is relevant to the present study which is concerned with humour communication and

its impact in cross-cultural adaptation. In these terms, the theory fosters a thorough discussion of the findings regarding the nature of humour communication within intercultural communication and the role of humour in the social and psychological components which are accounted for in the theory and which are explored in the next section. In this regard, the present study answers the call for further qualitative empirical studies (Chirkov 2009; Rudmin 2009) which contribute to her theoretical models like Kim's (2001).

7.3.2.2 Linking Data with Theory

The six dimensions of Kim's (2001) theory encompass comprehensively the different factors involved in the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Analysis of the interrelation between these dimensions and humour highlights not only its role in the adaptation process but also the relevance of each dimension as part of the theory.

These associations can be outlined as follows:

7.3.2.2.1 Host communication competence

Analysis of the data places humour competence as an essential element of host communication competence. As such, humour competence is reflected and influenced by the cognitive, affective and operational components of host communication competence. Firstly, regarding the cognitive components, humour competence is closely interlinked with language competence and cultural understanding as explained in detail in chapter 6. In addition, analysis of the data confirms its correlation to *cognitive complexity*, which is shown by participants' perception of Irish culture, its humour, and its cultural proximity to Spanish culture which tends to become more complex and refined as they evolve through the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Secondly, regarding the affective components, effective humour communication can affect participants' motivation to participate in the host

environment, reflect their flexibility towards themselves and others, and reveal their *aesthetic coorientation*, for example in their ability to enjoy humour communication during a comedy show or a friendly conversation. Thirdly, regarding the operational components, humour competence reflects participants' capacity to behave in accordance with the host cultural patterns, taking into account the behaviour of other people and the nature of the relationship involved. This is shown in their ability to use humour spontaneously, appropriately and in *synchrony* with other people, which is also interlinked with their *resourcefulness* to reconcile cultural differences, by, for example, adapting *cultural humour* to their interlocutors background.

7.3.2.2.2 *Host social communication*

Analysis of the data highlights the presence of humour in participants' experiences of interpersonal and mass communication, pinpointing the positive influence of these experiences in cross-cultural adaptation in ways that complement each other. First of all personalized experiences provide participants with an insight into the Irish culture and its humour. Frequency and increased experience of interpersonal interactions has an effect in participants' development of humour competence. In addition, analysis of the data highlights the importance of the quality and nature of such interactions; for example the absence of intimate relations implies lack of awareness of certain facets of Irish people's interactions and their use of humour, which must therefore point out towards isolation rather than integration. Secondly, mass communication exposes participants to a larger environment, providing an invaluable source of learning. For example, by watching stand up comedy, participants are exposed to a type of humour that does not conform to the social norms of interactions. In addition, this context can imply less pressure to laugh, and hence, less potential for losing face through humour miscommunication.

7.3.2.2.3 Ethnic social communication

Although Kim's (2001) theory considers the positive influence of ethnic social communication at the beginning of cross-cultural encounters, it focuses on its negative effects in the long term by associating contact with the culture of origin with poor competence and adaptation. This can be partly confirmed by the data which reveals that initial ties with co-ethnics can lead to the establishment of a circle of friends and acquaintances which is exclusive of co-ethnics, creating a tendency that can be difficult to break and can have a damaging impact in adaptation, affecting the development of both host communication and humour competence. However, analysis of the data calls for further clarification of this dimension regarding the nature of these interactions: firstly, it is important to highlight that participants' interactions with co-ethnics can be inclusive of Irish people and people from other nationalities, which creates a type of interaction that can be distinctive of interactions with Irish people or *host social communication*. Secondly, contact with other co-ethnics differs in nature to contact with the culture of origin, mainly because of the shared cross-cultural experience of living in Ireland, which can lead to the development of a distinctive type of humour based on sharing such perspective. Although this can realise tension and stress, which is beneficial for adaptation it can also deter adaptation by fostering criticism towards the host culture and perpetuating an outsiders' perspective (unless there is no potential for further development). In addition, this type of interaction can serve as an outlet for participants' needs to communicate humour, which can lead to the association between interactions with co-ethnics and quality of humour communication. In this context, the findings highlight the importance of considering such nuances in order to assess the negative

influence of ethnic social communication, questioning the ‘overall’ long term negative impact suggested by the theory.

7.3.2.2.4 *The environment*

Humour can be taken as a sign of *host receptivity* as effective humour communication can make participants feel welcomed and accepted. In this context, analysis of the data highlights the benefits of Irish people’s way of interacting in a friendly manner which is characterised by the use of humour. This is particularly beneficial at first encounters and in the development of relationships as humour can be understood a sign of ‘in group’ acceptance as seen in chapter 3 and 6. However, humour miscommunication can have the opposite effect and be received as a sign of hostility and rejection, particularly if participants feel targeted unfairly or inappropriately. This consideration highlights humour as a double edged sword as well as the importance of many other factors such as context in humour effects. For example, participants felt accepted as part of a group when being ‘slagged’ or teased by some of its members, whereas others felt insulted because they felt that the relationship with their interlocutors made such humour inappropriate.

Regarding *host conformity pressure*, the findings highlight the pressure that cultural differences in humour can put on newcomers, who may feel the need to conform to certain humour tendencies, such as slagging, banter or self-deprecation and accept them as part of everyday interactions. This pressure can also affect their need to modify their use of humour by, for example, adjusting their use of taboos, black or nonsense humour. However, the data also highlights tolerance toward participants who feel allowed to break the norms based on their foreign persona as discussed in chapters 3 and 6.

As regards ethnic group strength, the data points at the facility to create ties with a Spanish community in Dublin. However, it also highlights the temporal nature of those ties as many members of such a community live in Ireland on a temporary basis. This in turn contributes to their perception of Irish society, which views them as sojourners who sooner or later will go back home. In this context, the data suggest that Irish people have a high level of tolerance towards Spanish people, who feel welcomed and accepted but can find a bigger challenge in becoming deeply integrated. This lack of integration can be manifested in lack of personal relationships with Irish people, which in turns affects their host communication and humour competence.

7.3.2.2.5 Predisposition

Kim (2001) regards 'sense of humour' as a manifestation of an adaptive personality (Kim 2001:179). The findings contribute to the theory by pointing at humour as a personality resource that facilitates adaptation, enabling participants to endure stressful events and maximize new learning. The ability to see the comical side of adverse situations can be a sign of strength and positivity. For example, participants' ability to see the comical side of miscommunication and misunderstandings helps them relieve the stress created in such situations, fosters a positive attitude towards change and adverse situations, and can help to remember the cause of these misunderstandings which can promote new learning. In this context, newcomers' sense of humour can contribute to their preparedness for change, facilitating their mental, emotional and motivational readiness to deal with the new environment. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between sense of humour and optimism, highlight the individuality of newcomers' sense of humour and point out the negative effects of humour. For example, participants' tendency to laugh at cultural

differences or awkward situations can also trigger misunderstandings as it can be perceived as a sign of disrespect as seen in chapter 6.

Regarding ethnic proximity, the findings point out extrinsic differences, which are reflected in Spanish and Irish people's use of humour. However, the data highlights an overall compatibility regarding beliefs, values and orientations. These intrinsic similarities are reflected in the value of socialization and a relaxed attitude towards life, both of which influence and are influenced by humour communication. However, the findings point out the impact of intrinsic differences in humour communication, which can impede the mutual understanding or synergy which is necessary for effective humour communication. Finally, the findings highlight the importance of individual proximity as regards participants' predisposition towards adaptation, which is reflected in their humour preferences and their compatibility with Irish humour. In addition, the data suggests that such individual proximity or difference can become more evident in the light of participants' experiences of other cultures, which confirms the importance of other cross-cultural experiences and the expectations set by them in participants' predispositions towards their new environment.

7.3.2.2.6 Transformation

Analysis of the data has identified different patterns of cognitive, affective and behavioural responses that indicate adaptive changes undergone by participants. These changes involve language competence, cultural awareness, individual proximity to Irish culture and sensitivity towards individual affinities: the three major factors of humour communication according to the model in chapter 6. In addition, the findings reflect affective changes involving participants' ability to

enjoy their new environment by enjoying humour communication and feeling fulfilled and motivated by such experience, as well as changes in participants' ability to laugh at themselves and adverse situations. Finally, the findings have highlighted those behavioural changes which result in a more effective and adequate use of humour in *host social communication*, such as changes in communication style, the content of humour or reactions towards other people's humour.

7.3.2.3 Outcomes of transformation

According to Kim's (2001) integrative theory transformation results in the proficiency of self expression and fulfilling social needs which is revealed in the three outcomes of transformation: functional fitness, psychological health and intercultural identity. The findings highlight the role of humour in each component. Firstly, humour competence allows participants to interact successfully with their host environment. Secondly, effective humour communication and realization of self humour competence is linked to satisfaction and a sense of belonging, which will in turn contribute to psychological health, and can help maintain such mental health in the face of new adversities. Thirdly, as intercultural identity is characterised by the emergence of a more flexible definition of self and others, this is characterized by increased individualization and universalization. The findings confirmed the emergence of these tendencies as participants' development of humour competence is characterised by a greater emphasis on individual affinities that facilitate humour communication and openness to the possibility that such affinities can be realized in interactions with individuals from all cultures as seen in chapter 6. In this context, humour competence can be considered an essential component of the three outcomes of cross-cultural adaptation.

Overall, the role of humour in intercultural adaptation is highlighted by looking at the findings through the lenses of Kim's (2001) Integrative Theory. The above discussion shows that humour blends into the theory as an integrative element of each of its dimensions. Moreover, the dynamism of the theory aligns with the process of the development of humour competence presented in chapter 6. Such dynamism can be extended to the interrelation between humour and cross-cultural adaptation. As an essential part of communication, humour influences cross-cultural adaptation, and the experiences of cross-cultural adaptation influence humour communication and the development of humour competence in the context of *host social communication*.

7.3.3 Ward's ABC model of 'Culture Shock'

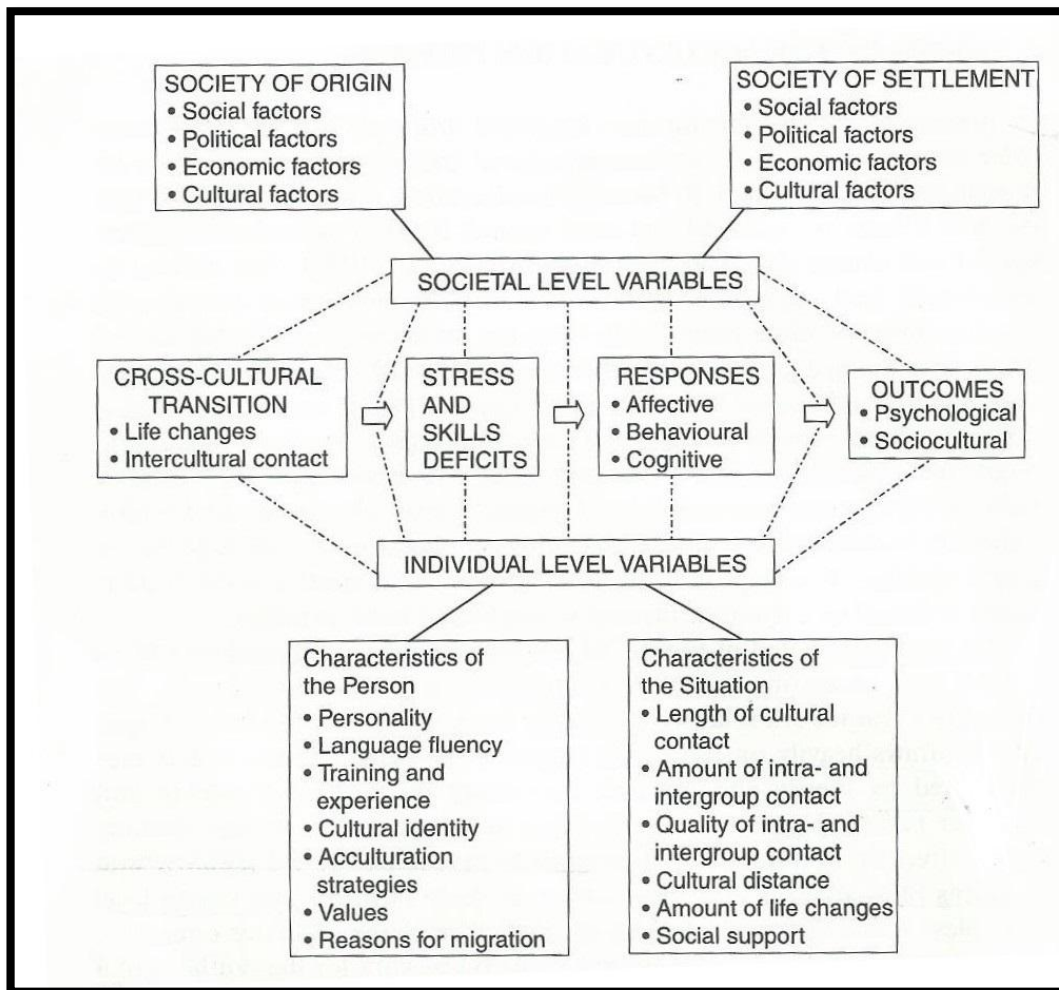
7.3.3.1 Theoretical Overview

Ward et al.'s (2001) examination of culture shock is as an active process of dealing with change and distinguishes the Affective, Behavioural and Cognitive aspects of contact with a new culture. Their model deals with affect by examining stress and coping theories and their affective outcomes that correspond to psychological adjustment. Enthused by culture learning theories, the theory encompasses behaviour which is changed through learning in a new cultural setting and results in the acquisition of specific skills that have behavioural outcomes corresponding to socio-cultural adaptation. Finally, cognitions are accounted for through social identity theories which result in the development of a specific identity and intergroup perceptions as cognitive outcome. In this context, Ward et al.'s (2001) ABC model is the result of a comprehensive and in-depth overview of existing theories involved in the study of cross-cultural adaptation, including stress and coping theories, culture

learning and social identity theories , all of which inform their model of acculturation as illustrated in Diagram 14.

Diagram 14 Ward's et al.'s model of Acculturation

(Ward et al. 2001: 44)



In this model Ward et al. (2001) consider intercultural contact within the framework of acculturation theory, considering acculturation as a dynamic transformation process that occurs as a result of sustained contact between individuals of different cultural origins. The model conceptualises cross-cultural transition as a stressful event that involves changes and new forms of intercultural contact. It focuses on the needs that individuals have in order to cope effectively with the difficulties that

intercultural contact brings about. Whether these are described in terms of debilitating stress or a lack of appropriate social skills, the appraisal and action that needs to take place may involve cognitive, behavioural and affective responses for both stress management and the acquisition of culture-specific skills.

The appraisal and action domains as well as their psychological and socio-cultural outcomes are influenced by both societal and individual level variables. On the macro level, characteristics of the society of origin and settlement are important including socio-political, economic and cultural factors. On the micro level, characteristics of the individual and situation may be important. Individual characteristics include personality, language fluency and cultural identity; whereas characteristics of the situation account for factors such as length of cultural contact, cultural distance, or amount of intra and inter-group contact.

Overall, this model is very comprehensive as it is an attempt to integrate all constructs and approaches in to a general, complex model of contact. It incorporates research on social identity and the prediction of the psychological and socio-cultural components of intercultural adaptation.

The model is relevant to the present study because it provides a cross-cultural psychology approach into the present analysis. However, its relevance is also linked to the fact that it converges a psychological approach with other approaches to the study of cross-cultural contact, providing a framework which fosters a thorough analysis and discussion of the findings from a variety of angles which complement each other and shed light to the nature of humour regarding the

Affective, Behavioural and Cognitive components of cross-cultural adaptation as discussed in detail in the following section.

An idea to take into consideration regarding this model is that it conceptualises cross-cultural adaptation as a stressful event. Within the field of cross-cultural psychology Rudmin (2009) critiques the focus on the negative aspects of acculturation studies where acculturation is seen as creating serious stress. He links this issue with the use of measurements of acculturative stress by scales designed for mental health screening. He states that such an approach confounds acculturative stress with acculturation and recommends acculturation to be defined as second culture acquisition. Although Ward et al. (2001) examine such acquisition, the stressful nature of acculturation underlies their theory. In contrast, intercultural theories such as Kim's (2001, 2005), which was discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, observe the relevance of stress in cross-cultural adaptation but focus on the changes and growth that come with it.

7.3.3.2 Linking Data to Theory

The ABC model of 'culture contact' considers the difficulties of cross-cultural contact in terms of debilitating stress or lack of social skills. Analysis of the data points at different sources of stress which, interlinked with a deficit of social skills, lead to affective, behavioural and cognitive responses, which result in psychological and socio-cultural outcomes. Findings confirm how this dynamic process is influenced by the societal and individual variables stated in the model. The following discussion is focused on the nature and role of humour within this process, discussing its role and relationship with other components of the model.

