

Laughing Metaphorically: Metaphor and Humour in Discourse

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Abstract

The common ground between figurative language and humour (in the form of jokes) is what Koestler (1964) termed the bisociation of ideas. In both jokes and metaphors, two disparate concepts are brought together, but the nature and the purpose of this conjunction is different in each case. This paper focuses on this notion of boundaries and attempts to go further by asking the question “when does a metaphor become a joke?”. More specifically, the main research questions of the paper are:

(a) How do speakers use metaphor in discourse for humorous purposes?

(b) What are the (metaphoric) cognitive processes that relate to the creation of humour in discourse?

(c) What does the study of humour in discourse reveal about the nature of metaphoricity?

This paper answers these questions by examining examples taken from a three-hour conversation, and considers how linguistic theories of humour (Raskin, 1985; Attardo and Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 1994; 2001) and cognitive theories of metaphor and blending (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) can benefit from each other.

Boundaries in Humour and Metaphor

The goal of this paper is to explore the relationship between metaphor (and, more generally, blending) and humour, in order to attain a better understanding of the cognitive processes that are involved or even contribute to laughter in discourse. This section will present briefly research in both areas and will identify possible common ground between the two. More specifically, the notion of boundaries will be explored in both areas. The following section explores how metaphor can be used for humorous purposes in discourse by applying relevant theories of humour and metaphor to conversational data.

Linguistic theories of humour highlight the importance of duality and tension in humorous texts. Koestler (1964: 51) in discussing comic creativity notes that:

The sudden *bisociation* of an idea or event with two habitually *incompatible* matrices will produce a comic effect, provided that the narrative, the semantic pipeline, carries the right kind of emotional *tension*. When the pipe is punctured, and our expectations are fooled, the now redundant tension gushes out in laughter, or is spilled in the gentler form of the sou-rire [my emphasis].

This oft-quoted passage introduces the basic themes and mechanisms that later were explored extensively within contemporary theories of humour: a humorous text must relate to two different and opposing in some way scenarios; this duality is not

detected at first by the person who is processing the text; a certain element in the text betrays this duality; the processor at some point realises the duality, the opposition, and, consequently, the tension between the two scenarios; the tension is translated into laughter.

These ideas were further developed and systematised by Raskin (1985). Using jokes as the core of his data, he put forward the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (henceforth, SSTH), whose main hypothesis can be summarised as follows:

A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying-text if both of the [following] 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 [...].
The two scripts with which some text is compatible are said to overlap fully or in part in this text . (Raskin, 1985: 99)

The idea of the two opposing scenarios that was mentioned earlier is now more formalised under the concept of *script*, which originally comes from psychology and is defined by Attardo (2001: 2) as “a cognitive structure internalized by the speaker which provides the speaker with information on how a given entity is structured.” The SSTH was later broadened by Attardo and Raskin (1991 – and was renamed General Theory of Verbal Humor or GTVH); the GTVH presented in great detail the knowledge structures that are necessary for generating and processing a joke, thus broadening its scope. Finally, Attardo (2001) extended the theory further in order for it to be able to account for any kind of (extensive) humorous texts, and not just jokes. Without going into the various versions of SSTH in any great detail, what interests me here is the fact that linguistic theories of humour highlight the fact that, in humorous texts, *the boundaries between opposing scripts are temporarily blurred until they are realised; the tension between these boundaries that is then released is what causes laughter*. A typical example of a humorous text (taken from Raskin, 1985) is the following one-liner: “the first thing which strikes a stranger in New York is a big car”. This text supports two different (opposing) scripts: that of a tourist being impressed by something in New York and that of a tourist being hit by

something in New York. The opposition is that between the real and imaginary script. The blurring of the boundaries between the two scripts is achieved via the wording of the joke: the word ‘strikes’ is ambiguous as it can belong to both scripts. The hearer, however, chooses the ‘impression’ script over the ‘collision’ script, since other words in the sentence (such as stranger) pertain *mainly* (but not only) to that script. However, the introduction of the ‘big car’ leads the hearer to understand that the real script is that of the ‘collision’. At this moment, the duality is realised, the boundaries are no longer blurred and the tension between them causes laughter. The cognitive processes that are involved in processing such a joke have been explored at length by Coulson (2001). She notes that interpretation of jokes (and not only jokes) requires “semantic reanalysis that results in a shift in its implications” (Coulson, 2001: 32). She names this process *frame-shifting*.

