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A critique and overview of current Humour Theories and their further integration into the field of Cognitive Linguistics

“I like jokes. Little pieces of nonsense. But thinking seriously about things
is frightetning”¹

Abstract

This paper explores the further integration of humour theories into the field of cognitive linguistics using Svetlana Alexievich’s book *Boys in Zinc* (2017). It applies a framework that aims to enhance our understanding of humour, language and cultural cognition. Through revisiting foundational humour theories, the study critiques their limitations and their holistic approach by focusing on each component of the humorous remarks. By employing a cognitive linguistic framework, the analysis focuses on the interplay between micro-, meso-, and macro-level contexts in joke construction and interpretation. It aims to highlight the necessity of a more precise manner of categorization, which relies on the existing cognitive linguistic framework of humour analysis. This approach was developed to demonstrate how humour reflects socio-cultural identities and beliefs manifesting in jokes.

Keywords: humour studies, cognitive linguistics

1 Introduction

The focus of the paper is to revisit current humour theories and to further analyse them through a cognitive linguistic framework. This will be done by presenting current theories and works connected to humour, relying on the established cognitive linguistic framework, and analysing jokes found in Svetlana Alexievich’s book, *Boys in Zinc*.

This paper proposes the following claims: (1) humour can and should be more closely examined and integrated into the field of cognitive linguistics, not only to better understand humour itself, but language and its use as well. (2) The current working theories of humour, the most widely accepted being the grouping into Superiority Theory, Incongruity Resolution Theory and Relief Theory (Nilsen & Nilsen 2019: 251) are acceptable, but should not be used to categorise jokes in their entirety. Rather, these theories serve to illustrate the inner workings of parts of these jokes, whose construction and comprehension relies on micro, meso and macro level contexts (Ellis 2019: 39–40) and a cognitive clash prompted by them (Marín-Arrese 2003: 5). Through understanding how people construct jokes and what they find to be humorous, we

¹ Alexievich 2017: 120

cannot only understand their sense of humour, but gain information regarding their socio-cultural background as well, since language and cognition are intertwined (Ellis 2019, Evans 2012, Sihna 2007 among many). This is further purported by the idea of the local sense of humour, referring to the unique sense of humour possessed by communities through their history (Kuipers 2008: 379).

To sum up, the paper investigates the inner workings of humour and cognition by employing a cognitive linguistic framework. The layout is the following: first, presenting the original categorisations, and second, identifying the limitations of a holistic approach, which will later be corrected through the proposed framework and categorisation. This should aid in our understanding of language in this regard.

2 Overview of corpus selection and current issues in humour research

In this section, the corpus and its selection process will be discussed. Following, the foundational issues in regard to the currently held frameworks for humour analysis are going to be laid out.

The corpus used for this study is Svetlana Alexievich's book *Boys in Zinc*, originally written in 1991, later translated into English and released in 2017. It is a compilation of interviews given by those who were affected by the Soviet Afghan war, collected, and compiled by the author. The reason for analysing the book's content is that it is an unalterable data-set, void of change and available to the public. This ensures academic integrity since it cannot be changed to favour the claims of the study and corpus-based studies are widely accepted in linguistics² (Egbert et al. 2020: 1–4). Another important reason for its selection is to move away from artificial examples. As mentioned by Coulson, cognitive sciences, which clearly includes cognitive linguistics, tend to use data stripped of realistic context (Coulson 2000 [In: Brône 2017: 252]).³ This approach is avoided, as *Boys in Zinc* is deeply rooted in context within the given time period.

In the following part, the current issues within the field of humour studies will be presented in two main sections. First, the problematic aspects in regard to categorization will be noted. Secondly, the existing cognitive linguistic framework will be elaborated on.

Humour theories are rather hard to categorize and grasp, as is noted by Nilsen and Nilsen (2019). For this reason, researchers rely on the three, most widely accepted categories. These are Incongruity Resolution Theory, Superiority Theory and Relief Theory (Nilsen & Nilsen 2019: 251). Superiority Theory is based on the idea that other people's shortcomings are funny and, when turned into a joke or a humorous remark, it helps to create a sense of superiority (Nilsen & Nilsen 2019: 252). Relief Theory states that laughter itself is a tool to release nervous energy or built-up tension and to overcome sociocultural inhibitions (Nilsen & Nilsen 2019: 251), while Incongruity Resolution theory encompasses the resolution of incongruity, which is understood as the root of humour (Nilsen & Nilsen 2019: 252). These categories would and do suffice in certain instances, mostly when jokes are straightforward and rather simple. We can

² Corpus linguistics relies on a collection of texts and other material that are in close proximity to the language domain a given study is set out to examine (Egbert et al. 2020: 5).

