

# Cognitive processes and multimodal communication

## in the parody of politicians

**Isabella Poggi**

Dipartimento di Filosofia, Comunicazione  
e Spettacolo  
Roma Tre University  
Via Ostiense 234 – 00146 Rome  
[isabella.poggi@uniroma3.it](mailto:isabella.poggi@uniroma3.it)

**Francesca D'Errico**

Facoltà di Psicologia  
UniNettuno Telematic University  
Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, 39  
00186 Rome - Italy  
[f.derrico@uninettunouniversity.net](mailto:f.derrico@uninettunouniversity.net)

### Abstract

To single out the cognitive processes implied in the production of a parody, viewed as a distorted imitation of a text or behavior aimed at eliciting laughter and mocking someone, a corpus of parodies of politicians has been collected and multimodal communication analyzed through a devoted annotation scheme. Analysis allows to distinguish between surface and deep parodies, to single out the steps required for making a deep parody when the bare imitation of the Target is not enough for the Parodist's satiric goals, and to see the intertwining of various modalities in conveying the crucial information of a parody: identification and characterization of a Target and of its flaws through allusion to some event.

### 1 Introduction

A common activity in everyday life, entertainment, and political satire, is to make parodies. Students make parodies of their teachers, humor writers make parodies of poems or songs, comedians perform parodies of politicians. This work explores the cognitive and communicative processes underlying the production of parodies in political satire.

### 2 What is parody

Holman and Harmon [1] define parody as an imitation intended to ridicule or criticize, that to be understood requires familiarity with the original object, and to be effective has to “sound true”, that is, faithful to the original. Rose [2; 3] sees parody of literary works as the comic reworking of preformed material through their partial imitation or evocation in a comic manner that marks the ambivalence of the parodist's attitude to the object of criticism. Being a case of intertextual

work, the parody contains two texts-worlds, and the reader must understand the comic satiric relationship between them. [3; 4; 5].

Parody is not a simple imitation, but an “approximation” to an original source, in which, like in sarcasm, “the subject is treated in a contradictory manner: elevated subjects are debased and low ones are elevated” [4; 5; 6]. Bachtin [7: 76] views the parodic act as “an arena of conflict between two voices”, split from one another in a hostile contrast, with the second voice representing a “semantic authority” with which the audience is expected to agree.

Rossen-Knil and Henry [8] mention four pragmatic aspects of parody: (1) the intentional verbal representation of the object of parody, (2) the flaunting of the verbal representation, (3) the critical act, and (4) the comic act.

The techniques used by the parodist to refashion an older text or image range from caricature to substitution, addition, subtraction [9], exaggeration, condensation, contrast, and discrepancy [5].

Luttazzi [10] attributes two goals to parody, informing and deforming, the latter often using “bodily reduction” to physical needs, with the aim of dissacrating and destroying hierarchies, mixing sacred and secular, and making fun of boasting characters and their arrogance in a blasphemous way.

Various authors [2; 3; 5; 9], stress how the parodic act depends on the successful interaction between parodist and audience, that not only needs to acknowledge the Parodist's “authority” and moralistic intention, but also must know vices and virtues of the Target, especially when the parody is focused on his/her body and verbal features (tics, stuttering...) that are the trigger of the comic part. In brief, a verbal parody is a highly situated, intentional, and conventional speech act that re-presents some object but flaunts the re-presentation to convey humorous criticism [11; 12].

### **3 The Parody of politicians.**

Based on [12] and [13], where ridiculization and mockery of politicians are viewed as “discrediting moves”, we define a parody as a communicative act – a text or a verbal or multimodal communicative behavior (discourse, song, film, fiction) – that performs a distorted imitation of another text or multimodal behavior, with the aim of amusing and eliciting laughter about either the behaviour or one who performs it. A text, a discourse, a rite, an institution, and finally a person may all be an object of parody. In the parody of a person, the Parodist P imitates a Target T by reproducing his/her traits and / or communicative or non-communicative behaviors, but in a distorted, for example an exaggerated or misleading way, that highlights the Target’s flaws; to do so the parodist must single out the most characterizing features of T’s physical traits or behaviors, and imitate them while exaggerating or subtly changing them in such a way as to make them appear ridicule. As mentioned, parody necessary makes use of allusion – the device of indirectly referring to something without explicitly mentioning it – in order for the Audience to recognize the Target and the reasons for the Parodist’s criticism.

