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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2688-6220>LOSE A TOE: STEPHEN COLBERT'S MAGA *FROZEN* PARODY  
AND POLITICAL HUMOR

## Abstract

Applying conceptual integration theory, the paper analyses the construction of meaning of political parody and political humor in which daily news is explicitly deconstructed. In particular, it focuses on Stephen Colbert's MAGA *Frozen* parody and political humor. The paper also analyses how the artistic adaptation of the tune "Let it Go" contributes to highlighting certain aspects of reality, and thus achieving rhetorical goals in political discourse. The aim of the paper is twofold: to examine the creation of humorous meaning in multimodal formats in a conceptual blending that is a result of the incongruity produced in a blended space and to examine the role of the novel inferences and conceptualizations produced in the blended space in achieving a number of rhetorical goals, that is, criticism of the political and social reality. Humorous meaning is created in the emergent structure due to the unusual combination of related elements, which results in incongruity (Coulson 2002; Marín-Arrese 2003; Fujii 2008). The variety of modalities employed in the creation of humor, including different visual cues, helps viewers unpack the blends and successfully understand the criticism of the political reality. Additionally, since blending can serve as a rhetorical tool capable of influencing the audience to alter their perception of reality and take action (Coulson 2006; Coulson and Oakley 2006; Coulson and Pascual 2006; Oakley and Coulson 2008), analyzing the satirical text's meaning construction through conceptual blending can uncover rhetorical and argumentative objectives within political discourse. In this way, certain viewpoints are promoted, and rhetorical goals are achieved through humor. The interpretation and understanding of humor depend on having general knowledge of the political and social situation, as well as on ideological beliefs and knowledge related to specific events. The viewer must create conceptual associations between input spaces using background knowledge to understand the meaning of the blend.

Key words: conceptual blending theory, political humor, political discourse, rhetorical goals

## 1. Introduction

The focus of late-night jokes is often the language used by those in power to frame issues of common political concern. By ridiculing the language that the politicians use, late-night humor criticizes political affairs and society's state in general and thus exposes hidden ideologies behind language use. Ezell (2016: 146) points out that "American humor and satire frequently finds itself reveling in ambivalence, and perhaps even nihilism when faced with the incongruity between America's ideals and America's reality." Although late night shows have ridiculed numerous presidents, presidential candidates, and other political figures in recent decades, the amount of derision directed at Donald Trump, first as a presidential candidate and then as president, is significantly higher (Farnsworth and Lichter 2019: 1).

Using conceptual blending theory, the paper analyses one segment from *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*<sup>1</sup> poking fun at Donald Trump and an incident that happened at a rally at Eppley Airfield. In conceptual blending, humor arises in the emergent structure due to an unusual combination of elements, which results in incongruity (Coulson 2002; Marín-Arrese 2003). In addition, conceptual blending can be used as a rhetorical tool influencing the audience to change reality and even act upon it (Coulson and Pascual 2006; Coulson and Oakley 2006; Coulson 2006; Oakley and Coulson, 2008), the analysis of the construction of the meaning of political humor as a product of conceptual blending can reveal some of the rhetorical and argumentative goals of political humor. The aim of the paper is twofold: to examine the creation of humorous meaning in multimodal formats in conceptual blending as a result of the incongruity produced in a blended space and to examine the role of the novel inferences and conceptualizations produced in a blended space in achieving a number of rhetorical goals, that is, criticism of the political and social reality.

The paper is organized as follows. In the first part, the paper provides a brief overview of conceptual blending theory, its application to humor, and the rhetorical potential of conceptual blending. The second part discusses the creation of humorous meaning in conceptual blending and the role of conceptual blends in achieving rhetorical goals. Finally, the paper presents the main conclusions drawn from the analysis. The present paper does not discuss the distinction between satire, parody and humor in detail, nor does it attempt to define the three terms, considering that these issues lie beyond the scope of this study. It is, nevertheless, important to mention that in contemporary humor studies, following Ruch (1998), humor is used as an umbrella term for the laughter-related forms such as (political) satire, parody, irony, jokes, standup comedy, and others (Simpson 2003; Martin 2008; Popa 2011, 2013; Tsakona and Popa 2011). The present study uses the term "humor" in the same sense, as the essential element in all these laughter-related forms is incongruity that gives rise to humorous meaning.<sup>2</sup> We are fully aware that parody

<sup>1</sup> This article analyses a segment from *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* produced after Donald Trump's first presidency. It is also pertinent to note that, at the time of this article's acceptance for publication, *The Late Show*, hosted by Stephen Colbert, had already been cancelled by CBS. The network announced that the programme would conclude in May 2026, a decision made public approximately two weeks after CBS reportedly reached a financial settlement with Donald Trump to resolve a defamation lawsuit he had filed against the network.

<sup>2</sup> See Tsakona and Popa 2011; Popa 2013.

“attacks a particular text or genre, making fun of how that text or genre operates” (Gray et al. 2009: 17), while satire is humor’s “most overtly political genre” (Gray et al. 2009: 11). As Faina (2012: 547) puts it “political satire is a powerful format because making jokes and humorous remarks about politics is how individuals often engage politically with each other.”

