

# Does Conceptual Integration Theory Possess the Cognitive Toolkit to Explain the Comic? Building Bridges Between Diverse Fields of Linguistics in Respect of English Humour

**Joanna Jabłońska-Hood**

Maria Curie Skłodowska University, Poland  
jablonska-hood@poczta.umcs.lublin.pl

## Abstract

*In this paper, I display the workings of the mechanism of conceptual integration theory (CIT for short), aka blending, as envisaged by Fauconnier and Turner (1998, 2002). I wish to demonstrate that blending is a potential candidate for a humour theory. On the basis of a few chosen examples of English humour, specifically a joke, a cartoon and a scene from a sitcom, I prove that CIT possesses a toolkit for an in-detailed analysis of any humour type. Further, I argue that some examples of comedy may require the cognitive procedure of frame-shifting alongside CIT, in order to account for the funniness in a systematic way. Frame-shifting is a term proposed by Coulson to be used in joke analysis (Coulson 2017). I point to the fact that it may boost CIT in humour explanation. Yet it needs to be stressed that frame-shifting on its own cannot explain humour. It ought to be regarded as a parameter to be included within CIT. Moreover, it is especially important to verify whether or not frame-shifting is always obligatory when studying comedy. Certainly, it is valid for shorter pieces of discourse, but its presence may not be required for all the other types of humour. The paper refers to this issue in conclusive remarks where I also postulate that in its power to throw light on the humour source and origin, CIT may be assigned the status of a cognitive tool with which to explicate humour.*

*Keywords: conceptual integration theory, blending, a mental space, frame-shifting, multimodality, English humour, the comic, comedy*

## Streszczenie

Czy teoria integracji pojęciowej zawiera odpowiedni aparat kognitywny do wyjaśniania komizmu? Budowanie mostów pomiędzy różnymi dziedzinami językoznawstwa w zakresie badań nad humorem angielskim

Niniejszy artykuł dotyczy mechanizmu funkcjonowania integracji pojęciowej, zwanej również teorią amalgamatów, która została stworzona przez Fauconniera oraz Turnera (1998, 2002). Jest również próbą ukazania, iż integracja pojęciowa może być uznana za potencjalną teorię humoru. W odniesieniu do wybranych przykładów humoru angielskiego, tj. żartu, komiksu oraz sceny z komedii, autorka próbuje pokazać, że teoria amalgamatów może posłużyć jako kognitywne narzędzie do wnikliwej analizy komizmu różnego rodzaju. Co więcej, autorka proponuje wprowadzenie terminu *frame-shifting* obok integracji pojęciowej do systematycznej analizy humoru. *Frame-shifting* to pojęcie wprowadzone przez Coulson (2017) do analizy żartów, i wydaje się być odpowiednie do studiów nad komizmem, aczkolwiek nie jest to zjawisko, które może samodzielnie wyjaśnić śmieszność, a powinno być raczej traktowane jako dodatkowy parametr integracji pojęciowej. W artykule autorka próbuje również sprawdzić, czy *frame-shifting* jest obligatoryjne dla humoru, czy też dotyczy to jedynie krótszych form dyskursu komicznego. Problem ten jest rozważany w konkluzjach artykułu, gdzie autorka argumentuje także, że amalgamat i przestrzeń mentalne powinny zostać uznane za podstawowy mechanizm wykorzystywany do studiów nad komizmem.

*Słowa kluczowe: teoria integracji pojęciowej, amalgamat, przestrzeń mentalna, frame-shifting, multimodalność, humor angielski, komizm, komedia*

## 1. The mechanism of blending

In the beginning, I shall introduce the main tenets of CIT in order to clarify its explanatory potential. Let me start with the notion of a mental space which CIT hinges on, to a large extent. The term 'mental space' has been introduced by Fauconnier (1997) and it may well be defined as an area of associations connected with one particular lexical item, which brings the connotations about. Mental spaces are described in literature as the “constructs distinct from linguistic structures but built up in any discourse according to guidelines provided by the linguistic expressions” (Fauconnier 1997: 16), or also in the following manner: “partial structures that proliferate when we think and talk, allowing a fine-grained partitioning of our discourse and knowledge structures” (Fauconnier, 1997: 11). In addition, any mental space “is built up in part by recruiting from (possibly many) conceptual domains and from local context.” (Fauconnier and Turner 2006: 331). Hence, mental spaces operate as temporary associative structures which are activated during information processing on the part of the human brain<sup>1</sup>. Further, a mental space can be linked with other related mental spaces, such relations being based on some striking similarity or connection between the relevant spaces in question. A case

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<sup>1</sup> Compare with the notion of "mental models" as discussed in de Jongste (2016), where a mental model is a cognitive situation representation which is characterised by its dynamicity and which is situated within our mind, including relevant elements such as a setting, participants and their conduct patterns, and also mental processes on the part of the participants, etc. This would suggest that mental models as a notion actually includes mental spaces as such, which by definition function as part and parcel of cognitive processes of language users, which will remain activate whenever we use our cognition (Turner 2014: 11).

in point might be the activation of mental spaces in the expression: 'Your eyes are like stars'. To comprehend the sentence, we need to activate a mental space of body, with eyes which are highlighted here, as well as the mental space of the universe and celestial bodies, such as stars, which are of importance. What happens next is the formation of a link between eyes and stars which become equivalent in the use of the language quoted above. Simultaneously, we transfer properties of one onto another. For instance, the shining or glistening of stars on the night sky might well be transposed onto the sparkly and shiny eyes of a person. Another quality to be transgressed is brightness or vividness. In this manner, specifically via the search for similarities or certain correspondences, we arrive at the meaning of eyes, via direct comparison to stars. This is exactly how networks between different mental spaces are established and operate, forming the basis of any conceptualisation through similarity-based association of vastly divergent concepts. At this point, I will briefly comment on the relation between mental spaces and other similar notions for the purpose of clarity in the further analyses below. The construct of a mental space can appear similar to notions such as frames, domains, or ICMs that are said to structure mental spaces (Evans and Green, 2006: 269–270), having been around in cognitive linguistics for a long period of time. Yet, what differentiates mental spaces from the other related notions is the fact that they are used by language users depending on the context, and can be thus freely manipulated and chosen and picked from, whereas, for instance, domains and frames are more of a stable nature. Additionally, mental spaces can vary from an individual to an individual, which is not the case with frames, domains or ICMSs. The reason for it is associated with the fact that people do have comparable, however divergent, experiences and knowledge resources. For my part, this seems to be a positive characteristic of mental spaces, since they will, to a large extent, present a specific language user with their particular worldview and perception in the form of the choice of the elements of particular mental spaces and the mappings they establish as networks between them. Typically, the variety is culture-oriented and context based, though, obviously, even in this respect we might encounter differences. That is why the specifics of mental spaces would dominate over the stability of more idealised notions such as frames and domains. The property of idealisation makes these other terms fairly different, since they need to exhibit a certain degree of universality. For instance, a frame of buying and selling will include elements such as a buyer, a seller, a object that will change its owner, etc. Such elements constitute fairly stable representations that any language user will be familiar with and will use to refer to. Similarly, domains must possess a degree of relative stability to be referred to as knowledge structures. In contrast, mental spaces are more context-oriented and can vary from person to person. Further, as domains, frames or ICMs are supposed to structure mental

spaces, they must be detailed, objective and stable, in order to provide information for another cognitive construct. It is possible, therefore, to conclude that such similar concepts as frames or ICMs are grounded and stable, thus functioning as subordinate constructs to mental spaces which will then be regarded as more subjective and construed by a language user on the fly, according to the discourse or context they encounter. Hopefully, this brief comparison will be useful when conducting humour analyses below.