In political satire, a comedian (Parodist) performs a distorted imitation of a politician (Target) to make fun of him/her, aiming at cruel criticism or benevolent irony.

[12] posit four defining features of the parody of politicians: 1. Similarity to the Target; 2. Allusion, 3. Distortion of the similarity, aimed at stressing ridicule aspects of the Victim and eliciting laughter, 4. Induction of inferences implying a negative evaluation, that in the judgment of politicians may concern three criteria: *benevolence* (caring the electors’ goals, not working on behalf of one’s own interest, being trustworthy, honest, ethical), *competence* (expertise, knowledge, planning and reasoning skills), and *dominance* (capacity of winning in contests, influencing others, imposing one’s will).

### **4 “Surface vs. “deep” parody.**

Often the Parodist’s imitation is not a faithful – albeit distorted – reproduction of the Target’s actual visible or audible behaviours, but rather a “deep” imitation: the parodist extracts a – sometimes hyperbolic or surreal – submersed ridicule aspect of the Target’s personality, and imitates the behavior that would stem out of it. A such device is exemplified in the comedian Maurizio Crozza’s parody of Matteo Renzi, who in 2012, before becoming the Italian Prime Minister in 2014, was an emerging leader of the Italian Democratic party. Crozza impersonates Renzi as a young boy hopping around and jumping the rod. This alludes to Renzi’s struggling against the old

leaders of his party and presenting himself as an “enfant terrible” carrying new ideas and a new young atmosphere. Of course, Renzi has never shown while jumping the rod, but his general attitude can well be represented by that (fake but funny) image. In this case the Parodist does not reproduce actual visible or audible features of the Target’s traits or behaviors, but ones that might plausibly be displayed by the Target, given his/her general attitude. To do so, P must find out the core of T’s personality, and imitate those traits and behaviors that may plausibly stem out of it, even if T has never actually exhibited them. This distinguishes a “deep” from a “surface” parody.

### **5. Towards a cognitive model of Parody**

Based on the above definition, we made a hypothesis about the cognitive processes implied in the production of a political parody.

#### **5.1.Hypothesis**

The sequence of steps gone through in making a parody can be split in two phases, devising what humorous aspects to highlight in the Target, and deciding how to communicate the humorous criticism devised.

##### **5.1.1. Devising humorous aspects of the Target**

The first phase of parody making is common to any kind of humorous behavior: before communicating humorous points, the Humorist must find them out. In political parody, the Parodist must find out some aspects of the Target that are not only worth being made fun of, but are so concerning some political criterion – according to our model, as far as the features of benevolence, competence, and dominance are concerned.

To illustrate this step with a real example, we may take the parody of Fabrizio Cicchitto by the comedian Max Paiella.

The parliamentary member Fabrizio Cicchitto in 1980-90 was in the center-left Italian Socialist party and a devoted follower of its leader Bettino Craxi; since 1995 on he became a member of the Italian Parliament for the center-right party of Silvio Berlusconi, and one of his most devoted followers.

In Paiella’s parody, the background scene is the wide luxurious hall of the Italian Parliament. Cicchitto is represented by Paiella as a roman waiter, dressed with a long white pinny and talking, in a heavy popular roman accent, of Italian politics as if presenting the menu of his restaurant. This rendering Cicchitto as a waiter highlights his lack of dominance, namely his always being a devoted follower of some charismatic leader.

In this case, the process going from singling out a ridicule aspect of the Target subsumed to some

political criterion, to reproducing it to communicate this criticism, includes the following steps.

First the comedian must **choose a general political criterion** according to which a potential ridicule flaw can be found in the Target. Here the general criterion is Dominance: that particular politician does not show strong, autonomous and independent at all.

Second, to display a flaw according to that criterion, the parodist must **single out a specific flaw** in the Target, that may be subject to mockery. Cicchitto is seen as a *follower of leaders*, one submissive to important people.

Third, to embody the flaw of low dominance – to express it in a visible or audible way – the Parodist must devise a specific “**characterization**” of the Target. Cicchitto is characterized as a category of people who by definition must comply with another’s commands: in a word, a servant. To find out the Target’s characterization is, actually, the core of “deep” parody.