## 2. Conceptual blending theory

The Theory of Conceptual Integration was developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner in 1993, as an extension of Fauconnier’s (1985) mental space theory. It is known by a range of related names such as *Conceptual Blending*, *Conceptual Integration*, *The Many Space Model*, *Network Theory*, *Blending Theory* and *Conceptual Blending Theory* (Coulson and Oakley 2000; Evans and Green 2006). This theory derives from both *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* and *Mental Spaces Theory* but is more closely related to the latter. “... [M]ental space theory locates meaning in speakers’ mental representations, and construes linguistic structures as cues that prompt speakers to set up elements in referential structure” (Coulson and Oakley 2000:176). It was initially developed to account for the construction of meaning in language such as novel metaphors, metonymy and counterfactual reasoning (Evans and Green 2006; Pereira 2007). However, the scope of its study soon spread to “a wide range of human activity such as art, religious thought and practice, and scientific endeavour” (Evans and Green 2006: 401). Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 18) explain that some basic and everyday mental abilities can go unrecognized for so long that the formation of mechanisms responsible for their understanding become invisible to the conscious mind. This is why, in solving problems, “because we have no awareness of the imaginative work we have done, we hardly even recognize that there was a problem to be solved” (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 12). One of the reasons for this is “that the operations we are talking about occur at lightning speed, presumably because they involve distributed spreading activation in the nervous system, and conscious attention would interrupt the flow” (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 18). Blending theory, as one of the most basic, unconscious and imaginative mental processes, shows these “expected properties of speed and invisibility” simultaneously revealing the mind’s hidden complexities (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 18). One of the most important aspects of this process is finding matches between input mental spaces which look as if they are straightforward but are in fact an almost unsolvable problem which requires careful analysis. As Fauconnier and Turner explain, “nobody knows how people do it” and they assume that “the unconscious mind gives it, seemingly for free, to the thinking person” (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 19-20). Blends as such are small and compact enough that we can keep them within the boundaries of our mind, where we can later look for them to understand phenomena we could not otherwise understand. The main idea behind conceptual integration as a basic cognitive operation is that it operates through an integration network consisting of mental spaces and the relations between them. “Building an integration network involves setting up mental spaces, matching across spaces, projecting selectively to a blend, locating shared structures, projecting backward to inputs, recruiting new structure to the inputs or the blend, and running various operations in the blend itself” (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 44). All these

processes represent the constitutive principles on which conceptual integration is based. Conceptual integration is a dynamic process that occurs as we think and speak, so that these processes can happen at any time, but also at the same time. Accordingly, the diagrams illustrating integration networks are in fact representations of only one of the phases of this dynamic and complex mental operation, and by no means of the whole process.

As the diagram below shows, a conceptual integration network is composed of at least two input spaces, a generic space, and a blended space, although a single network can be composed of several inputs, as well as blended spaces. The generic space captures the shared elements of both inputs and these elements from the generic space are in turn mapped onto the counterpart elements in the input spaces. The structure from the input spaces is projected into the blend, a new mental space. "Blends contain generic structure captured in the generic space but also contain more specific structure, and they can contain a structure that is impossible for the inputs, [...]" (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 47).

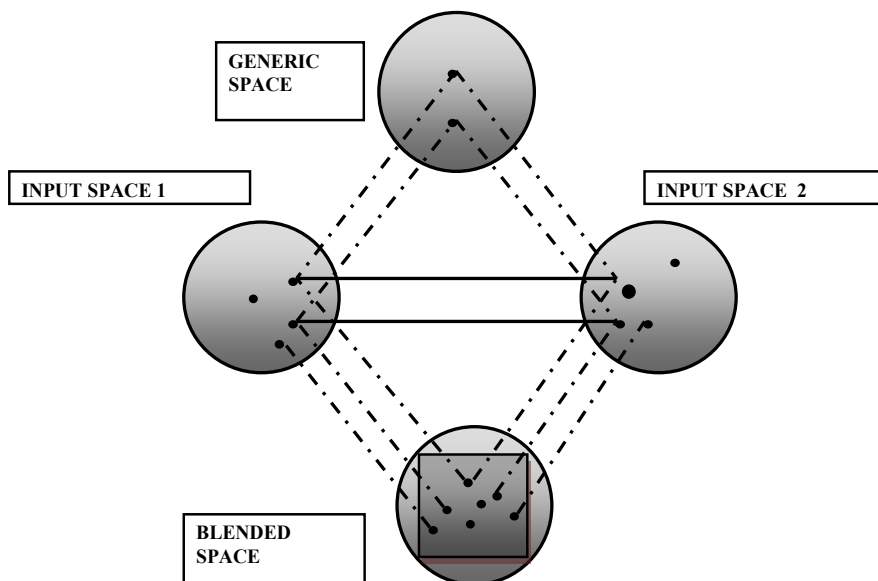


Figure 1. The basic diagram presenting a conceptual integration network  
(Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 46)

However, not all elements from the inputs are projected into the blend, which means that projections from the input spaces to the blend are partial. The emergent structure in the blended space is not copied from either input. Rather, the new structure within the blend is generated in three ways, through the processes of composition, completion, and elaboration, all of which operate unconsciously.