The notion of duality lies at the root of metaphor as well. Metaphorical processes involve the bringing together of two concepts; theorists may disagree on how these two concepts interact, but all theories of metaphor discuss the importance of boundaries between these concepts. More recent, cognitive theories define metaphor as understanding one thing in terms of another (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) and provide a two-spaced model that illustrates the relationship between the two concepts (see figure 1). In its initial stages, the cognitive theory of metaphor suggested that the

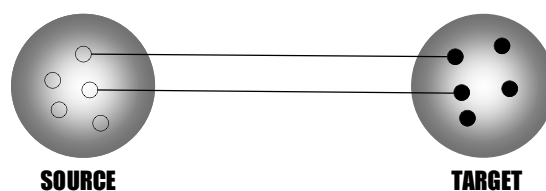


Figure 1: The two-space model

source domain is a well-structured, familiar concept, whereas the target domain is usually unfamiliar and abstract and therefore in need of structure. Via metaphor, cross-domain mappings are created from the source domain to the target domain. Via these correspondences knowledge, inferences, and structure (in other words, frames or cognitive models) are transferred from the source to the target domain. The result

is a better understanding of the target domain with the help of the source domain; we talk and think about the target domain in terms of the source domain. For instance, the classic example provided by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) is that of arguments. Expressions such as *Your claims are **indefensible*** and *His criticisms were right **on target*** show that there is an underlying metaphor (ARGUMENT IS WAR) that creates cross-domain mappings from the source domain-WAR to the target domain-ARGUMENT. Consequently, we think, reason and behave in arguments *as if* we were in a war.

The nature of the cross-domain mappings and the relationship between the two domains has been the subject of much research in the area (see for instance, Lakoff and Turner, 1989; Brugman, 1990; Lakoff, 1990; 1993; Turner, 1990). The main issue that theorists were faced with was whether the target domain is 'passive' in the whole process or whether it possesses its own structure which affects the cross-domain correspondences. Even though Black (1962) had already emphasised the importance of *interaction* between the two domains and discussed *parallel changes* that are induced in both domains via their interaction, the role of the target domain was mainly disregarded in more recent cognitive theories of metaphor and a sense of directionality of the mappings *from* the source *to* the target domain was created. But, as Coulson (2001: 166) notes "the two-space model cannot explain examples of cross-space mapping in which source domain models undergo accommodation so as to be more compatible with target domain models," and it also cannot explain implications that are *created* by the metaphor, but are not present in either domains. For instance, in the oft-quoted example *My surgeon is a butcher* used to refer to an incompetent surgeon, the concept of incompetence is not present in either domains (source: BUTCHER, target: SURGEON), but is created by the metaphor itself.

Thus the search for a third space began. Indurkha (1992) provided some interesting solutions to both problems with his interaction view of cognition, but the more widely accepted theory that reinstates the notion of interaction into metaphorical (and most other cognitive) processes is that of conceptual integration or blending

introduced by Fauconnier and Turner (1998; 2002). According to Fauconnier and Turner (1998; 2002) a wide variety of cognitive phenomena related to understanding

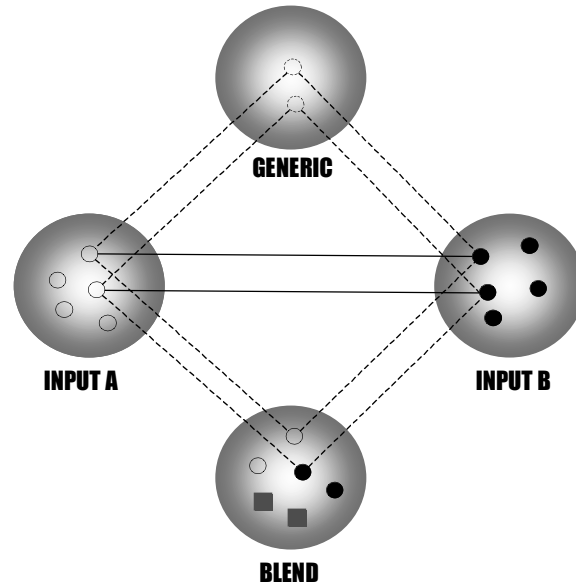


Figure 2: Conceptual integration network

and reasoning involve the conceptual combination of information pertaining to particular domains, what is known as *mental spaces*. This process can be represented by a *conceptual integration network* of mental spaces, as can be seen in figure 2 (adapted from Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 46). The two-space model has been replaced by a four-space one, and instead of domains, conceptual integration networks involve mental spaces, which are wider, richer structures. The two input spaces at the centre of the diagram roughly correspond to the source and target domains. In order to resolve the problem of directionality, there is a third space, the blend, which is created with elements projected by both input spaces – therefore, both input spaces are equally responsible for the blend. Although the blend is created with elements from the input spaces, it is possible for it to have its own *emergent* structure. The fourth space, the generic, is a schematic representation of structure common to all spaces. Going back to the *surgeon/butcher* example, the generic space will have elements such as *agent, event, outcome* which are common to all other spaces. The two input spaces will be that of SURGEON and BUTCHER, which project elements such as *surgery, butcher's knives etc.* onto the blend. Within the blended