7.3.3.2.1 Affective components

Analysis of the data has pointed at humour miscommunication as a source of tension in intercultural interactions. Firstly, humour can lead to misunderstandings causing unintended effects such as offense, awkwardness or embarrassment. Secondly, participants' inability to use and understand humour can trigger feelings of inadequacy. These situations can bring about negative emotions such as confusion, anxiety, frustration, a sense of helplessness and homesickness, which are a source of stress and can be reflected in newcomers' mental health. In this context, some participants have an aversive reaction and 'resign' themselves to the limitations of being an 'outsider' or a non-native speaker. In contrast, other participants accept their limitations and minimize the importance of their effects, which minimizes the negative psychological effects of humour miscommunication. The affective outcomes of humour miscommunication can be linked with psychological adjustment as some participants have gone from frustration to acceptance and satisfaction, which has positive psychological effects. However, this evolution is closely interlinked with participants' acquisition of humour competence which agrees with the dynamism of the model as its affective and behavioural components are closely interrelated. In addition, others participants have moved from acceptance to frustration, which highlights the importance of individual variables in newcomers' responses to the difficulties they encounter. It is precisely in this context that newcomers' sense of humour can reflect their ability to use it as a coping strategy when facing difficult situations which reduces their potential for negative psychological outcomes. Finally, analysis of the data points at several positive effects of humour communication as participants' realisation of effective use of humour can trigger a sense of satisfaction, adequacy and belonging increasing a

positive self-perception and self confidence. In addition, the data highlights the role of humour in personal relationships whose affective ties provide a context for spontaneous and intimate use of humour. Again this is coherent with the interrelation between affective and behavioural components of the model as host-culture friends can act as informal culture skill mentors (Bochner 2003).

7.3.3.2.2 Behavioural components

Analysis of the data has highlighted the significance of humour in daily interactions as well as the role of humour as a communicative and social tool. In this context, humour competence emerges as an essential constituent of the social skills which are necessary for successful intercultural interactions. The development of humour competence is aligned with participants' acquisition of host language competence and cultural awareness, which are two major factors for effective humour communication (see chapter 6). In addition, the hidden language of interpersonal interactions can be a major source of cross-cultural misunderstanding and friction, and intercultural competence depends on mastering its intricacies (Ward et al.2001)

Analysis of the data points out cross-cultural differences that affect interactions and humour communication. Being unaware of these differences can lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings, which obstruct effective communication but can also, at times, turn out to be humorous. Participants have become aware of these differences by repeatedly experiencing deviation from their culture of origin, which has often led to adaptive changes and the development of humour competence. Ultimately, participants' humour competence is reflected in their instrumental, interactional and relational adjustment, as it facilitates their ability to function, interact, and maintain friendships and social networks with members of

different ethnic backgrounds. In this context, the findings point at humour competence as an essential component of ‘intercultural competence’

To end, it is relevant to point out that the authors of the model suggest that in diverse societies successful culture learning involves acquiring bicultural communication competence since ‘most migrants can be members of two cultural networks made up of co-national migrants and host culture members respectively’ (Ward et al 2001:63). This questions the ideal objective of culture learning as adjustment to the dominant culture. In this context, they point at ‘code switching’ where ‘speakers change their speech style to put themselves closer to their audience’ (Ward et al 2001:65). Analysis of the data has revealed some participants’ ability to ‘switch codes’ by adapting the content and style of their humour depending on whether they are interacting with co-ethnics or co-nationals which allows them to experience effective humour communication in both types of interactions. In fact, code switching is a special case of accommodation in the CAT model of intercultural communication (Ward et al. 2001). In addition, the findings point at the blurred line dividing the two distinctive networks of co-nationals and host culture members which often overlap in participants’ daily interactions.

7.3.3.2.3 Cognitive components

According to the model, the cognitive processes involved in adaptation result in *cultural* identity and intergroup perception. An analysis of role of humour in the construction of such identity goes beyond the scope of the study. However, analysis of participants’ perception of Irish and Spanish culture and Spanish people has pointed out how their individual tendencies to identify with either or both cultures in different aspects. The complexity of humour, linked to its universal, cultural and individual components, has been made evident by participants’ tendencies to identify

themselves with some humour tendencies associated with both Spanish and Irish culture but alienate themselves from others. In some cases, participants' perception of these tendencies has developed during cross-cultural contact and participants have grown fond of certain humour tendencies or become more critical towards others. Moreover, some participants reveal a tendency to identify with other Spaniards who live in Ireland which can be reinforced by a type of humour that is based on their shared experience and perception, and can be extended to people from other nationalities.

The role of these identifications in participants' cultural identity is beyond the scope of this study. However, the present findings suggest that cross-cultural contact brings about changes in participants' perception of others and themselves. In this context, deviation from the original culture can create a new perspective and a different sort of attachment to it. On the one hand, these changes can affect participants' perception of their own and other people's humour which can become evident when they visit their home country. On the other, they can affect participants' perception of incongruities that may trigger humorous reaction, which can become evident when they visit their home country and find certain aspects of Spanish culture amusing; or, when their host visitors who point out incongruities about Irish culture which participants' are no longer sensitive to.

7.3.3.2.4 Individual variables

This discussion has pointed out a diversity of affective, behavioural and cognitive responses which illustrate the uniqueness of each individual process of cross-cultural adaptation. Such uniqueness relies on the context of each situation, which is represented by the variables considered in the ABC model (Ward et al. 2001). These variables are useful to recap the individual and situational conditions which can

impact on the role of humour in cross-cultural adaptation. At the societal level analysis of the data has highlighted social, economic, political and cultural factors of both the society of origin and settlement, which affect participants' perception of both cultures and their use of humour and their reasons for coming or staying in Ireland. At the situational level, analysis of the data has taken into account participants' length of cultural contact, their amount of intra and intergroup contact, which are not as clear-cut as implied by the model, and cultural distance. In this last aspect the findings point to the distinction between cultural distance between two cultures and individual cultural distance, which can be considered as an individual variable. At the individual levels the data analysis has pointed, to different extents, at the impact of language fluency, experience of other cultures, acculturation strategies, values and cultural identity. Finally, personality factors, such as being inquisitive, outgoing, shy, opinionated, self-conscious, positive or able to laugh at oneself have been linked with participants' sense of humour: the aspect of their personality which is at the heart of their use of humour in intercultural interactions.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has revealed the connection between the findings and existing intercultural theories in order to gain insight into the role of humour in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation. This chapter has introduced different intercultural theories that locate the present study within the context of intercultural research. This discussion has drawn links to the data analysis chapters, which has led to a further in-depth discussion based on such analysis. Table 7 outlines the connections made between the findings and existing literature.

Table 7 Findings in relation to intercultural theoretical models

The first column contains those aspects of the model confirmed or highlighted by the findings of the current study. The second calls attention to findings that go beyond the scope of the theory or question certain aspects of it.

Expectancy Violation Theory	
Confirms theory by	Calls attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirming the dynamics of expectations and violations in intercultural communication • Distinguishing between category and target based expectations • Considering the impact of cultural awareness in expectations • Pointing at the development of culturally appropriate expectations during cross-cultural adaptation • Pointing at the reassessment of expectations due to repeated exposure to violations • Illustrating positive and negative valences in humour communication. • Pointing at humour as a response to violations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The limits of category base expectations. • The absence of expectations in intercultural encounters. • The role of humour in creating new expectations. • Humour as a expectancy violation

Face Negotiation Theory	
Confirms theory by	Calls attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirming the dynamics of face negotiation in humour communication • Pointing at humour as a <i>facework</i> strategy for saving, maintaining and restoring face • Pointing at humour communication potential for face loss • Pointing out <i>facework</i> strategies after humour miscommunication • Linking face concerns to situational, individual and cultural differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of face-loss in long term adaptive changes • The evolution of newcomers tendencies regarding face concerns • The questionability of individualistic and collectivistic values in face-concerns and <i>facework</i>.
Communication Accommodation Theory	
Confirms theory by	Calls attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pointing out the relevance of accommodation strategies in intercultural communication • Confirming how non accommodation can lead to misunderstandings and friction • Confirming that accommodation can be a determinant of harmonious intercultural interactions. • Pointing at the result of inter-group accommodation in long term adjustment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The possible negative impact of accommodation in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation. •

Stress-Adaptation-Growth Theory	
Confirms theory by	Calls attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirming the dynamics of the stress-adaptation-growth model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of participants' perception of stress • The questionability of assimilation as a target. • The questionability of growth as an outcome of assimilation
Integrative Theory	
Confirms theory by	Calls attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirming the relevance of the six dimensions of the model, and the interrelation between them by illustrating the role of humour within each dimension • Confirming the outcomes of transformation in the context of humour competence • Illustrating the synergy between the theory and the model of humour competence (chapter 6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of the variation of factors in the overall process • The negative effects of ethnic social communication in cross-cultural adaptation • The clear-cut distinction between ethnic and host social communication in diverse societies.
The ABC of cultural contact	
Confirms theory by	Calls attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pointing at the difficulties of cross-cultural adaptation in terms of debilitating stress and lack of social skills. • Pointing at humour communication as a source of stress and a coping response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The blurred line between intra and intercultural contact; sojourners and migrants.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pointing at the role of humour competence in the context of intercultural competence/ social skills. • Pointing at effective, behavioural and cognitive responses to the difficulties of cross-cultural encounters. • Pointing out the socio-cultural and psychological outcomes involving humour • Confirming the influence of societal and individual variables of the model 	
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In these terms the chapter has:

- Firstly, presented a discussion of three Intercultural Communication Theories, which has focused on the role of humour in communication reflecting its relevance in intercultural interactions and considering the impact that such role has in cross-cultural adaptation:
 - EVT has highlighted the relevance of expectations and unmet expectations in humour communication. Firstly, this discussion has pointed out participants' development of culturally appropriate expectations which move away from stereotyped assumptions and facilitate humour communication. Secondly it has highlighted the role of humour as a stress reliever in response to violations.

- FNT has highlighted the potential of humour communication as trigger for face-loss, the use of humour as a strategy for saving, maintaining and restoring face, and the relevance of situational, individual and cultural differences in face concerns and *facework* strategies in humour communication and their impact in cross-cultural adaptation.
 - CAT has pointed at participants' and host society members' tendencies to accommodate their communication patterns and the effect of accommodation and non-accommodation strategies in humour communication and participants' cross-cultural adaptation.
- Secondly, the chapter has presented two models of cross-cultural adaptation and pointed out their strengths, limitations and relevance to the present study, concluding that cross-cultural adaptation is a dynamic process involving affective, behavioural and cognitive aspects that need to be taken into account in its analysis. Hence, a discussion of these two theories in relation to the findings has helped contextualize the role of humour communication in the whole process of cross-cultural adaptation offering a comprehensive analysis of its role and reflecting its relevance in a variety of dimensions involved in cross-cultural adaptation:
 - Kim's Stress- Adaptation Growth model has confirmed the dynamic nature of cross-cultural adaptation and called attention to the intricate role of newcomers' perception of stress and assimilation in such process.

- Kim's Integrative Theory has highlighted humour as an essential part of cross-cultural adaptation by connecting the process of cross-cultural adaptation with the participants' development of humour competence.
- The ABC model of culture contact has confirmed the relevance of humour in the process of adaptation as a source of stress, and strategy to cope with it and an essential part of intercultural competence.

Finally, the discussion has pointed out gaps and limitations of both the discussed theories and the present findings such as issues regarding the impact of acculturation, including the logic of its endpoint as assimilation, or the development of a 'bicultural competence'. Such issues highlight the intricacy of the study of intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation and point out some challenges for future research.

Overall, this chapter has explored the role of humour in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation by linking the findings to existing intercultural theories. In turn, the next chapter will discuss these findings under the light of Humour Theories in order to gain further insight of the research questions of the study.

CHAPTER 8

Linking Data with Theory: Humour Theories

8.1 Introduction

This chapter studies the data analysis in relation to relevant humour theories that point out the role of humour in intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation. This discussion contributes to a thorough analysis of the findings by examining them from an interdisciplinary perspective that tackles the communicative, social and psychological aspects of humour communication.

The study of humour has attracted scholars and scientists of many disciplines and theoretical views of humour range from the philosophical (Schopenhauer 1818, Cohen 1999) to the physiological (Sultanoff 2002). In the study of humour it is important to be aware of this multiplicity of levels in order to attempt to understand what humour is and how it can be explained. Any attempt to understand the many facets of humour requires going beyond disciplinary boundaries. This diversity of viewpoints has contributed to the existing heterogeneity in the field of humour studies but it should be appreciated as a positive sign as the contribution of several sciences should be mutually enriching for all of them. Humour is a complicated subject, and researchers have given us a variety of theoretical issues with which to wrestle.

In this context, the chapter presents a selection of humour theories and research studies from disciplines such as philosophy, linguistics, sociology and psychology, focusing on those aspects which are relevant to the research questions. Hence, this discussion does not attempt to offer a comprehensive review of these theories or to offer an alternative humour theory within their disciplinary premises or objectives.

However, by scrutinizing and comparing the present findings with other findings and theoretical claims, the present discussion not only highlights the validity and usefulness of some theories, but also questions the strength of some theoretical claims proposing an alternative vision based on real life data analysis and raising questions, which are beyond the scope of this study but relevant for future research in both humour and intercultural studies.

The chapter is structured in six sections according to the type of theory: Superiority theories, Incongruity theories, Translation theories, Linguistic theories, Social theories and Psychological theories. Due to the large quantity and interdisciplinary nature of humour theories which are relevant to this study, each section represents a different approach to humour studies including traditional philosophical theories, translation theories, linguistic theories, social theories and psychological theories. These sections discuss the work of different authors which complement each other's theories within the same approach. Each section starts with an overview of the theories including a discussion of their major criticisms and contributions to Humour Studies. Such discussion is then further developed by engaging with the findings of this study which were presented in the data analysis chapters. As result, the findings are contextualised within extant literature, which leads to a better understanding of the findings and a critical discussion of existing theories grounded on the analysis of real life data.

8.2 Superiority (and Inferiority) Theories

8.2.1 Theoretical Overview

The assumption of superiority theories is that humour reflects our feelings of superiority. However, there are two forms of claims of the superiority theory of

humour: the strong claim holds that all humour involves a feeling of superiority, and the weak claim suggests that feelings of superiority are frequently found in many cases of humour (Smuts 2009).

Humour's earliest origins in Western thought begin with Plato and Aristotle. Plato associated humour with laughing at vice in people who are relatively powerless, looking at it as a kind of malice toward such people. In the *'Philebus'* Plato argues that ignorance is a misfortune that when found in the weak is considered ridiculous, and that in comedy, we take malicious pleasure from the ridiculous. Moreover, humour was seen by Plato as an emotion connected with losing rational control over oneself and therefore something to be avoided (Morreal 1987).

Aristotle basically agreed with Plato emphasising the derisive character of laughter, which causes pain to those who are the butt of jokes (Morreal 1987). Some of Aristotle's brief comments in the *'Poetics'* corroborate Plato's view of the pleasure had from comedy. According to Aristotle, in comedy we look down upon the characters, since it presents subjects who are inferior to the audience.

In his own version of the superiority theory Thomas Hobbes (1994/1651) further explains that humans are in a constant competition with each other, looking for the shortcomings of other persons. He considers laughter as an expression of a sudden realisation that we are better than others, an expression of 'sudden glory' (Hobbes 1994/1651:33).

The main criticism to these Superiority Theories is that they do not include many instances of humour as there is no essential connection between laughter and scorn and much of what amuses us does not necessarily involve feelings of superiority. Morreall (2009) gives several examples which suggest that superiority is not a

necessary condition for humour, such as finding a bowling ball in his refrigerator, that could be found funny, but does not clearly involve superiority; whereas Hutcheson (1758/1989), a critic of Hobbes theory, points out that we can feel superior to lots of things such as dogs, cats or trees without being amused, pointing out that superiority alone is not sufficient to trigger humour.

However, Smuts (2009) suggests that neither Plato nor Aristotle make clear pronouncements about the essence of humour. Rather than clearly offering a superiority theory of humour, Plato and Aristotle focus on this common comic feature, bringing attention to ethical considerations and the role of feelings of superiority in humour (Smuts 2009). Likewise, Smuts (2009) points out that Hobbes's version of the superiority theory seems to focus on a theory of laughter rather than a theory of humour. Nevertheless, together with the Greek philosophers, Hobbes helped establish the notion that the activity of enjoying humour was unworthy and ethically suspicious.

Critically reversing the superiority theory, Robert Solomon (2002) offers an Inferiority Theory of Humour based on an analysis of the humour of The Three Stooges. Solomon points at self-recognition and self-deprecating behaviour as sources of humour based in inferiority or modesty. Rather than comparing our current with our former inferior selves, Solomon sees the ability to not take yourself seriously, or to see yourself as less than ideal, as a source of virtuous modesty and compassion (Smuts 2009). Solomon's analysis of the Three Stooges is not a comprehensive theory of humour, in that it does not make any pronouncements about the necessary or sufficient conditions of humour; however, it suggests a

possible source of humour explaining what humour can be and how it might function (Smuts 2009).

Solomon's inferiority theory of humour highlights the central objection against the Superiority theories, confirming that a feeling of superiority is not a necessary condition of humour. However, the weaker version of the superiority theory—that humour is often fuelled by feelings of superiority—entails a well supported empirical claim, easily confirmable by first hand observation (Smuts 2009). In this context, Superiority theories offer an interesting approach to analyse the findings of this study in terms of the concepts of superiority and inferiority which is presented in the following section.

