

# Conceptual integration theory and British humour: an analysis of the sitcom *Miranda*

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## Abstract

*Conceptual integration theory (henceforth CIT), also known as conceptual blending, was devised by Fauconnier and Turner (2002) as a model for meaning construction and interpretation. It is based on the notion of a mental space, which originated in Fauconnier's early research (1998). Mental spaces are structures that constitute information pertaining to a particular concept (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 40). Interestingly, mental spaces can be linked together and blended so as to produce a novel quality. In this manner, conceptual integration serves as a theoretical model that throws light on creativity in language use. In my paper, I will apply CIT to British humour in order to use its multiway blending together with its dynamic, online running of the blended contents for the purpose of comedy elucidation. It is crucial to observe that British humour is a complex phenomenon which pertains to many different levels of interpretation, i.e. a linguistic, cultural or discursive. CIT possesses a well-suited cognitive apparatus which can encompass the complexity of British humour with all its layers. The primary goal of the article is to analyse a selected scene from a sitcom entitled *Miranda* in order to show the validity of the theory in respect of humour studies. In particular, I will undertake to demonstrate that CIT, with a special emphasis on its principles such as compression and the emergent structure of the blend can deal with many processes that accumulate within British humour and result in laughter. Simultaneously, I will try to demonstrate that frame-shifting, as proposed by Coulson (2015: pp. 167-190), can be of help to CIT in explaining humour..*

*Keywords: conceptual integration theory, blending, British humour, compression, emergent structure, frame-shifting).*

## 1. Introduction

In this article, I will offer a critical evaluation of conceptual integration theory (henceforth CIT) with recourse to British humour. CIT was proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002) as a model of creative meaning construction and interpretation, which can also be applied within humour research. Initially, the main tenets of the theory will be presented. Secondly, I will briefly show the critique of CIT and its problematic methodology, together with some valid resolutions proposed by scholars. Subsequently, I will apply CIT to the study of humour within the BBC

sitcom entitled *Miranda*, or rather, one selected scene, in order to assess the validity of the theory. The aim of the paper is to demonstrate that CIT with its apparatus for meaning construction is well suited to the explanation of comedy, notably due to the following principles: compression of vital relations (i.e. analogy and disanalogy), and the emergent structure of the blended space. Enriched by frame-shifting, a concept proposed by Coulson (2015: pp.167-190) which relates to the reshuffling of verbalised context in humour, these principles could provide the language user with a cognitive tool to explain the complex notion of the British comedy with its different layers, especially the local sociocultural context.

## 2. An overview of the theory in question

In this section, I will provide an overview of conceptual integration theory or blending theory, the notion of a mental space which is fundamental to the theory in question, as well as the principles that are to guide and secure the theory. Additionally, I will provide sentences that illustrate how CIT operates in context, together with the instances of blended spaces types.

### 2.1 Conceptual Integration Theory

Fauconnier and Turner (2002) have proposed conceptual integration theory, based on the concept of *mental spaces* devised by Fauconnier much earlier (1998). A mental space is a cluster of data pertaining to a particular concept (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 40; Turner 2014: 4). For instance, when we discuss someone's illness, we refer to the so-called mental space of health, medicine and the NHS, with categories such as doctors, nurses and drugs that patients are prescribed. Mental spaces, then are transient conceptual constructs that reside in the short-term memory, and can be linked together to form temporal associations online and dynamically. For instance, in the sentence *Luke is a stockbroker*, we create one mental space regarding Luke as a person, his life, his family, etc., and another mental space of a profession, namely a stockbroker (Turner 2014: 4). We superimpose one against the other to find some correspondence that the above statement relates to. Such a correspondence between the two different mental spaces is known as a mapping (Fauconnier 1998: chapter 1; Jabłońska-Hood 2015: 16). People are capable of joining different mental spaces and creatively searching for mappings between them, so as to construe a novel interpretation. It is exactly on the basis of such mappings that blending is initiated. Both Fauconnier and Turner (Fauconnier 1998: 149-157; Fauconnier and Turner 1999: 77-80) stress the role of mapping the input structures of mental spaces onto each other and then projecting these as unified relations to the blended space, which is also a mental space derivative of them. A blend, however, is a meaningful unit on its own, because after the projection of the relevant data from the inputs, we may further elaborate its contents, in a process referred to as the running of the blend. This procedure is responsible for bringing additional and relevant data to the already blended information, pertaining to the encyclopaedic knowledge, other mental spaces, frames or domains. In this way, the blend extends its meaning and provides a wider perspective on the rendering of a certain linguistic item, which is referred to as the emergent structure of the blended space (Fauconnier and Turner 1998: 5; 1999: 77-80).

To be specific, let us inspect the statement *Dog is a man's best friend*. In this sentence we have two different mental spaces, the mental space of animals, where DOG originates from, and the mental space of friendship, where the BEST FRIEND comes from. The two mental spaces are then compared in order to secure (anchor) mappings, i.e. correspondences or similarities. Thus, the dog is interpreted as a best friend who is always loyal (the concept of loyalty ought to be introduced in both inputs, with the dog being loyal to its master, and the best friend being loyal in all circumstances to their friends). The dog's behaviour, such as licking or wagging its tail at the sight of his master, would be juxtaposed and compared to a best friend's conduct, e.g.

kissing, hugging or smiling. Similarly, the dog which cuddles up to its master to comfort him can be compared to the best friend hugging the person in need, and joyful barking could be mapped onto joyful exhortations uttered upon meeting up with a friend. All these mappings, once established, are projected into the blend, which will exhibit incompatibility as its characteristic feature. We can run the contents of the blend and look for more meaning elaborations of the statement above, in order to account for the emergent structure of the blend. The emergent structure is achieved via the completion of the data transfer from the inputs to the blend, its composition, and finally, its elaboration. In this manner, we could add situations from real life where a dog rescues his own master from danger or even death. This certainly adds to the quality of behaving like a best friend in need. Any similar incidents when dogs guard their ill or wounded owners after an accident, or bring the rescue services to victims – these too will count as examples of the best friend’s honourable conduct. In this way, the running of the blend provides a valid insight into the rendition of the concept in the form of the emergent structure, which is nothing more than an extended or elaborated blend (see Figure 1 below). This mechanism will be of special importance for humour studies, where the linguistic level merely serves as a starting point to the deeper analysis of humour, and involves the addition of more context- and culture-specific details in order to fully apprehend the comic situation (see section 3 below).