What is more, within CIT we encounter the principle responsible for joining mental spaces in networks, which is referred to as the Identification Principle, and it states the following:

If two objects (in the most general sense), a and b, are linked by a pragmatic function  $F(b=F(a))$ , a description of a, da, may be used to identify its counterpart b.

(Fauconnier [1994: 3]; Fauconnier and Sweetser [1996: 7])

Basically, the relation of similarity that allows us to connect diverse mental spaces, a and b, must be perceived by a conceptualiser who, acting in a creative manner, makes the association, and hence simulates the network of possible connections between the structures of the two, or even more, mental spaces; such a simulation being performed in the mind of the language user in question.

Further, the correspondences between intertwined mental spaces are established in accordance with the following mechanisms:

- (1) **CROSS-SPACE MAPPING**: there is a partial mapping of counterparts between the input spaces.
  - (2) **GENERIC SPACE**: there is a generic space which maps into each of the inputs. This generic space reflects some common, usually more abstract, structure and organisation shared by the inputs and defines the core cross-space mappings between them.
  - (3) **BLEND**: the inputs are partially projected onto a fourth space, the blend.
- EMERGENT STRUCTURE**: the blend has emergent structure not provided by the inputs. This happens in three (interrelated) ways: **COMPOSITION**: taken together the projections from the inputs make new relations available that did not exist in the separate inputs. **COMPLETION**: knowledge of background frames, cognitive and cultural models, allow the composite structure, projects into the blend from the inputs, to be viewed as part of a larger self-contained structure in the blend. The pattern in the blend triggered by the inherited structures is "completed" into the larger emergent structure. **ELABORATION**: the structure in the blend can then be elaborated, it consists cognitive work performed within the blend, according to its own emergent logic.

(Fauconnier, 1997, chapter 6)

The above mentioned regulations provide the guidelines as to how we can perform conceptual integration in theory, and they are referred to as Optimality Principles. They are to secure the topological mappings of particular mental spaces, and their projection from the inner structures of input spaces into the blended space, in this way providing the blend with the novel structure of its own. The new set of relations within thus constructed blend is further elaborated

on, and this is how we build a completely novel unit of meaning, which will necessarily include incongruous elements that have been formulated from different input spaces.

Moreover, the generic space is a construct which is abstract in its nature and it organises the choice of information and elements within inputs. It will highlight certain general roles or functions of participants of a scene we analyse, and it will, basically, provide a generic topology to be realised by the input spaces. This allows for the mappings between various inputs to be fulfilled correctly, such correspondences subsequently being projected onto the blend and forming its new structure. The blended space, however, does not merely unite the correspondences from various mental spaces, which constitutes composition. It actually goes one step forward and extends the new composite structure of meaning by adding some other related information, which is attracted to the blended contents in the process of completion via the so-called online meaning creation (Grady, Oakley and Coulson, 1999). The notion of the online meaning (*ibid.*) is defined as an instant, on-the-fly process of constructing new meaning based on the blend through its elaboration. This manner of drawing extensions to the blend might well be based on cultural, encyclopaedic or background knowledge on the part of the language user who performs as well as processes the blending. I reckon that the fact that CIT encompasses such added connotations, thus elaborating the blended meaning and extending it beyond the simple lexical capacity, ought to be regarded as a unique feature. In other words, language users are always grounded, pretty much in the same manner as their perception is. Therefore, CIT is particularly suited for humour studies, for it relates to the grounded experience of the comic on the part of a humour receiver. This is not to say that we cannot seek humour universals and that we must not consider humour in terms of a universally valid phenomenon. On the contrary, humour is a human characteristic, and as such it should be professed. However, one of its crucial elements will always be a subjective receiver of humour, which CIT actually does take into account by means of the above-mentioned operations. The mechanism of CIT is frequently presented in the graphical form with circles relating to mental spaces and the blend. Here is how to show the blending processes graphically:

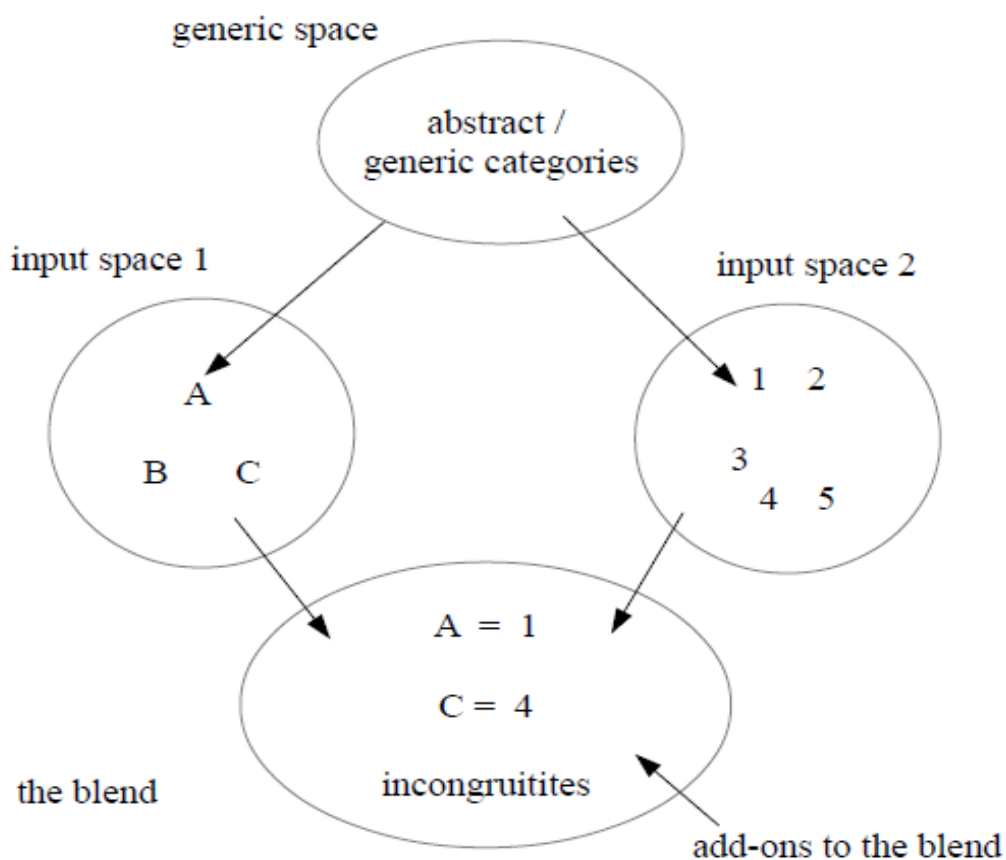


Figure. 1 The schematic representation of blending (own elaboration)

On the basis of the diagram, we can try and sum up what we have said about CIT so far. Initially, in blending, we concentrate on a generic space with merely abstract and non-specific information, which will later be realised in detail via mental spaces. Generic spaces can include elements such as persons, profession, tools, activities or states, etc. Moving down the diagram, we encounter mental spaces, known in CIT as input spaces or simply inputs, with certain elements that are topologically corresponded with some other mental spaces in the form of mappings. Mappings sketch new relations based on similarity, which are then transferred into the blend. Upon the projection, the blend is composed, completed and elaborated.

Let us now have a look at the concept of frame-shifting. This term has been devised by Seana Coulson (2015) in her studies on jokes. It is defined by its proponent as the “semantic and pragmatic reanalysis that reorganises existing elements in the message-level representation”

(Coulson 2015, p. 171). What this entails is reorganising information in a piece of text in order to arrive at the frame that is contextually relevant for the understanding of that same piece of factual information. Therefore, in jokes that Coulson analyses, it is possible to notice that the initial frame that a joke introduces must always be altered to suit the punchline of the said joke, which invariably changes the framework for humour comprehension. To give an example, the joke: “Does condensed milk come from small cows?” (Jarsz 2008: 262) initially mentions a frame of foods, in which condensed milk can be included. However, it then proceeds to the different frame of farm stock animals, particularly small cows. Hence, the original suggestion of the frame, referring to condensed milk, needs to be adjusted in order to explain the humour behind this joke. Specifically, we need to make this mental leap from condensed milk to small, or condensed, cows. Thus, the incongruity present within the joke, i.e. the different meanings of the word *condensed*, works well when the varying frames are perceived simultaneously, and then as juxtaposed frames. In this manner, allowing to make cognitive leaps and connections between diverse frames, frame-shifting explains the humour in short texts such as jokes or one-liners. I shall use the notion of frame-shifting within my analysis below, so as to find out if it is necessary at all times for humour rendering.