³ Relying on data stripped of context goes against the basis of cognitive linguistics and its offspring, cultural-cognitive linguistics. As they both are built on the principle of cognition being embodied, embedded within our environment, encultured, enacted and socially distributed (Ellis 2019: 39).

think of “Yo mama” jokes for Superiority Theory, laughing during stress-inducing events for Relief Theory, and simple puns for Incongruity Resolution Theory. Nevertheless, what this paper proposes is that these categories should not be holistically applied for jokes that are deeply rooted in context, and therefore more complex. Instead, every meaningful part of these humorous remarks should be carefully examined and then categorized, not the joke in its entirety. These categories are proposed to be embedded in our cultural cognition and therefore are in correspondence with different contextual levels. Within the field of cognitive linguistics, the most widely used and accepted framework for humour analysis involves mental spaces and conceptual blending theory (Brône 2017: 257–261). By applying this framework, we can not only understand the construction of the joke, but by further analysis, we can gain insight into the viewpoint accessible to both the creator of the joke and the audience (Ritchie 2006 [In: Brône 2017: 259]). Although this allows us to recognise and work with the mental repertoire of both the creator and the audience to some extent, it has yet to be connected to larger structures within our cognition. This is what this paper addresses. By understanding where and how the current beliefs and theories could be improved upon, it proposes that the strict holistic categorization should be abandoned for a more precise alternative, which focuses on parts and elements of the jokes, rather than the joke in its entirety. To analyse these parts, it applies the accepted cognitive linguistic framework which relies on mental spaces and conceptual blends, with the addition of further scaffolding provided by cognitive contextual structures to better understand the reason behind, and inner workings of the analysed jokes. This, in turn, cannot only help us only within the limits of humour studies, but based on the local sense of humour (Kuipers 2008), we can also use this framework to interpret the community in which these jokes are created and understood.

Overall, this section’s aim was to present the rationale for the selection of *Boys in Zinc* as the corpus of this study. The reasons are grounded in linguistic principles designed to maintain academic integrity and to avoid the selection and usage of examples void of critical context. In regard to the cognitive linguistic framework, a more precise alternative building on mental spaces and conceptual blends is proposed to include contextual levels for further understanding. These are then connected and used to aid in the categorisation of humour. The categorisation, in turn, should also focus on parts of the jokes, rather than interpreting, understanding and then categorising them holistically.

3 Literature review

This section aims to further expand on the foundational elements briefly mentioned in the previous sections. First, a more detailed introduction into the three main theories of humour is provided. These then are followed by broader presentation of previously held cognitive linguistic approaches to humour. Later, the focus will shift towards frames, mental spaces, and blending theory. These theories shall provide ground to analyse the selected material.

First, a brief overview of the three main theories of humour will be provided. The three main theories of humour are Incongruity Resolution Theory, Superiority Theory and Relief Theory (Nilsen & Nilsen 2019: 251). Incongruity Resolution Theory encompasses jokes with a ‘punchline,’ a blend to be understood after, or rather because of the cognitive clash, which is a result of a blended space that is built on contradictory or antipodal elements (Nilsen & Nilsen 2019: 251). This incongruity is resolved by revisiting the input spaces to decode the original structure

(Marín-Arrese 2003: 1). Superiority Theory is based on the idea that other people's shortcomings are funny and, when turned into a joke or a humorous remark, it helps to create a sense of superiority (Nilsen & Nilsen 2019: 252). Relief Theory focuses on laughter itself as tool to release nervous energy or built-up tension and to overcome sociocultural inhibitions (Nilsen & Nilsen 2019: 251).