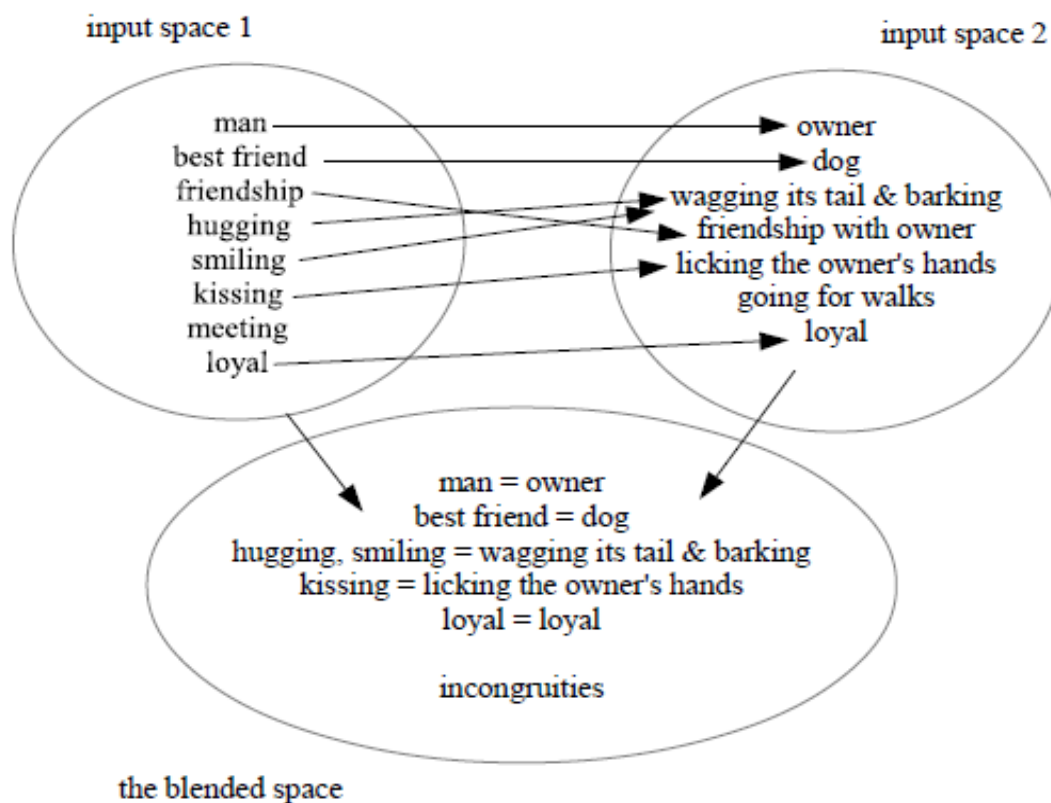


Figure 1. Dog is a man's best friend – a conceptual integration network

A word of explanation ought to be devoted to the notion of the so-called generic space (Fauconnier and Turner 1998). Fauconnier and Turner posit its existence as a more abstract mental space which carries a set of roles and relations that are fulfilled by means of concrete input spaces. It can, for instance, exhibit the following information: person, agent, patient, action, goal, tool, object, etc. So, when we return to the proverb depicted above, we could enumerate the role of the person and animal in their generic space, as well as the relation between them. Nonetheless, it has to be stressed that many scholars using CIT in language study treat its existence as debatable and more often than not reject the term, due to it being redundant and hence unnecessary within blending (cf Ritchie 2004 and Libura 2010). For this reason, I shall not refer to it in my analysis of humour either (apart from the above graphical illustration).

CIT has a number of principles that are to secure its procedure. The more general set of rules is referred to as constitutive principles (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 44-50, 345) and it runs as follows:

#### CONSTITUTIVE PRINCIPLES

- Matching and counterpart connections
- Generic space
- Blending
- Selective Projection
- Emergent meaning
  - Composition
  - Completion
  - Elaboration

Specifically, when we integrate conceptually, we distinguish the generic space that maps its abstract role and relations onto input spaces. Basically, we locate mappings between the inputs in question according to some more general relations that a generic space provides. Then we selectively project the relevant data from the inputs into the novel blended space, as not all the information from both input spaces will be relevant for a case of blending. Finally, the blend extends its emergent structure via composition, i.e. the setting up of mappings within the blend; completion, i.e. the addition of any information that does not stem from the inputs but that is visible from the composed set of data only in the blended space; and elaboration, which involves the addition of contents that are crucial for the new blend but that stems from related frames, scenarios, background or encyclopaedic knowledge.

What is more, CIT presupposes a few other rules to secure the blending procedure. To be specific, the proponents introduced the following governing principles (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 309-352) to the model:

#### GOVERNING PRINCIPLES FOR COMPRESSION:

- Borrowing for compression
- Single-relation compression by scaling
- Single-relation compression by syncopation
- Compression of one vital relation into another
- Scalability
- Creation of compression
- Highlights compression

#### OTHER GOVERNING PRINCIPLES

- The Topology Principle
- The Pattern Completion Principle

The Integration Principle  
The Maximization of Vital Relations Principle  
The Intensification of Vital Relations Principle  
The Web Principle  
The Unpacking Principle  
The Relevance Principle

The governing principles are based on the notion of compression as well as vital relations. Compression is simply scaling down topological mappings between the input spaces when projecting to the blend, and it is actually only the vital relations that we compress (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 92-93). Let me explain these vital relations first, and then how their compression arises. Vital relations constitute repeated patterns of conceptual relations and we distinguish the following: change, i.e. a link between two different elements that are somehow changed, identity understood as sameness, space, cause-effect, part-whole, representation, role understood as function or occupation, analogy, disanalogy, property understood as characteristics, similarity viewed as shared characteristics, category, intentionality connected with attitude or emotions, and finally uniqueness viewed as distinct property (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 92-103). These can all be compressed in many different ways.

Fauconnier and Turner distinguish between different kinds of compression. Firstly, we have borrowing for compression, which is the procedure of using one coherent input space in order to structure the less coherent one. This applies to the expression *digging one's own grave*, which has a clear input space of digging the grave with its clear stages. The whole input space with its stages can be transposed onto '*a bad financial investment*' (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 324). The single relation compression by scaling relates to the vital relations, such as time or space, which can be compressed between inputs or within the blend. For instance, present, past and future might be compressed in this manner (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 324). Single-relation compression by syncopation is basically representing the structure of something with only a few of its elements, without demonstrating all of it (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 324). When we compress one vital relation into another, we normally tighten the links between these, as in metonymy, to give one example. Further, scalability is the fact that we tend to reduce, or scale down, the complicated contents of blends in order to make these manageable. A case in point is the regatta race which Fauconnier and Turner frequently quote, where two ships racing in different time zones and spaces are compressed onto one race for the sake of easier comprehension (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 63-65). Creation of compression basically means that by projecting mapped relations onto the blend in a tightened form as topologies, we create relations that have not been present before within the input spaces. Highlights compression, then, is the ability to create tightened projected mapping by means of categorisation, property transfer or syncopation. All these governing principles are enriched by the additional governing rules. To start with, the Topology Principle ensures that inner-space relations are matched with the outer space relations. The Pattern Completion Principle, on the other hand, ensures that the blended space is enriched via existing integrated patterns that may function as additional inputs, and via compression of outer-space relations. These two principles are to make conceptual integration more unified as a procedure, in accordance with the Integration Principle. The Maximization and Intensification Principles are to guard the backward projection of compressed vital relations to the inputs in a Web of mappings (which is known as Web Principle), as well as their extension in the blended space. The Unpacking Principle ensures that the blend's contents can be easily reconstructed backwards, and the Relevance Principle necessitates relevance for any element used within the conceptual integration network (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 325-334). These principles provide a safeguard against unruly cases of blending and they ensure the correct procedure is attained. Frequently, Fauconnier and Turner reduce them to the following set:

Compress what is diffuse.  
Obtain global insight.  
Strengthen vital relations.  
Come up with a story.  
Go from Many to One. (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 346)

Finally, CIT proponents distinguish between the following types of conceptual integration networks: simplex networks, mirror networks, single-scope networks and double-scope networks. The simplex networks are regarded as common and basic. The first input space provides roles for the second one which fulfils those with values, so there is primarily one organizing frame of roles which is then mapped onto specific elements. A case in point is the sentence *Paul is Sally's father*, where the input space 1 provides roles such as father and daughter, and the input space 2 provides concrete values for the above, i.e. Sally and Paul (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 121-122).

Another type of conceptual integration network is referred to as a mirror network, in which all the mental spaces, i.e. the generic space, the inputs as well as the blended space share one organizing frame. Hence, we will not find any incongruities in mirror networks, but some elements might be juxtaposed. A good example of a mirror network is the Buddhist Monk riddle which Fauconnier and Turner analysed in detail. The riddle assumes that the Buddhist Monk ascends and then descends the mountain, and this provides the organisation frame for the blend. When we superimpose the monk's two journeys, we will have respective data that are congruous between the spaces, with an exception of the different directions of movement. Thus, each space mirrors the other, so to speak (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 122-126).