Behind the possibilities for conceptual blending, there is an entire system of interacting principles. To explain one of the products of this system, it is necessary to grasp the entire system. This system stands on conceptual compression, effecting a set

of relations strongly influenced by shared social experience and fundamental human neurobiology (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: xiii). These relations are also referred to as 'vital relations'. The human mind is able to compress in this way vital relations such as Time, Space, Cause-Effect, Change, Part-Whole and Intentionality and blending is thus "a compression tool *par excellence*" (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 113-4). It is known that conceptual blending is a process whose success depends mainly on selective projection mappings and dynamic simulation (Coulson and Oakley 2000: 176). This is why Evans and Green warn that, in order to "end up with the 'right' structure being projected to the blend," it is important to show how this selective projection is constrained (2006: 433). Dancygier (2016: 31) also points out that vital relations "guide the kinds of changes that elements of inputs undergo as a result of being projected into the blend." In addition to vital relations, Fauconnier and Turner (2002) propose a set of optimality principles that further clarify the relations within the conceptual integration network. They claim that under these principles, blends function most efficiently, but also point out that satisfying one of these principles does not automatically involve satisfying the others. Schmid (2011: 228) concludes that "both governing principles and vital relations do not always converge in their effects but may conflict in given cases, with one or several of them getting the upper hand over others." Governing principles and vital relations are represented in table 1.

Governing principles	Vital relations
<b>For compression:</b>	Change
Borrowing for compression	Identity
Single-relation compression by scaling	Time
Single-relation compression by syncopation	Space
Compression of one vital relation into another	Cause-Effect
Scalability	Part-Whole
Creation by compression	Representation
Highlights compression	Role
<b>Other governing principles:</b>	Analogy
The Topology Principle	Disanalogy
The Pattern Completion Principle	Property
The Integration Principle	Similarity
The Maximization of Vital Relations Principle	Category
The Intensification of Vital Relations Principle	Intentionality
The Web Principle	Uniqueness
The Unpacking Principle	
The Relevance Principle	

Table 1. Governing principles and vital relations (in Schmid 2011: 229)

Conceptual integration relies on the emergence of new, creative structures and as Dancygier (2016: 36) concludes "it is quite naturally more graceful in explaining the packaging of complex meaning into visual or linguistic chunks, thus allowing for efficient reference and discourse manipulation."

### 3. Conceptual integration theory in humor

Plato and Aristotle laid foundations of humor research. Their work on the subject has been the base ground for the development of different theories on humor. Moreover, it has influenced countless English linguistic researchers in their attempt to define and shape humor theories of today (Schwarz 2010). Throughout history, the study of humor has been approached from different aspects including the semantic, pragmatic, philosophical, sociological, psychological, psychoanalytical, behavioral and, most recently, the cognitive point of view. The development of Conceptual Integration Theory, has led to extraordinary and revolutionary discoveries of the nature, function, development and comprehension of humorous texts and discourses as well as humor in general. As Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 18) put it, "blending is an invisible, unconscious activity involved in every aspect of human life." Therefore, it is not surprising that conceptual integration theory has found its application in the study of different types of humor in a number of studies (Berberović and Delibegović Džanić 2009, 2020; Coulson 1996, 2002, 2003, 2005; Kyratzis 2003; Lundmark 2003; Marín-Arrese 2003; Bergen 2004; Delibegović Džanić and Berberović 2010, 2017; Dynel 2011, 2018; Dore, 2015; Fujii 2008; Libura 2017), both monomodal and multimodal. Monomodal humor typically appears in either verbal or pictorial form, while multimodal humor combines verbal and other modes. Multimodality is increasingly capturing the attention of researchers across various fields. Scholars agree that communication is multimodal, meaning it occurs through the combination of multiple modes (Forceville 2021, Jewitt 2014, Jewitt et al. 2016, Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, 2006, Tan et al. 2020).

Coulson (2002) claims that "[t]hough not all blends are humorous, blending does seem to be an inherent feature of humor." To illustrate the application of the theory of conceptual integration to humor, we will use the analysis of the famous joke discussed in Coulson (2002): *Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side.*