Secondly, the main principles and works of cognitive linguistics that are closely related to the aim of this paper will be presented. A constitutive principle behind cognitive linguistics is the Thesis of Embodied Cognition. The two aspects of the thesis encompass embodied experience and grounded condition. Embodied experience means that the understanding of the way in which we perceive our world is rooted in the capabilities of our bodies to perceive it and our surroundings to be perceived (Evans 2012: 131). This not only means that it is species specific, but also that it is individualistic in its nature as well. These capabilities and differences are clearly present in humans. These influence cognition, thus establishing the other aspect of the Thesis of Embodied Cognition, which is grounded cognition (Evans 2012: 131–132). It relates to the subjective experiences humans have in relation to their environment, how they interact with it and how it influences them. These effects and influences range from sensory-motor experiences to emotions (Evans 2012: 132). This has recently been extended to a body-mind-culture triad, which allows cognition to be placed and examined in regard to culture-specificity and linguistics relativity (Sinha 2002, Zlatev 1997 [In.: Hampe 2005: 4–6]).

Frames are a constitutive part of our cognition (Kövecses, Bencses 2010: 225). They contain elements that become part of the frame through entrenchment, which encompasses the manner in which elements are engrained in our conceptual frameworks and schemas. Without understanding every element within a frame, the frame itself cannot be fully understood (Petruck 1996: 1). An example for this could be SPORTS COMPETITION. This frame and its elements are understood because we not only have seen but competed in events that had opposing sides, used gears to do so and had winners and losers. Naturally, some specifications could be made and are made when necessary. These are dependent not only on context but also culture. For instance, the sentence “we lost the match yesterday” could not be understood without the elements of players, opponents, match as the event, win and lose, as these are constitutive parts of the frame SPORTS COMPETITION. These elements are added to our mental repertoire through entrenchment (Schmid 2007: 113–117). The frame itself contains equipment or tools used in competitions, the manner of their specification will be discussed later, but the way in which these elements become part of our mental repertoire is through entrenchment. It entails not only understanding and learning what certain elements are, but also what they are not via experience (Schmid 2007: 113–117), such as seeing Serena Williams use a tennis racket and not swimming goggles. To summarize, it can be concluded that frames are foundational not only to this paper but also to language as we understand it in the field of cognitive linguistics (Petruck 1996, Kövecses Bencses 2010, Turner 2007, Schmid 2007).

Mental spaces are going to be presented in this part. Mental spaces are conceptual structures. They are structured through framing but from different domains (Kövecses Bencses 2010: 228). These domains are activated when elements associated with them are introduced in discourse. As these domains are connected to both short- and long-term memory it can be stated that mental spaces are formed through the working memory (Fauconnier 2007: 351). This allows us to create a coherent ‘picture’ of, for example, the conversation we are a part of or to follow a lecturer's points. Therefore, when in comparison to frames, these conceptual structures are more specific and are modified through discourse (Fauconnier 2007: 351). Circling back to the

sports competition frame, the sentence “Joe competed in the tournament” does not contain elements that would help us to create a specific “picture” of Joe or the competition. In contrast, saying “Puskás competed in the tournament” would be easily understood for Hungarian speakers, because of their cultural background which, through the entrenchment of learning about him or even watching some of his matches, makes it clear that it is a football competition.

Access Principle and Counterfactual Spaces are to be essential for our analysis. As mentioned earlier, mental spaces access domains that are part of frames through the working memory (Fauconnier 2007: 351). This is made possible by the Access Principle, which states that elements from different domains are accessed through mentioning a space or element that the element also resides in or by describing its counterpart (Fauconnier 2007: 353–360). Football gear and its usage in conversation might evoke elements not only from the same game, but also from others, such as envisioning a goalkeeper with tennis rackets to help them reach the corner of the goal, or someone like Shaq being the goalkeeper because of his height and armspan. Counterfactual Spaces on the other hand enable us – via conceptual integration – to create blends that are not factual (Turner 2007: 377–378). These blends, even if hypothetical or imagined, can exist and be comprehensible if there are elements within the mental spaces creating them that are true or believable (Turner 2007: 377–378). To illustrate, when we say the sentence “Joe could have won if he had competed in the football tournament” makes sense, unlike the sentence “Joe could have become taller if he had won the football tournament” because that structure is not coherent, as through entrenchment we understand how one becomes taller and know what the results of winning a tournament are (Turner 2007: 377–378, Schmid 2007: 113–117). Without Counterfactual Spaces jokes are not likely to be created or analysed as many jokes rely on creating blends that are built on a mixture of implausible and plausible scenarios.