8.2.2 Linking Data with Theory

Although feelings of superiority are not necessary in order for humour to take place, superiority theories suggest possible sources of humour which are confirmed by the findings. A comparison of superiority theories to Solomon's (2002) inferiority theory can shed light on the distinction of humour targets which emerged from the data analysis: self deprecation versus humour that targets others. Firstly, the findings confirm that humour that targets others can be linked to feelings of superiority, for example laughing at others' ignorance, or ridiculing their behaviour often implies affirmation of one's knowledge or behaviour as superior. Secondly, self-deprecating humour projects an inferior image by exposing and ridiculing one's own weaknesses. Studying these instances of humour through the perspective of superiority and inferiority theories can highlight issues regarding the causes and effects of disparaging and self-deprecating humour in participants' intercultural interactions.

In the first place, humour that targets others can reveal the speaker's perception of the humour targets, exposing their opinions and preconceptions. For example, participants' humour towards Irish people's behaviour can sometimes expose their disapproval of such behaviour. As suggested by the data, this type of humour can highlight cultural differences and reinforce an ethnocentric attitude, particularly when used with other co-ethnics. However, ethnocentric attitudes and cultural differences may be played down if this type of humour is shared with members of the host culture as this can indicate a shared perspective and be negatively correlated to newcomers' development of stereotypes.

In contrast, self-deprecating humour reveals self-perception, exposing the speakers' attitudes towards their own behaviour and weaknesses. In this context, self-deprecation can reveal a negative self-perception, but it can also categorize weaknesses as something from the past contrasting present superiority to previous weaknesses. This perception can have a motivating effect as laughing at mistakes from the past can indicate progress in participants' cross-cultural adaptation. In addition, the data highlights how self-deprecating humour reflects a positive attitude, modesty and ability to laugh at oneself. In this context, the use of such humour can trigger a positive perception to others aligned with a positive self-perception that can counterbalance any feelings of inferiority. In this context, the data confirms Solomon's (2002) theory in highlighting the benefits of humour based on inferiority and modesty. This type of humour can foster effective intercultural communication by allowing interlocutors to laugh at each other. In addition, the findings reveal that participants' perception of Irish culture and its humour is positively influenced by their experiences of self-deprecating humour, so having a positive effect in their

adaptation process. However, the findings also suggest that cultural differences in the use of self-deprecation or the value of modesty can trigger miscommunication and emphasise the weakness of the speaker rather than the strengths of their humour, if this is not appreciated.

Regarding the effects of disparaging humour, the data confirms that humour that targets others directly can trigger feelings of inferiority. In this context, participants reveal having felt threatened or inadequate when being 'slagged' by Irish people, which had a clear negative impact on their adaptation. In addition, analysis of the data draws attention to feelings of inferiority triggered by participants' inability to understand or share others' humour, which is clearly highlighted if they are the butt of a joke. The feelings of frustration triggered by these interactions highlight the negative effects of humour in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation. In contrast, the findings highlight that being directly targeted by others can highlight the inferiority of the joke narrator if his or her behaviour is considered a sign of ignorance. This can be illustrated by participants' experiences of humour that targeted them by using Spanish stereotypes. This context highlights the benefits of newcomers' ability to detach from such 'attacks', which minimizes their negative impact in cross-cultural adaptation. However, tagging every instance of slagging as a sign of ignorance can foster a negative perception of Irish people be linked with poor adaptation. In this context, participants' cultural awareness of slagging can minimize the negative impact of such humour. In addition, such awareness can make them more receptive of that type of humour and perceive it as a sign of recognition from their interlocutors who believe that they can handle their humour. In this context, the use of slagging can be perceived as a sort of competition, in which the winner may

clearly feel superior to a certain extent. However, participants' ability to respond adequately in such contexts reveals their humour competence not only by their own use of slagging in culturally appropriate contexts, but also by their ability to cope with others' humour, which can prevent them from feeling inferior.

Finally, it is relevant to highlight the importance of the intention of the speaker and the sensitivity of the listener towards such intention in order to consider the causes and effects of humour in terms of superiority. Firstly, *the non bona fide* communication that characterises humour implies that the contents of humour may not match the genuine opinions and ideas of the speaker, who can pretend to be superior or inferior for comical effects. Secondly, cultural awareness can increase the listener's ability to identify such a façade, and such ability can be considered part of humour competence.

The above discussion suggests that superiority theories highlight important aspects of humour communication, hinting at possible psychological and sociological effects of humour communication, discussed later in this chapter. However, due to the intricacy of such aspects, humour instances cannot be simplified to the dichotomy of superiority and/or inferiority, which is illustrated by some of the different factors at play in both humour targeting others and self-deprecating humour.

8.3 Incongruity Theories

8.3.1 Theoretical Overview

After Superiority Theories, the issue of humour was left apart from philosophical Studies until authors like Kant (1751/1790) and Schopenhauer (1818) addressed it many years later. These two authors are generally associated with the second group

of traditional theories of humour: The Incongruity Theories. Whereas Kant (1790/1951) located the essence of humour in the dissipation of an expectation; Schopenhauer saw humour as being located in the contradiction of an expectation pointing out that the greater the contrast between the object and its concept, the more ludicrous it becomes (Schopenhauer 1818). As stated by Kant and Schopenhauer, the incongruity theory of humour specifies a necessary condition of the object of humour. However, focusing on the humorous object leaves something out of the analysis of humour, since there are many kinds of things that are incongruous which do not produce amusement. Morreall (1987) attempts to find sufficient conditions for identifying humour by focusing on our response. He defines humorous amusement as taking pleasure in a cognitive shift suggesting that humour is a certain kind of reaction had to perceived incongruity (Smuts 2009). Therefore, it is not the incongruity but the congruous resolution of the apparent incongruity that makes a certain situation funny.

The major criticisms of the incongruity theory are that it is too broad to be very meaningful, as it does not pay attention to context, it fails to explain why not all incongruities are funny and hence why some things, rather than others, are funny (Smuts 2009). Hence, although Incongruity Theory points at a necessary condition for humour: the perception of an incongruity; it does not reflect on other necessary conditions. Nevertheless, Incongruity Theory accounts for most cases of perceived humour, and despite its shortcomings it is extremely revealing regarding the nature of humour and is very useful in order to recognise and analyse humour and its appreciation as discussed in the following section in relation to the findings.

8.3.2 Linking Data with Theory

According to incongruity theories, jokes and laughter stem from the recognition that something is inconsistent and unexpected rational in the perceived environment. The findings confirm that irrational, paradoxical, incoherent, fallacious and inappropriate behaviour can lead to humour and suggest that cross-cultural encounters have a high potential for both newcomers and host society members to perceive each others' behaviour as such.

Focusing on the cognition of humour, incongruity theories highlight two key concepts that help understand the nature of humour in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural encounters: perception and expectation. According to incongruity theories, humour arises from an incongruity between the perceived event and the expected norm. In the context of cross-cultural encounters, both newcomers' perceptions and expectations are influenced by cultural awareness and cultural proximity. The findings confirm that lack of cultural awareness or cultural distance can lead to discrepancies between participants' perceived events and expectations, and that they often find humour in that relationship. In addition, behaviour which is influenced by different cultural norms and values can differ to others' expectations resulting in incongruence that may be perceived as humorous. Clearly, as participants become more culturally adept, such incongruities tend to decrease, but they may also choose to exploit them in order to trigger humour, by, for example, using a particularly direct communication style despite being aware that it is outside the expected norms.

However, the findings confirm one of the main critiques towards incongruity theories: not all incongruities produce humour. Morreal (2009) responds to such

critique specifying that humour is a reaction to a perceived incongruity in which the perceiver takes pleasure in a cognitive shift. The findings confirm the necessity of that condition for incongruities to turn out humorous, bringing into question the reasons for such pleasure. However, the answer to this question is beyond the scope of incongruity theories. Hurley et al. (2011) suggest that incongruous things do not produce humour when they are accompanied by a strong negative valance. This assertion is confirmed by the data, as, for example, incongruous behaviour induced by alcohol can result in being amusing in certain contexts but can be too disturbing to be comical in others. Hurley et al.'s (2011) explanation adds another condition for humour perception but it does not explain why some incongruities are not found humorous despite an absence of negative valance.

Nevertheless, incongruity theories make clear that perceived humour is a reaction to an incongruity, and it is in this frame of thought that Douglas (1968) sees humour as the way in which we deal with and understand our complex environment and its ambiguity. This function of humour is hinted at by the findings presented in chapter 5, which illustrate the regularity of humour as a reaction and interpretation of incongruities triggered by cultural differences. In this context, considering the use of humour as a reaction or interpretation of incongruities contributes to understanding the use of humour in intercultural and cross-cultural encounters and highlights the relevance of the role of humour in such contexts.

In these terms, the data suggests that newcomers' perception of the target culture and the expectations built around it are key to their interpretation of situations or behaviours as incongruous and on whether such incongruence can be perceived as

humorous. In this context, culturally inappropriate expectations may lead to incongruities which are perceived as humorous. However, cross-cultural adaptation brings about changes in newcomers' perception of both target culture and culture of origin. According to the findings, these changes alter participants' perception of incongruities in different ways. Firstly, incongruous behaviour may be perceived as normal and no longer trigger a humorous reaction; Secondly, negative valences attached to certain incongruities may lose their strength so they may be perceived as humorous instead of disturbing; thirdly, increased cultural awareness and proximity may result in shared perspectives with host society members, so they may pick up the same incongruities. These changes can be linked with the development of culturally appropriate expectations (discussed in chapter 7), suggesting that these expectations and their violation can lead to shared humour or effective humour communication based on similar incongruity perceptions. Finally, changes in participants' perception of their culture of origin trigger their perception of incongruities in relation to it, which is made clear by their amusement derived from the behaviour of Spaniards when they visit Spain. In addition, this new perspective can trigger self-deprecating humour towards Spanish culture, which, as suggested by the findings, can facilitate humour communication in intercultural interactions. Overall, a change in perception can lead participants to pick up different incongruities in each culture based on their expectations. In addition, comparison of two cultures can emphasise incongruities in each, which can be exploited to create humour. This type of humour may be common with co-ethnics who may be more likely to perceive similar incongruities but can be also a source of humour in intercultural communication. As participants' cultural awareness increases these comparisons tend to change in their nature, moving from an ethnocentric or

‘shallow’ perspective to a more grounded perspective of both cultures. As the findings suggest, participants’ ability to exploit this type of humour without being judgemental develops as part of their humour and intercultural competence. In these terms the findings suggest that participants’ ability to laugh at both Spanish and Irish culture can have a positive impact in the quality of their interactions. These findings resemble Valero’s (2003) suggestion that ethnic humour which mitigates tension between ethnic groups is conditioned by the ability to use and laugh at others’ humour towards one’s ethnic group and to know and respect the values behind the targeted stereotypes. In this context, as Valero (2003) suggests, ethnic humour can facilitate interpersonal relations and foster intercultural communication at a societal level.

8.4 Translation Theories

8.4.1 Theoretical Overview

The issue of the translation of humour entails an extremely problematic area within the discipline of translation studies. This type of translation presents problems which are both practical and theoretical in nature regarding the most central issues in translation studies: equivalence and translatability. In this context, authors like Raphaleson (1989), Chiaro (2008), and Valero (1998) point at the two major barriers which restrict the purpose of humour in translation: different languages and different cultures.

7.4.1.1 A Classification of Humour: Universal, Cultural and Linguistic Humour

Within the field of translation studies, Raphaelson (1989) created a classification focusing on the translatability of humour, which distinguishes three categories of humour: universal, cultural and linguistic. Her classification illustrates the

differences between those features of humour that are specific to a particular language or a culture as opposed to those that are universal. According to Raphaelson (1989) *universal humour* depends exclusively on universal knowledge or behaviour. Examples of it would be humour derived from an unexpected, unusual response, or a child making extremely mature, adult-like statements. Due to the individual nature of humour, such situations might not be funny for certain people regardless of their culture, but they can be considered 'universal' as their perception is not subject to a particular culture.

Cultural humour originates from something specific to a culture or society. As an example of this, Raphaelson (1989) gives ethnic jokes where one cultural group looks down on another. Regarding cultural jokes which depend on specific cultural items as Raphaelson (1989) points out:

There are many jokes which may mean the same thing semantically' (when translated to another language), 'but in terms of pragmatics and culture, there is something sorely missing which makes the joke untranslatable (Raphaelson 1989:132).

Davies (1990,2002) has studied ethnic humour in many different cultures pointing out endless similarities in the production of these jokes. These similarities can be used as a translation strategy in order to adapt humour without losing its foremost intentional effect, that of amusing others (Chiaro 2008 ;Valero 1998)

The third type, *linguistic humour* such as word play or puns derives from the linguistic features of a language. According to Raphaelson (1989), this is the most difficult type to translate as it depends on linguistic factors such as grammar, idioms, set phrases or word play.

8.4.1.2 The intricacy of humour translation

Regarding Raphaelson's classification, it is important to notice that these types of humour can be combined, and that many other factors play a part in the difficulty of translating a joke. In this context, sometimes an instance of universal humour might be harder to translate or adapt than a linguistic joke due to its unique features and the differences and similarities between the source and the target languages or cultures involved. In this context, Chiaro (2008) and Valero (1998) demonstrate that resistance to translation is a feature of both linguistic and cultural humour, despite the ease which is usually attributed to the translation of non-linguistic jokes. These authors emphasise the interlinked nature of language and culture, pointing out the relevance of shared socio-cultural knowledge in order to share humour, as well as the relevance of the linguistic resources that come into play in order to achieve the entertaining function of humour.

In this context, Chiaro (2008) sees translatability as a question of linguistic and cultural compromise. According to her, in humour translation: 'it seems only fair that the means should justify the functional ends of attempts to amuse even if formal equivalence is compromised' (Chiaro 2008: 26). Chiaro compares humour translation to poetry translation, stating that a translation of word-play always involve some sort of compromise. In order to achieve the same function (that of amusement) some feature of the source text is lost in exchange for a gain in the target text. Likewise, the problem of fidelity to the source text also arises when humour is based on aspects of the world which are typical only of the source culture and translators face the dilemma to whether remain literal or manipulate the text to make it more comprehensible in the target culture.

The issue of equivalence is especially significant with regard to the translation of humour because its nature tends to be so language-specific or culture-specific that the translator is compelled to make radical changes if she wishes to retain the text's original communicative function. Closely linked to equivalence the concept of translatability refers to the capacity of some kind of meaning being transferred from one language to another without undergoing radical changes, a task that becomes particularly challenging in humour translation.

In this context, Chiaro (2008) points at the usefulness of the concept of *dynamic translatability* by which the translator needs to analyse, transfer and restructure in order to replace significations in one language with significations in other language maintaining the purpose of the original text. Each language is inextricably linked to the culture to which it belongs, thus the process of translation involves the transposition of a series of extra linguistic features inherent to the source culture:

...before the joke can be discharged in all its swiftness there is much to be apprehended about cultural and social facts, about shared beliefs and attitudes, about the pragmatic bases of communication. (...) We share our humour with those who have shared our history and who understand our ways of interpreting the experience. There is a fund of common knowledge and recollection, upon which all jokes draw with instantaneous effect (Nash 1985:9).

Accordingly, the process of translation is not merely a linguistic activity but also involves the careful consideration of the world in which the language is produced. Thus 'successful translation does not simply involve the translation of words, but also the translation of worlds' (Chiaro 2008: 24).

Both Valero (1998) and Chiaro (2008) point out different challenges faced by translators and strategies which can be used by them in order to maintain such effect. In order to succeed, Valero (1998) points out that the translator needs to understand all the linguistic and extra-linguistic information underneath the original text. According to her, that specific interrelation between a linguistic and socio-cultural elements attaches humour to a specific community. In these terms Valero (1998) points out that a carbon copy of the original text is impossible. In this context, Valero calls for the need of 'pragmatic equivalence' suggests that when dealing with humour translation, the term 'translation' should be used in a very wide sense as a synonym to adaptation, version, recreation or evocation and which can be achieved by the use of different strategies such as substituting, adapting or even creating a new version (Valero 1998). In this context, Valero (1998) emphasises the difficulties faced by the translator, who needs to take into account the socio-cultural knowledge of the receiver but limit the use of explanations which would lead to the loss of humour.

These considerations regarding the translatability of humour are an essential contribution to the study of the role of humour in intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation, not only because they contribute to understand newcomers and non-native speakers' needs to translate humour, but also because they examine cross-cultural differences in humour use, which is discussed in further detail in the following section.

8.4.2 Linking Data with Theory

The findings suggest that participants' attachment to Spanish can be emphasised in humour communication, meaning that their needs to translate or adapt their humorous remarks or their failure to do so become more evident during their

intercultural interactions. In this context, the findings highlight participants' consciousness of the *untranslatability* of humour which has linguistic or cultural content attached to Spanish language and culture. However, their varying attitudes and abilities to overcome this issue can be linked to the development of their *humour competence*, including their language competence, and their cultural awareness (see chapter 6). Translation theories of humour can offer insight to participants' difficulties to adapt humour and the strategies used to overcome such difficulties. In this context, translation researchers (Chiaro 2008; Raphaelson 1989; Valero 1998) identify two main barriers that restrict the purpose of verbally expressed humour: a different language and a different culture. These authors highlight the complexity of humour translation by the relevance of a shared understanding of the world in order to share humour. In this context difficulties to translate humour are linked to linguistic or referential issues, linguistic humour being considered the most untranslatable, whereas referentially based or cultural humour is less likely to resist translation and universal humour is considered the easiest to translate (Raphaelson 1989). In addition, as Valero (1998) points out the entertaining function of humour is linked to specific linguistic resources on each language, which may also be difficult to translate regardless of whether humour is universal, linguistic or cultural.