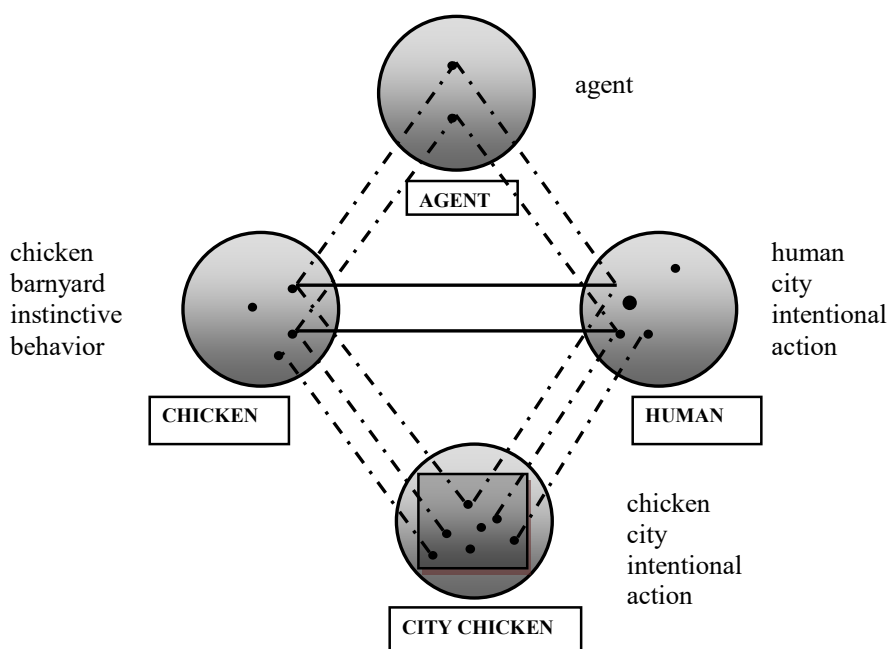


Figure 2. The conceptual integration network for the chicken joke (adapted from Coulson 2002)

The integration network is composed of two input spaces, a generic space and an integrated space. In the first input space, we find chickens as animals that behave according to their instincts, and usually live in chicken coops. In the second input we have people who live in cities and who are usually characterized by conscious behavior. Projections from these two inputs in the integrated space create a chicken that lives in the city and has well-thought-out intentions, i.e., it acts like a human intentionally crossing the street.

As Coulson (2002) argues, humor arises in an integrated space as we have a combination of a chicken and a human being, which results in incongruity. Cognitive linguists (Coulson 2002; Marín-Arrese 2003; Fujii 2008) believe that the incongruity created in the integrated space is a key element for the emergence and appreciation of humor. In that sense, the incongruity in this joke is the result of the fact that chickens usually do not live on city streets in the Western World and we do not usually conceptualize them as beings with deliberate intentions. However, the blend does not imply the emergence of a new creature created by crossing human and chicken, but we still have a chicken that behaves according to the norms of human behavior and that lives in a world created by this joke.

Conceptual integration is equipped with the mechanisms necessary for explaining the construction of meaning in different types of humor. Input spaces include bizarre scenarios and conventional ones which are compatible with the current political world. The clash of these two input spaces results in an emergent structure which yields incongruity and thus creates humor. Lewis also claims that in order “to get a joke we must resolve its incongruity by retrieving or discovering an image



or idea that can connect its oddly associated ideas or images" (1989: 34; quoted in Coulson, 2002). Humor has a very important role in criticizing our political reality highlighting the absurdity of the political world. Martin and Ford (2018: 255) point out that "political humor can function as a powerful tool of persuasion, effectively discrediting politicians and negatively affecting people's attitudes toward them."

For Perlmutter (2002), humor can be the result of the style of verbal presentation of the joke as well as the speaker's body language including facial expressions. For him the potential for humor is located in conflicting scripts which is finally realized in the hearer's mind. He emphasizes that not every joke is the same for every hearer and that its funniness depends on the hearer's interpretation of given scripts as well as on the amount of background knowledge the hearer may rely. The notion of unrealistic scenarios is also the topic of research of Semino (2010), who discusses a form of metaphorical creativity that involves unrealistic scenarios using blending. Here, Semino argues that the unrealistic scenarios evoked in her examples "arise from a creative process in which a writer (or, potentially, speaker) crafts an unfamiliar version of a familiar situation in order to convey a particular view of the topic they are discussing" (2010: 5). These papers are, by no means, the entire spectrum of the cornucopia of blending-related humorous research, but just a small number of examples which serve as evidence for the applicability of blending in explaining the creation of humor in various types of discourse.

#### *4. Humor in late-night shows: a case study*

This paper uses Forceville's (2006, 2021) provisional classification of modes, which is based on conceptual metaphor theory and attempts to link a mode and sensory perception as much as is tenable, for the sake of terminological clarity in the analysis. Forceville (2021) proposes that meaning-making modes are spoken language, written language, visuals, music, sound, taste, smell, touch, and body posture, including gestures, postures, facial expressions, and movement. Bülow and Johann (2023) argue that, in a multimodal approach, political hints can appear in images (like showing politicians), language (such as discussing political issues), or the combination of both image and language (such as using exaggerated visuals to create humor). In this paper we will show how they interlink and how their roles affect the understanding of political humor.

