

# What are you laughing at?

---

## **Presentació**

The main motivation of carrying out this research project has been knowing what makes Britons laugh nowadays, a society featured by a peculiar sense of humour; full of wit and sarcasm.

The initial hypothesis was that the level of the socioeconomic wellbeing of a society is fully reflected in the sort of humour, specially in its acidity, produced and broadcast on sitcoms.

## **Metodologia**

In order to demonstrate this hypothesis, the research has been focused on the British society from the 21st century based on the analysis of the two most watched and most rewarded television sitcoms from the first decade of the new century: Little Britain and Miranda. They have both won the most prestigious awards existing in the field of television and comedy.

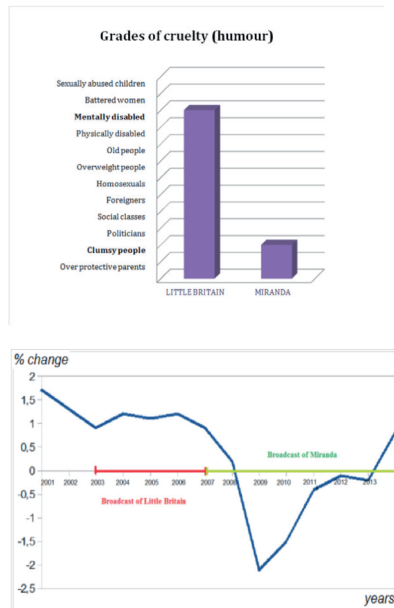
The reason why television sitcoms have been chosen so as to verify our initial hypothesis is that sitcoms are the only audiovisual medium where society's day-to-day is reflected in a particular period of time.



---

## GROWTH OF GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP) UK 2001-2013

This graph provides an overview of the growth of the Gross Domestic Product in the United Kingdom from 2001 to 2013. The gross domestic product (GDP) is how much a place produces in a year. To know the GDP of a country, you need to add up spendings and the value of exports and subtract the value of the imports. This measure allows to find out a country's wealth. Thus, the higher the value of the GDP, the better the economy in that specific country is.



---

## Cos del treball

The first sitcom that has been analysed is Little Britain (2003-2007), broadcast in the early years of this new century; a time where the gay boom, among other social issues, made the news.

The other sitcom which has been considered is Miranda (2007- actuality), produced at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, an era in which those social issues that once were dominating the headlines, are of an irrelevant importance nowadays.

This research project starts with a theoretical framework consisting of an introduction about humour in general: why do humans understand by humour, sorts of humour and variations in each culture. Moreover, the concept of British humour is further developed and studied in depth.

Additionally, a thorough study is conducted of sitcoms including a detailed explanation of their structure, their evolution over time and their influence among society, as we live in a world where the transmission of information is essential and the mechanisms destined to assure this transmission perform a basic function in the development of our society.

The last part of this research project is the practical framework, based on the intensive analysis of the two sitcoms chosen; including character's psychological profile,

---

the message they want to convey or their media repercussions. Since most of the information has been obtained from other books, manuals and texts on British culture, psychology and sociology, the coherence of the different parts of the theoretical framework, which I hope are logically chained and result in a clear explanation of the subject, is one of the main values of the project.

The practical framework also includes a comparison between the two sitcoms chosen, obtaining as a result the evolution of society's behaviours and concerns along the first decade of the new century from the emerging themes which are under focus by each sitcom in order to produce humour.

The research project concludes with two graphs where the level of acidity in the humour produced by the sitcoms chosen and the growth of the GDP in the United Kingdom in a specific time interval.

## **Conclusions**

As can be seen in the graph, in the time interval between 2008 and 2013 the UK's GDP has a negative growth rate. Whereas in the years prior to 2008, the GDP in the UK reported positive growth.

This graph shows the level of cruelty and acidity in humour reached by Little Britain and Miranda.

The highest grade of acidity is to laugh at sexually abused children and the lowest grade is to laugh at people with over protective parents.

As it is reflected on the graph, Little Britain achieves a much higher level of acidity in its humour, reaching the point of laughing at mentally disabled people. Therefore, Little Britain uses a very cruel and acid sort of humour.

Whilst Miranda uses a softer and more suitable for all audiences humour, reaching the second lowest grade of acidity, to laugh at clumsy people.

If we make a comparison between the interpretation of both graphs, we can see that the time interval with the highest growth of the GDP (2001-2007) corresponds to the years where Little Britain was broadcast (2003-2007); a sitcom featured by its cruelty, satire and acidity.

Whereas the time interval with the negative growth of the GDP (2007-2013) concurs with the broadcast of Miranda (2007), a sitcom which uses a soft and innocuous sort of humour.

In fact, Little Britain (2003-2007) arises from one of the brightest times of economic prosperity in the United Kingdom. Whereas Miranda was issued for the first time in 2007, the starting year of one of the most grave worldwide economic crisis that we are still undergoing at the present time. Hence, we could establish a close relationship between the general socioeconomic wellbeing of the society and the acidity of

---

humour broadcast in sitcoms, taking into account their everydayness. Thus, the more and the better the national economy is, the more cruel, sharp, acid and satiric its humour will be. This fact it may be easily extrapolated to any other country or culture.

### **Bibliografia**

Books: — HUGHES, Y. M. *The book of Dublinman jokes*. Cork: Mercier Minibooks, 1977. — KING, J.; RIDOUT, R.; SWAN, D. K. *The book of British Humour*. Harlow: Longman Group Ltd, 1981. — MACHALE, D. *Englishman jokes for Irishmen*. Cork: Mercier Minibooks, 1978. — MIKES, G. *How to be an alien*. Harmondsworth: Penguin books Ltd, 1946. — WOLFF, J.; Ferrante, L. P. *Successful Sitcom Writing*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996. Websites: — <<http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/features/is-british-humour>> — <<http://british-humour.over-blog.com/>> — <<http://impedimenta.es/prensa.php/el-humor-britanico-una-sonrisa>> — <<https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/dspace-jspui/bitstream/213/5599/3/You%20Must%20Be%20Joking03>> — <[http://www.comedy.co.uk/features/the\\_impact\\_of\\_comedy/](http://www.comedy.co.uk/features/the_impact_of_comedy/)> — <<http://www.transparencynow.com/sitcom.htm>> — <<http://thejohnfleming.wordpress.com/2011/01/23/the-funniest-british-sitcoms-are-actuallytragediesand-the-latest-one-is-neither-british-nor-a-sitcom/>> — <[http://www.sitcom.co.uk/writers/why\\_audiences\\_laugh.shtml](http://www.sitcom.co.uk/writers/why_audiences_laugh.shtml)> — <<http://www.comedy.co.uk/guide/tv/miranda/>> — <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/bbc/9758098/Miranda-many-hapless-returns.html>> — <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/9762781/Just-a-funny-old-fashioned-sort-ofgirl.html>> — <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/littlebritain/characters/sallymarkham.shtml>> — <<http://www.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/news/archives/2008/LittleBritain.aspx>>.