## 2. How does conceptual integration operate in context?

Let me give an illustration of how CIT works on concretes. To provide it, I would like to use the first line of Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, which reads as follows: “Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?” (Mowat and Werstine 2004: 20). The direct comparison is to be made between the beloved lady and a summer's day. Clearly, there is a need to establish a set of correspondences, i.e. mappings, between the two. Starting from a generic space, we can already state that we will have a person as well as a season in it. The mental space related to the person in question will include a woman and her qualities such as airiness, beauty, brightness, fairness, warmth etc. Above that, it might well include personality-related characteristics which will not count for the comprehension of the sonnet, for instance wisdom or shrewdness. Although these are present, they remain aside in the processing of the relevant information. Another input to be considered centres around the season of summer and it will include the summer's day which is airy, beautiful, light and sunny, with fair weather and warmth. Further, it can incorporate elements which are irrelevant for the understanding of the verse, such as summer's night or summer's rain, which are present but will, however, not take part in the blending. The transfer of properties from the summer's day onto a person will provide us with relevant mappings, such

as a beloved woman who is a summer's day, a beautiful woman who is equivalent to a beautiful day, female fairness which is equated with the fair weather day, warm heartedness of the woman which is mapped onto the warmth of the summer's day, and lastly a bright face of a woman which is mapped onto the bright appearance of the day. These mappings are then projected to the blend where we are presented with a novel meaning, namely a lovely female who somehow becomes a summer's day; which means she is perceived as beautiful, warm and bright, just like the qualities of the season. Such a unification of attributes, and their juxtaposition, functions on both literal and metaphorical levels, where warmth and brightness are particularly good examples of the blending of these two concepts in question. However, we will inevitably experience some incongruity in the blend. For one, a person can never become a summer's day. Secondly, weather related literal features of a day are not the same as someone's good looks or personality, however attractive these might be. Hence, the incongruities are always there within the blend. Yet, that does not stop a language user from processing a novel unit of meaning or elaborating it. Specifically, we can go further and find more features related to the blend itself. A case in point might be gentleness, which can be culturally attributed to women, hence the association of gentleness and delicateness on the part of a beloved woman, which might well be projected onto the summer's day. Incidentally a beautiful day in summer can also be described as gentle and delicate. Similarly, it is feasible to deepen the relations of beauty both with regard to a woman the lyrical I adores, as well as a day in summer. This property already functions on two levels, i.e. a literal one which denotes the good looks of a female as well as the general appearance of nature in the summer, when compared with the winter months. But the notion of beauty can also metaphorically refer to a female's inward beauty of character, as well as the summer's day beauty which relates to the quality of warmth and weather at that time of the year. All these follow-up associations create the emergent structure of the blended meaning and extend our comprehension of the verse, too. All these procedures at hand in here can be represented schematically as follows:



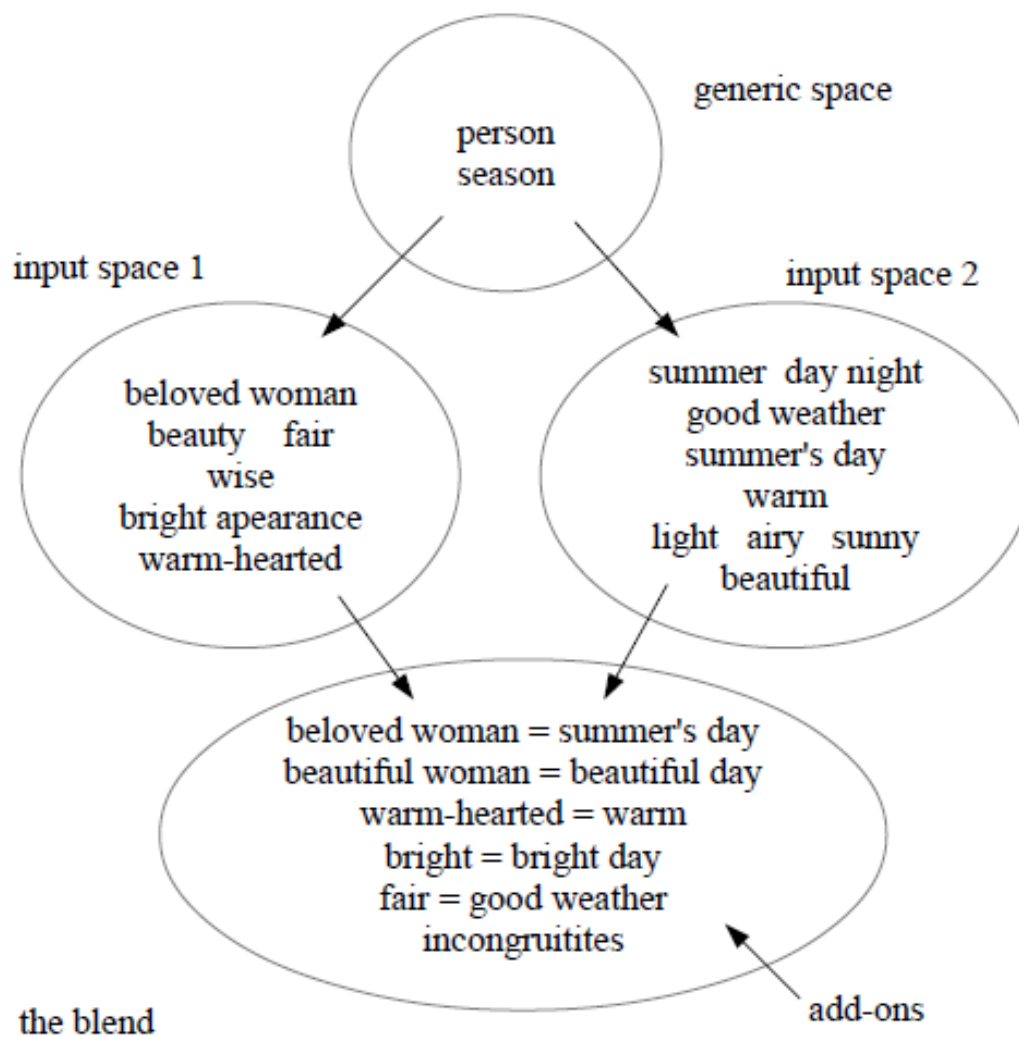


Figure 2. Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? - a graphic representation of mental spaces (own elaboration)

### 2.1. An analysis of multimodal humour by means of CIT

To proceed with my analysis, I would now want to resort to the demonstration of blending potential with regard to humour. To be precise, I would like to analyse three vastly different illustrations of humour, so as to show the interpretative capability of CIT. Firstly, I will analyse a simple joke. Secondly, I shall extend the modality of humour and aim at the analysis of a

cartoon, and finally I will progress to the most complicated medium and analyse a scene from a sitcom. Lastly, I will try to sum up how the blending works in relation to humour generally, irrespective of its nature.