#### 5.1.2. Communicating the humorous aspects of the Target

Once devised the Target’s specific flaw, the parodist must communicate it, but must do so in a satiric way, that is, by highlighting its potential of ridicule, to make it an object of fun. In sum, conveying political criticism in parody requires that the following aspects are communicated, either directly or indirectly, in one or another modality:

- a. the Target’s identity
- b. the event where the Target’s flaw emerged
- c. the specific flaw F (a negative property) attributed to T
- d. (in some cases) the Target’s characterization as a C, i.e., its attribution to category C, in which flaw F is embodied. In fact, attributing T the flaw F makes one characterize T as a C (as belonging to the negatively evaluated category C)
- e. the humorous aspects of the Target’s flaw F and/or characterization C

## 6. How the parody-crucial information is multimodally conveyed

To see how all the information is multimodally [14] conveyed by the visual and acoustic scene of the parody, we run a qualitative observational study.

### 6.1. Corpus

To find examples of how this information is conveyed in real parodies, we collected a corpus of 40 parodies of 30 Italian politicians and other public characters performed in Italian satire shows by 12 Italian

comedians. We also included the parody of Hitler in Chaplin’s “*The Great Dictator*” as an additional item.

### 6.2. Annotation scheme

To analyze the parodies of the corpus, we built an annotation scheme encompassing all the mechanisms that, according to our hypothesis, may be at work in making a parody. Table 1 shows the analysis of Max Paiella’s parody of the Mayor of Rome Gianni Alemanno.

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19ZACx63Vsq>). Here we report the scene and background knowledge necessary to understand the parody and its analysis.

Gianni Alemanno, a former member of the Italian fascist party Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance), was the Mayor of Rome from 2008 to 2013, often criticized for his having been a fascist drubber in his youth, and, when in the role of Mayor, for his familialistic management of the Roman administration, having hired relatives and friends in the town bus company.

For his parody of Alemanno, Paiella picks up an episode in which the Mayor really made himself ridicule: the snow in Rome. Below we describe the context and background of this event, with words in bold describing the “allusion points”, i.e., the objects and events the Parodist supposes to be known by the Audience, and to which he alludes in his parody.

On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012, snow came on Rome. Not used to snow, Rome is generally not prepared for this challenge, but in this case the disorganized management by Alemanno’ staff turned a meteorological event into a disaster. A **newsletter** from the national Civil Protection warned that **35 millimeters** water were expected to come; actually, 1 mm. water corresponds to 1 cm. snow, but Alemanno and his staff did not know this, so they expected 3,5 centimeters of snow instead of the 35 that came in fact. No kind of prevention was undertaken: no **salt** to prevent streets from freezing, no **snow chains** for buses; cars stopped, buses stopped for hours with romans inside. All that Alemanno did was to warn people to stay home, to buy **shovels** and distribute them to Romans recommending to clean up their doors (he also was videorecorded on TV while shoveling snow), and to say he would **call the army** to cope with the emergency. As the emergency was over, Alemanno was accused of disorganization and inefficiency, and to justify himself he appeared in all TV news and talk shows imputing the disaster to the Civil Protection, who had not warned how serious the situation was, and complaining that **he had been left alone** to confront the emergency.

In the annotation scheme of Table 1., Col.1 lists the modalities analyzed and Col. 2 the signals in the various modalities. Columns 3-5 refer to the topics on which the signal of col. 2 provides information: it may explicitly mention or allude to the Event relevant for the Target’s judgment (col.3), contribute to the Target’s identification (4), or characterization (5). In col. 6 we state if some stereotype is exploited in this characterization, and if so, which one; in col. 7, we write the specific flaw attributed to the Target through

the characterization of col. 6, and in col. 8 the political criterion – Benevolence, Competence or Dominance – with respect to which that is a flaw.