Accordingly, the findings point out that participants' difficulties adapting all three categories of humour, namely universal, cultural and linguistic, since even universal humour is linked to linguistic resources. However, the distinction between linguistic and referential humour is useful in revealing participants needs and abilities to adapt their humour. In this context, although participants' acknowledge difficulties related to language issues, referentially based humour emerges as the major source of

frustration or failed attempts to communicate humour effectively. Analysis of the data suggests that as participants' become increasingly more fluent, they become able to produce humour in English spontaneously so their need to translate linguistic forms of Spanish humour decreases. However, although participants' cultural awareness and proximity to Irish culture tends to increase during their time in Ireland, references to Spanish culture seem to stay deeply ingrained in their humour. As such, during intercultural interactions, participants either decide to let go of humorous remarks or use different strategies in order to translate their humour (see chapter 6).

These strategies include being resigned to the *untranslatability* of humour and translating the remark literally. This literal translation may, nevertheless, maintain the function of humour by triggering humour in unexpected or expected ways due to its absurd nature. Other strategies are giving explanations, which create the risk of losing its humorous effect, and finally thinking in terms of *dynamic translatability* (Chiaro 2008) and restructuring humour content by using different strategies such as reformulating the humorous remark and replacing its cultural references with culturally appropriate ones. In this context, although participants are not professional translators and their need to translate should decrease as they gain fluency, their ability to adapt cultural humour and exploit it during intercultural interactions can be considered part of their humour competence and a relevant skill for effective humour communication in intercultural interactions.

8. 5. Linguistic Theories of Humour

Linguistic theories explain humour as a linguistic phenomenon, focusing on the use of verbally transmitted humour. In this context, the notion of 'humour competence'

is regarded as the ability to make and understand this type of humour and is considered as an integral part of native speakers' linguistic competence.

8.5.1 Semantic Theories on Verbally Transmitted Humour

8.5.1.1 Theoretical Overview

Raskin's (1985) script based semantic theory of humour (SSTH) is considered a major contribution to the incongruity theory of humour from a linguistic perspective. However, his theory does not aim to cover humour in general, but only verbal humour by trying to 'determine and formulate the necessary and sufficient linguistic conditions for a text to be funny' (Raskin 1985:47). The main hypothesis of the SSTH is the following: A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if these two conditions are satisfied:

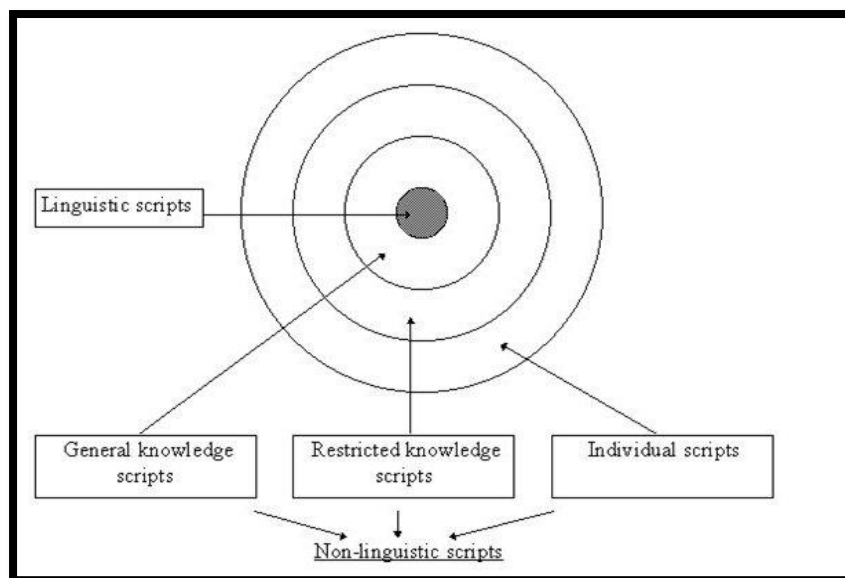
- (i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts (ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite in a special sense... [as they] overlap fully or in part on this text' (Raskin 1985: 99).

A *script* is a cognitive structure internalised by the speaker which 'represents the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world' (Raskin 1985:81). Raskin (1985) distinguishes between two basic types of scripts: *lexical* and *non-lexical*. *Lexical* are those which give information pertaining to words (*lexical knowledge*) and *non-lexical* are those which give information pertaining to the world (*encyclopaedic knowledge*). Jokes and anecdotes have a single point of culmination which brings together two contrasting scripts: one which appears to be logically correct and another one which is the opposite of the first on some basis but can also be seen as a logical interpretation. Diagram 15 illustrates Raskin's theory of scripts (1985: 135). The circle in the centre shows the *linguistic scripts*, which contain

information pertaining to words (*lexical knowledge*) which is supposed to be known to native speakers of the language. The external circles represent the non-linguistic scripts which refer to our knowledge of the world (*encyclopaedic knowledge*): *general knowledge scripts* are those which are generally known to speakers, but do not directly affect their use of the language, *restricted knowledge scripts*, are those which are known to certain people such as specialists in a certain area, or members of a particular group of society. Individual scripts are those which are unique to a person.

Diagram 15 *Raskin's Theory of Scripts*

Raskin (1985: 135)



The semantic theory of humour is designed to model the native speaker's 'humour competence', which is defined by Raskin as the knowledge that enables a language user to produce and interpret 'a text which is compatible with two opposite scripts, which in turn, fully or in part overlap' (Raskin 1985: 99) Despite acknowledging social and individual differences, the theory is formulated for an ideal speaker-hearer community whose senses of humour are 'exactly identical' (Raskin 1985:58)

Attardo, who worked with Raskin in an updated model of the SSTH, specifies that the context of a joke's telling is 'irrelevant' to its humorous nature (Attardo 1994:197) since the theory is based on idealised interlocutors who are for example unaffected by racial or gender biases, undisturbed by scatological, obscene or disgusting materials, or subject to boredom.

8.5.1.2 Shortcomings of Raskin's Theory: criticism and alternative theories

Although Raskin does account for the social world and individual differences which suggest that scripts can differ from person to person, his theory relies on an idealised humour competence which is 'identical' for everyone in order to determine the funniness of verbal humour based on 'the native speaker's judgement of texts' (Raskin 1984: 58). However, in the real world it is clear that these judgements will differ significantly, which questions the significance of the theory's purpose. These considerations emphasise the cognitive focus of the theory but also highlight a major gap which has been criticised and explored by other linguistic theories such as Chiaro's (1992) and Carrell (1997). In *The Language of Jokes* Chiaro (1992) presents a model which involves the interaction of three systems to make up the competence needed to get a joke: the linguistic, the socio-cultural, and 'the poetic' (Chiaro 1992). To illustrate this, she offers the following children's joke:

A: How many ears has Davy Crockett?

B: Two, hasn't he?

A: No three. He's got a left ear, a right ear, and a wild frontier.

(Chiaro 1992:13)

To understand this joke the hearer needs linguistic competence to understand the sentence meaning and recognise it as a joke, socio-cultural competence to know who Davy Crockett was and that the phrase 'wild frontier' comes from the theme song of the children's television show about him, and poetic competence to read 'wild

frontier' as 'wild front ear'. Chiaro 1992's theory includes a strong social dimension and is grounded in actual use of language in the world.

Carrell (1997) also emphasises the importance of physical, mental, social conditions and values in order to appreciate humour. These conditions can vary not only from one individual to another but also within each individual. Both Carrell (1997) and Chiaro (1992) highlight that the social and individual circumstances are crucial elements in any conception of humour competence, which cannot be simply a universal cognitive skill.

8.5.1.3 Linking Data with Theory

In the context of this study, Raskin's theory highlights the relevance of the factors affecting participants' humour communication which are present in the model in chapter 6, namely language competence, cultural awareness and proximity, and individual affinities and compatibility. These categories can also be aligned with Chiaro's (1992) model which considers the interaction of linguistic, socio-cultural and poetic competences as part of an individual's ability to understand a joke.

Accordingly, the findings highlight the importance of language competence and cultural awareness in participants' development of humour competence, as their competence of language and knowledge of Irish culture increases which has an impact of their recognition and production of all types of scripts but particularly those which are linguistic or based on socio-cultural knowledge (*specific knowledge*) attached to Irish culture and society. In addition, the findings highlight that socio-cultural knowledge can encourage culturally appropriate use of humour, helping

participants to identify adequate contexts for humour use and adequate content to fit those specific contexts.

Finally, the model in chapter 6 highlights the interrelation between these factors and a person's recognition of individual scripts (Raskin 1985) or their poetic competence (Chiaro 1992). In this context, shared individual affinities can imply shared individual scripts. The findings in this study suggest that lack of these competences can lead to ineffective humour communication, whereas disparity between interlocutors in each of these competences can lead to misunderstandings. Moreover, newcomers and their interlocutors can point at either competence as the major culprit of miscommunication. For example, they can blame their lack of language competence or socio-cultural skills instead of their individual scripts or poetic competence in order to save face. However, realisation of lack of linguistic, cultural or poetic competences can cause feelings of inadequacy and frustration, affecting participants' interactions and cross-cultural adaptation. However, the findings call attention to factors which are characteristic of non-native speakers and are discussed in detail in the following section.

8.5.2 Humour and Second Language Learning

8.5.2.1 Theoretical Overview

The previous sections have explained that humour can be made through a variety of forms and the recipient needs linguistic, socio-cultural, and 'poetic' competence in order to interpret them as intended. Studies of humour in second language learning have examined some of these aspects regarding learners' communicative competence in the target language.

Vega (1992) examines Raskin's notion of 'humour competence' in the context of second language learning by analysing the presence of this notion within the concept of communicative competence using Canale's (1981) theory of communicative competence. Based on Raskin's definition of humour competence, Vega highlights that the production and understanding of humour calls for a specific competence which involves knowledge of the semantic mechanisms of humour which combine knowledge from different areas ranging from grammatical competence to world knowledge. She relates Raskin's script based theory of humour to the other four competencies of Canale's (1981) theory of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic, and discourse.

Firstly, she points out the relevance of discourse and grammatical competence in order to understand and produce a joke.

Secondly, she highlights the role of sociolinguistic competence in enabling learners to distinguish what is appropriate and inappropriate regarding both the production and the interpretation of discourse and its social context.

Thirdly, she points out the interaction between strategic competence and humour competence noting that there are many verbal and non verbal strategies that can help learners to create and understand humour, whereas a verbal joke can be a good strategy to achieve communication. Furthermore Vega (1992) points at the internalisation of scripts involved in ethnic jokes which are bound to the new culture as an exclusive element of humour competence.

Finally, as the other four competences, humour competence contains elements that are transferred from the first language and vary from learner to learner, which in the case of humour competence entails the semantic mechanism of verbal humour.

On this basis Vega defines humour competence as ‘the knowledge that enables learners to produce and interpret verbal humour’ (Vega 1992:12) and she considers ‘humor competence’ as the fifth component of the theoretical framework for communicative competence, which involves knowledge of the semantic mechanisms of humour, grammar, discourse rules, communication strategies, social norms of language use, and world knowledge.

In addition to communicative competence Vega (1992) considers Widdowson’s (1983) notion of *capacity* as ‘the ability to actualize knowledge’ (Widdowson 1983) or ‘what enables speakers to use the language creatively in actual communication’ (Vega 1992:5). According to her, there is a capacity component for every competency which varies from competence to competence within an individual, but the capacities for each competence are interrelated and interact with each other as do the competencies. Because capacity involves psychological factors such as personality and intelligence, learners achieve different levels of proficiency and overall communicative competence. In the case of humour, sense of humour is a variable that affects capacity and in turn overall communicative competence. In this context, Vega notes that the fact that some people find it more difficult to switch into a joking mood than others does not mean that they have less knowledge to produce and interpret verbal humour. Following up this last consideration, Vega’s theory seems vulnerable to the same criticism that Carrell (1997) makes to Raskin’s theory,

calling for a distinction between the ability to recognise humour and to actually appreciate it, and questioning if the ability to produce and interpret humour considered by Vega a humour competence is different to the ability to use humour effectively. It is clear that humour is attached to its purpose of amusement, so if that amusement is not achieved it could be said that neither is effective communication. This criticism can be avoided by highlighting the importance of ‘humour capacity’ as an essential element for effective humour communication, which takes account for the fact that for humour to work there needs to be something more than knowledge.

The question which remains open, and is particularly relevant to the context of the present study, is whether these missing elements are linked and ‘transferred’ from the first language and culture or if can they be ‘acquired’ during cross-cultural adaptation. Nevertheless, Vega’s study is extremely relevant in understanding the concept of humour competence in intercultural interactions among native and non-native speakers of the language in use. In addition, she highlights the importance of humour competence in the development of learners’ overall communicative competence, pointing out that second language learners fail to develop this competence even when they reach native-like proficiency levels. This observation highlights the intricacy of humour communication, the need for further studies, and their practical implications in fields such as language and intercultural training (see chapter 9 for further discussion).

8.5.2.2 Linking Data with Theory

The findings call attention to factors which are characteristic of non-native speakers or newcomers such as their identification with their first language or culture of origin

in comparison with the target language and culture, which can affect their perception and production of humour. In this context, Vega's (1990) theory which places Raskin's theory in the context of second language learners' contributes to the findings by pointing at other factors as part of learners humour competence. For example, Vega points at the significance of strategic competence which can help learners to overcome their lack of linguistic or world knowledge, but also the use of humour as communication strategies: a two-way relationship which is confirmed by the findings in chapter 6.

In addition Vega considers the notion of 'capacity' as *the ability to use language creatively in actual communication* (Vega 1990:14). This notion involves personality and intelligence, and in the case of *humour capacity* sense of humour. This can be linked to the findings regarding participants' individual affinities which call attention at the importance of individual humour preferences or compatibility with others' humour styles. According to the findings, these specific factors contribute not only to humour competence, which is reflected in a more effective and spontaneous use of humour but also to participants level of satisfaction from their use of humour in intercultural interactions.

8.5.3 Veatch's theory of humour

The discussed linguistic theories have pointed at some of the factors for effective humour communication and the reasons for humour miscommunication. In this context, it seems essential to take into account Veatch's (1998) theory which suggests that a perceiver would find a situation offensive by being too close to the

states that in order for something to be perceived as humorous, there are three elements that need to be present:

- *Violation*: the perceiver has in mind a view of the situation as constituting a violation of some affective commitment of the perceiver to the way something in the situation ought to be. That is, a “subjective moral principle” of the perceiver is violated.
- *Normality*: The perceiver has in mind a predominating view of the situation as being normal.
- *Simultaneity*: understandings of normality and violation are present in the mind of the perceiver at the same time.

According to Veatch (1998), humour occurs when things are normal (N) while at the same time something seems wrong (V). In this context, Veatch gives two possible reasons as to why some things may not be perceived as funny: Firstly, a situation may be perceived as offensive if the hearer is too close to the principle which is violated, for example, when hearing racist or sexist jokes. Secondly, when a perceiver has no moral or emotional attachment or commitment to the principle being violated. There is no V-element in the interpretation, and thus the situation is not perceived as humorous.

Veatch’s theory is quite relevant to this study as it helps understanding the conditions which are necessary in order to share humour. However, it is important to remark that as the findings suggest, people may be closely attached to the principle behind a joke and still not feel offended by it, which may depend on their view or relationship with the joker or aspects of their own personality which may affect their threshold for offensiveness. In these terms, interlocutors who share values and

attitudes may have fewer chances to offend each other. In addition if a situation is perceived as normal it may not trigger humour but confusion, leading to wrong assumptions that can have a negative impact in cross-cultural adaptation.

8.5.4 Communicative Functions of Humour

8.5.4.1 Theoretical Overview

Within the field of linguistics, several studies have focused on the communicative or social functions of humour (Graham 1992; Graham et al. 1995; Boxer and Cortes-Conde 1997, Veacht 1998, Adelsward and Oberg 1998). In this context, social and communicative are often blended or can be interchanged. In these terms, referring to his classification of the communicative/social functions of humour, Attardo (1994:323) points out that the question '*How does humour affect the communicative interaction of speakers?*' means in other words '*What are the social goals of humour?*'.

8.5.4.1.1 The Communicative Functions of Humour: Theoretical Overview

In order to tackle the complexity of the communicative functions of humour Attardo makes a functional distinction between primary and secondary functions of humour. Primary functions are effects that speakers may (wish to) achieve directly by using humour in their discourse. Secondary functions of humour are effects that are achieved either indirectly or without the knowledge or intend of the user. In addition, for functional purposes, Attardo (1994) groups the effects of humour on the communicative process in four classes: social management, decommitment, mediation and defunctionalisation; acknowledging large degrees of overlap among these categories.