Single-scope networks consist of two input spaces that possess different organizing frames, one of which is used and projected to organize the blend. Thus, there is asymmetry in mappings that are subjected to one input's contents, and there is also incongruity that follows from it. To illustrate this point, Fauconnier and Turner quote an example of a boxing match input space that is corresponded with the input space of business CEOs who fight professionally. The former secures the organizing frame, and all the mappings that are established will conform to that (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 126-131).

Double-scope networks, on the other hand, are viewed as the most creative type of CIT, since they are organised by selective elements that stem from two varying input spaces. Each of the inputs provides some data to be projected onto the blend. Therefore, the conceptual integration in these cases requires a great deal of mental effort on the part of a language user who processes such networks. Furthermore, in double-scope networks there will certainly be incongruity present. An illustration of double-scope networks may be the comparison between office work and computer system of commands which are interlinked for the computer interface (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 131-146).

## 2.2 The criticism of the theory and its issues

In this section, the main challenges in respect of CIT will be presented. As the scope of the article is limited, I will constrain the critique to the most important issues with recourse to methodology and validity (for a detailed discussion on the problematic aspects see Jabłońska-Hood 2019 forthcoming).

CIT has numerous dedicated supporters who use the theory in their research successfully. However, an ongoing debate regarding the status of CIT is constantly taking place, with many dissatisfied scholars doubting its explanatory power and waging criticism on its methodological apparatus. The most common critique relates to the fact that CIT explicates so many different phenomena while displaying a lack of methodological rigour, and hence becomes an overarching as well as underspecified paradigm (Tendhal and Gibbs (2008 online), Gibbs

(2000), Coulson and Oakley (online), Cienki (2008: 236), Oakley and Hougaard (2008); Hougaard (2005 & 2008), Harder (2005), Ritchie L.D. (2004), Libura (2010), to mention just a few). The research based on mental spaces and blending deals with such diverse areas of study as literature, mathematics, music, law or humour. This means that the range of the topics to which CIT is applied seems vast, which raises the question about the paradigm's credibility (Oakley & Hougaard 2008: 1; Jabłońska-Hood 2015: 30-31). Nonetheless, Fauconnier and Turner both advocate that CIT is to be regarded as a higher-order theory which mirrors the workings of the human mind, and hence, it is only natural that it ought to pertain to varying fields of study as a general mechanism (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 396, Turner 2014: 253-254). In fact, the proponents claim that the advanced blending which pertains to the so-called hyperblends (i.e. the conceptual operations that involve already blended inputs which have become templates throughout the years of use within a community) is the operation behind various patterns of human thought. In this way, it may well incorporate different phenomena (Turner 2014: 253-260). Whether advanced blending is a basic operation of the human mind or not, its all-embracing quality is actually less problematic when compared with its lack of methodological specification. The principles that guard CIT are too general and underspecified, which encourages the theory's wide application and, at the same time, poses serious questions about CIT's falsifiability (Libura 2010: 148). Specifically, the main theoretical construct of CIT, i.e. the notion of a mental space, is never sufficiently defined (Gibbs 2000, Tendhal and Gibbs 2008 online), while other principles seem to be abstracted and generalized, e.g. the running of the blend (Chilton 2008: 251), to the extent that they make the theory open-ended (Handle & Schmid 2008: 7). Also, Ritchie (2004) accuses the paradigm of using metaphorical language in its terminology which is confusing and unnecessary. Further, Libura (2010) is dissatisfied with the manner in which mappings are to be established between the generic space and input spaces, and she also criticizes the formulation of Vital Relations, which again seems inconsistent and imprecise (for an in-detailed discussion see Jabłońska-Hood 2019 forthcoming). Additionally, concern is voiced in respect of the need for the generic space, which in certain cases might be obsolete for blending (Libura 2010: 84; Ritchie 2004: 37-38).

The above issues, I hope, illustrate the gist of the multitude of problems that CIT faces. Although the theory does apply to the study of many linguistic phenomena, which in itself raises the problem of its omnipresence, the lack of precision in the depiction of its main concepts and the lucidly defined principles that are to guard its processes pose far more serious issues with regard to CIT's credibility and validity as a model of meaning construction.

### **2.3 Potential solutions**

In this section, I will briefly present a handful of suggestions, proposed by different scholars, to improve the quality of the theory by alleviating some of its most alarming issues. One voice here belongs to Brandt and Brandt (2005 online), who initiated the discussion on the necessity of ground blending. They hold that in any communicative situation, a language user creates their own cognitive representation of the said situation which becomes part and parcel of their meaning creation process related to the event in question. Hence, they propose to introduce an additional semiotic space which would represent the cogniser's understanding of the communication and, at the same time, ground the blending involved. Along similar lines, Kalisz introduces the Langackerian notion of grounding to CIT, which certainly resolves the problem of the lack of the creator of mental spaces and blends (Kalisz 2001, after Libura 2010: 56-57). Moreover, Chilton notes that such grounding could also limit the construal, and more importantly, the elaboration of the emergent structure of the blend, which otherwise appears to be somewhat never-ending (Chilton 2008: 151). The idea of introducing grounding to CIT seems

to be particularly relevant for humour studies that must involve the person who actually attempts to comprehend comedy and appreciate it, so I shall apply it in my analyses below.

Another line of development has centred on proposing psychological tests for CIT (Gibbs 2000; Ritchie 2004). It is believed that falsifiability testing and empirical evidence would aid the theory by checking whether blending truly reflects the mechanism of meaning creation on the part of the human brain.

Finally, growing research advocates the need for CIT to be treated as a social process in context, rather than focusing merely on an individualistic meaning construction process. Numerous scholars believe that inspecting meaning in a shared context provides a far better insight into its properties and also eliminates the issue of decontextualisation (e.g. Cienki 2008, Dancygier 2008, or Hougaard 2005). Again, I find this suggestion helpful with recourse to British humour, which oftentimes incorporates a social perspective and alludes to socio-cultural facts and information. I shall demonstrate this in section 3.

One of the prominent critics of CIT is Libura, who scrutinized the theoretical side of CIT in her book entitled *Teoria przestrzeni mentalnych i integracji pojęciowej. Struktura modelu i jego funkcjonalność* (Libura 2010). Among others, Libura critically evaluates the notion of a generic space which is supposed to be understood as an abstracted general knowledge structure incorporating elements which allow a language user to set up the two input spaces, as well as display the basic correspondences between them. According to Libura, the generic space does not have to include all the elements common to both inputs, and what is more, such data might not even be entrenched and available within the background knowledge repositories (Libura 2010: 75). Furthermore, she points to the fact that in certain analyses by Fauconnier and Turner, the generic space has not been provided at all (ibid, 76), or that there are cases where the generic space is to be construed together with the input spaces of the conceptual integration network, which proves that it may well be far more detailed than it was originally assumed by its proponents (ibid, 77). To make matters worse, in simplex networks the generic space appears to be unnecessary for securing correspondences between the inputs (ibid, 80), and frequently, the generic space seems to comprise more than one general schema obligatory for the inputs. Also, the mappings between the inputs might simply allow for the novel correlations to be secured which could also coexist with the generic space in question (ibid, 82-83). All this leads Libura to the conclusion that the generic space is not a well-defined notion within CIT and that it needs clarification (ibid, 74-84). For this reason, I shall skip this construct in my study on humour.