In Alemanno's parody, the relevant signals of the background scene are (line 1, col. 2) the *Coliseum* and the *flocks of snow*, the *shovel* and the *sheet of paper*, which provide information about details of the **Event** (col. 3): *Coliseum* and *flocks* allude to the snow in Rome, the *shovel* to Alemanno exhibiting while shoveling, the *sheet of paper* to the Civil Protection's misunderstood newsletter. While reminding the scene of the Event (*snow* and *Coliseum*) is potentially neutral, the other two allusions contribute to the characterization of the Target (col.5) and then point at his flaw (col. 7), finally classified in terms of a political criterion (col.8). Respectively, allusion to exhibiting while shoveling characterizes Alemanno as one who cares the image of doing things more than doing in fact, then a negative judgment of hypocrisy in terms of Benevolence; allusion to the misunderstood newsletter marks him as ignorant, a negative evaluation as to Competence.

On line 2, the *Roman centurion costume* (col.2) characterizes the Target (col.5) as the tourist operators at Coliseum dressed as centurions, generally connote as underprivileged people from Roman slums, waiting for a tip after posing for a picture. This suit then conveys a social stereotype (col.6) of low socio-cultural level (col. 7): a negative evaluation in terms of Dominance or possibly Competence (col.8).

Line 3., with the morphological trait of a *square face* similar to Alemanno's, obtained by make-up (col.2), informs about Target **identity** (col.4).

Voice (line 4) here is relevant to highlight the **flaw**. Paiella imitates Alemanno's prosodic features of a voice sometimes tachilalic (very fast), even stuttering. This, besides contributing to Target identification (col.4), may also lead to infer anxiety or fear of the Audience judgment (col. 5), again implying too much care for one's image (col.7), a flaw as to Benevolence (col. 8.).

In the verbal modality (line 8.) Paiella literally repeats words really uttered by Alemanno in various news and talk shows. The literal quotations "*I have been left alone*" and "*I'll call the army*", besides evoking the event of snow in Rome and the Mayor's behavior, characterize him as one who plays the victim (col.5) to reject accusation and criticism, highly caring his image (col.7): again a flaw in Benevolence (col. 8).

No relevant signal is found here as to gaze, facial expression or head movement (line 4.), gesture and body movement (5), conversational behavior (7) and name allusion (9), relevant in other parodies (see below).

### 6.3.Multimodal resources to communicate the bulk of parody

When devised the event, flaw, identification and characterization of the Target, how does the parodist distribute this information across modalities? We overview how corpus helps answer this question starting, in this Section from the information to convey (the columns of the annotation scheme), in Sect. 6.4 from the available communicative resources (the lines), showing the potentialities of each modality.

#### a. Target identification

When the Parodist impersonates the Target, to let the Audience understand who s/he is, it is sometimes sufficient for him to imitate the Target's suit and/or multimodal traits or behaviors. Max Paiella in his parody of the Mayor of Rome Alemanno exhibits a *square face*, similar to Alemanno's; in one of the subsequent Mayor Ignazio Marino, Paiella is dressed with a *sweater*, as Marino typically wears.

#### b. Event

Information concerning the event, is generally given by the scene background. That Cicchitto is a member of the Italian Parliament, and that he is talking of Italian politics, can be understood from the background scene, representing the *Parliament hall*. In the Parody of Alemanno, his being the Mayor of Rome is clear from the background of *Coliseum*.

#### c. Flaw

The flaw is less trivial to convey, being an abstract – not directly perceivable – property. How can the Parodist select just those physical features that characterize a concept, referent or property in such a way as to make it recognizable by the Audience? For example, how can one convey the concept of "servant"? This is where information d. may help.

#### d. Characterization

The Parodist characterizes the Target by assign him/her to a category that is stereotypically or prototypically distinguished by the flaw to convey. For example, what category of people is typically characterized by humbly complying with another's will? Waiters. In fact, Paiella characterizes Cicchitto as a popular roman waiter, presenting himself as a "humble servant", who manages the restaurant for politicians in the Parliament, and lists the present political events as items of a menu.

Both to invent a characterization that is a carrier of flaw c., and to find out a shared recognizable appearance of the devised category, the Parodist often resorts to the stereotypes or prototypes linked to that category.