space we have a surgeon attempting to attain their ends by butcher's means. It is this unique combination of elements that creates the emergent structure in the blend and the notion of incompetence appears. This is an example of a metaphorical blend, where "prominent counterparts from the input spaces project to a single element in the blended space – they are 'fused'. A single element in the blend corresponds to an element in each of the input spaces" (Grady, Oakley and Coulson, 1999). There are other non-metaphorical blends where the processes are similar but no such fusion occurs.

The idea of the blend, where two concepts coexist, appears to be perfectly suited for the analysis of humorous texts. Indeed, blending theorists have used conceptual integration networks in order to explain the cognitive processes involved in processing and producing jokes. Coulson (2003), for instance, shows how the classic joke *Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side* can be analysed in terms of blending (see figure 3 – adapted from Coulson, 2003: 3). Coulson (2003)

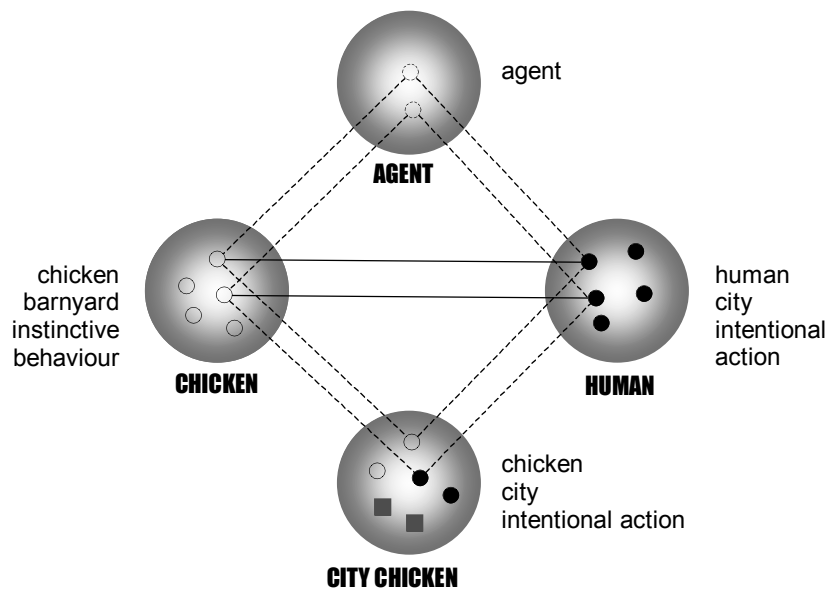


Figure 3: The *chicken* joke

argues that the humour of the joke relies on the incongruity of the fact that chickens are not normally found in streets and do not have directional intentions. This incongruity is, however, legitimate within the blend (which is the world the joke

constructs) where the chicken is still a chicken, but with human-like intentions.

This very brief review shows that metaphor and humour share some structural similarities. In both jokes and metaphors two disparate concepts are brought together, but the nature and the purpose of this conjunction is different in each case. Pollio (1996: 248) suggests that “split reference yields humor if the joined items (or the act joining them) emphasize the boundary or line separating them; split reference yields metaphor if the boundary between the joined items (or the act joining them) is obliterated and the two items fuse to form a single entity.” So given these structural similarities, when does a metaphor become a joke?

Metaphor and Humour in Discourse

This section will investigate the ways in which metaphors become humorous in discourse. The main hypothesis that has led the research is that *for a metaphor to be used for humorous purposes in discourse attention must be drawn in some way to its two (or more) input spaces; this process deautomatises the metaphor and provides the speaker with the opportunity to emphasise the boundaries between these two spaces and comment on their dissimilarities*. More specifically, the questions that I will attempt to answer are:

- (a) How do speakers use metaphor in discourse for humorous purposes?
- (b) What are the cognitive processes that relate to the creation of humour in discourse with the help of metaphor?
- (c) What does the study of humour in discourse reveal about the nature of metaphoricity?