Similarly, Fauconnier and Turner do not explain adequately the topological principles that arise between the inputs and the blend and which are to be compressed. Hence, Libura proposes to broaden those topological relations with image schemas, frames, roles and scripts, but she additionally observes the need to include objects and structures (ibid 113), which appears to be an interesting and valid proposal.

Additionally, Libura observes that CIT proponents blur the lines of blending as a process with their imprecise nomenclature of relations that are to be compressed via conceptual integration, e.g. part-whole, role or identity (Libura : 99-104), which makes CIT versatile and widely applicable, but it certainly does not ensure the paradigm's validity or unity (ibid 148). One of her proposed alterations to the methodology regards the types of conceptual integration, which for Libura should be threefold, and not dual as CIT's proponents claim. Libura, in order to clarify processes of blending, would distinguish between: the act of construing terms, the conceptual integration that functions as a type of construction, and blending which is to create a novel integrated structure that does not originate in any of the inputs. In this way, CIT would be distinguishable from other types of constructions (ibid 129). Again, I find this resolution highly feasible and will try to demonstrate that humour studies basically hinge on the third process Libura puts forward, i.e. blending.



An interesting critical voice is that of Kuźniak, who does not applaud the versatility of CIT. In his articles, Kuźniak contrasts CIT with metaphor theory and proposes that in many cases, CIT is obsolete and unnecessary for researching metaphors of different kinds, as the older model of metaphor theory when assisted with Krzeszowski's axiological model is well equipped for analysing certain linguistic expressions (Kuźniak 2012). Kuźniak studies the metaphor THIS SURGEON IS A BUTCHER, which is a classic example quoted by Fauconnier and Turner, who claim that metaphor theory is not enough to explain its meaning. Kuźniak actually demonstrates that Krzeszowski's notion of axiology, which we acquire with embodiment and image schemas, enables us to process the above metaphor by means of metaphor theory exclusively, without resorting to the complex theory of blending. Thus, in Kuźniak's opinion, CIT ought not to embrace the modelling of the semantic structure at all. Instead, as Kuźniak puts forward, CIT ought to return to its original aim, i.e. to analysing novel and creative communication in context, which few other theories might boast. In fact, I agree with Kuźniak's conclusion, as I am of the opinion that conceptual integration has the potential for explaining language in local context via the emergent structure of the blended space, which I will demonstrate in the analysis of the British sitcom below.

Moreover, CIT is demonstrated as a basic operation of the human mind, the higher-order mechanism with which people comprehend reality. Blending is viewed as an evolutionary process that leads to the formation of entrenched blends known as templates that are later further elaborated via conceptual integration into hyperblends (Turner 2014). This advanced blending technique appears to prevail among human mental powers to make sense of the surrounding world, and people are said to excel at it (Fauconnier and Turner 2002; Turner 2014). Therefore, I claim that advanced blending might be of especial influence within humour research (for more discussion on the doubted status of blending and its issues see Jabłońska-Hood 2019 forthcoming).

The methodology and wide application of CIT may be debatable, yet its apparatus does provide invaluable help in humour research. In my analysis of British humour in section 3, I will demonstrate how it deals with a complex notion of a sitcom. The analysis is to demonstrate that blending is particularly suitable for comedy film analysis, due to the emergent structure of the blended space which, I claim, provides a tool for elucidating English humour not only on the verbal level, but what is more compelling, on the contextual level. CIT possesses a toolkit which systematically allows for the local context to be incorporated into the explanation of humour; not many other humour theories can boast of that. It is of great importance, as English humour rarely is of verbal nature only, and most of the time requires reference to British culture, history or society to some degree. CIT is therefore a useful model to apply to it. In addition, I claim that the principle of compression plays a vital role in explaining humour, along the same lines as the emergent structure of the blend and frame-shifting.

#### **2.4. Frame-shifting vs. CIT**

In this section, I will introduce the final parameter, which will play a crucial role for humour studies, but which does not originate from CIT: namely, so-called frame-shifting. Frame-shifting is a concept that was introduced by Coulson in her research on conceptual blending theory as applied to humour (2015: 167-190). Frame-shifting is the reanalysis of both semantic and pragmatic contents of the message we aim to interpret. It occurs in jokes, i.e. in verbal humour, and it has to do with the ambiguity that short pieces of text will carry for comic purposes. In any joke, we need to have a textual element that will prompt the double meaning, and hence, call for frame-shifting when the initial processing of the text does not fit within the verbal context presented. For instance, in the following one-liner, the word "wife" assumes the role of a frame-shifting element:

When I asked the bartender for something cold and full of rum, he recommended his wife.

(Coulson 2015:  
171)

The properties of a drink, such as coldness and percentage of alcohol/rum, are not to be applied to a drink, as it would seem initially, but rather to the bartender's wife. This provides a whole new rendering to the text, where the wife and the alcoholic beverage are equated. Certainly, this equation provokes laughter, especially when we consider that it was the bartender's suggestion, and that he is the husband in the one-liner above. This cognitive mechanism of frame-shifting does work within blending elements of jokes, but I shall demonstrate that it should be treated as helpful also in more complicated types of humour, such as the TV series medium (see section 3 below).

### 3. The analysis of the sitcom *Miranda*

This section will be devoted to the analysis of humour within the British sitcom entitled *Miranda*. It tells the story of the main character, a woman named Miranda, who is in her early thirties but still uncertain about what to do with her life. She runs a joke shop with her best friend called Stevie, and they are like chalk and cheese, even appearance-wise. Miranda is exceptionally tall and big, while Stevie is petite and slim. Miranda has graduated from a public school, while Stevie completed state education. The former has a posh accent and is knowledgeable, whereas the latter does speak with an ordinary pronunciation and has no airs and graces about herself. The two already provide a clashing pair which frames the sitcom, yet there are also other characters who need to be mentioned. Firstly, Miranda's mum who wants her daughter to marry at all costs and hates the fact that Miranda is single and wastes her life in a joke shop. The mother wants more of a career for her daughter, e.g. in the navy, and she constantly arranges for Miranda to date some potential candidate for a husband. Miranda, however, is in love with Gary, her old friend who runs a restaurant conveniently placed next to Miranda's shop. However, Miranda cannot verbalize her love for Gary as she is shy and cannot express her feelings. Furthermore, when in public places and nervous, she has the tendency to sing well-known songs quite loud to raise her own spirits. She is also very clumsy and incompetent, yet exceptionally warm and funny

#### 3.1 The job interview scene

The scene from *Miranda* that I will examine centres around the job interview that the protagonist Miranda attends (It is advisable to watch the selected fragments of the scene, so please go to the following links: 1-<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=1m4O3p4EtYI> and 2-<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=aGVccAt7Olc>). She does not really need to acquire a job as she already has one: she runs a joke shop with her best friend. However, Miranda wishes to satisfy her mother by pursuing a career as a manager in one of the well-known high street department stores, so she plucks up the courage and decides to apply. Her job interview is certainly one of a kind: Miranda sings her way through it, which is bizarre to say the least. Unfortunately, she possesses this quirky habit of singing in stressful situations (which a regular viewer of the sitcom would be familiar with). In a nutshell then, her interview, apart from a few initial metaphorical utterances, becomes a singing contest.