In sum, blended spaces are created by integrating elements from different domains. These are invoked through the Access Principle and can be counterfactual as long as they are coherent. Therefore, it can be stated that mental spaces, the access principle and counterfactual spaces are imperative to analyse humour since these are the only viable structures to examine these blends and to better understand the reasons behind the occurrence of the cognitive clash that produces them (Brône 2017, Fauconnier 2007, Marín-Arrese 2003, Turner 2007).

Image schemas are highly flexible and unspecified structures on which we can project emerging information to – among many others – groups and categorize them for better understanding and usage (Oakley 2007). Similarly to the example used by Oakley, which is of going to the university library (Oakley 2007: 216–217), to illustrate image schemas but not break the structure let us consider the example of a sports facility. Similarly, certain elements of the image-schematic profile will be the same, such as the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL, CONTAINER, PART-WHOLE and –if revisited multiple times– ITERATION (Oakley 2007: 217). Naturally, instead of COLLECTING used in the university library profile, ENABLEMENT would be the used image schema, as one does not collect a swimming pool or a football field, but they enable usage (Oakley 2007: 217). These image schematic top-down processes appear in jokes as well.

Lastly, the more detailed introduction of the local sense of humour will take place. Local sense of humour states that every single community throughout history has possessed a certain kind of humour that is unique to them and them only (Kuipers 2008: 379). These range from nations to political groups up to niche online communities. Naturally, soldiers are not excluded, examples for this range from reporting that war even has its own smell (Alexievich 2017: 97) and developing their own slang (Alexievich 2017: 119). Nevertheless, through frames, entrenchment,

and mental spaces we can not only understand how these jokes are constructed, but in turn, also enable us to better understand the given culture and group in which the jokes are made.

Based on Ellis (2019), micro-, meso- and macro-level contexts can be applied to gain insight into a higher categorization order within cognition. These contextual levels range from the micro-level contexts, such as a close circle input, for instance family members and friends, to larger groups within the mezo-level, as in institutional settings, to the macro-level contexts encompassing nation-wide and international ideologies (Ellis 2019: 39). This is the reason behind our ability to share humours remarks within a closed circle, understanding why we use inside-jokes within schools to refer to teachers and places within the institution itself, and how we make fun of politicians, ideologies and religious groups.

Therefore, the analysis builds on the following: frames are constitutive organisational categories from which we can access elements through the working memory (Kövecses, Benczes 2010, Fauconnier 2007). As we access these elements – either by mentioning them or through the access principle– conceptual structures are then created through which we can understand, follow and anticipate the discussion. Naturally, as these are not always factual, especially not when we consider jokes, we can and do create counterfactual spaces that are not completely accurate, since they only have to be coherent to fulfil their function (Turner 2007). These constructions can be further analysed to develop a clearer insight into the communities in which these jokes are told through the idea of the local sense of humour (Kuipers 2008) and cognitive contextual levels (Ellis 2019).

4 Analysis

This part of the paper will examine jokes told by those who experienced and were affected by the Afghan Soviet conflict.⁴ First, an illustration and a more detailed version will be presented.

“Koshchei the Deathless and the witch Baba Yaga meet up at the transit point in Kabul. They’re all off to defend the revolution. Two years later they see each other again on their way home. Only one of Gorynych’s three head is left- the others have been chopped off. Koshchei the Deathless is barely alive, and only because he’s immortal. But Baba Yaga is all dolled up in Montana jeans and stone-washed denim gear. Looking cheerful.

‘I’m signing up for a third year.’

‘You’re out of your mind, Baba Yaga!’