The prevalent perception is that late-night comedy has been politically significant to the mainstream scene in the United States of America for a long time. Ezell (2016: 13) points out that "American humor possesses a critical, often ironic, strain that highlights the incongruity between the rhetoric that promises equality, wealth, and prosperity in American culture and the failure of America to fulfill those promises." According to Symons (2019: 190), it is evident that The Late Show with Stephen Colbert took on a more provocative schema and adopted the role of an overt opponent of Donald Trump once Stephen Colbert replaced David Letterman in the show. He further argues that, "Colbert's nightly monologues are personal, consistently satirizing Trump's every controversy with blunt criticism. When Colbert impersonates Trump, reading his onscreen tweets aloud, he imposes an elongated 'camp' form of Trump's speech, making his words yet more flamboyant and 'silly.'"



Stelter (2017, quoted in Becker 2020: 2) points out that "Stephen Colbert and Seth Meyers are certainly leading the way in terms of presenting more politically charged content, even more entertainment-oriented hosts like Jimmy Kimmel have offered their own take on personally salient issues like the health care debate."

The popularity of these shows was discussed two decades ago in Feldman (2007), Peyser (2003), Rich (2003), Rosenthal (2003a), Rosenthal, P. (2003b), Rutenberg (2000), Salamon (2000), Segal (2002). Their reputation is based on the fact that political issues are usually framed in the same manner as ordinary viewers discuss them in very everyday lives. Faina (2012: 547) concludes that "political satire is a powerful format because making jokes and humorous remarks about politics is how individuals often engage politically with each other." LaMarre et al. (2009) note that political affiliation and ideology play a significant role in how Colbert's humor is perceived, with conservative-leaning viewers interpreting his comments literally and liberal-leaning viewers ironically. Ezell (2016: 150) also discusses the impact of TV shows and points out that the audience who watches shows, such as *The Daily Show*, does not express the enthusiasm to participate in politics due to their "exposure to the show." This brings us to the age-old question: do these shows' sarcasm contribute to the lack of political participation, or do they represent a rising skepticism of once-respected institutions? It is very difficult to answer this question as the audience members' inclinations may differ.

Analyzing the impact of the news parody programming, Becker (2020: 3-4) critically approaches research which "suggests that exposure to satire encourages viewers to express more cynical attitudes toward politicians, the media, and government institutions, satire simultaneously has a positive influence on one's own belief in their personal or internal political efficacy" (Baumgartner and Morris 2006; Becker 2011, 2014b; Peifer 2018). She further argues that exposure to satire, including news political programing might motivate the audience to express their opinion on social media, sign certain petitions or even take parts in protest, which is usually the most difficult part in youth political engagement, which usually finishes in an online format.<sup>3</sup> Gatti et al. (2019: 239) point out that "for linguistic creativity, adaptivity can be very important: consider personalized advertisements, user-adapted humor, irony, and poetry, to mention just a few themes. The potential is simply enormous considering the huge amount of textual content we are exposed to and its constant transformation." There are quite a few studies that deal with political humor, but not many that examine linguistic aspects of late-night comedy (see Berberović and Delibegović Džanić 2009; Delibegović Džanić and Berberović 2010; Fonseca et al. 2020).

The humor analysis that follows exposes the reader to specific aspects of conceptual blending in a step-by-step manner in order to demonstrate how dynamic cognitive processes evaluate and analyze the information expressed by the three modes and how much of the information contained in these modes is further projected onto the ultimate meaning of the parody and political humor in question. We will now deconstruct the Stephen Colbert's parody and political humor allowing for the tools of Conceptual Integration Theory.

<sup>3</sup> See Baumgartner and Lockerbie 2018; Becker 2013; Bode and Becker 2018; Hoffman and Young, 2011.

Stephen Colbert did a hilarious "Make America Great Again" (MAGA)-*Frozen* parody after Trump fans were abandoned in the Omaha cold. It is said that this "MAGA *Frozen*" celebrates those who could lose a toe to the tune of "Let it Go." In October 2020, thousands of Trump fans were stranded for several hours in freezing temperatures after a rally at Eppley Airfield in Omaha. It is reported that three hours after the event had ended, all participants were loaded onto buses. Numerous persons were brought to hospitals as a result of being exposed to severe weather conditions. The part analyzed, which lasts around 90 seconds, mocks the incident.

[The transcript]

(1) A reporter from the studio: Nebraska, which was a stop at the President's meeting yesterday.

Reporter: Supporters were stranded outside of the airport in literally freezing conditions. There were multiple individuals. They were actually taken to hospital for hypothermia.

[the song starts]

"The MAGA rally just ended tonight,  
He danced to YMCA.  
His campaign bussed me out here  
But the ticket was one-way.  
Extremities have all gone numb,  
All to watch Trump attack Biden's son.  
My feet can't feel severe frostbite.  
I think I might,  
Lose a toe,  
Lose a toe,  
Left foot will have only four.  
Lose a toe,  
Lose a toe,  
My choice of footwear was poor.  
Obamacare will cover my stay.  
Oh, wait, Barrett got confirmed.  
Might have to sell this tiara on eBay."