### 2.1.1. *A one-liner (verbal humour)*

Let me start with the one liner<sup>2</sup> by Paul McMullan, taken from last year's Edinburgh Fringe Festival. It was voted one of the best one liners there and it goes as follows: "Do you know what I'd do if I found you in bed with my wife? I'd tuck you in." It basically is one of those question-answer types of humour. As a short form of joke, it can be explicable by the incongruity between the contents of the question and the answer that follows. The question assumes that finding your own wife in bed with another man is rather grim and it calls for some tragic or even drastic measures. What we expect to hear as an answer is therefore a negative, threatening or frightening scenario, such as: 'I would kill the man!' or 'I would suffocate him and my wife!', etc. However, we are faced with a mild response, which enables us to assume that the betrayed husband would happily tuck the lover in. Thus, we can perceive the frame-shifting on the level of discourse, i.e. from an expected negative response, we have to shift to a positive response, which would be likely to appear as an answer to a question carrying some positive entailment. Hence, this paradoxically inadequate answer opens up a whole bag of interpretations. Firstly, it allows us to perceive the fact that there must be little or no love between the scenario husband and wife. Perhaps they grew vastly apart and they do not have much in common any more. Or more likely, the sarcasm on the part of the speaker suggests that he is not really particularly fond of his wife. Therefore, finding a lover in bed with his wife would make him so happy, we can conclude, that he would tuck the lover in and wish him the all the luck in the world. Also, we can suppose that the wife is vicious or cruel, and finding the evidence of her betrayal would free the poor husband of the withered relationship. Such and similar interpretations which are incongruous with the initial assumption of trauma to come after hearing or reading merely the question, and the final surprising answer do provide the amusement. Again, we can assume that frames need to be adjusted on the semantic level of the interpretation, too. To be specific, the frame of a married couple and a binding love between the husband and the wife need to be reorganised into a frame of a casual relationship, an open relationship or perhaps an affair where the emotions have faded away completely. What is more, it is CIT that can explain that technically. When we take into

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<sup>2</sup> For more examples see the following link: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comedy/comedians/the-funniest-jokes-from-the-edinburgh-fringe/paul-mcmullan/>

account the generic space for the humour in question, we have to enumerate the role of husband and wife as well as lover, and the state of marriage, too. Obviously a more discourse-oriented elements such as the question and answer are also present but they exist on another level, i.e. the verbal/textual level. Yet, all these together seem to provide the abstract schema for the one liner. Similarly, input space one would be the mental space of a marriage with husband who is in love with his wife, and any sign of affair would torment him. This mental space is conjured up together with the question asked in the joke. The second mental space would be the one of the above-mentioned open relationship which allows for betrayal and unfaithfulness, and in which such behaviour is appreciated and favourably looked upon (this mental space is triggered by the answer to the original question). It is obvious that the participants in both mental spaces would be the same: namely the husband, the wife and the lover. Yet, in input space 1 a faithful husband who loves his wife is mapped onto the partner from input space 2 who is happy to hear about the unfaithful act on behalf of his own wife. Similarly, the reaction of the loving and caring husband on the discovery of his wife's affair would be rather dramatic and emotional in input 1. This behaviour would have to be mapped onto the extreme happiness on the part of the partner in an open relationship from input space 2 who would treat betrayal as a certain kind of liberation. Along the same lines we could interpret the reaction of a devastated husband from input space 1 which is mapped onto the reaction of a partner who is delighted at the discovery of his own wife's romance. Again these two are vastly inadequate. The unfaithful wife-partner and her conduct, just as the lover and his interest in the wife would remain very similar in both input space 1 and 2. All these mappings would have to be projected onto the blend and their incongruity, which is reflected in the incongruity of the discourse level (i.e. the question-answer pattern which is violated unexpectedly, on a different level of discourse, of course) can explain the reason behind humour of the one-liner in question. Furthermore, the elaboration of the blended contents would also further enhance the humour presented by the joke. Specifically, we could envisage the drama and tragic reaction of the love struck husband who might, for instance, kill the lover in affect or harm him at least. This could be juxtaposed with the positive reaction of the liberated partner from input space 2 who might do the dance of joy and ecstasy, and perhaps even kiss the lover, for that matter, since it is him who finally helped the husband find release from the supposedly unhappy marriage. Even such simple simulations elaborating the emergent structure of the blend are incongruous enough to provide the language user with more laughter and create more amusement, thus enriching the humour of the joke analysed. These are

merely a few associations that can be added to the blend and its meaning. The whole mechanism of CIT in the one liner mentioned above can be represented graphically in the following manner:

### 2.1.2. A cartoon

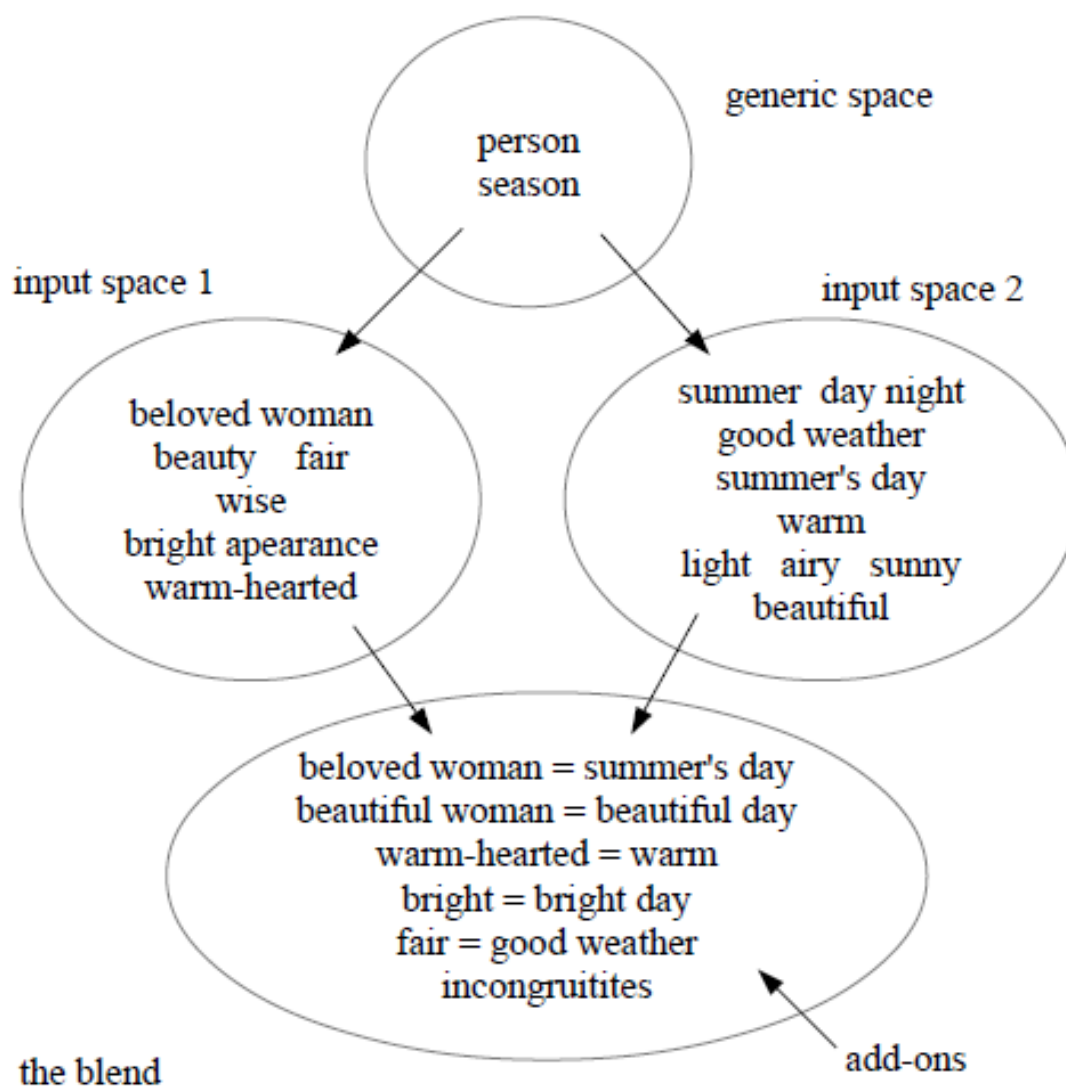


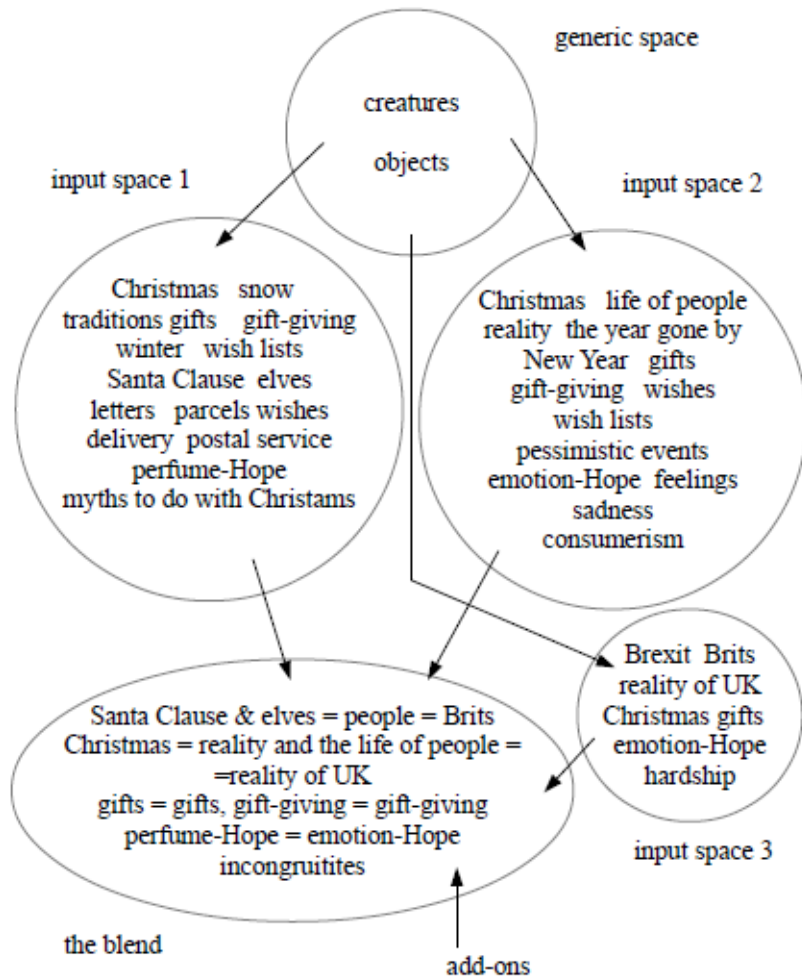
Figure 3. Tucking a lover in - example 1 of English humour (one-liner; own elaboration)

Now I shall turn to a cartoon that I have chosen from the Christmas 2016 selection of the Guardian online, as created by the duet cartoonists Berger and Wyse. The picture shows a truly

Christmas-oriented situation: several busy elves are preparing Christmas presents according to the wish lists of different people. They are clearly ordering presents in piles ready for Santa to deliver, one might assume. One of the elves who seems to be in charge of present distribution finds a particular gift request popular. It is hope that numerous individuals have asked for. The concept appears to be so alien to the elf that he decides to inquire about it and make sure that he understands this request correctly. Hence, the question posed at one other elf to specify whether the much requested hope is a brand of perfume. Working within this Christmas frame of mind, we are presented with a simple ambiguity in terms of conceptual integration. To be specific, we can enumerate the following spaces that produce the funny blend: a generic space with elements such as creatures, objects, and again perhaps some dialogue at the level of discourse; input space one is the mental space of Christmas with its tradition of gift giving and other customs, traditions and myths concerning that, e.g. Christmas time, wish lists, presents, elves who prepare and distribute gifts, Santa, winter, holiday season, snow, etc., with 'Hope' on the top of wish lists from ordinary people - the concept so ambiguous that elves assume it must be some kind of perfume name; as well as the second mental space where we also have the same space and time of Christmas, with its traditions and customs. Nevertheless, in this space, we could safely say, the wish for hope is more abstract and it denotes the general feeling of yearning for the better times ahead on the part of individuals who want it so desperately they ask Santa Clause for it. This second mental space might be the space that incorporates our reality and the past years gone by, where there have been too many disastrous, hope-drenching and depressing events for the people that they only ever want more hope for something positive to happen to them soon. Hence, the blend will include hope from input space 1, which is objectified and consumerised via elves and understood as a novel fragrance to be gifted to others, and also hope from input space 2, which functions as an emotion and a more abstract feeling that cannot be regarded as palpable and visible, but rather it must be experienced and welcomed with relief and optimism. This blended incongruous unit of meaning (hope from input space 1 as equated with hope from input space 2), though, is further elaborated with recourse to other mental spaces that are easily joined with the scene. This entails adding the British perspective onto the blend in form of the third input space of Brexit. Namely, we know that culturally, politically and socially the authors of the cartoon definitely wanted to make specific reference to the events of the last two-three years which have been extremely difficult for the British citizens. Many high-ranking events and things perceived as very negative have occurred, such as the general vote for Brexit, or the change within the government and its policies, to mention just a few, have signified the lack of hope for the future for many Europe-oriented Britons. Additionally, the voting in America where

Donald Trump has been chosen as the next President also did not vouch well for the British friends of the USA. Generally, with cut backs and savings too, the political climate has been tough, hence the wish would be for more hope to arrive at the scene. However, the elves and their lack of understanding of the concept is not irrelevant either. We could assume that they represent a perspective on our times with their lack of comprehension of higher feelings such as hope. It is as if they symbolise people who have been so tormented by some unexpected or extreme events in the lives which have devastated them so drastically that they are not even familiar with the term hope. The concept such as this does not enter their minds, as they do not have feelings that would be similar to hope; they lost the will to seek for the better or the happier times, hence hope can merely signify the idea of some exotic perfume or so. All these references to the social reality are grounded in the blend and extend it further. Along the same lines, we could go so far as to say that people, not only in Britain, but also universally, will soon be so fed up with world events, whether political or social does not matter, that they will cease to understand other higher emotions such as love or compassion, and these will also ring a bell but merely as exotic perfume names, etc. Summing up the analysis of the cartoon, it is possible to say that the incongruity of the sense of hope is responsible for humour in here. Nonetheless, it is only a starting point, all the other references to culture, society and politics which are situated within the Christmas magical setting of elves certainly add to the blended ambiguity, thus enriching humour and providing a deeper insight into the cartoon itself. Such an intelligent manifestation of the comic is nevertheless further boosted with a rather witty presentation of the scene graphically. The green-clad elves are serious and diligent, and the puzzled expression on the head elf's face sorting out Christmas deliveries only adds to the contrasting nature of the funny cartoon. Moreover, the elves seem to be fairly modern in their approach to Christmas wish lists and presents, ticking off lists of potential gift receivers and utilising rather modern looking vehicles in transportation of goods around. This, in itself, can introduce another mental space of a logistic company and its operations such as the delivery of goods, which is a real-life concept, as opposed to elfish creatures who actually look surprisingly like men, with the exception of their green apparel. On the whole, the drawing introduces not only a new mental space, but a new modality to the scene, i.e. the pictorial representation, which in itself greatly enriches humour within the cartoon. In addition to that, it is possible to conclude that CIT is capable of dealing with a sophisticated medium of cartoon and a witty instance of humour rather smoothly, by adding another layer of the humorous perspective with the aid of another mental space of the British reality, and a universal situation of all people in the last couple of years.

The graphic representation of the blending processes in here, which becomes a fertile ground for allusions to other phenomena in the form of diverse mental spaces, is presented below, exemplifying the complexity of references at hand.