#### Stereotypes

A stereotype is a schematic cognitive structure: a set of beliefs attached to some concept or category, that are socially shared in people of a given culture, and allow them to generate fast and easy inferences. [15; 16; 17]. The stereotypes that Jews are intelligent, that Italians eat spaghetti, or that Swedish are blonde allow people to generate expectations in case of interaction with people of those cultures. We have stereotypes concerning all categorization criteria – gender, age, social class, social role, culture, communicative behavior – and concerning the acoustic or visual appearance of people belonging to those categories [13]. So the Parodist may exploit stereotypes in finding both a category generally marked by a given (internal) flaw and the (stereotypical) multimodal features to represent that category. To convey the idea of “servant”, Paiella characterizes Cicchitto as a waiter, and makes him recognizable by three stereotypical features of waiters in a popular roman restaurant: the textual one of *listing political topics in the form of a menu*, the visual one of the *long white pinny*, and the acoustic one of *roman accent*.

#### *Prototypes*

In some cases the characterization is so extremely stereotypical as to use a prototype. A prototype is a representative of some category that is characterized by its defining features to such an extent as to become an emblem, a primary exemplar of the whole category. A Parodist makes use of a prototype, not only of a stereotype, when the exemplar used for his characterization is a real person, embodying the defining features of that category so fully as to be a vivid and extreme example of them. Like in Maurizio Crozza’s parody of Alan Friedman, an American journalist who conducts TV programs on Italian economy. In imitating him, Crozza adopts the peculiar accent of an American speaker, but to characterize it in an exaggerated, hence humorous way, he uses the unmistakable accent adopted by the famous Italian comic actor Alberto Sordi in his dubbing of Oliver Hardy: for Italians a prototype of the American man speaking Italian, an exemplar embodying all the most typical features of American accent.

##### e. Humor

According to most influential theories [15; 16], humor results from the violation of expectations consequent to the clash between two scripts, here represented by the distortion of the Parodist’s imitation. In Cicchitto’s Parody, the humorous effect is caused by the clash between the two scripts “Parliament” and “restaurant”, the former evoked by the *Parliament hall*, the second by Paiella *dressed as a waiter*. The humorous intent is conveyed by the distortion – the exaggeration and stereotypicality – of the *pinny*.

#### 6.4. The intertwining of modalities

From the analysis of our corpus it emerges that all modalities may be exploited to convey the various types of information relevant for a parody, but there is not a one-to-one relationship between types of modality and types of information. Let us take the modalities in the lines of our annotation scheme and see what types of information they provide in the parodies of the corpus.

##### *A. Scene background*

A first type of signal is the scene of the parody, generally informing about the event. In Paiella’s parody of Alemanno, that the event concerned snow is alluded to by *flocks falling down* around Alemanno, while the location is revealed by the *Coliseum*.

At times, though, the location of the scene is used to identify the Target: the *Parliament hall* on the background of the man with a pinny listing his (political) menu helps recognizing that waiter as the Parliament member Fabrizio Cicchitto.

Music, a relevant acoustic aspect of the scene, sometimes helps Target identification, like when the *Italian national hymn* opens Crozza’s Parody of the Italian President Giorgio Napolitano. Yet sometimes music makes part of the very criticism borne by the parody: like in the parody of Elena Boschi by Virginia Raffaele. Boschi is a young left-wing minister very close to Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, who deliberately made a government full of young politicians and women. In this parody, Raffaele / Boschi is interviewed by a male journalist and, when asked politically embarrassing questions, her face performs a seductive behavior, while in the background goes the soundtrack of the movie “*A man and a woman*”, a music by itself evoking romantic and erotic contents: an allusion to Elena Boschi’s seductiveness.

One more aspect of the scene is bystanders’ behavior. In “*The Great Dictator*” this is a relevant pointer to political criticism in Chaplin’s parody of Hitler. As soon as Hitler/Chaplin raises his hand in a sort of nazi salute, all *the crowd simultaneously starts clapping and booing*, while as he lowers it, the crowd *abruptly stops*: this alludes to the typical conformity and unanimity of totalitarian regimes, and therefore is part of the criticism.

##### *B. Suit and general make up*

Another signal helping to recognize the Target are, quite trivially, suit and general make up. This is the case with Hitler’s *uniform* worn by Chaplin, but also with the *sunglasses* worn by Crozza’s Flavio Briatore, which (stereotypically) characterize him as the tanned and vacuous millionaire he in fact is.

Sometimes, though, the suit, dress or costume is definitely part of the critical act. Cicchitto’s *pinny* that is definitely a pointer to his being a servant, while Alemanno’s *centurion costume* assimilates the Mayor of Rome to an unemployed of a Roman suburb in search for a tip from tourists.