["Elsa Was Among Those Stranded in The Freezing Cold at Trump's Omaha Rally," The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, October 29, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXJgYpVNmHo>]

The meaning of a joke emerges within the conceptual integration network that can be viewed as a megablend. This megablend consists of two integration networks, each containing four spaces, in which the blend of the first network serves as an input space in the second network.

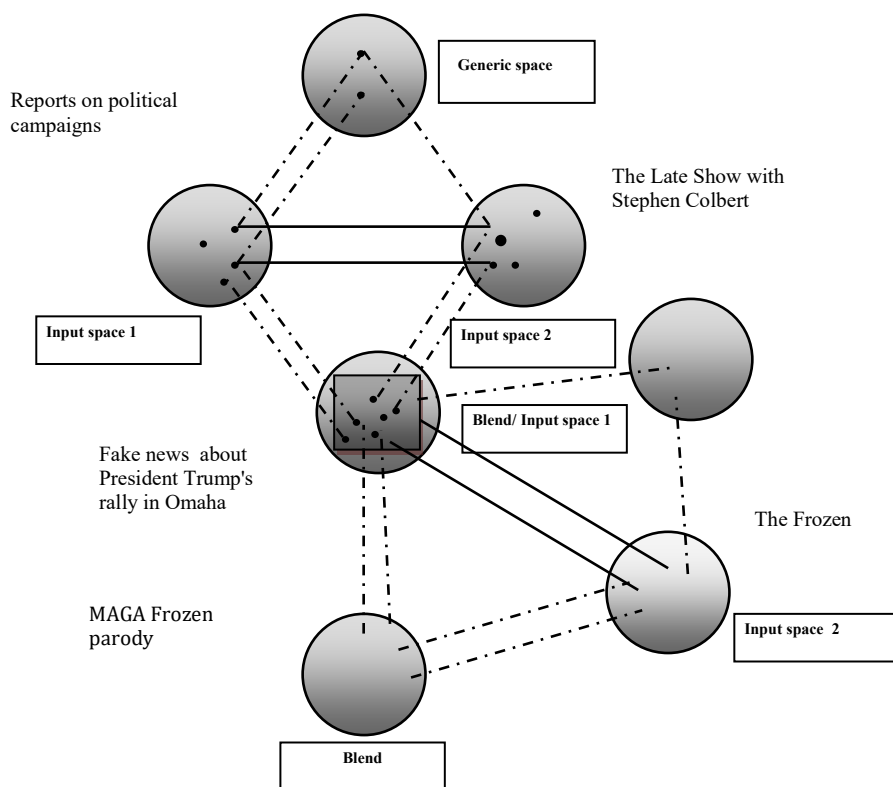


Figure 3. The conceptual integration network for MAGA Frozen parody

In the first network input space one contains a video in which a news report about what happened in Omaha is shown. Additionally, the written language at the bottom of the video provides a summary of the news and gives additional information to viewers. The second input space contains the concept of late-night shows, specifically *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. In this show, the concept of fake news in the sense of satirical news is very important. The generic space contains the concept of delivering news, that is, reporting on socio-political topics. The blend receives an organizational frame from the first input space, including projections such as a video that provides an overview of the fiasco that occurred at the rally in Omaha. From the second input space, the concept of satirical news is projected into the blend. Mappings between the input spaces connect the news from the first input space with the satirical news from the second input space. In the blend, the video, which is additionally accompanied by written and spoken language, also includes a warning in the bottom right corner that the news is fake.

The blended space from the first network serves as the input space one in the second network. This input space incorporates the political situation in the United States during the Trump administration. The blend receives only salient projections from this complex input space, i.e. the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett, Obamacare,

the occasion at which Trump made an unkind allusion to Hunter Biden's addiction problems, and selling Trump-autographed memorabilia on eBay to raise money for the people whose homes were terribly damaged in the hurricane. The second input space incorporates Walt Disney Animation Studios' animated fantasy film, *Frozen*, about Princess Elsa and Princess Anna of Arendelle. They were best friends and Anna was the only person who knew Elsa's secret, her power to make snow and ice. Elsa struggled to control her magical ice powers. During their childhood, Elsa accidentally injured Anna with her powers, and in fear of hurting her again, Elsa isolated herself from Anna. When her powers accidentally became known to the public, Elsa decided to leave her home. Anna, determined to bring her sister back and save the kingdom, embarked on a perilous journey accompanied by an ice harvester named Kristoff, his loyal reindeer Sven, and a hilarious snowman named Olaf, brought to life by Elsa's magic. Ultimately, love and the bond between the sisters proved to be the key to saving Arendelle. In a climactic moment, Anna sacrificed herself to save Elsa from a frozen fate. However, true love's act of selflessness thawed Anna's heart and saved the kingdom.

Input space two projects the frame structure to the blend, which also receives salient projections from the first input. In input space one, we find a network of political and media events, including Trump's campaign rallies, the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, debates surrounding Obamacare, Trump's references to Hunter Biden's addiction, and the circulation of Trump-autographed memorabilia on eBay, all of which are projected into the blend.