I would like to start my analysis with the metaphors that Miranda produces in her speech. Firstly, when discussing motivation, she utters the words: "I could splatter this table with motivation. Yeah, I'll motivate you now if you want." If we want to analyse the scene by means

of CIT, we have to distinguish the respective mental spaces at hand. Specifically, input space 1 would pertain to splattering a prototypical liquid of some kind, whereas the second input space would regard motivating and all the actions we take to increase motivation. Please notice that so far, the inputs are the same as in the elucidation of humour by means of CMT. So, this analogy between the two also allows us to map the act of splattering onto the action of motivating, in much the same manner as discussed earlier in the paper. Nonetheless, we would back-project motivation from the second input onto the first one, where it would be mapped onto a liquid. This back-projection is crucial, as we have motivation mentioned directly in the text, while liquid is inferred by the verb *to splatter*, so the interpreter must make the connection here (hence the grounding of CIT is also present in this example). Such mappings could then be transferred into the blended space, where they would be equated and generate incongruity. The clash between them would be used to explain the comic effects, as they are strikingly diverse in nature; i.e. input 1 describes the experiential reality and objects as well as activities we are familiar with, while input 2 denotes a more general capability of a human to motivate others. The latter is likely not to be perceived as a down-to-earth action. When thinking of motivation, some people can have in mind a more abstract set of thoughts or verbal arguments which are supposed to be motivating when verbalized, for instance: If you work harder, your job satisfaction will increase, or: when the job is completed faster than anticipated, you will be given some time off. This makes the dichotomy between the inputs and the incongruity within the blend even bigger. And we can arrive at such a meaning in the process referred to as running the blend. In contrast, as far as CMT is concerned, the act of elaborating on the correspondences between the source and target is not attainable. Thus, the additional connotations which specify the way of motivating are only accessible via the emergent structure in the blend. Also, motivation might include cultural elements and might vary in different societies and contexts, which could also be explicable via conceptual integration. The way Miranda chooses to motivate her interviewers is striking, as she tells them in an informal manner to get off the chairs and do something (“Get off your asses and do something!”). In the British society, such a conduct would most likely be considered interesting, quirky or perhaps even funny, and the proof of it is visible in the fact that Miranda actually gets the job. Yet in many other cultures it would be unthinkable, extreme or even rude. So, the cultural level enters our humour analysis here, too.

Furthermore, in this case, we deal with the so-called borrowing for compression (see above), which means that we borrow from splattering, which seems to be a well-known mental space, and we project actions and the scenario connected with the verb to splatter onto the abstract act of motivation. This certainly enriches the comedy by allowing the viewing of the two different concepts as interrelated. Moreover, we encounter analogy and disanalogy in this case, the former one between different mappings of input spaces and the latter within the blend, which helps to elucidate the nature of the amusement in the scene depicted. The grounding of the comedy viewer who processes the data at hand is also introduced by means of the mental space which I shall refer to as the ground. The whole integration network is an example of a single-scope network which can be represented as follows:

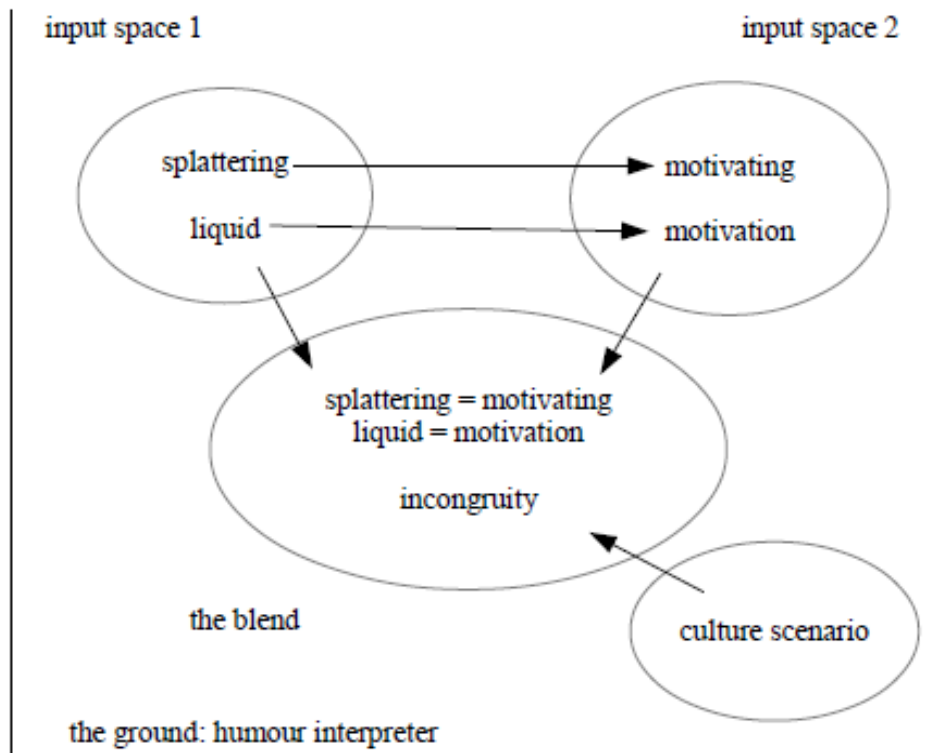


Figure 2. Splattering liquid as motivating

The second metaphorical expression from the job interview scene is connected with the love of children. Miranda claims that she can easily get inside children's heads, as a sign of the good rapport she is able to build with the little ones. As in the previous example, this figurative statement ("I can get into kids' heads easily") acquires comic properties due to its dichotomy between the literal and metaphorical interpretation. The former would be strange, and highly impossible. This makes Miranda explain herself, having uttered the problematic sentence, for she feels it might sound "freaky" and "subliminal". She basically uses the phrase in a figurative way, expressing the fact that she can easily understand what kids may feel and think. Moreover, what adds to the comedy here is the fact that Miranda actually feels the need to explain her use of an idiomatic expression. This creates another incongruity on a cultural level, since nobody who is sane is expected to explain stable metaphorical language to other interlocutors, and yet Miranda chooses to do so in order to be regarded as funny. The humour interpreter, who is present in the mental space of the ground, will certainly find it amusing, too. Also, it is such a British thing to do, explaining oneself so that there is no confusion possible, even if it means explaining the obvious. This is again the cultural level functioning together with the linguistic one.

In this example, we distinguish two input spaces: input 1, which relates to the literal act of getting somewhere, finding more information about the place, its people, customs, etc.; and input 2, which conveys the metaphorical image of getting into kids' heads, i.e. the capability of understanding how children think, react and what they want. Therefore, we would have to search for mappings between the above, based on the first input which provides the organising frame for the input space 2, making the integration network of a single-scope type as in the above

example. One would be the literal reaching of a place or people. This, on the other hand, would be mapped onto understanding children. We could also project and map finding out information about the place or people and their habits onto understanding kids in this context. The mappings would then be blended and would function as an incongruous unit (see Figure 3). This incongruity would certainly provoke amusement, especially if the emergent structure of the blend envisaged the fact that someone would truly get into another person's head and exist in there and, thus, improve the understanding of their mind. Such an imaginary scenario is accessed within conceptual integration via the emergent structure of the blend. This certainly adds to the amusement in the example analysed here. And, it goes hand in hand with what Miranda actually does in the sitcom, i.e. the explanation of the figurative meaning used. Similar to the illustration analysed above, we encounter borrowing for compression in this scene. That is to say, the scenario of getting into a place, which is well established, is used as a frame to structure the understanding of children, which is a rather abstract concept. This type of compression seems to be prevalent in the scene analysed. However, we can also perceive the following vital relations: the analogy and disanalogy. The mappings between the respective inputs initially operate as analogous and then, in the blended space, become discordant as unified relations. This also helps to explain humour.