‘In the Union I’m Baba Yaga, but here, I’m Vasilisa the Beautiful.’ (Alexievich 2017: 55)

For Soviet citizens during the Afghan war this joke made sense without any further explanation. For us, who are not part of that society and therefore do not possess the necessary elements to be included in their local sense of humour, extra information is required. That extra and crucial detail is the fact that the Soviet society, and mostly men serving in Afghanistan, viewed women aiding in the war effort as mere sex objects. Their achievements were often attributed to their

⁴ The Soviet Afghan war began in 1979 ending in 1989, directly involving over 500 000 soldiers and civil personnel. The war’s effects on the Soviet Union ranging from its stationed military present to the perception of its institution has surfaced in different manners (Ackerman, Galbas 2015: 1–5) and therefore should be examined through various methods. The selected parts consist of jokes that, according to the interviewees, were shared among them during their time in Afghanistan.

sexual relationships with soldiers and high-ranking officers (Alexievich 2017:55). The traditional analysis of the joke is as follows: in the generic space we have mythical creatures of Russian origin, they possess elements such as indestructibility which are then combined with the horrors of the war in Afghanistan, for instance destruction. These elements are then projected onto two of the three creatures, namely being barely alive and having only one head left as they have suffered as soldiers do. The last one, Baba Yaga, who is a typical character of Russian fairytales, embodying the ugly and demonic witch, has not been affected by them, building up the incongruity especially considering the fact that she is “dolled up” and that it breaks the structure of the PROCESS schema. This incongruity is then resolved by her pointing out that as she is a woman, held in “high regard” and has been pampered. (See Figure 1)

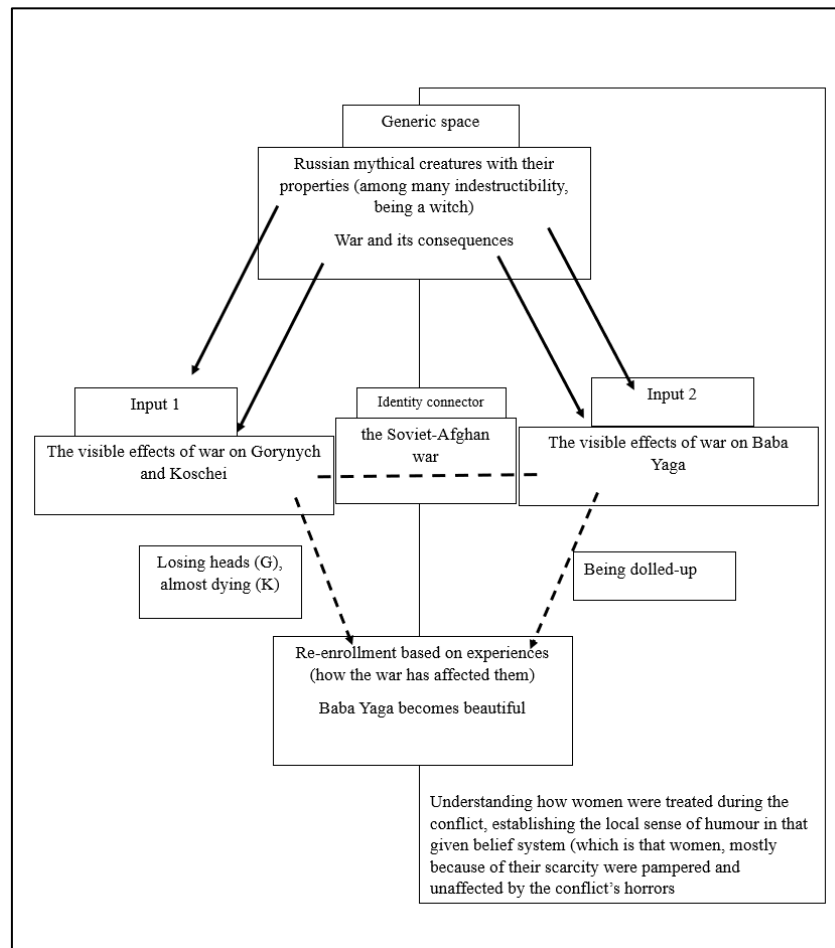


Figure 1. The joke about Baba Yaga becoming beautiful. Based on the integration models of Mark Turner (Turner: 2007: 379).

It is rather hard to distinguish between the two categories of incongruity resolution and superiority. This issue will be raised and further discussed later.