The data come from a three hour conversation among 5 Greeks (3 male and 2 female) aged 28-32; the topic of the conversation is sex, love, and relationships. The extracts that will be discussed fulfil two main criteria: (a) they make use of metaphor, and (b) the metaphors used contribute to humour. Concerning the first criterion, although identifying metaphors in discourse is not an uncontroversial process, expressions that relied on metaphorical blending (as described in the

previous section) were selected. Concerning the second criterion, since cases of conversational humour rely mainly on the ‘you-had-to-be-there’ element, extracts were selected only if they caused laughter in the group.

The reasons for choosing to research the relationship between metaphors and humour *in discourse* (and not in, say, jokes) are two. First, both linguistic and cognitive theories of humour rely mainly on narrative (or canned) jokes (see for instance, Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 1994; 2001; Coulson, 2001). Research on conversational humour (Sacks, 1974; Sherzer, 1978; 1985; Tannen, 1984) is done mainly from the conversation analysis perspective and is more interested in the structure and function of humour in discourse rather than the processes that produce it. Second, examining metaphorical blends in conversation provides the opportunity to examine how blends are created *in real time*. This will provide invaluable information both on how metaphors are used in discourse and on their relationship with humour.

The most common form of humour in conversation identified in the relevant literature is that of puns (Sacks, 1972; Attardo, 1994). The conversation under examination is no exception; its informal nature allows for a certain linguistic jocularity. Sometimes, metaphors emerge from a play on words and serve no other purpose but to present things in a new and witty way. In the first extract, the participants of the conversation strive to define the two elusive concepts of *eros* (falling in love) and *agape* (loving someone). In order to do this, they resort to personification; in this way, they concretise the concept of *eros*, thus allowing for more specific characteristics to be attributed to it. Everything goes smoothly until Y decides to show some wit:

Extract 1

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-
- 1 Y *Eros is meant to be possessive*
2 S *What is it meant to be?*
3 Y *Possessive*
4 S *And agape isn't?*
5 Y *Possessive and volatile, it evaporates like methylated spirit*
6 *((laughter))*
-
-

The play on words is to be found in line 5 and it is not evident in the English translation. The Greek word for possessive is *ktitikos* and for volatile *ptitikos*, i.e., the difference is only in the initial sound. This pun resulted in the creation of a new metaphor, which brings together *eros* and methylated spirit. Like most new metaphors in discourse, their mappings have to be explained so as not to be discarded as irrelevant. *Y* proceeds to make his metaphor cognitively and contextually relevant: he explains the mapping and relates it to the topic of discussion to make a point, that *eros* is temporary and can vanish into this air like methylated spirit. In other words, *Y* makes a pun, which leads him to create a metaphor and then, in order to make that metaphor relevant, he searches for similarities, presents them succinctly and even manages to make a point and to cause hilarity. This extract shows how metaphor can *create* similarity: the newly created metaphor leads *Y* to become aware of previously unthought of similarities between *eros* and methylated spirit, similarities that did not exist *before* the metaphor occurred. I think this is what Indurkha (1992) means when he suggests that metaphor can reinstate lost similarities between objects and events and what later Fauconnier and Turner (2002) called the *emergent structure* of the blend.

The humour of extract 1 relied mainly on the pun which (maybe accidentally) led to a metaphor. The following examples all rely on metaphors for their humour. The first one (extract 2) is in line with processes identified by the SSTH (Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 1994) and with Coulson's (2001) *frame-shifting*. *E* is talking about people who constantly fall in love with people who are unattainable for various reasons:

Extract 2

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- 1 *E* They are generally concerned with people who are on a pedestal
2 *Y* Could it be because they haven't been concerned with anything else?
3 *E* Maybe
4 *L* Or they think they can't be concerned with anything else
5 *S* So tell us, they are concerned with people?
6 *E* Who are on a pedestal, who are far away, who are by definition...
7 *Y* Olympic champions?
8 *L* Maybe
9 *Y* ((laughs))
-

The expression 'to be on a pedestal' in Greek is a conventional metaphor and it

means ‘to be difficult to reach because of high status’. *E* uses this expression along with another conventional metaphor (*who are far away*, line 6) to describe the category of people she is talking about. *Y* in line 7 deautomatises the metaphor intentionally by referring to people who are literally on a pedestal. However, his example is accepted by *L* (line 8), because *Y*’s utterance is metaphorically ambiguous. Olympic champions fit both the literal and the metaphorical interpretation of *people who are on a pedestal*. The former is a witty deautomatisation of the metaphor, the latter is an accepted contribution to the conversation. Note, however, that *Y*’s utterance is only acceptable via metaphorical misunderstanding. His jocular intentions are attested by his chuckle that follows.