In the blend, Elsa is singing a completely modified "Let it Go," a song that shares the melody and some features of the original so that it is easily recognized even in audio format. The video analyzed is a modification of Walt Disney Animation Studios' animated fantasy film, as in the video appears a foot with four toes, Obama's head, a bundle of money, flip-flops, the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett and other events mentioned in the text of the modified song. In the imaginary scenario in the blend Elsa attended Trump's rally in Omaha and just like other participants was left in severe conditions for hours.

From the first input space there is projected the typical scenario at Trump's rallies, which is described in the first line, the YMCA dance. This dance became a staple of his rallies with him dancing in front of Air Force One or on elevated platforms. There is no exact explanation for Trump's fascination with this single from the Village People's record *Cruisin'*, which appeared in 1978. This disco classic is known for its catchy tune and iconic dance moves, particularly the letters Y, M, C, A being spelled out with corresponding arm movements.

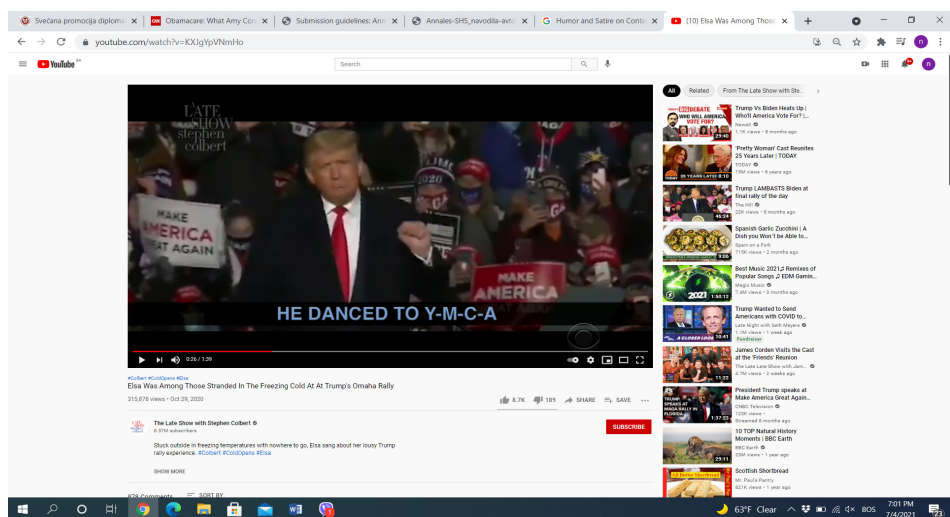


Figure 4. Trump is dancing to "YMCA"

In the blend Elsa is bussed to Eppley Airfield and literally left stranded with other supporters. The blend projects back to the first input space where Elsa is struggling with cold on her own expedition, which, contrary to the familiar scenario from the Disney cartoon, where Elsa is unaffected by the negative effects of the cold and she explicitly mentions it in the line, "The cold never bothered me anyway" in "Let it Go." In the blend, Elsa's extremities have all gone numb from the exposure to severe cold, as she is witnessing Trump's attack on Biden's son. The blend receives salient projections from input space two. It projects the episode that happened during the first presidential debate, when Donald Trump raised questions about Hunter Biden's business dealings and personal issues, including his history of substance abuse. His accusations could have reinforced the stigma for millions who have addiction problems. A lot of people with addiction problems never ask for help because of shame and social stigma, although addiction is now considered as a treatable illness many people are reluctant to seek for medical treatment (Mann 2020). The blend projects back to input space two as the media also suggest that high addiction rates in some battleground states, like Pennsylvania, might influence the presidential election.

In the absurd scenario in the blend Elsa cannot feel her feet because of severe frostbite and there is a great possibility that she will lose a toe due to hypothermia. As we can see, the image of a foot lacking a toe appears in the altered extract from the animated film *Frozen*. The blend projects back to input space two, as after this rally there were only four days left before Election Day and the situation in Trump campaign headquarters was far from satisfactory.



Figure 5. An excerpt from "Lose a Toe" with a foot with four toes

Our modified Elsa in the blend continues with her song, referring to some important aspects of the American political scene:

"My choice of footwear was poor.  
 Obamacare will cover my stay.  
 Oh, wait, Barrett got confirmed.  
 Might have to sell this tiara on eBay."



Figure 6. An excerpt from "Lose a Toe" with flip-flops

Stephen Colbert successfully played with the meaning of the noun flip-flops as it can be used to name a light sandal with a thong between the big and second toe, but also to describe the action of making an abrupt reversal of policy. Donald Trump is known as one of the most unpredictable American leaders as he often changes his mind and takes different stances on some important political issues including the Affordable Care Act (ACA) or Obamacare. The Act was signed into law in 2010. The main aim of the ACA is to provide affordable health insurance for all Americans. With the ACA the number of people with health insurance has increased and prescription drugs have become more affordable (Kominski, Nonzee and Sorensen 2017). In the blend, Elsa became aware that her choice of footwear, i.e., flip-flops, contributed to hypothermia. The blend projects back to the second input space as Trump supporters were left stranded in the cold mainly because of the chaotic organization of the event and it also refers to his abrupt reversals of policies.