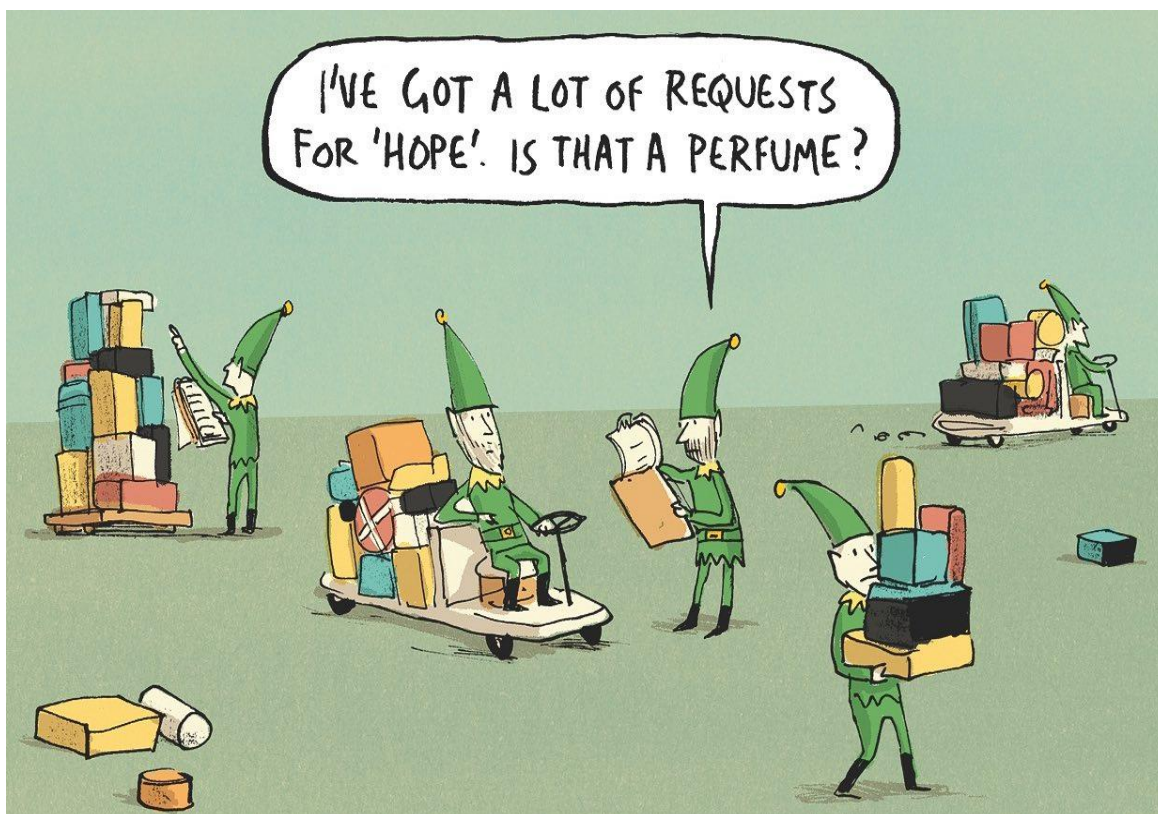


Figure 4 / 5. Christmas 2016 graph - example 2 of English humour (own elaboration) / cartoon reprinted from: [https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/picture/2016/dec/17/berger-wyse-on-christmas-presents-cartoon?CMP=share\\_btn\\_link](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/picture/2016/dec/17/berger-wyse-on-christmas-presents-cartoon?CMP=share_btn_link)

In addition to CIT, we can also implement the notion of frame-shifting in this instance. We may assume that the word hope is linked to two frames here: the first one used by elves in a Christmas scene where it stands for a present in the form of perfume, but also the second frame of interpretation that refers to a general positive feeling people are fond of when thinking of their future. Nonetheless, these frames and their shifting is not enough to explicate all intricacies of the British humour in this illustration, which has been created as a reaction to specific events in the British history, or world history. I strongly believe that CIT, which accounts for contextual information and more detail in the depicted scene, ought to be regarded as better-suited for the humour interpretation than frame-shifting. This is not to say that frame-shifting should be rejected. It can certainly be of aid when analysing humour in short texts, where we directly encounter two clashing frames, e.g. in one-liners where succinctness demands a more general kind of incongruity to initiate laughter. However, in more complex examples of humour, such as the cartoon discussed above, frame-shifting does not appear to have enough explanatory



power to deal with a more cultural perspective on humour. CIT, on the other hand, does possess a toolkit which can boast just that. For this reason, I hold that conceptual blending might be considered more appropriate as a tool to study humour, especially British humour.

### 2.1.3. A sitcom entitled *Miranda*

Last but not least is the humorous scene taken from a well-known sitcom entitled *Miranda*, after the name of the main protagonist<sup>3</sup>. It concerns the situation where Miranda pretends to be an elderly pensioner who needs the so-called meals on wheels, i.e. the catering service for the old and disabled. Clearly, it is just a pretence, as there is nothing wrong with Miranda and she is slightly over thirty, so she does not even qualify for any special care. However, Miranda jumps at the opportunity from the very moment a delivering lady, who has parked on a double yellow line (an offence in the U.K.) and is in a hurry, brings food for Miranda. As it turns out, Miranda's handwriting is confusing and especially her ones and sevens look alike, so based on her tax return and badly handwritten figures in it, the council has issued her with an ID for the pensioners as well as has provided a hot meal delivery for her, on the false assumption she is old. Our protagonist immediately accepts the food she generally loves so much, as she does not want to waste it. She keeps up appearances but finally decides she cannot continue that forever, and cancels the catering. This prompts the delivery woman mentioned earlier to bring some flowers for Miranda, assuming that she has passed away, since this is the only reason the meals on wheels are cancelled. Obviously, Miranda takes it without a twitch in her eye and thus finishes with free takeaway food, allowing herself to produce a eulogy to her own self. Analysing this scene, we can establish a generic mental space with elements such as an old person and a young one, as well as social services. Accordingly, we refer that abstraction to input space one which denotes a life of a pensioner, with the old and senile, help provided to them by the state, catering for the old, delivery as well as food provided. The analogy is drawn between this input and the other one, where we have a young person who is cunning and cheats the government NHS system in order to obtain the benefits and live comfortably (input space 2). There is, finally, also the third input space in the form of Miranda's perspective on the situation. Here we can enumerate elements such as Miranda, who is supposedly functioning as the pensioner, the food being delivered to her, the catering, as well as the help. The mapping of the old and disabled (input space 1) onto the fit and well-functioning (here both input space 2

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<sup>3</sup> I will analyze a scene from Series 2 Episode 2 entitled *Before I Die*, the whole episode is available at the following address: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=8AAXfBp8Kqg>.