Firstly, the social management function of humour is related to the use of humour as a tool to facilitate in-group interaction and strengthen in group bonding and out-group rejection. These include:

1. Social control: where the speaker uses humour as a social corrective by embarrassing or intimidating.
2. Conveying social norms: where the speaker uses humour to attract attention to taboos or unacceptable behaviour
3. Ingratiation: where the speaker tries to get attention, foster liking or build consensus.
4. Discourse management: where humour is used for initiation, termination, topic shift or checking.
5. Establish common ground: where a hearer's reaction to humour can be read as sign of attention, understanding or involvement.
6. Cleverness: since the abilities to produce an understand humour can connote cleverness
7. Social play: the camaraderie created through humour can strengthen social bonds and foster group cohesiveness. It can manage communality and intimacy, but also aggression and domination.
8. Repair: it can defuse unpleasant situations, connoting a positive attitude, in-group bonding and lightness.

These functions reveal how humour can facilitate or impede interactions and influence speaker attitudes towards each other by either having a positive 'inclusive' effect or a negative 'exclusive' effect, which is emphasised by the sociologically based theories of humour discussed in section 8.6.

Attardo's (1994) second category decommitment can be considered a subclass of *social management* because it facilitates the speakers' social interaction. Referring to Kane et al.'s (1977) notion of decommitment as '*denying any harmful intention for an action*' (Kane et al 1977:13) by declaring that the action was not intended to be treated as serious (Kane et al. 1977:15), Attardo points out that humour communication is retractable so that speakers may back away from their utterances without loss of face. In these terms he highlights two of the tactics proposed by Kane et al (1977): 'probing' and 'salvaging': In the first case, the speaker may *probe* the hearer's reaction to a behaviour that may not be met with approval by engaging in that behaviour with overt signs of non-seriousness. In this context, Attardo (1996) points out that humour can also be used to convey serious contents, and can be used as a tool for negotiating issues that may be too threatening to be handled overtly, as well as to express agreement or dissent in the case of aggressive humour. Secondly, speakers may *salvage* a situation that is becoming unpleasant by decommitting from it indicating that the proposed or past action was 'just a joke', which as Attardo suggests gives the speaker a 'ready-made excuse' (Attardo 1996:326).

Attardo's third category –humour as a mediation tool- is closely linked to Mulkay's (1988) sociological work, where humour is seen as a mediating device and teasing is seen as a device for criticizing a person without an overt attack. In this context, Attardo (1996) suggests that humour can be used to test behaviour which is potentially socially unacceptable and deal with emotionally charged issues. These functions are possible due to the deniability or retractability of the humorous mode which give speakers the option to claim that their assertions belonged to the humorous *non-bonafide* mode and so are false. Therefore, the speaker does not have

to face the consequences of his assertions since joking is accepted as a mode of communication. However, as Mulkay suggests contextual jokes can be received seriously and interpreted at face value so the non bona fide status of the joke is bypassed. In addition as Attardo suggest the *non-bona fide* and *bona fide* values are better represented on a continuum which can be negotiated by interlocutors.

The last primary function - defunctionalization- is particularly relevant to nonsense humour and puns which can be seen as defunctionalisation of language, which is not used for transmission of information but for playful purposes. Focusing on linguistic humour, Attardo points out that, speakers may choose to take advantage of the ludic or playful possibilities of language for entertainment purposes.

Finally, regarding the secondary functions of language, Attardo deals with the claim that jokes have an informative aspect and can be used by the hearers to extract information about real life (Zhao 1988). Attardo describes the process as follows: the hearer is presented with information during the telling of a joke that he did not previously know. The hearer somehow discriminates between non bona fide information and bona fide information in the text and incorporates the later to his/her knowledge (Attardo 1996:329). In this context, Attardo emphasises the value of humour in allowing a more pleasant acquisition of the context of the text, allowing retractability, and transmitting taboo information, and revealing significant information about interlocutors, such as indicating that they are in the right mood for joking or what choice of subjects they consider appropriate for the situation.

Overall Attardo's (1996) analysis of the communicative/social functions of humour highlights that humour can carry serious information and that 'serious' verbal

interaction tends to include fragments of humorous discourse. In this context, Attardo suggests 'that a completely serious discourse would be perceived as odd outside a very formal setting' Attardo (1996:331). On these bases, Attardo highlights the relevance of the dynamics of conversational humour, and emphasizes the need for further studies in this field.

8.5.4.1.2 The Communicative Functions of Humour: Linking Data with Theory

The interlinked relationship between the communicative and social functions of humour in interaction implies that the following discussion of Attardo's (1994) categorisation of the effects of humour in the communicative process will also deal with the social functions of humour in the context of the study.

Firstly, *social management* implies all the cases in which humour is used as a tool to facilitate in group interaction and strengthen in group bonding or out-group rejection. The findings reveal the relevance of this function in intercultural interaction. In the first place, humour can be used to *convey social norms* by attracting attention to unacceptable behaviour which can in turn act as a form of *social control*, for example if participants feel embarrassed or intimidated by humour that targets them they may change their behaviour. For instance, analysis of the data reveals participants' changes in behaviour which were encouraged by other peoples' humour that targeted their tone, body language and topics of conversation. Attardo (1994) links this category with the inclusive and exclusive functions of humour. The findings highlight how shared humour is correlated with shared affinities and connotes familiarity and a mutual shared background or knowledge, which is manifested in shared scripts upon which the humour is based, which results in *bonding*. In contrast, 'humour miscommunication underscores their belonging to two

different groups (those who are laughing and those who are not' (Attardo 1994:324) which, in the case of non-native speakers and newcomers, may be linked to lack of language competence or cultural differences, but can nevertheless highlight other dissimilarities related to interlocutors' humour. In this case, humour may not only, bypass its bonding effect, but also be perceived as insulting or offensive. Analysis of the data confirms the implications of shared or failed humour in interlocutors' positive and negative perceptions of each other.

Secondly, analysis of the data reveals participants awareness, receptiveness and use of humour for *ingratiation*, acknowledging their use of humour to foster liking intentionally and unintentionally. Thirdly, the findings reveal the usefulness of humour as a means of *discourse management*, particularly for initiation of conversations with host society members, as well as checking information. Fourthly, the findings show participants use of humour to establish a common ground by, for example, establishing appropriate topics of conversation or pointing out shared attitudes and values. Fifthly, the data highlights humour connotations of *cleverness*, which is revealed by participants' positive perception of Irish people due to their wit and sharpness, as well as by their improved self perception encouraged by their adequate use of humour in intercultural interactions.

In sixth place, humour can be used as social play, which can strengthen bonds and foster group cohesiveness (Attardo 1994). In this context, the findings correlate participants' tendencies to socialize with co-ethnics with a distinctive use of humour within these groups. In addition, participants' point at their effective use of humour as a revealing sign of belonging to a group and feeling integrated.

Finally, humour can repair by diffusing unpleasant situations and connoting a positive attitude and levity, which is highlighted by participants' use of humour which is based in their own misfortunes, cultural faux pas, miscommunication and misunderstandings. In addition, this function of humour may cause in-group bonding which may be particularly but not exclusively linked to other co-ethnics or newcomers.

Decommitment plays an essential role in intercultural interactions as the findings make clear that it allows flexibility regarding interlocutors' behaviours, allowing them to use humour as a face saving strategy by denying harmful intentions. This can be done by *probing*, using humour to convey certain serious content such as expressing criticism or opening up without committing to the seriousness of the topic, which will prevent face loss, or *salvaging* by indicating that a passed action was only a joke. In these terms as Attardo (1994) points out, decommitment can be considered a facilitating function of humour, which can be particularly useful in intercultural interactions by allowing newcomers and their interlocutors to avoid awkwardness and offense. However, the findings point to the negative effects of abusing this function of humour, which has occasionally irritated or disoriented participants, who thought their interlocutors were going too far.

In addition, this function of decommitment is closely connected with humour as a *mediation tool*, which is based on Mulkey's (1988) sociological work that sees humour as a mediating device. As the findings highlight, humour can allow criticism and cover taboo topics, including intimate subjects. In addition, the findings confirm that teasing can be used as a device for criticizing a person directly without

an overt attack, which is clearly demonstrated in the use of slagging. This function of humour is particularly relevant in the context of this study due to participants' perception of cultural differences between Spanish and Irish culture and their humour. It is clear that humour can be a powerful intercultural tool since the *non bona fide* mode of communication lets participants cover taboo topics, criticise and open up within the context of socially appropriate behaviour without losing face or offending others. Humour lets participants test behaviour which is socially unacceptable and deal with emotionally charged issues. The findings also reveal participants' exploitation of this facet of humour which encourages them to maintain behaviour which is attached to Spanish culture relying on others' amusement. In addition, the relevance of this function of humour in Irish interactions, which is pointed out by the findings reveals that cultural awareness is key to recognise interlocutors intentions and expectations and switch to the *non bona fide mode* of communication in order to communicate effectively. These reflections highlight the significance of humour in social interactions and the application of humour competence in intercultural communication.

Finally, *desfunctionalization*, or loss of meaning, which characterises nonsense humour and puns, is highlighted as problematic by the findings. In the case of puns participants difficulties to play with English language can be an obstacle for this use of humour. In the case of nonsense humour, participants report cultural differences in humour tendencies which inhibit them from using this type of humour with Irish interlocutors. In this context, many participants reveal a deficit in the use of this *ludic* or playful aspect of humour in intercultural interactions, which may have a negative impact on their cross-cultural adaptation. In this context, some participants

feel nostalgic or rely on their Spanish acquaintances for the use of linguistic or nonsense humour. For example Andrés refers to the use of nonsense humour as *sometimes is nice to just let go, here it is a bit like a competition to see who says the wittiest things*'.

To end this section, it is worth considering the secondary functions of humour which refer to the informative aspect of humour and underscores its significance in cross-cultural adaptation. In these terms, the findings confirm the relevance of the implicit and explicit information contained in humour. However, the findings also point at the subjectivity of interlocutors' interpretations which is highlighted by the indirectness of *non bona fide* communication, and may have positive and negative consequences in participants' perception of their interlocutors and of Irish culture. In this context, information inferred from humorous interactions can be a contributing factor for participants' cultural awareness, but it can also lead to misinterpretations and the development of inadequate preconceptions. As Attardo (1994) states, 'the hearer somehow discriminates between non bona fide information and bona fide information in the text and incorporates the latter to his/her knowledge' (Attardo 1994:329). The findings highlight how this process becomes more complicated in intercultural interactions where participants and their interlocutors have different norms regarding socio-cultural aspects and norms around humour communication.

In this context, others' humorous remarks may have implications which can downplay the retractability of humour, meaning that even if the speaker clarifies humorous intentions, the receiver still incorporates some of that knowledge, which

can not only affect the receiver's perception of that person, but also of the ethnic or cultural group that is associated with that person. The findings thus highlight participants' development of their perception of Irish culture and its humour based on their own experiences. If these experiences are limited, then so will be participants' cultural awareness. However, the findings point out that participants' awareness of this limitation minimizes the development of false stereotypes or preconceptions. Consequently, such awareness can be considered a significant element of newcomers' humour and intercultural competences and an asset for effective intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation.

Overall, Attardo's (1994) theory brings light to the use of humour as an intercultural tool which can facilitate communication and social interactions. However, his taxonomy, which focuses on the positive functions of humour, seems to slightly undermine its negative effects and the nature of humour as a double-edged sword.

8.5.4.2 Norrick's Theory of Interdiscourse Strategies: Theoretical Overview

Norrick (2007) examines humour communication across cultures and languages identifying not only the needs of the speakers but also the potential for humour in these interactions. Based on Scollon and Scollon's (2002) concept of interdiscourse, Norrick views *Interdiscourse communication* as 'any kind of communication characterized by contact between different discourse systems and attempts to overcome their boundaries (Norrick 2007:309). According to him, this type of communication has a built-in potential for ambiguity and misunderstanding, because of the interaction of two or more discourse systems with their inherent differences, which can lead to incongruities: the basis for humour according to Incongruity

Theories. Hence, interdiscourse humour includes both the exploitation of linguistic and cultural differences for humorous purposes and attempts to convey humour across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Although Scollons's (2002) concept of interdiscourse finds a common basis for cross-language and cross-cultural phenomena in the notion of the discourse system, Norrick focuses on linguistic mechanisms pointing out three linguistic strategies of interdiscourse humour: contrast, merging and accommodation.

Contrast involves the exploitation of dissimilarities between separate discourse systems for humorous effect, which can be done by spotlighting, manipulating or exaggerating such differences between languages and cultures. Norrick focuses on linguistic examples involving contrasts between separate languages and varieties, which may be mutually unintelligible. In the strategy of contrast, the humorist creates a persona representing an outsider's perspective on some discourse system. This outside perspective 'leads to confusion or misunderstanding and creates the characteristic perception of incongruity required for humor' (Norrick 2007: 392). Norrick gives examples from jokes which play with similar words with two different meanings in either the same or different languages such as 'oui' (in French) and 'wee' (in English) or piss (in English) and peas (in English). As Norrick (2007) points out neither the humorist nor the audience must necessarily be bilingual, but some minimal familiarity with the contrasted language or discourse system is often required of recipients. Despite focusing on linguistic differences, Norrick notes that cultural differences such as differences in food, clothing, institutions and behaviour can provide the basis for humour when the outsider's perspective renders them incongruous.

Norrick's (2007) second strategy- *merging*- refers to mixing of languages for humorous effect. The availability of two or more separate discourse systems allows bilingual participants to switch between the systems and to mix them to produce humour. Norrick gives the following example which merges both language and culture:

What is the most arduous time of the year for Jews?

Schleptember

(Norrick 2007:339)

Norrick (2007) explains that:

Even if the word "schlep" appears in American dictionaries, it does not sound English. It still signals its Yiddish origin clearly and evokes associations with Jewish culture. For insiders, the humor of *Schleptember* resonates with cultural knowledge of the unusual workload associated with the month for Jews. Depending on who tells and who receives this joke, it could count as either cross-cultural or bilingual, but it illustrates interdiscourse humor through merging either way (Norrick 2007:339).

Although *merging* can also refer to *code switching*, Norrick clarifies that code switching can be used as an accommodation strategy, aiding interlocutors' interaction by borrowing constructions and vocabulary from a second shared language or evoking knowledge attached to other culture.

Finally, the strategy of *accommodation* refers to a set of procedures for avoiding misunderstanding including slowing down, checking for uptakes, repeating, explaining, switching codes and even translating. According to Norrick (2007), accommodation is a strategy opposed to contrast because it seeks to minimize differences between speakers of different languages and thus to avoid misunderstanding. Thus, accommodation is not just instrumental in conveying humour understandably, it also predisposes recipients towards the humorist and

prepares them to enjoy the humour (Norrick 2007). In contrast, under-accommodation or failure to accommodate can negatively influence a listener's opinion and lead to misunderstandings or impede humour appreciation. However, accommodation may become a strategy for humour in cases of over-accommodation. Overall, Norrick's study explores areas of contact between interdiscourse and humour communication, taking some initial steps in defining the linguistic issues involved in interdiscourse humour. In this context, his study is a significant contribution to the interdisciplinary research involved in the study of humour and intercultural communication. Hence, its implications regarding the research questions and findings of the present study are discussed in the following section.

7.5.4.3 Linking Data with Theory

According to Norrick (2007), interdiscourse humour includes exploitations of linguistic and cultural differences for humour purposes and attempts to convey humour across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Norrick (2007) points out three strategies focusing on linguistic issues. Analysis of the data confirms the occurrence of these strategies in intercultural communication, pointing out its relevance regarding not only linguistic but also cultural issues involved in humour communication as follows:

1. The findings highlight *the clash of discourse systems* as a source for intended and unintended humour, which participants use as a strategy to trigger humour, by for example, exaggerating their accent, transferring their communication style despite awareness of its inappropriateness, or translating Spanish sayings which will appear incongruous to their interlocutors, or they may exaggerate their accent. In addition, the findings reveal that contrast of cultural differences can also be a source of humour

which participants often choose to exploit focusing their humour on differences such as food and eating habits. In addition, the findings point out that these cultural contrasts can be used in both interactions with host society members, co-ethnics and other newcomers from different backgrounds.

2. Regarding the *merging* strategy, the findings reveal participants ability to switch between the systems for humorous effects by mixing language and cultures. For example, participants can exploit such ability by switching from their 'Irish' persona, to their 'foreign' persona, which displays cultural contrast. However, the data point at participants' difficulty to apply this strategy to linguistic features of interdiscourse due limitations such as their ability to play with other accents besides their own. However, the data highlights the use of code switching with co-ethnics, which became evident during the interviews as participants switch from English to Spanish to recount their anecdotes, making the most of interlocutors shared knowledge and bypassing unnecessary explanations or adaptations which may affect humour. (See chapter 7 for a discussion on *code switching*).
3. Finally, regarding *accommodation*, the findings confirm Norrick's (2007) point that accommodation can have a positive effect in humour communication by helping interlocutors to convey humour and predisposing recipients towards humorists who make clear efforts to engage with them by accommodating their speech (see chapter 7 for a discussion of accommodation strategies). In contrast, failure to accommodate can lead to ineffective humour communication which leads to misunderstandings. However, the findings also highlight that accommodation can trigger humour

by overlapping with contrast, which can occur both intentionally or unintentionally. In addition, although Norrick (2007) highlights the positive effects of over-accommodation which can be used as a humour strategy, the findings underscore its negative effects in communication by signalling a condescending attitude on behalf of the humorist, which may in turn affect participants' self-perception in Irish society.