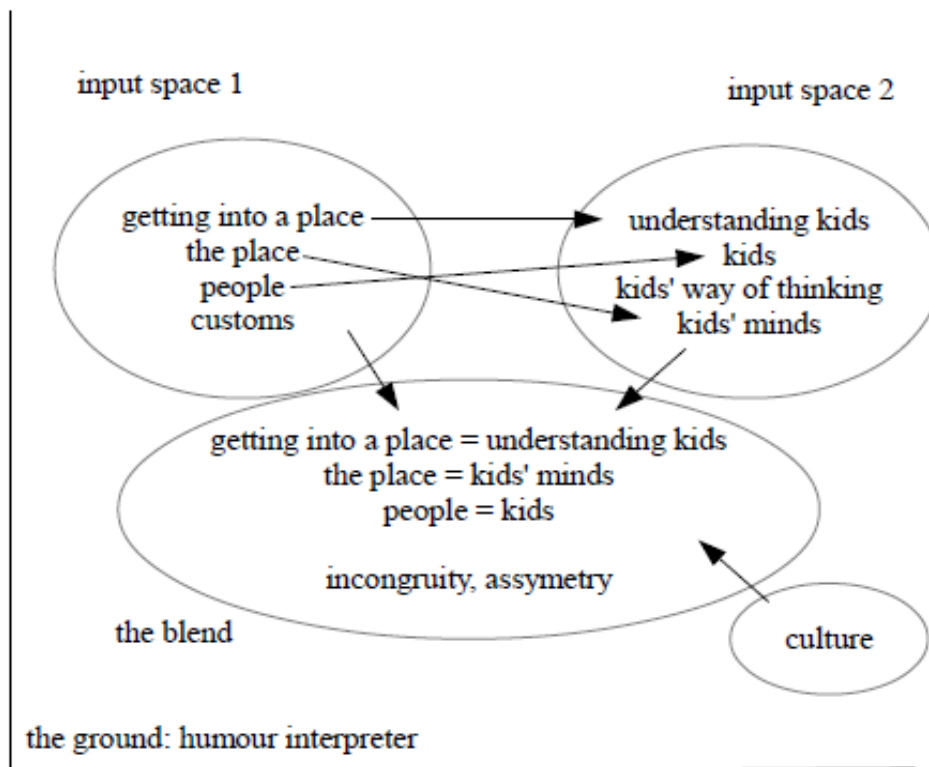


Figure 3. Getting into a place as understanding children

### 3.2 What more can blending offer?

Having used blending with regard to metaphorical discourse in *Miranda*, I would now like to demonstrate that CIT is actually capable of much more than merely a semantic analysis on a

verbal level with a few cultural references here and there. Specifically, the whole scene of Miranda's job interview can be interpreted in terms of blending. If we introduce an initial input space of a prototypical job interview (input space 1), we may then juxtapose it with what occurs during that episode, which would be classed as input space 2, i.e. Miranda's singing and her general conduct or performance during a job interview. However, we would also need input space 3, i.e. the mental space of a true performance, e.g. singing. In the film mental space, Miranda sings numerous verses while standing on the table in front of her interviewers, prompted by the remark that children are our future. What is more, she also makes gestures that a performer would produce during their performance, such as holding a pen to her mouth as if it were a microphone or drawing her shoulders dramatically to the back at the end, in order to highlight the dramatic element of the "show." Her figurative utterances, which were explained above, can also signify the need to be perceived as intelligent and stunning, which is the domain of celebrities or showmen. Just to briefly recap, drawing such an interpretation, we could distinguish input space 1 of an interview with employers who interview a candidate and discuss the job together. This would function as an ICM for the humour receiver. We could introduce input space 2 of the film scene which links interviewing with performing, i.e. Miranda is an interviewee to the extent that she answers some questions from her potential employers and attempts to be polite and versatile to impress them. Similarly, we could also distinguish the elements of a performance in the sitcom, where Miranda functions as a celebrity who uses creative metaphorical language in her interview; additionally, she sings and creates a performance for the audience of the three managers and certainly makes an impression. Furthering the connection with this, we could determine the potential input space 3 of a show where a celebrity gives interviews, comes across as smug and funny, and sings to the audience. This input again operates as an ICM against which we can comprehend the episode of a TV series.

When we superimpose the three mental spaces, we can project the data to the blend in the following mappings: interviewers become the shop management who incidentally also function as the audience during a performance, an interviewee is mapped here onto Miranda, who also happens to be a performer/celebrity/star, answering questions and participating in a discussion in an interview becomes a mixture of the sitcom interview and singing, which can also be mapped onto the celebrity's singing contest and a show, and finally the ICM interview is mapped onto a film job interview, which again is also mapped onto a show/performance/singing contest ICM. What is more, we could also map the pen Miranda sings to, from input 2, onto a microphone from input space 3, and map Miranda's singing and performance on the table onto the celebrity's conduct on stage, etc. With such a number of striking correspondences that go three-way in between three different input spaces, we surely attain incongruity within the blend. This again explicates the humour of the whole scene, and when supplemented with the above analysis of the verbal material by means of CIT, it allows us to notice that blending operates not only on the semantic level of the utterances we encounter, but also on a more general level of meaning construction with regard to the plot, characters and acting. The scene's conceptual integration network constitutes the double-scope network type, i.e. the most creative of all. Furthermore, this double-scope network is also connected with the previous two verbal-level single-scope networks, which allows us to introduce the three-dimensional perspective to British humour. The graphic representation of the above is the following:

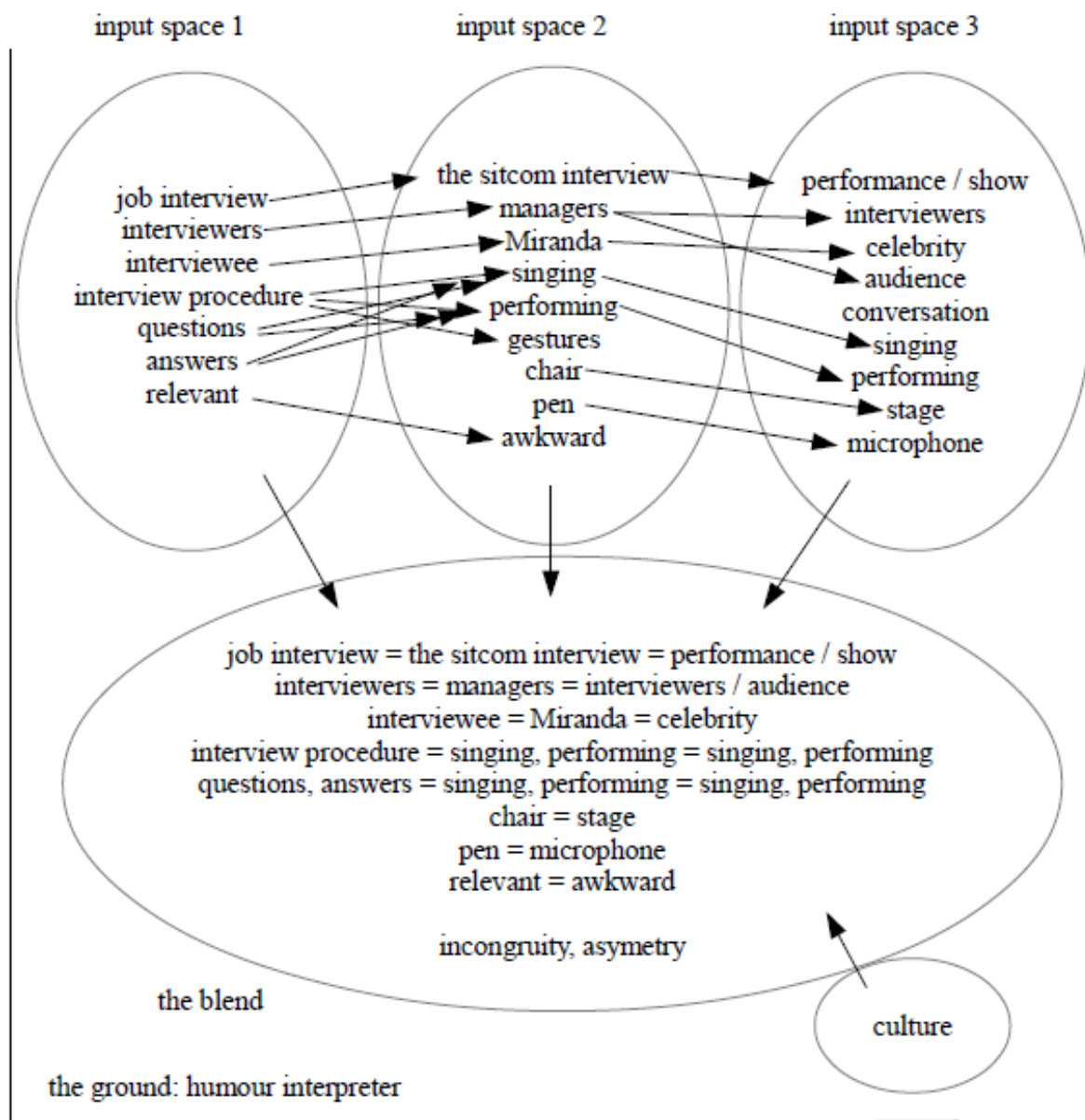


Figure 4. Conceptual integration of the complete scene

Additionally, we can perceive the compression in the scene which relates to the scalability of the scene. Because we encounter three different mental spaces, it would be impossible to manage them correctly at the same time. Hence, the data within these is compressed into the manageable mappings (as enumerated above). This can also be referred to as syncopation, since we do not deal with the elaborate multiple blend in its entirety, but rather choose certain aspects of it as vital. For instance, in reference to input space 3, we compress performance or show to merely singing and answering queries in a clever manner. The overall compression tightens the mappings and the blend thus achieves human scale. Also, it is important to observe that analogy and disanalogy in this example play a crucial role. The oppositions between the properties of the blended space, such as Miranda who functions as an interviewee as well as a celebrity or performer, are all based on the vital relations of analogy which becomes disanalogy. I claim that these vital relations will be especially relevant for any studies on humour, as their interrelation will allow for the incongruity within humour analysis to be captured.

What is more, in the complete job interview scene, we can refer to frame-shifting, too. It does not, however, relate only to the verbal level, i.e. the category of inappropriate motivation. The whole interview scene could be viewed in terms of frame-shifting, where the original interview mental space (the ICM of a job interview) is not enough for the viewer to interpret the contents. So, prompted by Miranda's behaviour, we need to relate to another mental space: of performance. So, frame-shifting can operate on a verbal as well as contextual level in humour.

As far as blending is concerned, CIT can be also studied within the job interview scene on a pragmatic level. When we inspect the conversations that Miranda has with the interviewers, it is possible to notice humour there, too. Starting with the motivating fragment, Miranda wants to astound her employers, and when encouraged to motivate them, she produces the exclamation: "Get off your fat asses and do something!" This is hardly polite or expected, although it certainly can be categorized as creative in the situation. So, how to explain the humour behind it with the use of pragmatics? And where does blending come in handy? To begin with, the pragmatic theory of language, according to the Gricean perspective, advocates that each and every utterance is supposed to adjust to the conversational maxims that guide our communication. The primary rule states that in order to communicate at all, one needs to be involved in cooperation with the other discourse participants, here, our interlocutors. This rule is known as a more general Cooperative Principle: "Make your contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1989: 45). The more specific principles, however, are enumerated by Grice as Maxims of conversation; they are closely associated with the Cooperative Principle, and they are as follows:

The Maxims

Quantity Make your contribution as informative as is required. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

Quality Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

Relation Be relevant

Manner Avoid obscurity of expression. Avoid ambiguity. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity). Be orderly

Grice (1989: 45-46)

Overall, any interlocutor needs to be truthful and relevant. When we inspect what Miranda says to the interviewers, we immediately notice that her motivational statement is wrong. To be precise, it flouts the Maxim of Manner due to its incorrect register, for in a formal situation, such as a job interview, no interlocutor should use informal, slang expressions that border on rudeness, simply because such behaviour is unbecoming. In our society, the scenario of a job interview requires succinctness, clarity and adherence to a formal register. Miranda vaguely adheres to the first two, yet the latter is completely non-existent. Thus, the impoliteness occurs (although in the British society this would not necessarily be perceived as such).

The pragmatic paradigm used here does not, however, explain the comedy. It merely talks about violating certain norms in a social situation of discourse. Therefore, let us once again resort to conceptual blending. Taking its premises into account, we could treat the polite and communicative job interview as one of the input spaces, with interviewers, an interviewee, a discussion, a conversation, and adhering to politeness (also in the Gricean sense). Finally, we would have a request from interviewers to be motivated to which the interviewee would answer prototypically, perhaps enumerating financial benefits as motivation. In this light, the sitcom's job interview will function as another input space, with potential employers, with Miranda who sings and performs in her own 'show', and with her inadequate answer to the issue of motivation, and others. Now, if these inputs were to be compared and contrasted, we could perceive the



comedy scene, i.e. input space 2, as divergent from the conventionalised one as represented by input space 1. The mapping of Miranda's motivational strategy onto the more prototypical answer certainly introduces incongruity. This is enriched by her behaviour, which again, as seen against the conventional background knowledge of input space 1, seems odd, to say the least. Such incongruous mappings, which we project into the blend, strengthen dichotomy and clash within the blend. In this manner, the surprising element on the discourse level of a single-scope network becomes entertaining.

Furthermore, if we run this blend, we could also incorporate British cultural elements into the analysis of the blended contents. For example, we could state that the reaction of the potential employers to Miranda and her conduct is part and parcel of Britishness, where eccentricity is tolerated, and politeness and manners as well as respect for another win over their shock and the thoughts that must form in their heads upon Miranda's silliness and inability to participate in a sensible conversation. Similarly, we could assess the next part of the interview, where Miranda, asked if she has any queries, responds with the statement about the lightning and the fish ("When the lightning strikes the sea, why don't all the fish die?"). This piece of conversation (which would serve as input space 2) flouts the same Maxim of Manner and, perceived against the input space 1 of an ideal interview situation, would certainly result in the clash and incongruity, adding to the humour in fairly the same manner as the instances above. Therefore, with regard to the pragmatically-oriented humour, it is feasible to regard CIT as a theory that works towards the elucidation of comedy at hand in quite a systematic manner, even when it assumes the complex incorporation of multiple input spaces and the relations between these. The above example can be illustrated by the following diagram:

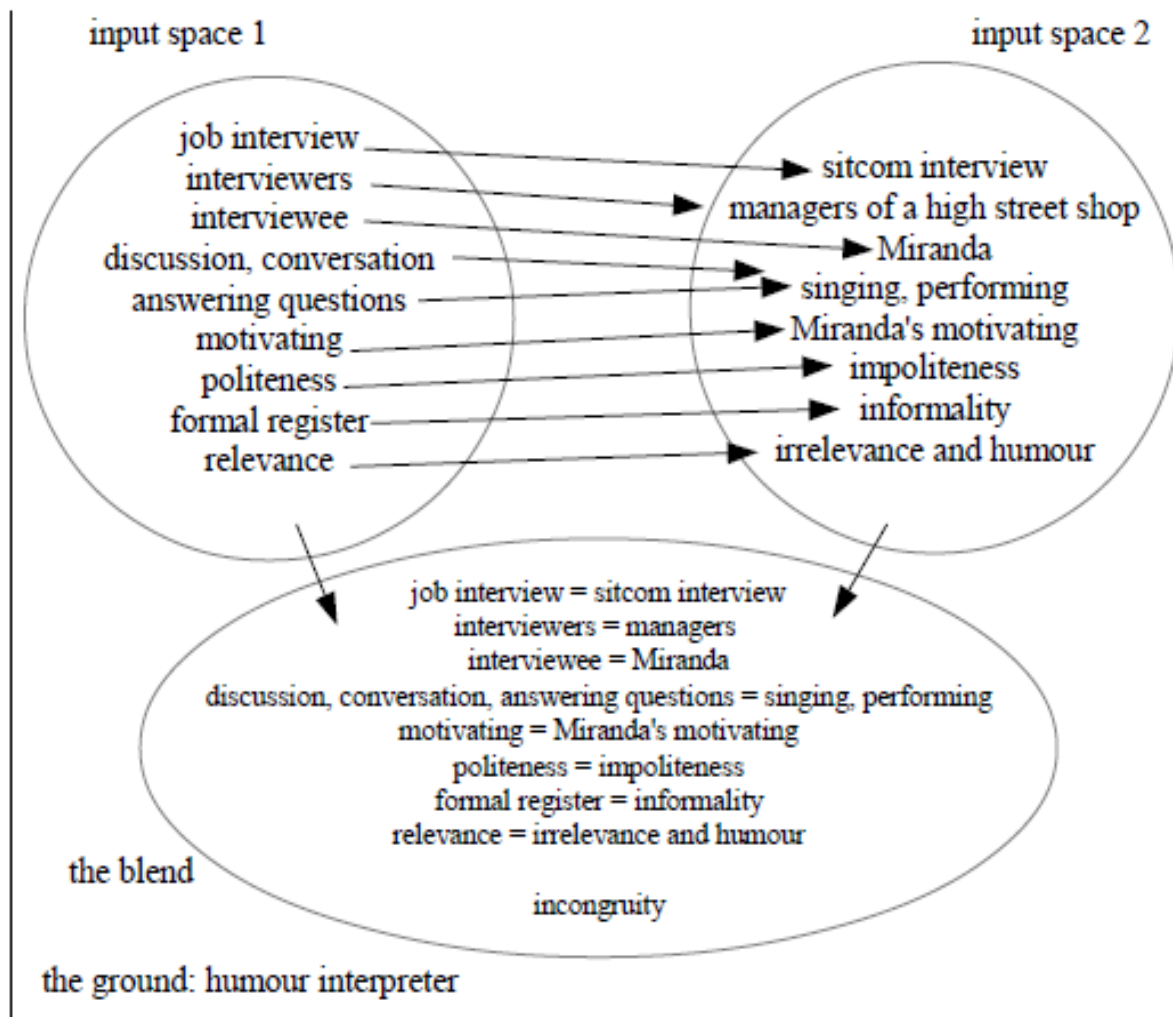


Figure 5. Pragmatically-oriented conceptual integration network

### 3.4 Summary of the analysis

First of all, it becomes apparent that CIT is capable of explaining versatile British comedy, as it can be used to study and explain humour on a verbal, semantic, pragmatic/discourse and cultural level simultaneously. CIT does not only cover literal or metaphorical language, it is also present and applicable at a cultural level with regard to humour, which accounts for its gestalt nature. Not many theoretical proposals can boast such a premise. In fact, blending is rare in the sense that it allows for joining numerous levels of interpretation into one. I am inclined to believe that blending could be said to operate as a 3D theory, which simultaneously links various surfaces of comedy in a TV series medium (for more see Jabłońska-Hood 2015). To be specific, we can distinguish blends on a verbal level where the uttered text becomes semantically deviant. We can additionally note discourse blends where the pragmatic conceptual integration flouts the Maxims of Cooperation, and still we could bring to these the socio-cultural data which is dichotomous, by blending the idealized, internalized and conventionalised knowledge of the world with the filmic presentation of fictitious reality. The said levels can also be grouped into a taxonomy where at the very bottom we would distinguish the verbal layer, further above it the

discourse/pragmatic layer, which prompts the socio-cultural references. On top of such a taxonomy, we could assign the space for the meta layer, which I did not discuss in detail in this paper but which in *Miranda* is represented by the titular character's continual dialogue with the viewer (where the character specifically turns to the camera and speaks to the audience). This meta level would basically be of a higher order and it would allow the humour researcher to bring reality into the humorous frame. That is frequently the case in British comedy, which blends the two together for even greater comedy. The taxonomy as a whole can be regarded as a 3-dimensional structure, interlinking its different levels with the various layers and surfaces of the sitcom in a systematic way. Via the procedure of running the blend, we access the path to socio-cultural elements, which enriches the humour analysis, and which is necessary in case of the British humour, which abounds in allusions and references of many kinds.

In addition to that, I can conclude, based on the material analysed above, that British humour will either be of a single-scope kind, when restricted to a linguistic level, or of a highly creative, double-scope type, when viewed as a gestalt of the above-mentioned taxonomy. This duality is a characteristic feature of British comedy. Obviously, more research is needed to confirm whether the hypothesis can be applied to other formats of British humour, such as stand-up or interactional humour. Furthermore, frame-shifting can function not only in verbal comedy, but also in any type of humour, broadening its definition from the reshuffling of discourse data into the restructuring of the concepts and mental spaces at hand.

Last but not least, it is important to recognise the role of compression and grounding for humour studies. What we can observe in the above analyses is the compression of the following type: borrowing for compression, scalability to achieve human scale, analogy and disanalogy (vital relations) that are compressed and explain humour in this way, making diverse blends into manageable ones. As far as grounding is concerned, in British humour, and especially in the TV series medium, it can be viewed as a crucial principle which enables the explanation of humour from the perspective of its audience. Grounding the blends and thus, introducing the notion of the humour interpreter, is a valid manoeuvre since it introduces the socio-cultural perspective into the blend. Hence, all the culturally-oriented add-ons to the emergent structure are not random, but rather stem from the receiver of comedy with their particular socio-cultural bias.

## **4. Conclusion**

All in all, CIT can be said to offer a complex yet viable cognitive toolkit for studying British humour to the extent that it incorporates different levels of comedy, e.g. the linguistic, pragmatic, or cultural level, and so provides a much fuller insight into the notion of comedy. It would certainly be of interest to use blending in the study of meta humour within British sitcoms in order to measure its relation to comic effects. It may even be relevant in terms of a general British sense of humour, also. That said, CIT appears to be well equipped for explaining humour in the TV series medium, as its toolkit—with its emergent structure, the running of the blend, as well as the grounded online meaning creation, which allows for a concrete language user, i.e. humour interpreter, to be incorporated into the model of meaning creation—aspire to analyse British humour in a much more concise and systematic way than any other theory can promise to offer. What is more, the principle of compression is certainly valid for comedy studies, as it not only tightens the blending or renders it human in scale, but it also directly introduces compression of analogy into disanalogy which is, for my part, responsible for the explanation of humour, in collaboration with the incongruity encountered within the blended space.

Further, I am inclined to believe that British humour in film format can be studied and explained by means of the 3D conceptual blending model, due to the fact that the model interlinks multiple layers of asymmetry and incongruity of the blended space with the verbally

secured blends and various socio-cultural allusions, which are to operate as add-on mental spaces stemming from the blend's emergent structure, the pragmatic interpretation, as well as the meta representation. CIT therefore can tackle the multi-dimensional British humour in a systematic manner. If equipped with frame-shifting, it could also display a boosted potential for clarifying funniness; simply because frame-shifting does not merely operate on a linguistic level, but on a cultural one as well.

In a nutshell, the idea of the 3D CIT with its compression, emergent structure, and the grounded humour interpreter appears to be of special importance for the explanation of the complexity of British humour.

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