In metaphorical blending terms (see Figure 4), the term *Olympic champions* belongs primarily to one of the input spaces (that of people who can be found literally in high positions), but also to the blend (where important people are placed metaphorically in high places). In SSTH terms, *Olympic champions* belongs to two scripts which are

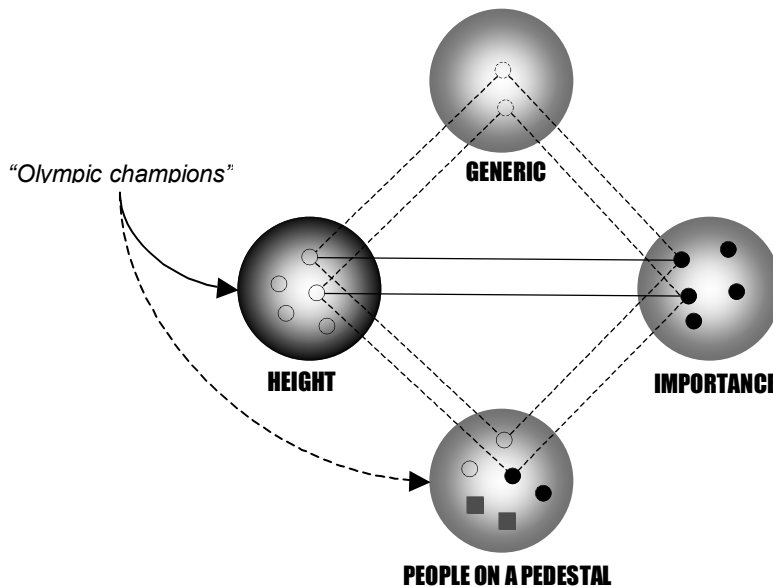


Figure 4: The *Olympic champion* example

incompatible, or in Coulson’s terms, *Y*’s utterance in line 7 causes a frame shift: from a frame relevant to placing people on a pedestal *metaphorically* to one where people are placed on it *literally*. This shift draws the attention of the hearers to one

specific input space and thus makes them realise the metaphoricity of the blend: it is only when *Y* mentions the Olympic champions that the interlocutors become aware of the fact that they have been using a metaphor. I believe that this process of ‘breaking’ the metaphor into its input spaces contributes to humour.

This process is also present in the following two examples. The difference here, however, is that the term that triggers laughter is not metaphorically ambiguous as in extract 2, and therefore, the text does not support explicitly two different scripts. Within the conversation, one of the new metaphors that was gradually conventionalised by constant use was that of *fluttering* to describe the feeling *eros* creates in one. In extract 3, this metaphor has become rather conventional, until an unusual question leads to its deautomatisation:

Extract 3

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- 1 *Y* I mean, when this guy came and talked to me in Ahududu on Saturday...
 2 *D* The guy from Los Angeles?
 3 *Y* I fluttered
 4 *S* Well, this could be related to fear and all that
 5 *Y* No, I fluttered, but not because I was scared
 6 *S* How did you flutter?
 7 *Y* Like a moth, how did I flutter? I don't know
 8 ((laughter))
-
-

Although metaphor can sometimes provide a useful alternative to the target domain (in this case, *flutter* for the abstract concept of *eros*), there are certain limits to which the metaphor can be elaborated before it reaches the ridiculous. In line 6, *S* tries to define the kind of feeling *Y* is talking about, but in order to do that he uses the