If we were to subvert this, by, for example, putting Koschei as the one being pampered, the joke would not be coherent, as it would not be part of neither Superiority Theory nor the Incongruity Resolution Theory as we would not gain insight into who is superior and why (men for

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properly suffering and not being sexually abused) and the incongruity would not be resolved as we would only have an indestructible being that has been pampered, which does not create the cognitive clash necessary for humour.

a) “A black marketeer ended up at the war. The first thing he did was find out how many hard currency checks a captured ‘spirit’ cost. One ‘spirit’ was valued at eight checks. Two days later, there’s a cloud of dust beside the garrison: it’s him leading along two hundred prisoners. A friend of his says: “Sell me one. I’ll give you seven checks.” ‘Ah, come on, old buddy. I bought them for nine.” (Alexievich 2017: 27)

In the generic space we have black marketeers and their way of conducting business, along with the fact that capturing the enemy has an economic value, namely eight checks. From this, we create a counterfactual space in which – quite amazingly– the black marketeer captured two hundred prisoners. When offered checks for it, he refuses, stating that it cost him even more than the original price. Once again, without understanding how the underground economy creates inflation for certain goods, how usual it was in the Soviet Union, the incongruity would not be neither created, nor resolved. Nevertheless, it once again can be stated that the supremacy of one economic system is presented, while also hinting at some common issues Soviet citizens faced as a result of a socialist economic system.

b) “I’ve never come across girls wearing military decorations, even if they have them. One put on her medal ‘For Services in Battle’ and everyone laughed ‘For Sexual Services’.” (Alexievich 2017: 55)

Similarly, the one discussed previously, b) could be categorised into Superiority Theory, as it makes fun of women and their way of earning medals by performing sexual favours. However, it can also be interpreted within the framework of incongruity resolution, as holding this belief might create an incongruity when encountering a woman wearing her medal, which is then resolved by making fun of how these are obtained within the said belief system. Thus, it can be seen that there is a cognitive clash that occurs, the reasons for which are clearly belonging to and under Superiority Theory. Rather interestingly, without it explicitly stating it, the beginning can be connected to Relief Theory, as the built-up tension – the cause for it being the taboo and socially degradable (in that given belief system) way of earning that medal – is released through laughter.

c) “The young nurses couldn’t stand it. Some cried so hard they started hiccupping. Some laughed. One just stood there all the time, smiling.” (Alexievich 2017: 73)

This description was given by a doctor. It describes the way in which Relief Theory functions, as the monstrosities experienced during the war built up tension in these nurses which was then released through laughter. The case is similar in d) as well:

d) “Our unit was based in Kabul... *(he suddenly laughs.)* (Alexievich 2017: 80)

The only difference being the fact that it is from a soldier’s recollection.

e) “A man dies and goes to hell and looks around. There are people being boiled in a cauldron and some being sawn apart on a table...He walks on. And there’s a little table with men sitting round it, drinking beer, playing cards and clattering away at dominos. He walks up to them.

‘What’s that you’ve got there? Beer?’

‘Yup.’

‘Can I try it? He tries it and it really is a beer. Cold. ‘And what are those, cigarettes?’

‘Yup. Fancy a smoke?’

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He lights up. ‘So what is this place then? Is it hell or not?’

‘Of course it’s hell. Relax.’ They laugh. ‘Over there, all that boiling and sawing, that’s hell for those who imagine it like that.’ (Alexievich 2017: 88–89)

In the case of e), we have the elements borrowed from the generic space when considering the description of the Judeo-Christian hell, which is filled with suffering. These are clearly depicted, but the incongruity is created by the opposite of this being present in the counterfactual space as well. It is then later resolved by pointing out that hell differs based on beliefs.

All in all, it can be stated that these jokes, although their categorization is not as clearly defined as previously stated, can be analysed within a cognitive linguistic framework, as it is clearly shown by examples a–e. Aside from jokes c) and d), these are all based on creating a counterfactual mental spaces through accessing elements by the working memory causing a cognitive clash to occur. Jokes c) and d) do also take place as a cause of a cognitive clash, but these are rooted in the reality and experiences, taboos, and horrors that they have experienced.

What might prove to be an improvement is not to directly categorize humour based on its form and function, but rather on its context, with the two main parts being the level of said context and the content. This relies on two main assumptions, one being that since language and cognition are intertwined and culture is an integral part of cognition the micro-, meso- and macro-level contexts (Ellis 2019: 39–40) – in which there are innate pairings of superior inferior elements – provide a basis to develop a rationale-based reality which is broken into pieces and quickly rebuilt in Hankiss’ view (Hankiss 2014).