Overall, Norrick's (2007) categories highlight different strategies that affect participants' use of humour in intercultural interactions which can become an integral part of their humour competence. Although Norrick's (2007) discussion focuses on linguistic features, the above discussion highlights the use of these strategies based on cultural differences, as well as transferability to interactions with people from similar backgrounds such as co-ethnics, and their impact in cross-cultural adaptation. Norrick's theory is an invaluable contribution to the study of humour in intercultural communication. However, its strategies seem to be based on a collaborative attitude on behalf of the interlocutors. As the findings point out interlocutors may not have the competences or willingness to use these strategies in order to overcome cultural differences and communicate humour. These conditions have a negative impact in intercultural interactions and can lead to disagreements or disengagement from communication, which can in turn foster apprehension towards humour communication in both newcomers and host society members.

8.6 Social Theories of Humour

8.6.1 Theoretical Overview

Sociological theories of humour studying the social functions of humour can overlap in content with linguistic theories exploring the communicative functions of humour

since both approaches are concerned with how humour functions within a social context. In these terms, many of the theories discussed in section 8.5.2 which dealt with the communicative functions of humour are linked to the discipline of sociology. However, sociological approaches to humour tend to emphasize and focus on the aggressive or cohesive aspects of humour and their impact in society. One of the most influential sociologically-oriented theories which focus on the aggressive element of humour is Bergson's (1911), which considers that humour is used by society to correct deviant behaviour 'by the fear that it inspires' (Bergson 1911: 20). Decades later, Mulkay (1988) suggested that the symbolic separation of humour from the realm of the serious action enables social actors to use humour for serious purposes. He argues that humour can be used in accordance with the requirements of those in power, but that it can also be used to challenge, condemn and disrupt existing social patterns, although in reality it often works to maintain social structures (Mulkay 1988).

In a study of the organizational function of humour, Lynch (2002) defines and examines these functions as follows:

- Identification occurs when humour creates an internal perception that increases in-group cohesiveness and validates commonly held perceptions. Simultaneously, this humour excludes individuals or groups who do not have the knowledge of the in-group, which is the differentiation function.
- Differentiation humour can extend and express pre-existing boundaries of divergence in social groups such as gender, nationality, race, religion or occupational position.

- *Control humour* can be used by the in-group for establishing collective norms by pointing out and laughing at the deviates,
- whereas *resistance humour* can act as a valve for tension, but resistance humour is not true resistance but disguised control as it does not threaten or change the status quo (Lynch 2002).

In this context, it seems relevant to point out Davies (2010) suggestion that:

The jokes' importance lies not in their effects or long-term consequences, for jokes produce neither of these (Davies 2002, 2007). They are important, rather, because of the insights they give us into the particular society in which they are invented and circulated. Jokes are thermometers, not thermostats.

An analysis of the implications of these functions of humour in society are beyond the scope of this study, however, it is important to take them into account as regards the social role of humour in diverse societies.

8.6.2 Linking Data with Theory

Sociological studies of the social functions of humour place greater emphasis on the societal impact of humour interactions and highlight the dualistic nature of humour regarding their identification and differentiation function. The *identification* function refers to 'the use of humour to create an internal perception that creates in-group cohesiveness and validates commonly held perception' (Lynch 2002:12). Analysis of the data confirms that humour can draw a line between accepted inclusive behaviour and undesirable exclusive behaviour, which can lead to identification among interlocutors. For example, the use of humour that targets the host society can foster identification with co-ethnics or other newcomers highlighting their shared perspective and cultural proximity by ridiculing others' behaviour. In contrast, using

humour that targets Spanish or other cultures with host society members can also encourage feelings of identification. Moreover, the data point out that using self-deprecating humour about Irish culture with Irish people can also lead to identification, provided the humour is shared, and using self-deprecating humour towards Spanish culture may also trigger identification among co-ethnics.

In any case, shared humour can highlight shared values and perspectives that foster cohesion among interlocutors. In addition, the findings point out that participants' predisposition to share humour with co-ethnics is correlated to their identification with Spanish culture, whereas participants' ambivalence regarding their use of humour with either co-ethnics or host society members had more ambivalent identifications with Spanish and Irish culture. These findings suggest that shared humour can encourage identification, bonding and group cohesiveness. Such humour highlights similarities between interlocutors, but it is questionable whether it needs to be based around shared values, since interlocutors may laugh at their own or others' behaviour, with or without categorizing it as *unacceptable*. Nevertheless, these reflections do not negate the use of humour as a form of *social control*, which some studies linked to identification. In fact, the findings corroborate the use of humour for establishing collective norms by laughing at deviates. In this context, participants' have inferred social norms from other peoples' humour which highlighted desirable and undesirable behaviour coming from themselves or others. However, their choice to adapt their behaviour varies among participants, depending on many factors such as their personality or the implications of such behaviour.

Regarding differentiation, analysis of the data confirms that humour can exclude individuals that do not share the humour of the in-group. For instance, certain uses of humour among co-ethnics or newcomers are clearly exclusive of host-society members, and can extend or express existing boundaries between their in-group as a minority in Irish society. In addition, some participants have felt attacked by slugging or sarcastic comments which triggered feelings of exclusion, particularly if those comments attacked them as a minority. Again, the context of the situation, the cultural awareness and humour competence of the participants is an essential factor for triggering feelings of exclusion. In other contexts, the data correlates failure or inability to communicate or understand humour to lack of integration. However, participants tend to blame their own abilities and circumstances rather than an intentionally excluding use of humour.

In short, these findings suggest that effective humour communication can trigger cohesiveness, whereas ineffective humour can trigger differentiation. Nevertheless the findings highlight the nuances that come into play to foster such triggers in a way that they impact the host society, fostering adaptation or integration or resistance in newcomers. For example, by targeting certain behaviours with humour, host-society members may trigger adaptive changes or foster resentment.

8.7 Psychological theories

8.7.1 Release Theories

8.7.1.1 Theoretical Overview

Release or Relief Theories attempt to describe humour along the lines of a tension-release model, so rather than defining humour, they discuss the essential structures and the physiological or psychological processes that produce laughter.

The relief theory introduced by Spencer (1860) takes a rather physiological approach to laughter treating it as a venting of excess nervous energy. Using incongruity as a starting point, Spencer (1860) determined that the contraction of facial muscles when amused with certain unexpected contrasts of ideas was the result of nervous energy built up within our bodies, which discharges itself on the muscular system (Spencer 1860). Spencer's basic idea that laughter serves to release pent up energy theory does not explain why a specific mental agitation arising from an incongruity results in laughter (Smuts 2009). In addition Spencer's theory fails to point out the origin of this pent-up energy and whether for example is created by humour or everyday stress.

Sigmund Freud, who also saw laughter as an outlet for psychic or nervous energy, developed a more specific description of the energy transfer mechanism involved in humour and laughter. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud (1905) explains that 'psychic energy' continuously builds up within the human body, has no further use and therefore has to be released. This release is spontaneous and expresses itself in laughter. Freud explains that this 'psychic energy' in our body is built as an aid for suppressing feelings in taboo areas, like sex or death. When this energy is released we experience laughter, not only because of the release of this energy, but also because these taboo thoughts are being entertained. In this context, Freud distinguishes three kinds of laughter situations: joking, the comic and humour. According to his theory, built-up psychic energy, suddenly no longer needed for concentration upon some object or idea, is what is discharged during the physical process of laughing. The laughter in 'joking' arises from the psychic energy no longer needed to repress hostile or sexual feelings and thoughts, while the laughter in

‘the comic’ comes from cognitive energy used to solve an intellectual challenge which is left over and can be released. The energy discharged in ‘humour’ is that of built-up emotions such as anger or pity that are suddenly relieved when an emotion provoking situation turns out to be something that can be treated non-seriously.

The main criticism to Relief theories is that they do not distinguish humorous from non-humorous laughter. Freud’s attempt to explain why we laugh is also an effort to explain why we find certain tendentious jokes especially funny. However, Freud’s discussions of the process of energy saving are widely regarded as problematic (Smuts 2009; Morreal 1987; Carroll 2001), and his notion of energy management is unclear. As Smuts (2009) points out:

we may have an idea of what it is like to express pent up energy, but we have no notion of what it would be to release energy that is used to repress a desire (Smuts 2009:3).

Rather than claiming that all laughter results from a release of excessive energy, less radical versions of the Realise Theory claim that humorous laughter often involves a release of tension or energy (Wilkins and Eisenbraun 2009), or that we experience a pleasant sensation when humour replaces negative feelings like pain or sadness (Mulder and Nijholt 2002). These theories are the base of those studies exploring the psychological and health benefits of laughter, which are discussed in further detail in section 8.8 of this chapter.

8.7.1.2 Linking Data with Theory

Release theories of humour are based on the idea that humour and laughter are used to release stress. Analysis of the data provides evidence of the function of humour as a tension and stress reliever in the context of cross-cultural adaptation as stressful as

it can be. In this context, the findings confirm Freud's (1963/1905) notion of the healing quality of humour, which allows built up tension to be released. As the findings point out, this tension may be triggered by the difficulties and challenges brought up by cross-cultural encounters and cross-cultural adaptation. However, the findings cannot confirm that participants repressed emotions are a direct source of their humour, as Freud's (1963/1905) theory would suggest. Although an analysis of the sources of built up tension which is released through humour is beyond this study, the findings suggest that newcomers' use of humour is not necessarily linked to their need to purge the tension of being newcomers. Nevertheless, the idea that humour and laughter are used to release stress is a key aspect of this study, and has been the basis of psychological and medical studies focusing on the psychological and physiological benefits of humour and laughter which are discussed next.

8.7.2 Humour as a Coping mechanism and Stress Reliever

8.7.2.1 Theoretical Overview

In a study of the physiological benefits of laughter, Wilkins and Eisenbraun (2009) draw on findings from empirical studies on laughter to demonstrate the occurrence of the physiological benefits of laughter and their implications for nurse practitioners. They highlight the use of humour as a coping mechanism, a stress reliever and a mood improver accounting for the health benefits triggered by these effects. Regarding the use of humour as a coping mechanism, they first draw on studies of oppressed people who have used humour as a survival tool throughout history, such as Native Americans and people imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps (Gutwirth 1993; Frank 1984). In addition, drawing from different psychological studies (Berg and Brockern 1995; Carlson and Peterson 1995) they highlight that humour can help

people deal with the disappointments and struggles of life by helping them to reframe situations.

Humorous responses in stressful conditions have been described by a number of authors in terms of a cognitive ability to distance oneself from negative experiences and to take on a broader perspective (May 1953; Frankl 1969; O'Connell 1976; Moody 1978; Christie 1994). Wilkins and Eisenbraun (2009) concur with Martin (2007) and Martin and Lefcourt (1983,1986) that by finding humour in stressful or potentially threatening situations, people can replace negative with positive affect, thereby giving them an increased ability to cope with negative states of affairs, whereas humour based on incongruities, or things that appear inappropriate for their context, is particularly well suited to reappraising negative situations from different, less threatening perspectives.

Regarding the stress- reducing effects of humour Wilkins and Eisenbraun (2009) suggest that research on humour's effectiveness in reframing stressors supports anecdotal accounts of the stress-reducing effects of humour. This type of research has found that having a sense of humour is associated with lower perceptions of stress and higher levels of optimism, hope, and happiness. Wilkins and Eisenbraun (2009) point out these aspects of humour, such as turning negatives into positives, being optimistic, and having hope in life, are all effective coping strategies. In addition Wilkins and Eisenbraun (2009) point at research which shows that believing in the benefits of laughter alone is sufficient for the body to experience physiological benefits, such as decreased pain and research that shows that laughter is correlated to elevated mood results.

Authors such as Sultanoff (2002) have cautioned against scientific speculation in the identification of laughter with health and well-being. However, Sultanoff (2002) and Wilkins and Eisenbraun (2009) point at empirical evidence supporting the health benefits of laughter's as well as the fact that humour can help reduce anxiety states and mood disturbances. Overall, there seems to be enough evidence suggesting that humour has positive effects on physiological and psychological health. However, as the literature suggests, the role of humour is intricate and still unclear and calls for the need for further studies. Nevertheless, existing studies highlight the relevance of the study of humour, and its impact in psychological wellbeing which has direct implications for the current study since cross-cultural adaptation is a psychological process which can involve stress.

8.7.2.2 Linking Data with Theory

Wilkins (2009) points out that humour can be used to deal with disappointment or struggles in life. By finding humour in stressful or potentially threatening situations people replace negative with positive affect, which increases their ability to cope. In this context, Wilkins (2009) highlights the use of humour as a survival tool, which can help people to adjust to stressful situations by shaping their perspective and reframing stressful situation. As illustrated in the data analysis chapters, it is clear that cross-cultural adaptation implies challenges and changes that can bring about stress (Kim 2001). In addition, cross-cultural differences can trigger incongruities that can elicit humour. However, cross-cultural differences, and the incongruities triggered by them can also be the source of stress or anxiety. The findings suggest that participants' ability to see their problems with a humorous perspective increases their ability to cope with them. The role of humour in order to face difficulties has been explicitly acknowledged by some participants, who have pointed at the adaptive

value of the ability to laugh at oneself in difficult situations or of tackling one's misfortunes, mistakes and shortcomings through self-deprecating humour. In addition, the coping value of humour is well hinted at by all participants' tendency to use humour and laugh about difficult aspects of their cross-cultural adaptation during their interviews, including the weather, insecurities or uncertainties about the future, financial struggles, disliked aspects about Irish culture, and their own inability to communicate.

Such behaviour highlights the relevance of humour in cross-cultural adaptation and can be linked to psychologists' idea that by laughing at things that frighten us we become less threatened, which points at humour as an effective coping strategy which can turn negative experiences into positive ones by turning them into a source of humour. In this context, the findings link participants' use of humour with their perception of stress, their mood and their attitude towards cross-cultural adaptation. However, it seems relevant to question whether all types of humour benefit these three aspects of stress, mood and attitude. For example, bitter or sarcastic humour may realise some tension but it may not trigger positive emotions that encourage a positive attitude towards cross-cultural adaptation. This reflection directs attention to the distinction between the psychological effects of wit, mirth and laughter (discussed in the previous section) in the context of cross-cultural adaptation. However, this complex analysis is beyond the scope of this study. In addition, psychological studies have explained the notion of nervous laughter as a physical reaction to stress, tension, confusion and anxiety (Ramachandran 1998; Milgram 1973; Provine 1996; 2001) which can be viewed as a defence mechanism. Although this type of laughter is not considered true laughter, the findings confirm that it can

easily be mistaken as such, so leading to serious misunderstandings in intercultural communication.

To end this section, it is worth mentioning that psychological studies of humour have focused on the positive psychological and physiological effects of humour and laughter, which include mood and health improvement, which would clearly have a positive impact in newcomers' adaptation. However, the present study also calls attention to the negative psychological effects that can be triggered by humour miscommunication, which can lead to frustration and feelings of inadequacy, or disparaging humour, when perceived as verbal abuse, which, according to the findings can trigger feelings of rejection or frustration towards unfair treatment.

8.7.3 The Study of Sense of humour

8.7.3.1 Theoretical Overview

8.7.3.1.1 Individual and Universal Traits of Humour

Psychological theories tend to focus on the concept of sense of humour. Martin (1998:17) refers to a sense of humour as 'a personality trait or individual difference variable (or, more likely, a family of related traits or variables)' which includes the ability to appreciate, create and comprehend humour. Sultanoff (2002) offers an interesting definition of humour based on the distinction between individual and universal traits of humour. While each individual has a distinct sense of humour and may be triggered by events that are different from those that trigger other people, there are 'universal categories of "stimuli" that trigger humorous reactions in all human beings' (Sultanoff 2002:3)

Steven Sultanoff (2002), who has studied humour from a psychotherapeutic perspective, lists the following universal characteristics of humour: incongruity, absurdity, ridiculousness, expected replaced with unexpected, surprise, non-threatening startle, getting it, and finally, chaos remembered in tranquillity. Sultanoff (2002) points out some relevant facts for the study of humour in the context of the current study. Firstly, he says that for some individuals, it is not the incongruity, the surprise, or being startled that is funny, but it is simply the “getting it.” Sometimes it is the cognitive appreciation, or the joy of “solving” the twist in the situation that is experienced as humorous. This idea is particularly relevant to the process of adaptation as new-comers might experience pleasure because they are at the cognitive level where they can take pride in the fact that they were able to figure out a joke and this may contribute to their amusement.

Secondly, while a stimulus that presents incongruity, surprise, or startling may be perceived as humorous, humour may well be emotional chaos remembered in tranquillity (Sultanoff 2002). Humour may be experienced when the chaos of the past is viewed at a peaceful moment in the future. This universal trait of humour as emotional chaos remembered in tranquillity may be relevant in the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Even though an experience might have been stressful at the time it can be appreciated as funny later and hence contribute to make our cross-cultural adaptation process an enjoyable one. According to Sultanoff (2002), even though one’s ‘sense of humour’ is highly individualized, it is based on one’s awareness and perception of a stimulus that is presented in the context of one or more of the existing universal traits of humour. Therefore, the presence of one or more of the universal characteristics of humour makes events more likely to be perceived as

funny by the observer. The ability to perceive these characteristics would define one's sense of humour.