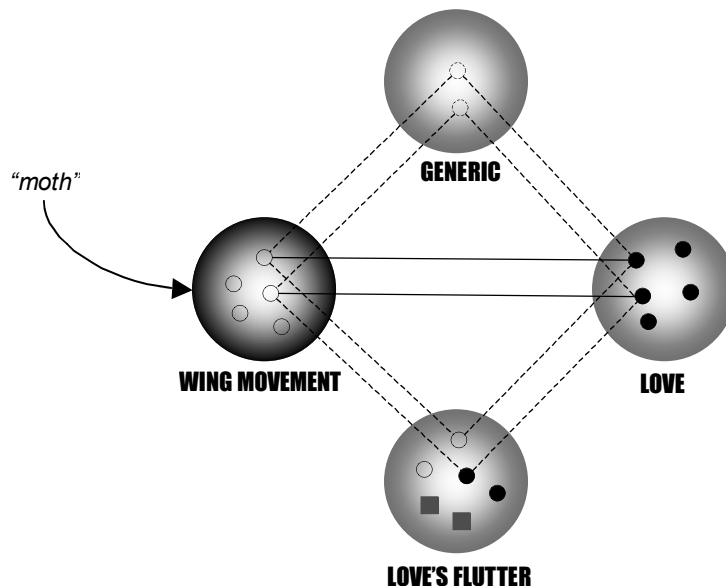


Figure 5: The *flutter* example

conventional (by now) metaphor of *fluttering*, thus producing an odd question (*How did you flutter?*). In other words (see figure 5), *S* is trying to understand *Y*'s emotions (input space B: LOVE) by asking to clarify the structure of the blend. *Y* however chooses to remain in the metaphorical sphere (in other words, disregards the connection between the two input spaces), and his response pertains *only* to input space A: WING MOVEMENT. In this way, he plays between the literal and the metaphorical, highlights one particular input space, reminds everyone that *fluttering* is a metaphorical blend and causes laughter (in Greek his response is even funnier, because the word for moth – literally *butterfly of the night* – is also used to refer to prostitutes). This process that raises awareness of the boundaries between the input spaces that have contributed to the blend is similar to the *Olympic champions* example; the difference here is that the text is not (metaphorically) ambiguous – the term *moth* only refers to one input space (and not to the blend as well) and in this way draws attention to it.

The examples presented so far dealt with intentional deautomatisation of a metaphor. However, humour can be created through unintentional deautomatisation. This may occur when a conventional (or conventionalised within the conversation) metaphor is found in such a context that makes us aware of its metaphoric (and long forgotten) qualities. Conversational proximity of its literal and metaphorical meanings is one such context, clustering of various metaphors is another. The latter applies to the following example:

Extract 4

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- 1 *S* *Should we touch the thorny issue of...*
 - 2 *Y* *Eeee, let's not touch it*
 - 3 *((laughter))*
 - 4 *L* *Which one, tell us*
 - 5 *S* *Relationships*
 - 6 *D* *We'll hurt*
 - 7 *((laughter))*
-

In extract 4, the combination of two conventional metaphors in line 1, *touch* meaning 'to deal with', and *thorny issue* meaning, as in English, 'difficult, controversial', leads to the deautomatisation of both, thus invoking an unpleasant picture. *Y* does not

let the opportunity pass and makes a comment (and a sound) pointing to that image (line 2), and in this way he creates a hyperblend (see figure 6) where thorny issues are being touched. *Y*'s exclamation pertains primarily to the blend, but this reaction can only be understood if the original input spaces of the hyperblend (those of PROXIMITY and HARD EDGED) are activated. In terms of boundaries between spaces,

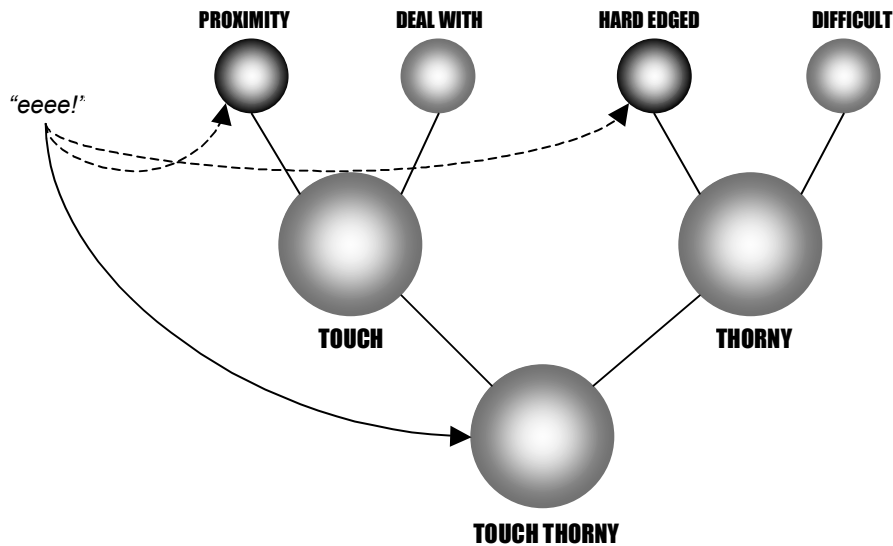


Figure 6: The *thorny issue* example

this is an interesting example, since there appears to be a palindromic movement between fusion of and tension between spaces: for the humour to work, boundaries have to be fused in order to create the hyperblend where thorny issues are touched, and then they have to be realised again in order to become aware of the fact that the touching that takes place and the thorns that are involved are not metaphorical, but very real, otherwise why scream (line 2)? In this way, the conventional metaphors that act as input spaces to the hyperblend are deautomatised. Once the hyperblend has been created, speakers can then use it creatively for the purposes of humour. *D*'s metaphorically ambiguous response (line 6) is a case in point: its literal meaning is in line with *Y*'s response and hyperblend, whereas its metaphorical meaning is related to *S*'s suggestion. At the time of the conversation, *D* had recently ended an eight year relationship, and talking about this particular topic will cause emotional pain.