Firstly, one should consider the level of context. Based on Hankiss’ (2014) and Ellis’ (2019) works the following is proposed: if we look at joke e), it can be stated the joke is at the macro-level, since religious beliefs are ideological structures. Having established this, we can see that the incongruity is based on people enjoying hell, the place for suffering in Abrahamic religions. This is resolved, but not without pointing to inferior beliefs within this macro-level context. This goes against and breaks down our rationale-based view, which is then rebuilt with additional elements. Whether we reorganise this structure based on the additional view within the macro-level is up for the individual, but a structure based on a certain rationale will be rebuilt.

Obviously, this is a clear example without different elements that rely on different contextual levels. Therefore, we should examine jokes that contain elements that would make this categorization more complex. Jokes a) and b) are good examples for this.

Joke a) works on both the meso and macro levels of context. At the meso-level the certain military community stationed in Afghanistan is presented, one of the elements of which is capturing enemies for money. This is both sanctioned, institutionalized and supervised by a certain body, in this case, the military. This allows the creation of the local sense of humour, one which is absent in the previous example, as the view in which we look at hell cannot be considered part of a smaller community, as it is of a macro-level context. Having established this, the capture of prisoners builds up the incongruity, mostly the number. This is then resolved by the black marketeer informing his friend that he had purchased them. This could point to the macro-level context of economic systems, to the efficacy of the capitalist one regarding solving supply and demand issues, which the other system – especially when compared to the success of the capitalist solution performed by the black marketeer – lacks. This constitutes the superiority part of the joke.

Joke b) is similar in this regard. Certain parts of it belong to different contextual levels, therefore grouping it into any of the three foundational theories would be hard; however, analysing and categorizing its parts should facilitate in the creation of a more refined framework.

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Seeing a woman wearing a military medal builds up the incongruity, as it breaks from the norm established within the meso-level, her wearing it constitutes as incongruity. This is then resolved within the same level, firstly, by releasing the built-up tension caused by seeing her wear a medal and then through superiority when the way in which women earned their medals are presented.

Naturally, this approach, one which focuses on contextual levels of categorisation, then involving the three main theories to help us understand the given culture or community should be applicable for jokes created in similar conditions. An example could be jokes told by those who survived the nuclear catastrophe in Chernobyl and were interviewed by Svetlana Alexievich⁵. Consider the following:

“‘Is it okay to eat Chernobyl apples?’ The answer: ‘Yes but bury the cores deep in the ground.’” (Alexievich 2016: 54)