8.7.3.1.2 Individual differences and Humour

Leventhal and Safer (1977) review three classes of personality theories relevant to the study of individual differences and humour: social-psychological theories which emphasise interpersonal relationships in institutional frameworks, cognitive theories which emphasise the functioning of the structure which determine individuals' understanding and affective theories which emphasize the contribution of affect and emotion to humour.

Social- psychological theories deal with the impact of culture in the content, context and form of humour. When members of a cultural subgroup tell jokes the content is relevant to group experience. However, themes alone are insufficient to deal with individual and group differences. Culture provides established humorous forms for both the production and expression of humour. Socio-cultural factors provide significant contextual cues signifying that specific occasions are appropriate for humour and laughter.

Cognitive theory suggests a variety of factors which can alter humour response such as mental age. However, the fact that one understands a joke does not imply that the joke will elicit humour. In this context, there are three groups of factors which are important for processing 'funny material' : Readiness, which can be established by factors like situational context , the process of incongruities, which involves tolerance for the incongruity, and contextual factors indicating safety and humorousness of the incongruous experience, such as mood or emotional tension.

Finally, emotional theory deals with the responses to humour such as body arousal and humour as a unique quality of feeling.

Leventhal and Safer's (1977) review of psychological studies linked to humour appreciation helps understand the intricacy involved in humour communication. It points at the interrelation between the different psychological approaches to the study of humour and emphasises the relevance of acknowledging cultural issues in this research area, particularly regarding the study of individual differences and humour appreciation.

8.7.3.2 Linking Data with Theory

The distinction between universal and individual traits of humour sheds light on the notion of humour perception from a psychological perspective. Firstly, Sultanoff's (2002) classification of universal humour reveals the potential for humour in cross-cultural encounters beyond the notion of incongruity. In this context, the findings suggest that the nature of cross-cultural encounters may foster newcomers and host-society members perception of the universal traits of humour including incongruity, absurdity, ridiculousness, the unexpected future, pleasant surprises, being startled (if the stimulus is quickly perceives as non-threatening), 'getting it' and emotional chaos remembered in tranquillity. Although the findings confirm the likelihood of all these traits in cross-cultural encounters, particularly in the initial phases, it is worth looking in detail at the last two:

Firstly, '*getting it*' highlights the importance of the cognitive appreciation and the joy that accompanies it. In this context newcomers humour may be triggered from

'getting' a joke that required linguistic or cultural knowledge that has been recently acquired. Some participants acknowledge that their humour appreciation becomes '*simpler*', whereas others point at the satisfaction triggered by 'getting' humour in intercultural interactions. Secondly, *emotional chaos remembered in tranquillity* highlights the humorous nature of 'viewing chaos from the past at a peaceful moment in the future' (Sultanoff 2002:5), which emphasises the usefulness of humour as a strategy to cope with difficulties triggered by cross-cultural encounters.

According to Sultanoff (2002), individual sense of humour is characterised by a unique perception and ability to appreciate the universal traits of humour. Psychological studies point at the cognitive, emotional and motivational factors that affect such ability. The findings confirm the relevance of these factors in order to appreciate and share humour. For example, interlocutors' knowledge of the word will affect their cognition of humour; their emotional attachment to the content of humour will affect their perception and reaction, and their need to be liked or accepted may affect their motivation. In addition, cognitive theories of personality and humour acknowledge the importance of contextual factors, which can be determined by given socio-cultural contexts. In the context of intercultural interactions, the findings highlight the influence of cultural differences that can predispose interlocutors towards a specific type of humour such as nonsense or witticisms. Overall, cognitive theories of humour portray the complexity of individual humour appreciation, confirming the necessity of individual affinities as an essential factor for effective humour communication in intercultural interactions.

8.8 Conclusion

This chapter has offered a review of those humour studies which are relevant to the research questions of the study and which discussed under the light of the study's findings can contribute to a better understanding of the role of humour in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation from a variety of disciplinary perspectives which are accounted for in the various sections of this chapter.

Each of these sections has critically discussed those specific aspects of humour which have been explored by these theories, pointing out their strengths and contribution to humour studies. However, this discussion has also accounted for a number of inconsistencies and limitations in some of these theories. Both strengths and limitations have been discussed in further detail in relation to the data analysis findings. In these terms, this chapter has located and analysed the findings in relation to existing humour theories, as outlined in table 8 and explored significant communicative, social and psychological aspects of humour communication in the context of intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation.

Table 8 *Findings in relation to humour studies*

The first column contains those aspects of the theories confirmed or highlighted by the findings. The second calls attention to findings that go beyond the scope of the theory or question certain aspects of it.

1. Superiority (and Inferiority) Theories	
Confirm theories by	Call attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirming that humour that targets others can be linked to <i>superiority and inferiority</i> • Suggesting that inability to perceive humour can trigger feelings of <i>inferiority</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The non essential nature of superiority as a condition for humour • The questionability of the negative impact of all humour that targets others • The possible perception of <i>the joker</i> as inferior

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of cultural differences and awareness in humour appreciation and emotions triggered by it. • The flaws of tagging specific types of humour in terms of superiority/inferiority
Inferiority Theory	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighting the benefits of using self-deprecating humour • Confirming the positive perception that can be projected by self-deprecating humour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of cultural differences and awareness in humour appreciation and the perception of <i>the joker</i>
2. Incongruity Theories	
Confirm theory by	Call attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirming that irrational, incoherent and inappropriate behaviour can lead to humour • Highlighting the perceiver's need to take pleasure in a cognitive shift for humour to occur. • Considering humour as a way to deal and understand the environment and its ambiguity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The high potential for cross-cultural encounters to trigger humorous incongruities • The socio-cultural aspects of the interpretation incongruities • The conditions for incongruities to turn out humorous • The impact of disposition in humour appreciation. • The impact of cross-cultural adaptation in humour perception • The use humour based on culture-related incongruities as a descriptor of humour competence and intercultural competence

3. Translation Theories	
Confirm theories by	Call attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighting the <i>untranslatability</i> of linguistic and cultural humour • Emphasising socio-cultural issues in humour communication. • Confirming the entertaining function of humour as a challenge for humour translation. • Confirming the value of <i>dynamic translatability</i> for effective humour communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcomers' needs to translate and adapt humour • Referentially based humour as a major source of frustration and failed attempts to communicate humour • The effect of translation strategies in intercultural interactions • <i>Translation competence</i> as an element of humour competence and intercultural competence
4. Linguistic Theories	
Theories on jokes, humour appreciation and humour competence (Raskin, Attardo and Veacht)	
Confirm theories by	Call attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirming the existence of <i>linguistic scripts, general knowledge scripts, restricted knowledge scripts</i> and <i>individual scripts</i> that activate humour appreciation • Confirming the interaction of <i>linguistic, socio-cultural and poetic competences</i> in humour competence • Highlighting the importance of language competence and cultural awareness in participants' humour competence • Linking socio-cultural knowledge to culturally appropriate use of humour • Highlighting the impact of competences affinities for effective humour communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants' realisation of lack of linguistic, cultural or poetic competences as a source of frustration and stress • Lack of linguistic competence as a face saving strategy • Factors which are specific to non-native speakers or newcomers. • The relevance of non-verbal humour in humour competence

Vega's theory of humour competence	
Confirm theories by	Call attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The significance of strategic competence in participants' use of humour • The relevance of '<i>capacity</i>' (the ability to use language creatively) in humour communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of individual sense of humour in humour competence and intercultural interactions. • The impact of identification with language and culture in humour appreciation and production
Attardo's taxonomy of communicative functions of humour	
Confirm theories by	Call attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corroborating the significance of humour as social play • Underscoring the relevance of the distinction between <i>non bona fide</i> and <i>bona fide</i> information • Illustrating inclusive and exclusive functions of humour • Pointing out the implications of shared or failed humour in interlocutors' perceptions of each other. • Revealing the relevance of all social functions of humour in intercultural interactions • Highlighting the relevance of <i>repair</i> and <i>decommitment</i> and the use of humour as a mediation tool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of cultural differences and humour competence in humour communication • The application of humour functions in intercultural communication • Participants' deficit of playful humour and its impact in cross-cultural adaptation • The subjectivity and limitations of interlocutors' interpretations of <i>non bona fide communication</i> • The nature of humour as a double edge sword and the negative effects of humour as <i>social play</i>
Norrick's theory of interdiscourse strategies	
Confirm theories by	Call attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrating the use of linguistic and cultural differences for humour purposes in intercultural interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of the theory strategies in interactions with host society members, co-ethnics and other newcomers

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirming the need to trespass cultural and linguistic boundaries for effective humour communication • Confirming participants' use of the theory's strategies in intercultural communication • Pointing at the theory strategies as an integral part of participants' humour competence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants' difficulty to use <i>linguistic contrast</i> purposely due to language limitations • The relevance of code switching in interactions with co-ethnics • Additional effects of <i>accommodation</i> in intercultural communication • The relation between participants' use of strategies and cross-cultural adaptation
5. Social Theories	
Confirm theory by	Call attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirming the inclusive and exclusive functions of humour • Illustrating <i>identification</i> in diverse societies. • Illustrating the cohesive function of humour • Corroborating the use of humour for establishing collective norms • Concluding that humour can exclude individuals from the in-group • Confirming that humour can extend or express boundaries between in-group and out-group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patterns of humour use as descriptors of cultural identity • Humour as a sign of respect between different ethnic groups. • The impact of <i>corrective</i> humour on adaptive changes • The relationship between humour competence and integration. • The impact of inclusive and exclusive humour in the host society
6. Psychological theories	
Psychological theories: Freud's release theory	
Confirm theory by	Call attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pointing out the function of humour as a tension and stress reliever in the context of cross-cultural adaptation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sources of built up tension which are released through humour

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The questionability of repressed emotions as a source of humour
Psychological theories: the beneficial effects of humour	
Confirm theory by	Call attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrating the use of humour as a coping strategy • Endorsing the adaptive value of self deprecation • Linking humour with stress, mood and positivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The suitability of humour as a coping strategy in cross-cultural adaptation • The link between type of humour and psychological effects • The relevance of negative aspects of humour communication: frustration and victimization.
Psychological theories on nervous laughter	
Confirm theory by	Call attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subscribing to the notion of nervous laughter as a physical reaction to stress, tension, confusion and anxiety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consequences of nervous laughter in intercultural interactions
Psychological theories: Individual humour perception	
Confirm theory by	Call attention to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • revealing the potential for humour in cross-cultural encounters beyond the notion of incongruity • Confirm the likelihood of universal traits in cross-cultural encounters • Pointing at the cognitive, emotional and motivational factors that affect humour appreciation. • Highlighting the psychological effects of cognitive appreciation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the psychological effects of cognitive appreciation in intercultural interactions • the influence of cultural differences in humour appreciation • The relevance of humour in cross-cultural contexts • The relevance of individual affinities in humour communication

This discussion has highlighted the following:

- Superiority and inferiority theories have highlighted the feelings of inferiority and superiority attached to certain humour styles and how they can affect newcomers and their interlocutors.
- Incongruity Theories have emphasised an essential condition of humour, namely the perception of an incongruity, which needs to be taken into account in any analysis of humour appreciation. In these terms, incongruity theories have pointed out the potential for humour in cross-cultural encounters and the impact of cross-cultural adaptation in participants' perception and production of such incongruities.
- Translation theories have explained the universal, cultural and linguistic nature of humour; and its *translability* from one language or culture to another. Furthermore, translation theories have brought light to participants' needs, difficulties and attitudes towards humour translation, as well as the relevance of the sociolinguistic and cultural aspects involved in such process.
- Linguistic theories have dealt with the concept of humour competence, its linguistic, socio-cultural and individual components and its implications in second language learning and interdiscourse communication, which has pointed out the importance of universal knowledge, cultural knowledge, language competence, socio-cultural and individual capacities in participants' developments of a humour competence. In addition, a discussion of the communicative functions of humour has depicted humour as a powerful communicative tool in intercultural interactions.

- An examination of sociological studies of humour has observed the plausible impact of the cohesive and aggressive functions of humour in society pointing out the social impact of humour communication in the development of newcomers' social networks and in the host society.
- Finally, a review of psychological studies has tackled the concept of sense of humour, the relevance of individual differences in humour appreciation and the functions of humour in relation to physiological and psychological health pointing out the effects of such factors in cross-cultural adaptation.

Overall, the combination of these different perspectives has examined the role of humour in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation, pointing out its relevance in the sociological, psychological and functional aspects involved in such processes and the contribution of this qualitative study. Such contribution contributes to a better understanding of such aspects by exploring Humour Theories which contextualise the study and its findings within this discipline. The next chapter concludes this study by pointing out the relevance of the study's findings and exploring their specific contributions to existing literature from different disciplines including both Intercultural and Humour studies.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

A conclusion is the place where you got tired of thinking

Martin Henry Fisher (quoted in Smith 1945:309)

9.1 Introduction

This final chapter is a reflection of the overall study in terms of its contents, the process of research, and its context within existing studies. It starts by outlining the rationale of the study which is followed by a review of its Grounded Theory model and the key findings associated to it. It then discusses its contribution to existing knowledge and it evaluates the study in terms of Grounded Theory criteria. This is followed by some recommendations for future research and some final remarks that draw an end to the study.

9.2 The rationale of the study

This study has explored the role of humour in intercultural interactions in terms of its impact on cross-cultural adaptation by carrying out qualitative research based on the experiences of 21 Spanish participants who were living in Ireland at the time the interviews took place. Accordingly, the study does not aim to be representative but wishes to address particular issues that are relevant to this group of participants regarding the role of humour in their individual processes of cross-cultural adaptation. Thus, the research takes into account the individual nature of the process of cross-cultural adaptation and examines the role of humour within these parameters, rather than attempting to generalise its findings. The focus of the study has been on migrants' experiences and their own interpretations of those experiences. This focus, consistent with the nature of the research questions, was

further encouraged by the quality of existing qualitative studies on cross-cultural adaptation, which have focused on migrants' experiences in order to obtain a better understanding of the process of cross-cultural adaptation (Sheridan 2005, Storch 2008, Zhu 2013). In addition, lack of this type of research in humour studies, which have mainly focused on the analysis of intercultural interactions (Bell 2006, Miczo and Welter 2006, Cheng 2003) rather than on its impact in cross-cultural adaptation, contributed to the decision of pursuing a focus on participants' experiences as migrants living in Ireland. Hence, the 21 participants were interviewed to collect rich data that was analysed using a Grounded Theory framework in order to work inductively towards the development of a theory explaining the role of humour in their adaptation processes. The developed theory and its contribution to knowledge are explained in further detail in the following sections.

9.3 Review of the study and key findings

The unique focus of each section of the study, its contents and contribution to the rest of the study can be outlined as follows:

9.3.1 Contextualisation

Firstly, the introductory chapter presented the study, its aims and research questions, and contextualised the study within existing literature in the field of Humour and Intercultural Studies. This discussion exposed the scarcity of existing intercultural studies examining the role of humour in intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation, the innovative nature of the present study and the significance of its objectives. Finally, the chapter accounted for the choice of Grounded Theory as an appropriate methodology to the study due to its inductive nature and its impact in the overall structure of study.

Secondly, the Methodology chapter included a thorough discussion of the methodological approach taken. This included an examination of Grounded Theory methodology which was explored in further detail in regard to its application to the present research. Such examination emphasised the non-linear, thorough and subjective nature of this process, revealing the methodological framework that contextualises the data analysis chapters which culminate in the theoretical model outlined in the next section.

9.3.2 Data Analysis and The Grounded Theory model

Participants' use of humour in intercultural interactions and its consequences in their cross-cultural adaptation are examined throughout the data analysis chapters and finally presented in a theoretical model of the processes involved in humour communication in the context of intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation.

9.3.2.1 Data Analysis and Research Findings

Firstly, the findings of the research presented in the data analysis chapters are grounded in the raw data by using categories and concepts emerging from data analysis. For example, Chapter 3 focused on participants' perception of Spanish and Irish humour, their proximity and its impact in participants' cross-cultural adaptation, pointing at two areas which expose a higher level of distance, namely humour targets and humour intricacy, and paying special attention to the cultural norms and values underneath these differences and their implications in participants' interactions and adaptation. Chapter 4 dealt with participants' perception of Spanish and Irish culture and their proximity distinguishing three areas of analysis: the environment, attitudes and behaviours and values. It also made connections between

such perception and humour issues and referred to the value of humour to cope with cultural distance and difficulties triggered by such distance. Chapter 5 focused on participants' perception of cross-cultural differences in interactions between Spanish and Irish people including differences in communication style and content which can affect the role of humour in daily interactions. In addition, awareness of these differences, context and personality factors can have an impact in both intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation.

9.3.2.2 The Theoretical Model

Secondly, the theoretical model presented in chapter 6 brings the previous findings together revealing the essential concepts involved in humour communication in intercultural interactions and their development throughout cross-cultural adaptation. Hence, the model points to *language competence, cultural awareness and proximity*, and *individual affinities and compatibility* as the major factors influencing the quality of humour communication in intercultural interactions.

