

O HUMOR É UNIVERSAL

Sírio Possenti

Estadual de Campinas University (Unicamp), Brasil , siriop@terra.com.br [ORCID: 0000-0002-3358-4984](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3358-4984)

Abstract:

It is said that humour is cultural, particular. The claim in this paper is that, quite on the contrary, it is universal, for its subjects and even its fundamental techniques are universal. Certain aspects of technique (certain linguistic games) or features of the characters (the appearance of a politician, for instance) may be particular. But the subjects are universal: politicians are corrupt or incompetent, spouses betray, schools are awful, peoples or ethnicities are deemed stupid, greedy, filthy, lazy, and so on. Compilations of jokes from different countries or on different subjects are clear evidence for this. Physicians and attorneys are subject to the same jokes in different countries. Books that attempt to portray the specificities of humour in each country or region quote jokes that would be typical, but even a layman could ascertain that they are not. Jokes related to Portuguese people in Brazil are the same in France about the Belgian, in the United States about Polish, etc. What is not universal in humour are certain circumstances or unusual aspects, which here will be considered secondary. Varied reasons, in general pragmatic – knowledge shared by listeners, for instance – can explain the lack of success of jokes or comic routines in theatre or the movies. But such issues do not concern cultures, rather they involve knowledge of listeners or of specific social groups.

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