and 3) provides the main structure of the topology within the blend. This incongruous relation gives rise to more additional associations that can be arrived at. Firstly, the idea of meals on wheels which are delivered to a relatively young person who is so lazy and loves food so much that she cannot deny the wrongly delivered catering is preposterous, as it also connects to the bad service provided by a state organisation who is supposed to support the elderly, and not the young. For such an incident to happen and carry on for some time, it is necessary to assume that the workers on behalf of meals on wheels must be easily fooled. Moreover, they apparently do not check people's identity accurately, issuing the young with pensioner IDs and providing them with the service meant exclusively for the elderly. Further, the state services also look ridiculous when taking into account the fact that they have brought the funeral wreath for Miranda, after she has finally ceased to require the catering service. This is all very nice, yet when we consider that the caterers have not even checked the identity of the person they are to help, the perspective alters. We are presented with the allusion to charitable organisations which are so detached from the ones they are meant to help, so naïve and uninterested that leaving cooked meals to the young and the able makes no difference and does not raise any alarm bells. This social dimension is also reinforced by Miranda who, as a representative of the younger generation, sees nothing wrong with the fact that she is cheating the system of welfare. The right perspective is eventually brought on by Miranda's friend -Stevie, who is appalled by her best mate's conduct. Secondly, the comic dimension of Miranda's actions could be extended further, thus enriching the humour present, if we imagine, on the basis of the blended contents, that she, for instance, informs the social services of her own funeral so as to confirm that no meals on wheels will be required henceforth. Ridiculous as it may appear, such a simulation goes along with the flowers in tribute of the supposedly deceased pensioner that the caterer has brought in the end. In fairly the same manner as Miranda who delivers a solemn eulogy to herself, too (mocked and derided by Stevie's remarks in the background). In addition to that, we can further enhance the humorous effects if we were to incorporate the film mental space with its mimics, gestures and farcical body language going on. Miranda oftentimes directs attention to the screen in order to make a face, roll her eyes or wink at the viewer or the audience watching comedy in front of the camera, all this contact being necessary for establishing an indirect relation with the viewer. Further, Miranda also talks to the audience, scolding the viewer for being naughty or inappropriate, etc., which strengthens the bond. Additionally, the complete series establishes a fairly good bond between Miranda the character and people watching it. This provides an additional space grounding the whole sitcom in real life. Specifically, in contemporary Britain with its issues and problems. A case in point might be the allusion to incompetent social services as described

above, or those episodes which incorporate cameo performances by British celebrities, such as Gary Barlow. For my part, this window of contact with the real life fans of the sitcom strengthens the funniness and certainly enhances humour in it, via the mapping of the blended elements onto reality, which seems to be a particularly British thing to do. The idea that comedy with its fictional characters and setting relates directly to the life within the U.K. appeals to the British and it is one of the crucial features of their comic standards that definitely enriches the English humour sense (similarly to the cartoon described above).

Here is the schematic representation of mental spaces operating in the sitcom:

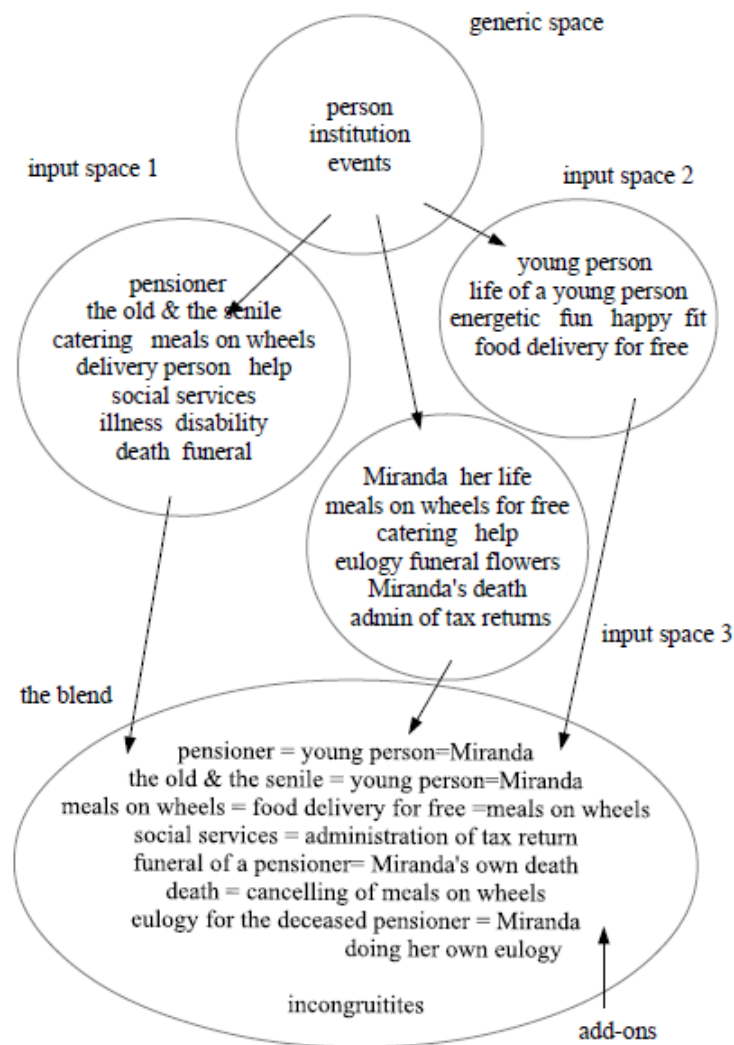


Figure 6. Miranda and meals on wheels - example 3 of English humour (sitcom; own elaboration)

As far as frame-shifting is concerned, in the above example of the English comedy it is also possible to enumerate two different frames of interpretation, i.e. the frame of being a pensioner in Britain, as well as a frame of a young person who is sly and capable of cheating the NHS system. We also need to relate these two frames to the frame of the comedy scene. When juxtaposed, the elements of all the frames concerned may account for humour, for we see Miranda as a sly young person who pretends to be old and receive appropriate benefits for her own good. However, the mere association of the frames and their elements respectively is again not enough for the humour to be explained well. With the frames, there is no such construct as the blended frame which could unite all the vital elements together, as well as show all the incongruities. Obviously, we are capable of perceiving links in-between the frames, but not all such relations will show incongruity. A case in point might be Miranda's supposed death. This cannot be linked with any other element of the remaining frames which would be incongruous, and hence generate comic effects. Certainly, it is feasible to set correspondences between respective frames, but they do not operate as mapping in CIT. Such relations cannot be elaborated on by a language user who, creating meaning online, brings their own context to the comedy present. For that we need a more systematic toolkit, such as CIT, with blended spaces, which are elaborated on and which actually require more contextual and cultural information to be brought into the picture in order to appreciate all the nuances of the comedy. I am of an opinion that CIT, when compared with frame-shifting, does have a more convincing apparatus to explain comedy fully, as presented above.

## **2.2. Advantages of CIT in humour explanation**

Having conducted the analysis of the funny material, I shall now turn to conclusions which can be drawn from this. Firstly, it is right to state that CIT provides a toolkit with which to explain the source of amusement in various modalities. By the toolkit I specifically mean the range of operating terms which allow for the explanation of how language users will create meaning online in real time (for more information see Grady, Oakley and Coulson 1999; Jabłońska-Hood 2015) and what processes are employed in the mind of a language user in order to arrive at the meaning intended by a funny utterance, situation or picture. The most vital concept in CIT is the idea of a mental space which can be compared with terms such as ICMs, domains or frames. Mental spaces are, nonetheless, dynamic in nature, since they can be manipulated by language users freely based on a given discourse or context, whereas the other concepts mentioned above are more stable and objective. Also, the dynamicity of mental spaces leads further to the fact that

their arrangement may vary from an individual to an individual, because people have different experiences and knowledge representations. Hence culture-oriented mental space can be said to be of a higher-order nature in contrast with domains or ICMS, for example. This is also the reason why the specifics of mental spaces would dominate over the stability of more idealised notions such as ICMs, frames or domains in respect of humour studies, especially British humour which is heavily culture- and context-based.