On the other hand, in Crozza's parody of Roberto Formigoni, the right-wing Governor of Region Lombardia, famous for his bright color blazers, the extremely bright color blazer worn by Crozza alludes to Formigoni's crazy habit, or it makes fun of it; but it does not contribute to the political criticism.

#### C. Morphological traits

As predictable, visible morphological traits of the Target are often imitated, through make-up or fakes, to make the Target recognizable: *teeth* and *hair* in Crozza's parody of Matteo Renzi, the *square face* of Paiella's Alemanno, and the *moustache* of Chaplin's Hitler.

Only the exaggeration of morphological traits is sometimes used as humor point, like in Crozza's parody of Renato Brunetta, a right-wing Minister who is physically very characterized by his being very short. Crozza represents him by standing on his knees.

#### D. Facial expression

Communication through head, gaze and facial expression is not used very often to convey crucial information in parody. As predictable, different from morphological traits, that are by definition stable, it is never exploited for Target recognition. Yet, it is used as a "flaw pointer" in the parody of Elena Boschi, where her particular facial expression is crucial to convey the idea of a seductive she/politician.

#### E. Gesture, posture and body movement

Gestures, postures and body movements are frequently used, as predictable, to identify the Target, like in the parody of Matteo Renzi as a Prime Minister, where Crozza imitates his *loose and casual walk*, his talking with *hands in his pockets*, and his typical gestures of impatience. But both gesture and posture are also often exploited to point at the Target's ridicule flaws. Crozza counts various parodies of Umberto Bossi, the founder and first charismatic leader of the North League – a party struggling for the secession of the North from the Center and South of Italy. In a recent parody, that follows the fall of Bossi and the ascent of his former lieutenant Roberto Maroni, Crozza performs both roles, of Bossi and Maroni: the former as a very active, dynamic, still enthusiastic and provocative person, the latter as a rigid clerk, a white-collar, a bureaucrat; and to render this imagine of Maroni, Crozza represents him as a person always *dressed in brown*, with a *rigid posture*, his *head recessed in his shoulders*, always *still* and *looking forward*, much like a robot or a puppet. All this points to Maroni's lack of the vision, creativity and charisma necessary to a leader, as opposed to Bossi. Thus, Bossi's postures and movements evoke cheerfulness, while Maroni's are intended to raise criticism, derision, and laughter.

In general, what is imitated in parody – and actually what most characterizes the identity of a Target – is

not so much a specific gesture or posture, but rather the "expressivity parameters" of the characters' movements [18], their amplitude, fluidity, velocity, repetition: for instance while gestures and movements of Crozza / Renzi are frequent, of high fluidity and medium amplitude, those of Crozza / Maroni are few, of minimum fluidity and low amplitude.

Only in rare cases are some specific gestures the marker of a Target: like for Brunetta, whose typical gesture of *raising both hands with extended index fingers* is repeatedly used in Crozza's imitation. Actually, Brunetta is generally very aggressive and arrogant, and the didactic and haughty attitude he generally adopts is often conveyed by that very gesture.

#### F. Voice

A classical and important part of imitation is voice. All parameters of voice are exploited by Parodists in our corpus in order to Target identification: voice quality, regional accent, typical intonation and prosody, including the Target's idiosyncratic temporal structure (fast or slow voice). Crozza imitates Renzi's *Florentine accent*, Paiella sometimes *speaks as fast* as Alemanno, Chaplin reproduces Hitler's *jerky rhythm of voice*.

In many cases, though, that particular vocal parameter is not only used to identify the Target, but also – or only – to convey the ridicule flaw and to solicit laughter: it is not easy to tell which of two functions is mainly aimed at by the Parodist. For example, Chaplin's jerky and loud German vocal onset not only identifies Hitler, but also the stereotype of the threatening German, and at the same time makes fun of him when the word onset turns into a cough.

#### G. Conversational behavior

Parodists in our corpus do not only imitate Targets' specific words, but also their "conversational behavior". Since Brunetta, when being interviewed, takes the role of the interviewer, chasing the actual interviewer, asking provocative questions and repeating them obsessively, Crozza imitates his aggressive and insistent sequence of behaviors.