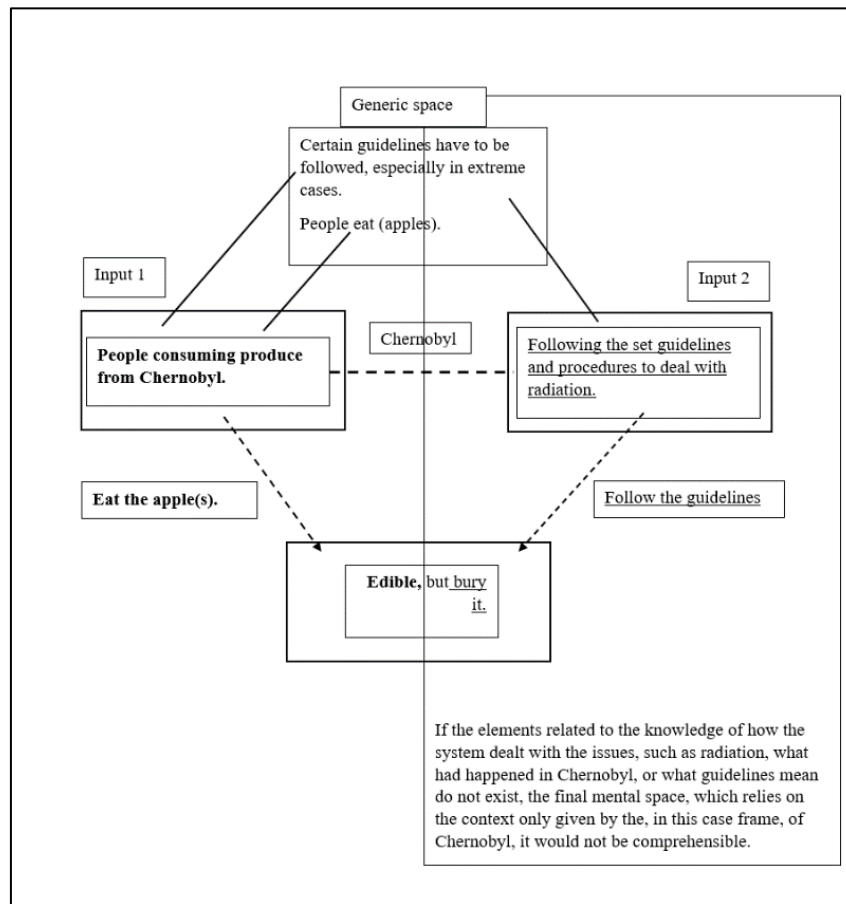


Figure 2. How the joke about apples is built up. Based on the integration models of Mark Turner (Turner: 2007: 379).

⁵ Svetlana Alexievich's book, *Chernobyl Prayer* is a related corpus to source examples from that are important with respect to the subject of analysis of this paper and therefore provides a deeper examination of humour. She interviewed the survivors of the catastrophe and compiled these into the book, which was first released in 1997, with a revised version published in 2013.

In this case, the macro-level context encompasses the guidelines that are to be followed in situations involving radiation, which clearly incorporates not consuming produce contaminated by said radiation. Answering yes to the question establishes the incongruity, as it goes against the rationale-based view created within the macro-level context. This is then resolved through a punchline that uses the meso-level context, namely, the approach of the Soviet government towards those affected by and living in the vicinity of the nuclear disaster. It also points to its inhumane approaches towards its citizens, creating a superior-inferior dichotomy which corresponds with Superiority Theory. Just as in the previous examples, this joke also operates within different contextual levels by blending macro-, and meso-level contexts to create a cognitive clash.

To summarize, this paper proposes that jokes can be analysed within a cognitive linguistic framework; however, their categorisations should not be based on a holistic approach. Each part of a joke should be considered as a separate, independent, but interconnected entity. These can then be analysed and categorized to understand the context(s) of a joke, providing a clearer and more refined method. Instead of a rigid categorisation, jokes should be viewed as a set of correspondences within the established contexts. For example, in joke a) the number of prisoners captured by the black marketeer corresponds with Incongruity Theory based within the meso level context. Nevertheless, other parts hint at the differences between the two economic systems, which then relates to Superiority Theory within the macro level context. In the case of joke b), the release of the built-up tension, stemming from the incongruity of a woman wearing her medal, is connected to Relief Theory within a meso-level, while its resolution pertains to Incongruity Resolution Theory within the same level.

5 Conclusion

A brief summary of the findings is provided in this last section. The paper's aim was to revisit current humour theories and further analyse them through a cognitive linguistic framework in the works of Svetlana Alexievich. Two goals were set, the first presents the further integration and examination of humour studies through and into the field of cognitive linguistics. The second aims to further improve upon the already accepted humour theories by focusing on elements and parts of said jokes rather than viewing and grouping them holistically.

The paper proposes that both points are valid within the examined cases. The proposed cognitive linguistic framework was shown to be applicable as a basis for analysis. This framework relies on principles that are fundamental to the field. Therefore, claim (1) can be confirmed. Claim (2) aims to further refine the existing theories of humour by examining parts of a joke, rather than a holistic approach applied previously. These sections of the jokes should be viewed as representations of corresponding beliefs within a cognitive level of context and their verbalisations. Lastly, these correspondences, whose conceptualisations are understood within the framework established in claim (1), should be viewed as parts of either Incongruity Resolution Theory, Superiority Theory or Relief Theory.

Overall, it could be stated that both claims are confirmed, as jokes could be further analysed by this framework and more precisely categorized which allow us to gain further insight into language and cognition. Further examination of these conclusions should be to test the validity of the findings. As this is not a generalisable, but rather an ethnographic analysis, further work both involving Svetlana Alexievich's other publications and similar historical events should be carried out.

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