Secondly, the blending of topological correspondences between selected information from mental spaces provides another vital part of the creative apparatus of CIT. The formulation of the blended contents as well as the idea of matching and mixing incongruous yet familiar information so as to comprehend some novel creative unit of meaning appears to be crucial in humour explanation, and also in any other creative thinking procedures, whether humorous or not, for that matter. Although I would presuppose that for humour, in particular, the notion of blending incompatible mental spaces provides a stronghold to build the meaning against, in a creative manner. No other theory, I should think, has such an apparatus to explicate the humorous. More so, if we consider the emergent structure of the blended meaning, which is achieved via composition, creation and elaboration of mappings from input spaces. If one takes this into account, it ought to become apparent that this feature of extending blended meaning with add-on mental spaces that arise as relevant and necessary in the context of the blend only is exceptional against the background of other theories of humour. Blending does incorporate such external associations and brings them extensively into the picture, which should be treated as vastly important, for humour by definition is comprehended by a language user, and hence it must enable this language user to utilise relevant simulations and grounded knowledge they possess and store in their long-term memory, with recourse to any comical situation. Via the extension of the blend we are also allowed to introduce to any humorous situation additional levels of the comic, i.e. the discourse perspective (belonging to the level of text which is being processed), which further relates to the structure of humour analysed (as in the one-liner studied in this paper above), the level of reality, a particular culture or society with its politics, etc., or simply the level of various modalities such as drawings (as in the cartoon) or gestures (as in the sitcom) [An interesting concept of a grounded blend has been put forward by Liddell 1998, who maintains that it incorporates a mental space which is blended with physical environment and can thus add to the blended concept some non-linguistic information used in communicating such as gestures]. Additionally, *Miranda* exemplifies the sitcom in which we could also introduce the meta level of linguistic communication, on which the character from the comedy discusses events and talks freely to the viewer. This meta function allowed by CIT has not been

introduced by any other broad theory of humour, to my knowledge. Furthermore, the mere idea of a language user who interprets humour is regarded by the majority of other humour theories as a homogenous concept whose idealisation does not serve a purpose within humour studies. CIT, by comparison, does attribute a proper role to the conceptualiser, though indirectly. A person who simulates mental spaces and performs the blending and its elaboration is a must in conceptual integration, as well as in humour theorising.

Further, when proposing CIT as a general theory of humour I would like to straightaway explain that it can operate as a higher-order theory of a broad nature that will help to interpret the origin of humour, no matter what type of it is scrutinised. Blending, which is regarded by its proponents as a basic operation of the brain (Fauconnier and Turner 2006: 304; 2008b online) in any conceptualisation type, will smoothly explicate the fact that humour originates from the dual clashing nature of a language use or a communication act. This duality, or incongruity, is mechanically explained by blending mental spaces and their selected elements, which is then still expanded via related mental spaces. The whole procedure can be attributed the role of a mechanism behind humour, and it is, too, a general mechanism that characterises our human mind. But it does not explain specifics of every humour scene, this must be performed by a language user, where each and every person can go about it in a slightly varying manner. This, however, does not provide criticism of CIT, in my opinion, but rather should be regarded as its strength, since with any humour some people will understand humour better, some will have to take more time for all the essential mappings to be blended and elaborated as required. Still some people will not find the amusing relations or meaning at all.

Additionally, CIT is largely compatible with other more detailed and specific humour theories, e.g. incongruity and its resolution, relevance theory or semantic script theory of humour or any pragmatic theories for that matter, but also one-stage and two-stage theories of humour, to mention just a few. Let me give a word of explanation in this respect. Blending does fit perfectly within incongruity theories of humour, as it does involve varying mental spaces, and it blends mappings from these. As for any resolution, blending does involve the comprehension of incongruity, though it might take a longer period of time than the assumed online meaning creation within CIT. Yet who is to say that any resolution in humour is to be immediate? Clearly there are cases where it takes people days to arrive at humour and its explanation in their own minds, which results in a belated arrival at the comic meaning. This is true for both incongruity and its resolution theories as well as blending, since there is nothing to say we unravel the enigma of funniness instantly. Sometimes we might even fail to discover the humour behind some stimulus, or we might even need help in explicating it.

Further, the relevance theory whose aim is to find the most relevant meaning, i.e. the humorous one in this case, will also be compatible with the blending scope. CIT does select elements from mental spaces in such a fashion as to be most relevant and find the amusing blend which will be incongruous as soon as possible and with the least cognitive effort on the part of the human brain. Also, any pragmatic theory of humour which does assume the presence of a speaker and a hearer will have its counterparts in CIT. To be precise, the language user who performs blending does assume one of the above mentioned roles, usually the hearer, or the recipient of the comic. Surprisingly, we might go as far as to state that the speaker in a humorous situation will become part of mental spaces to be blended. Moreover, pragmatic accounts of humour will study it within a context based surrounding, which again blending does take into account via extensions of the blended space and online meaning creation in real time. Similarly, semantic script theory of humour will fit within CIT, as it, too, searches for incompatible clash of relevant scripts, which here will be adequate to mental spaces and their incongruity within the blend. What is more, CIT goes slightly further than semantic script theory of humour, as it does enrich the blended clashing spaces via secondary associations, whereas Raskin's paradigm does not provide that.

As for one- and two-stage theories of humour, I maintain that both could be realised by means of conceptual integration. Whether we assume that we establish the humorous correlations in one stage or two, these can also be attributed to the mental spaces and the blend, where stage one would mean the correspondences between inputs, while stage 2 would actually mean performing the processing of the information given within the blend and its extension.

Finally, when we take into account the frame-shifting procedure, we can observe that it does work in some less elaborate instances of humour, such as verbal jokes which relate to the level of discourse. In the more elaborate medium of a cartoon or comedy, frame-shifting can be applied to the semantic rendering of the text, yet it does not play a vital role in the overall humour interpretation that necessarily refers to contextual or social elements.

### **3. Concluding remarks**

However we want to categorise CIT, it certainly can be regarded as a higher-order theory that can also function as one potential humour theory under which it is possible to subsume all the other, more specific and in-detail theories of humour. As a fundamental operation of the human mind, blending can be described as a basic operation to establish any humour. Specifically, this could be achieved via mapping diverse mental spaces onto each other, with their selected

elements, and then projecting these as one in a simulation which unifies as well as blends the varying information, sets up a novel relation of meaning and then simulates further potential extension(s) of it. This is, for my part, how we ought to perceive humour, as a simulation of opposing mental spaces, where we simply blend certain elements and then elaborate them anew, until we reach a novel meaning construction which is funny due to its distinct nature which has been surprisingly brought together as a creative act. Simultaneously, a brand-new meaning that never existed before can be said to have been created in such an act of humour. Further, this new blended unit of humorous meaning can become entrenched. This is a perspective on language similar to the one Langacker advocates. Namely, Langacker (2000: 3f.; 2005: 143–146) speaks of augmentation, i.e. the process of conventionalising a linguistic unit to the extent that it might become a basis for some novel meaning. Similarly perceived blends, entrenched and conventionalised, would be comparable with such an augmented unit, and these could later function as a basis for more humour, i.e. in the form of one mental space that will be joined with some other, perhaps also already blended mental space, resulting in a conceptual integration again. The multiplication of thus created and envisaged humour does fit rather well within linguistic studies of utterances and what language users say and express, becoming part of a continuum of meaning adjustment, creation and extension within language. Similarly, with recourse to English humour, that would be of particular importance as over the years my observations of it allow me to conclude that it is truly becoming more and more sophisticated and demanding in its interpretation, especially for non-native speakers, or native speakers who fail to function within the British reality due to different reasons. The English comedy blends such a variety of contemporary meanings with immediate reference to a multitude of the up-to-the-moment associations with cultural, political as well as social life that it has become increasingly demanding to study and analyse English humour. Frequently, it centres around the blends that were already rooted culturally and that previously became input mental spaces for other conceptual integration processes. Hence the tendency for the British comedians to build their repertoire on more and more already blended contents, to provide a fuller and deeper insight into the English-speaking world, reality and perspective. This phenomenon certainly proves that CIT has a striking bearing on how humour can develop together with the community that uses it. CIT can function as an operating theory of humour, which can be included, in a subordinate manner, within many other detailed theories and paradigms on the comic and its creation. What is more, the fact remains that there is a certain prevailing omnipresence of blending in every sphere of our human lives these days, humour not being an exception in this respect. Why not, then, assign the status of a broad, higher-order humour theory to CIT?



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