It was hypothesised that metaphors can contribute to humour if awareness is raised

of their input spaces and tension is created between their boundaries. The last example showed that a combination of both fusion and separation between spaces can have humorous effects. The final example (extract 5) concentrates mainly on fusion and is similar to examples discussed in Coulson (2003) where the blend presents a hilarious image. In the case of metaphorical blends, such fusions extend a metaphor in order to create ridiculous similarities between its input spaces. *Y* is talking about how rare sex is in his life and what consequences this has:

Extract 5

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-
- 1 *S* *Tell me, the phase in which there is sexual activity in your life, and the phases*
 2 *in which there isn't, how do you see those in which there isn't?*
 3 *Y* *Long*
 4 *S* *Tell us*
 5 *Y* *What is there to say? To begin with, from one time to the next I forget what*
 6 *happens. For instance, I forget how it is to kiss someone, honestly*
 7 *E* *You forget what you've learnt the previous time?*
 8 *Y* *And they're so many*
 9 *S* *Isn't it like cycling and swimming then?*
 10 *E* *Yes but cycling and swimming are things you never forget*
 11 *Y* *The truth is that well OK*
 12 *S* *Tell us*
 13 *Y* *I have never learnt this particular thing like I can say I've learnt to cycle or to*
 14 *swim*
 15 *E* *Aaah you never forget these*
 16 *Y* *I know how to cycle and swim, the other thing I never learnt*
 17 *D* *Yet*
 18 *Y* *I'm using stabilisers and arm-bands*
-
-

In line 9, *S* introduces a metaphor to summarise what *Y* has said before. Cycling and swimming are supposed to be things one never forgets, and so is sex. However, this metaphor does not fit *Y*'s case, and therefore, it has to be negotiated. This is done collaboratively from line 10 to line 16. In doing so, a metaphorical shift occurs in line 13. Although the common ground for the initial metaphor was 'things one never forgets', *Y* in line 9 shifts it to 'things one has to learn in order to do them'. In the two blends that are created (see figure 7), the slot 'inexperienced' from the SEX input

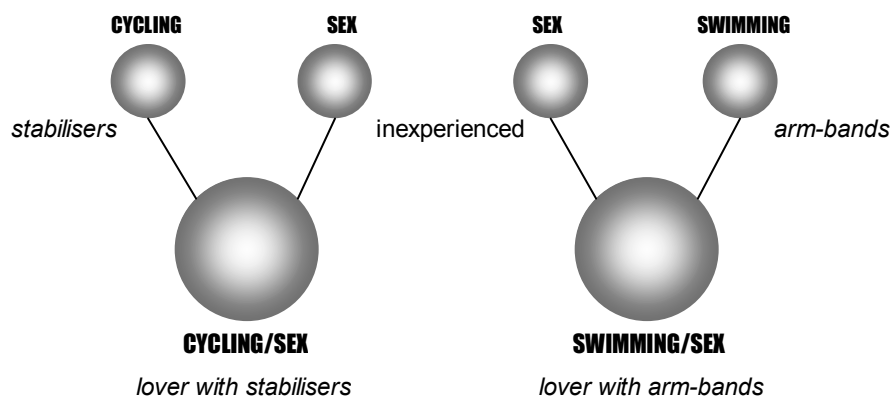


Figure 7: The sex for beginners example

space is projected onto the blend where it is fused with elements projected from the CYCLING and SWIMMING input spaces (i.e., *stabilisers* and *arm-bands*). The two images that result from this fusion, i.e., a lover with stabilisers or with arm-bands is what causes laughter.

Conclusions

This paper explored the relationship between metaphor and humour. It was found that the notions of duality and tension between boundaries is the key to understanding how both function. Duality and tension are central to humour. As Raskin (1985) first showed, for a text to be funny, it must support two overlapping and contrasting scripts. Even though overlapping, the boundaries soon become apparent. Indeed, it is the realisation of both the boundaries and the tension between them that causes laughter. In Coulson's (2001) terms, humour relies largely on shifting from one frame to another whilst processing a funny text. On the other hand, duality is also important for metaphor, but there the boundaries of the two input spaces are fused. The more conventional a metaphor is the less aware we are of the tension between the boundaries of its input spaces. So when does a metaphor become a joke?