In addition, the model identifies the development of *humour competence*, which is defined as the ability to understand and communicate humour in intercultural interactions, as an integrative element of cross-cultural adaptation. The development of humour competence is triggered by the major factors involved in humour communication, as well as *the communicative, social and psychological effects* linked to it. These effects make humour a powerful intercultural tool but also a double edged sword that can lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings and frustration. In this context, humour competence becomes a crucial factor of humour

communication, which influences and is influenced by the other major factors as part of a dynamic process.

Overall, the theoretical model grounded on data analysis points at the development of humour competence as both an essential attribute for effective intercultural communication and descriptor of cross-cultural adaptation. These pronouncements are the essence of the contribution to knowledge of the present study, which are pinpointed and discussed in further detail in the next sections of this chapter.

9.3.3 Literature review and discussion

9.3.3.1 Intercultural Theories

Chapter 7 revisited the research questions with reference to the research findings presented in the data analysis chapters in relation to intercultural theories. This engagement offered valuable insights to both the research findings and the discussed theories because:

- Firstly, Intercultural Communication Theories highlighted the role of humour, its relevance in intercultural interactions and its impact in cross-cultural adaptation. For example an examination of Burgoon's (1976,1995,2005) Expectancy Violation Theory highlighted the relevance of expectations in humour communication, pointing at the role of humour as a stress reliever in response to violations and suggested a tendency to evolve towards culturally appropriate expectations which move away from stereotyped assumptions and facilitate humour communication. Face Negotiation Theory (Ting Toomey1988,1994,2005) explained the potential of humour communication as trigger for face-loss, the use of humour as a face saving strategy, and the relevance of situational, individual and cultural

differences in face concerns and *facework* strategies in humour communication and cross-cultural adaptation. Communication Accommodation Theory (Gallois et al 1995, 2005) pointed at participants and host society members' tendencies to accommodate their communication patterns and the effect of accommodation and non-accommodation strategies in humour communication and cross-cultural adaptation.

- Secondly, cross-cultural adaptation theories helped contextualize the role of humour communication within the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Firstly, Kim's Integrative Theory (2001) pointed at participants' development of humour competence as an integral part of the process of cross-cultural adaptation, whereas the ABC model of culture contact confirmed the relevance of humour in the process of adaptation as a source of stress, an strategy to cope with it and an essential part of intercultural competence.
- Finally, the discussion pointed at gaps and limitations of both the discussed theories and the study findings. These included the impact of acculturation and the logic of its endpoint as assimilation in the context of the development of a 'bicultural competence'.

9.3.3.2 Humour Theories

Chapter 8 contributed to further insights of the research findings by examining them under the light of humour theories, paying special attention to the communicative, social and psychological aspects of humour communication in the context of intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation.

- Superiority and inferiority theories highlighted the feelings of inferiority that can be linked to humour styles and how they can affect newcomers and their interlocutors.
- Incongruity theories pointed out the potential for humour in cross-cultural encounters and the impact in participants' perception and production of such incongruities in cross-cultural adaptation
- Translation theories explored participants' needs, difficulties and attitudes towards humour translation, as well as the relevance of the sociolinguistic and cultural aspects involved in such process.
- Linguistic theories illustrated the communicative and social functions of humour which make it a powerful intercultural tool and pointed out the importance of universal ,cultural knowledge, language competence, and individual capacities in humour competence;
- Sociological theories suggested the social impact of humour communication in the development of newcomers' social networks.
- And psychological theories highlighted the psychological factors of humour appreciation as a coping strategy and a stress reliever, and its effects in cross-cultural adaptation.

Overall, a discussion of the findings under the light of intercultural and humour theories , not only helped contextualised the study within this complex area of research but contributed to further understanding of the findings in order to answer the research questions. In these terms the key findings of the study can be summarized as follows.

9.4 Summary of key findings

- Firstly, the study points at the factors that influence the quality of humour communication in intercultural interactions, which can be linked to language issues, cultural differences and individual characteristics. This analysis reveals the intricate nature of such factors and how they are interlinked in each individual's unique experience of cross-cultural adaptation.
- Secondly, the study examines the communicative, psychological and social effects of humour communication and connects them to the affective, behavioural and cognitive elements of cross-cultural adaptation. This analysis reveals the significant presence of humour throughout the process of cross-cultural adaptation and its influence as a double edged sword in such process.
- Finally, the study points at the development of humour competence as an essential part of intercultural competence. By placing the concept of humour competence in the context of intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation, the study accounts for factors outside the linguistic issues which concern linguistic studies. Such examination contributes to a better understanding of the concept of humour competence in intercultural settings and shows its development as an organic part of cross-cultural adaptation as a dynamic process.

Overall, the study showcases the role of humour as a vital element of intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation. Its contribution to existing literature is explained in further detail in the following section.

9.5 Contribution to knowledge

Humour is an essential part of everyday interactions which has multiple communicative, social and psychological facets. Accordingly, references to humour are not uncommon within existing literature dealing with intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation. Such references link humour communication to the quality of intercultural interactions by considering its quality as a trigger for miscommunication and misunderstandings that can lead to awkward situations or face-loss, and as a communication strategy that can improve intercultural communication (Ting-Toomey 2005). Despite extended references to the relevance of humour in such contexts, its study has received little attention from academic research in the field of intercultural studies. Studies of humour in intercultural communication are mainly concerned with interactions between native and non-native speakers with a focus on second language (L2) acquisition, which is nevertheless strongly connected to the present study. On the one hand migrants, such as the participants of this study, are often non-native speakers; on the other hand in many contexts second language learners are or will be migrants.

Scholars examining humour in L2 learning have emphasised the lack of scholarship regarding L2 humour pedagogy (Bell 2005; Wulf 2010; Johnson 1990; Vega 1992), an area of research which has received increased attention since Vega's (1992) study introduced the notion of humour competence in L2 as an essential component of L2 learners' communicative competence, and highlighted the need for a better understanding of this concept. The present study contributes to such understanding from an intercultural perspective which views humour competence as the ability to understand and communicate humour in intercultural interactions and reveals

humour competence as an essential element of intercultural competence. Such analysis provides insight to the linguistic, cultural and individual components of humour competence and the impact of intercultural interactions in its development pinpointing variables which may influence this development, such as newcomers' attachment to their mother tongue in terms of expressing humour; their perception of their culture of origin and target culture in terms of cultural distance; or the nature and context of their interpersonal interactions.

In addition, the findings contribute to a better understanding of humour as an intercultural and pedagogical tool highlighting its nature as a double edged sword in terms of its communicative, social and psychological effects which are strongly connected to individual and cultural differences and can lead humour to facilitate or disrupt communication, promote bonding or feelings of exclusion, or lead to either frustration or satisfaction.

Moreover, within the area of L2 research, empirical studies have examined intercultural interactions between native and non-native speakers in order to study the communicative functions of humour such as those linked to the use of affiliative and aggressive humour. In this context, Habib (2008) concludes that the use of humour in cross-cultural conversations contributes to cultural learning and that relational identities are displayed and asserted through humour, whereas both Bell (2008) and Habib (2008) highlight the collaborative nature of humour communication and their participants' tendencies to 'accommodate'. Both authors call for the need for further empirical studies of the use of humour in intercultural contexts, which is accounted for in the present study.

Bell (2007) calls special attention to the role of first language and culture as a limitation to her study, calling for the need of further research regarding the impact of perceived differences attached to the first language and culture in intercultural interactions. In this context, the present study has contributed to a better understanding of the communicative functions of humour by taking into account such differences in participants' interactions. For example, the study points out the relevance of cross-cultural differences regarding tendencies commonly used in the humorous discourses attached to Spanish and Irish culture and the appropriateness of certain subject matters or contexts for humour use. In addition, the study takes into account the social and psychological effects triggered by humour communication and miscommunication. For instance, it highlights the significance of participants' experience of accommodation as a communication strategy regarding humour use, pointing out how such experience can have a positive impact in intercultural communication but can also signal the 'reduced personality' (Bell 2006) involved in such collaborative use of humour by which non-native speakers are positioned as limited conversational participants. Based on the participants' experiences the present study picks up on that notion and observes its negative impact in cross-cultural adaptation.

In addition, whereas studies of second language learning point at humour competence as an indicator of fluency, the present study looks at it as an indicator of intercultural competence and adjustment. Indeed, other studies on cross-cultural adaptation have pointed at humour as a predictor or indicator of adjustment and as a coping mechanism from a quantitative perspective (Tuna 2003; Savicky 2004), whereas Pitts (2009) findings emphasise the role of humour as response to the stress

brought on by intercultural contact from a qualitative perspective that points at the social and psychological effects of humour. The qualitative nature of the present study brings insight to such findings by placing intercultural communication at the heart of cross-cultural adaptation and exploring the reasons for such indications by, for example, examining the alienation and frustration experienced by newcomers when humour passes them by or the satisfaction and closeness triggered by effective humour communication as well as the release of tension linked to it.

In reference to existing models of cross-cultural adaptation the study reveals humour to be an essential component of such processes of transformation in terms of two influential models. This analysis highlights the significance of arguments and concepts proposed by these theories such as the dynamic nature of cross-cultural adaptation (Kim 2001), and the need to account for social, individual and psychological perspectives regarding the study of cross-cultural contact (Ward et al. 2001). This study also challenges other arguments by, for example, calling attention to the blurred line between intra and intercultural contact or the clear-cut distinction between sojourners and migrants (Kim 2001; Ward et al 2001). In these terms, by examining a very specific aspect of cross-cultural adaptation, the study contributes to a better understanding of such process.

Likewise, regarding theories of intercultural communication, the study confirms and brings insight to certain components of Expectancy Violation Theory (Burgoon 1978; 2005), Communication Accommodation Theory (Gallois 1995) and Face Negotiation Theory (Ting Toomey 1988) but calls attention to several factors such as

the nature of humour as an expectancy violation or the questionability of individualistic and collectivistic values in face negotiation.

Regarding contribution to humour studies, the study confirms the worthiness of this line of research by pointing out the different insights that the study of humour in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation can bring to the study of humour from communicative, social and psychological perspective. In this regard, the study contributes to cross-cultural humour research which has received attention from translation and social studies which have mainly focused on the study of jokes or humour in literature and cinema (Davies 1990; 1998; 2010; Kuipers 2006; Valero 2011) as well as quantitative psychological quantitative studies which have examined humour styles and appreciation (Carbelo-Baquero et al. 2006; Ruch et al.1996). In this context the study examines participants' perception of cross-cultural differences in humour tendencies as well as differences regarding the ability to laugh at oneself which is closely linked to the study of *gelotophobia* or the fear of being laughed at (Proyer et al.2009) which has received extensive attention in quantitative psychological humour studies.

As such, the study has confirmed the importance of the research of humour with an intercultural perspective and identified specific areas which warrant further research, and are discussed in more detail the next section.

9.6 Evaluation of the study

Charmaz (2006) whose version of Grounded Theory was adopted in the study provides four criteria for evaluating Grounded Theory studies: credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness.

Firstly, ‘Credibility’ is linked to intimate familiarity with the setting or topic, support of claims by the data, systematic comparisons between observations and categories, and logical links between data, arguments and analysis. In this context, the depth of the research findings reveals an intimate familiarity with the phenomenon being explored. This awareness is reflected in the in-depth examination of participants’ experiences and what they mean to them, which provides a solid base for the comparative analysis that has led to a theoretical model. In these terms, the data analysis chapters provide support for analytic and conceptual claims by using codes and participants’ comments to illustrate the arguments built upon them through the systematic comparison between data and categories which led to the emergence of the new categories and concepts. This logical argumentation is also supported by visual models that illustrate the relationships between emerging categories and concepts. In addition, the information in the appendices provides further transparency to the research process regarding both data collection and data analysis methods.

Secondly ‘Originality’ is linked to ‘freshness’ of categories, new insights, social and theoretical significance and challenges, or refinement of current ideas and concepts. In this context, this is one of the first empirical studies focused on the role of humour in cross-cultural adaptation from an intercultural perspective, as well as the first to explore the cross-cultural adaptation process of Spanish migrants living in Ireland. This innovative line of research provides new insights for both humour and intercultural studies. By examining humour as a very specific aspect of cross-cultural adaptation, the study contributes to better understanding of the processes involved in that relationship including intercultural communication, cross-cultural

adaptation and humour communication. Moreover, the theoretical significance of the study is revealed in the 'fresh' nature of categories and concepts such as 'language competence', 'humour competence' or 'humour compatibility' which reflect their inductive development and contribute, challenge or validate existing theoretical claims in reference to those concepts. Regarding its social significance, the study examines the role of humour as an essential element of intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation, which involves social processes; it points out the influence of societal and individual factors in intercultural interactions and relationships between people of different cultural backgrounds in a diverse society.

Thirdly, 'resonance' refers to portrayal of the studied experience, accessibility of the findings to participants and people who share their circumstances in terms of their understanding and insights provided about their lives and worlds. In this regard, the categories presented and examined throughout the study provide an understanding of the role of humour in participants' cross-cultural adaptation, which in turn offers insight to their individual perspectives and experiences by examining a very specific aspect of their lives. In addition, the data analysis findings are presented in an accessible way to participants. In addition, the theoretical model presented in chapter 6 was explained and discussed with a participant of this study who understood the model straight-away, related to it and found it insightful regarding her own experience and the role of humour within that experience, particularly as I answered the questions triggered by the presentation of the model, which were linked to different arguments made in the study. In addition, at the time of the interviews most participants expressed their interest in the research topic and the thought provoking nature of the questionnaire. For some participants humour communication was an

issue that they had often taken into consideration, whereas for others it was a revealing topic which had not reflected much upon.

Finally, 'usefulness' is related to the application to everyday settings, the examination of generic processes, insights for further research and contribution to knowledge. In these terms, the study provides insight to the study of intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation by examining the different factors which are at play when communicating humour in intercultural interactions: a very practical aspect of intercultural training (Lewis 1996,2005). On these grounds the study also contributes to existing knowledge and points out relevant issues which are worthy of further research. Although these last two arguments are discussed in detail in the previous and next section of this chapter, the application of Charmaz (2006) criteria for evaluating Grounded Theory research to the present study suggests that the innovative, meaningful and useful findings of the present study are supported by a systematic and thorough methodology which provides them with credibility.

9.7 Recommendations for further research

Future research can make a more detailed examination of some of the issues highlighted in the present study. For example, further research about cross-cultural differences regarding targets of humour, intricacy and themes or taboos that may lead to a better understanding of their impact in humour communication in intercultural interactions.

The large amount of data gathered for this study and its analysis suggests relevant areas of research which were not pursued further due to the scope and focus of the research project. These include investigating gender issues such as cross-cultural

differences or differences between male and female newcomers' in terms of humour communication which may impact on their experiences as migrants; examining further links between humour, cultural identity and the development of an intercultural identity which were referred to by the findings in terms of participants' attachment to their native languages and cultures for humour communication or their tendencies to identify with people with similar ethnic origins; or further study of the impact of participants' contact with the target culture and the culture of origin in terms of quantity and quality including their exposure to the media or to entertainment such as comedy shows.

Hence, a longitudinal study may provide further insights about the evolution of humour during the course of cross-cultural adaptation, including the development of humour competence, intercultural competence and intercultural identity. In this context, it might be useful to ask participants to write a journal or to use a blog where participants can reflect about their use of humour and can note down or share relevant experiences as they occur to them which may provide richer data in terms of humour miscommunication and misunderstandings.

In addition, it seems relevant to highlight again the limited generalisability of the findings which are relevant to the specific participants of the study. In this context, studies with different groups of migrants in different contexts will clearly contribute to a better understanding of the role of humour in cross-cultural adaptation.

Another fruitful area of further research is the topic of humour as a research tool in the context of cross-cultural adaptation or migration studies. The present study has suggested that the topic of humour can lead participants to open up about other

‘serious’ issues. Such potential can be linked not only to the perception of humour as a lightweight topic which can foster a relaxed atmosphere but also to the significance of humour in the societal and individual elements which are at play in the process of cross-cultural adaptation such as cultural distance or individual predisposition towards other cultures.

Christi Davies (2002; 2007) has described jokes as a thermometer of society which provides insights into the particular society in which they are invented and circulated. Likewise, the present study suggests that humour can be a thermometer of cross-cultural adaptation, and reveal insights of the issues which underlie the role of humour in such a process.

9.8 Conclusion

The present study has examined the nature of humour in intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation from many different angles concluding that humour competence is an essential factor in the development of the intercultural competence which results in effective intercultural communication. It has explored the communicative, social and psychological effects of humour from an innovative perspective that observes their impact in intercultural interactions by focusing on participants’ experiences of humour communication and miscommunication in their process of adaptation.

Overall, the findings of this study provide insight into the role and nature of humour in cross-cultural adaptation, offering a major contribution to knowledge in the scarcely-researched area of humour and cross-cultural adaptation. In this context the findings provide a better insight into the process of cross-cultural adaptation by

examining the specific role of humour within this process. Ultimately, the study has made new connections between Humour Studies and Intercultural Studies from an interdisciplinary perspective and it has identified areas and ideas which warrant further research in both disciplines.

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