#### H. Words, sentences, discourses

Verbal text is a relevant part of the Parodist's work, in which the Parodist performs both a surface and a deep imitation of the Target. A surface – yet, quite effective – imitation when s/he utters the very same words or sentences that have actually been used by the Target, becoming a "torment", a verbal emblem or griffe of that character. A such case is in Crozza's parody of Fausto Razza, a senator who betrayed his left-wing party and passed to a right-wing party, thus avoiding the Government resignation, because if the legislature had been closed he could not have got his retirement fund. In an off-air personal dialogue with a colleague he justified his vote by saying: "*Fatti un*

*poco li caazzi tua. ... Dammi retta, te lo dico da amico*" (Act in your own interest... Listen, I tell you this as a friend). These sentences became a legend, so much so that even a T-shirt was invented with this motto. Crozza parodies the off-air dialogue using Razzi's very words.

Another case of literal quotation of the Target's words is Crozza's parody of the millionaire Flavio Briatore, who often uses the adjectival idiom *da sogno* (dream-like). Crozza often uses this expression but does so in quite improbable combinations, like "dream-like frozen green peas", to elicit laughter.

Often, though, the Parodist's words do not literally draw on the Target's, but rather express the concepts – or a parody of them – generally conveyed by the Target: a case of "deep" parody.

For example, to make fun of Briatore's strange priorities, Crozza says: "*Io penso che l'altruismo sia molto importante. Per me l'altruismo è al diciottesimo posto*" (I think altruism is very important. To me altruism is in the 18° place). This points to the essence of Briatore as a person strongly oriented to business and money.

In sum, the imitation of words or sentences, both in their literal phrasing and in their simply expressing a concept typical in the Target's (communicative) behavior, is never used only in order to his identification, but to point at his ridicule flaws.

### I. Names and puns

So far we have only found one case of distortion of the signal in our corpus: exaggeration. Crozza represents Brunetta as much shorter than he really is; Hitler's jerky accent in Chaplin's representation is exaggerated, as is, up to the paradox, the list of ethical priorities for Briatore. But an intriguing exploitation of words in parodies is word mangling, and more specifically, name mangling. Name mangling is a way to make a name just a little bit different and thus evoke a different meaning, but keeping track of its original meaning: what is generally done in puns.

Name mangling is a typical strategy of discredit is, considered, even by Freud, an insulting behavior, because it shows contempt toward the named person – not even worth to have his name reminded. – and possibly suggests some negative nuance of him/her. This strategy is used by Chaplin when, as Hitler, he mentions the German officials around him, *Harring* and *Gabitsch*, probably alluding to Goering and Goebbels: two names evoking the nouns "*herring*" and "*garbage*", and thus shedding a light of insult over them – a filthy animal and filthy stuff.

The same strategy is used by Crozza in his parody of Massimiliano Fucsas, a famous Italian architect and designer, who, to stigmatize his intellectualism, vacuity and the odd things he says, is called "*Massimiliano Fuffass*", a name connected to the jargon term *fuffa*, "vacuous, vague, imprecise stuff".

## 1 Conclusion

To describe the cognitive processes implied in producing parodies of politicians, we made a hypothesis about the types of information a Parodist necessarily conveys.

The Parodist does not only exhibit some ridicule features of the Target, but also make it recognizable resorting to all possible devices of imitation. Like for any imitation the Parodist must select which features to represent of the Target, but if those features are not per se ridicule, he sometimes characterizes the Target as belonging to an unexpected – hence laughter inducing – category, by finding out a "deep" aspect of it.

By analyzing a corpus of 41 parodies we described how all modalities in the Parodist's behavior and background scene intertwine in the crucial steps: identifying the Target, alluding to specific events, and highlighting the Target's flaws through characterization within an unexpected category.

**Acknowledgements.** Research partly supported by SSPNet Seventh Framework Program, European Network of Excellence SSPNet (Social Signal Processing Network), Grant Agreement N.231287.