The analysis of the data has shown that (as hypothesised) metaphor becomes a joke and causes mirth in discourse when attention is drawn to the boundaries between the two concepts it brings together; speakers, either intentionally or unintentionally, disjoin the domains that are relevant to the metaphor and emphasise their dissimilarities. In this way, the initial tension between the two input spaces is reinstalled and the realisation of the existence of boundaries and the tension between them leads to humour (as it does in jokes).

Processes of deautomatising a metaphor are quite common in discourse and serve many purposes (see Kyratzis, 1997; 2001); this paper shows how it is associated with humour. In the examples analysed, it was shown how speakers use terms (intentionally or unintentionally) that pertain primarily to one of the input spaces; in

this way, interlocutors become more aware of the existence of the input spaces, and consequently, the metaphorical blend is ‘broken up’. Hence, I shall call this process **de-blending** (see figure 8), since it appears to be the reverse of blending. As was

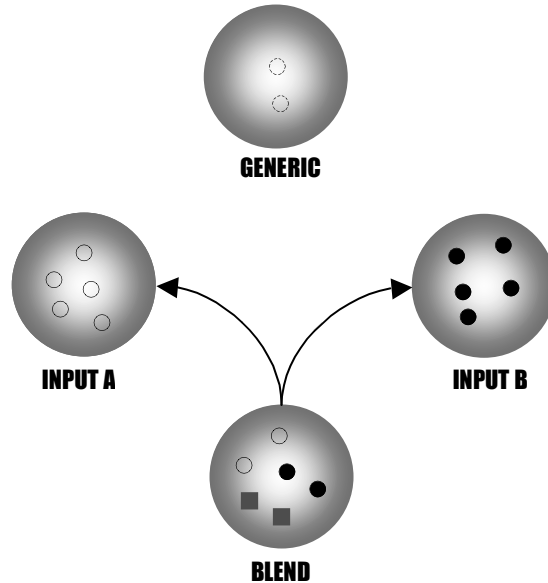


Figure 8: De-blending

mentioned before, for humour to exist there is a need for duality and tension. Metaphor certainly has both, but in most cases they are latent. De-blending first reinstates duality and then unlocks the tension between the two input spaces, and consequently the ground is prepared for humour. In the *Olympic champions* example (extract 2), the expression was metaphorically ambiguous and referred to both the blend and the input space; this was a case similar to SSTH where there are two overlapping scripts. In the *flutter* (extract 3) and the *thorny issue* (extract 4) examples, however, the expressions that triggered humour (*moth* and *eee!* respectively) only pertained to the input spaces, so no overlap was apparent. In all three cases, reference to one or more of the input spaces led to de-blending. This is similar to the process relating to jokes: the hearer is unaware of the ambiguity of the joke until they hear a term that only pertains to one script (the one that was latent) and not the other (that was explicit). Therefore, what seems to unite humour based on metaphors and other types of humour is this *sudden realisation of duality*: in the former, it is the realisation that an expression is metaphoric and therefore there are

two (or more) input spaces behind it; in the latter, it is the realisation that the text can be interpreted by means of two different frames.

Such creative interventions (on the part of the speakers) in relation to the boundaries between concepts that are metaphorically related affects the metaphoricity of expressions in discourse and provides further evidence that metaphoricity is dependant on context. In the *thorny issue* example (extract 4) for instance, the clustering of two conventional metaphors made speakers aware of their input spaces. This led to the creation of a hyperblend which aided further the de-blending of both metaphors. Therefore, metaphoricity of expressions is not fixed, but can be altered through various means in context. Specific reference to one input space or the clustering of metaphors are two ways in which this can happen.

Finally, (and contrary to the hypothesis) it was found that the reverse process – that of fusing boundaries – can also contribute to humour. In the *sex for beginners* example (extract 5), two new blends were created were two disparate domains were fused to create a ridiculous image, that of a lover with stabilisers or with arm-bands. Even though in this example there is fusion, I believe that the two necessary ingredients for humour, namely duality and tension, are still present. These two blends are novel in this conversation, and therefore the fusion of the elements projected from the input spaces is not crystallised in the way they are in more conventional metaphors. This means that the input spaces are still active and the necessary tension between them is still strong enough to cause laughter.

I hope that this analysis has shown that studying metaphors in discourse provides an insight into the cognitive processes involved in the creation of blends, since they are observed in real time. Also, by exploring the relationship between metaphor and humour in discourse in can be seen that both linguistic and cognitive theories of humour can benefit from each other.

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