## References

1. Holman C. H. and Harmon W. 1986. *The handbook to literature*. 5th ed. New York, Macmillan.
2. Rose M. 1979. Parody//Meta-Fiction: an analysis of parody as a critical mirror to the writing and reception of fiction. London, Croom Helm.
3. Rose M. 2011. Pictorial Irony, Parody, and Pastiche: Comic Interpictoriality in the Arts of the 19th and 20th Centuries. Bielefeld, Aisthesis Verlag.
4. Condren C., Milner Davis J., Phiddian R. and McCausland S. Defining parody and satire: Australian copyright law and its new exception, Part II – Advancing ordinary definitions. *Media Arts Law Review*, Vol. 13, No. 4, Dec 2008, 401-421.
5. Milner Davis J. Book review of "Margaret Rose: Pictorial Irony, Parody, and Pastiche: Comic Interpictoriality in the Arts of the 19th and 20th Centuries. British Journal of Aesthetics Vol. 53 | Number 3 | July 2013 | pp. 365–376.
6. Kreuz R.J. Roberts R. 1993. On satire and parody: The importance of being ironic. *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 8(2): 97-109.
7. Bakhtin M. M. 1981. From the prehistory of novelistic discourse. In: Michael Holquist, ed., *The dialogic imagination*, 41-83. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas.

8. Rossen-Knill D.F., Henry R. 1997. The pragmatics of verbal parody. *Journal of Pragmatics* 27(6): 719-752.
9. Rotermund E. 1964. Die Parodie in der modernen deutschen Lyrik. Berlin, Eidos Verlag.
10. Lutazzi D. 2001. *Satyricon*. Milano: Mondadori.
11. Hulstijn J., Nijholt A. 1996. (eds.). *Proceedings of the International Workshop on Computational Humour* (TWLT 12), University of Twente, Enschede, Netherlands.
12. Poggi I. D'Errico F. 2013. Towards the Parody Machine. Qualitative Analysis and Cognitive Processes in the Parody of a Politician, New Trends in Image Analysis and Processing – ICIAP 2013, Lecture Notes in Computer Science, Petrosino, Alfredo, Maddalena, Lucia, Pala, Pietro, Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 491-500.
13. Poggi I., D'Errico F., L.Vincze,. 2011. Discrediting moves in political debate. In F.Ricci et al. (eds) Proceedings of Second International Workshop on User Models for Motivational Systems: the affective and the rational routes to persuasion (UMMS 2011) (Girona) Springer LNCS.pp. 84-99, 2011.
14. Poggi I. 2007. Mind, hands, face and body. A goal and belief view of multimodal communication. Berlin: Weidler.
15. Gordon W. Allport. 1954. The Nature of Prejudice. Addison-Wesley, Cambridge, MA.
16. Susan T.Fiske. 1998. Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination. In The Handbook of Social Psychology, Daniel T.Gilbert, Susan T. Fiske, and Gardner Lindzey. Volume Two (4th ed.). McGraw-Hill, Boston, Mass.
17. Dirk Geeraerts. 2008. Prototypes, stereotypes, and semantic norms. In Cognitive Sociolinguistics: Language Variation, Cultural Models, Social Systems, Gitte Kristiansen and René Dirven (Eds.), Mouton – De Gruyter, Berlin, 21-44.
18. Hartmann, B., Mancini, M., & Pelachaud, C. (2002). Formational Parameters and Adaptive Prototype Instantiation for MPEG-4 Compliant Gesture Synthesis. *Computer Animation 2002*, 111-119.
19. Ruch, W. (ed.) 1998. The Sense of Humor: Explorations of a Personality Characteristic. Mouton-de Gruyter, The Hague-Berlin.
20. Attardo S. 1994. Linguistic theories of humor. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.

Table 1.The annotation scheme of parody

	1. Target and Modalities	2. Signal	3. Event	4. Target Identity	5. Characterizat ion	6. Stereotyp e	7. Flaw	8. B/C/D
A	Alemanno							
1	Background	Coliseum Snow flocks Shovel Paper	Snow in Rome  Showing while shoveling  Misunderstood newsletter				Image care  Ignorance	B  C
2	Suit & makeup	Centurion costume			Tourist operator going for tips	Social	Low cultural level	D
3	Morph. traits	Square face		X				
4	Head face gaze							
5	Gesture & body movement							
6	Voice	Tachilallic		X	Performance anxiety		Image care	B
7	Conversati onal behavior							
8	Text	<i>I have been left alone</i>  <i>I'll call the army</i>			Self- victimization		Image care	B D
9	Name allusion							