At first, Elsa hopes that Obamacare will cover her medical costs, but she instantly realizes that Amy Coney Barrett was confirmed. From the second input space, there is projected information about Barrett's nomination. In October 2020, the Senate confirmed the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett, a conservative appeals court judge, to the Supreme Court. It would not have drawn public attention if it had not happened eight days before the presidential election. Although the Democrats insisted that the Republicans wait for the election results, for the first time in 150 years a justice was confirmed without the support of the minority party. It is also important to mention that Amy Coney Barrett replaced a liberal icon, Joan Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She was definitely the most prominent member of the nation's highest court. It is completely justified to fear the future decisions of a new conservative judge that might alter every aspect of American life. Due to the circumstances, in the integrated space Elsa is considering selling her tiara on eBay to cover her medical costs. The blend also receives relevant projections from the second input space as Donald Trump suggested that people in the midst of Hurricane Laura could sell his autograph for a huge amount of money. There are many pieces of Trump-autographed memorabilia on eBay which have been purchased for huge sums of money.



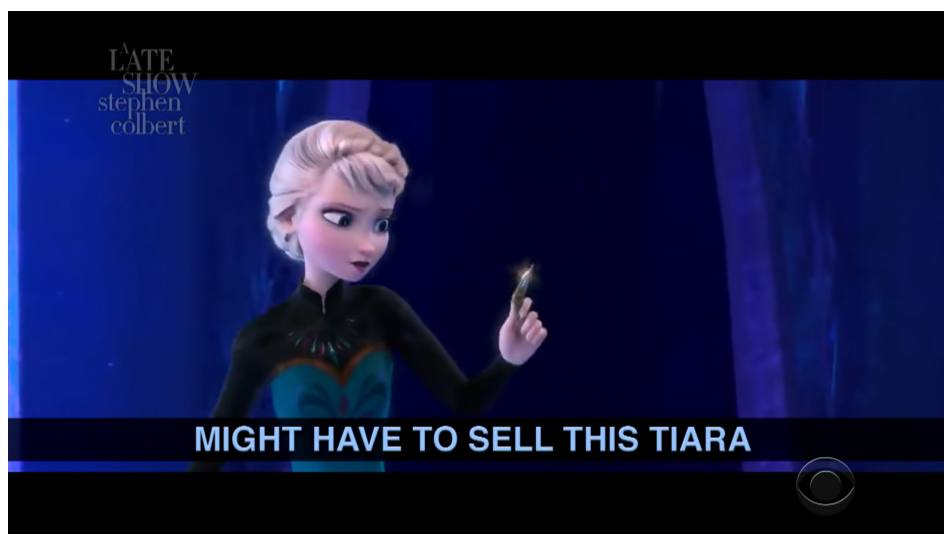


Figure 7. An excerpt from "Lose a Toe" with Elsa considering selling her tiara

The incongruous scenario in the blend is not created solely by the verbal components of the joke. Rather, the verbal components are combined with various multimodal components that add to creating the rich scenario in the blend. Incorporating different types of modalities into the single segment of the joke makes the joke more effective and more efficient. The incongruity is resolved by reconstructing the network into inputs by projecting back from the blend into the inputs. The backward projections to the second input highlight that Trump's political flip-flops contributed to the chaotic scenario in his campaign headquarters. At his rallies, president Trump complained about how much he disliked being there, which reflected in the lack of organization, as in Omaha where his supporters were left for hours in freezing cold. By offering an alternative scenario with *Frozen* in the blend, this joke ridicules and criticizes Trump campaign headquarters and the politics of the White House during his presidency, the danger of repealing the Affordable Care Act, lack of assistance for those affected by Hurricane Laura, etc.

### 5. Conclusion

The analysis of our case study shows that humorous meaning is created in a blended space as a result of an unusual combination of related structures, which results in incongruity. The resolution of incongruity, and thus the understanding of humorous meaning, was achieved by recognizing the incongruity and unpacking the blend. Unpacking the blend and projecting back to the second input space gives the viewer a different perspective on the American political scene. The variety of modalities employed in the creation of humor, including visual cues, helped viewers unpack the blends and successfully understand the criticism of political reality. Furthermore, the interpretation and understanding of humor entirely depend on having general knowledge about the current political situation in the United States of America. Thus,

comedians tend to build their humor on the foundations of the shared sociopolitical and cultural knowledge. Palmer (1993: 149) points out that background knowledge must be available in advance, because "its explanation afterwards will never make up the deficit." He also adds that "the information in question must be part of the culture of the individual who responds to the joke" (Palmer 1993: 149). Furthermore, the ideological beliefs of a viewer can greatly influence the understanding of the intended meaning. As the case study shows, late-night comedians call attention to and expose sociopolitical absurdities and contradictions. The comedians' role is to criticize and evaluate the language and content employed in politics and try to reframe public discourse by criticizing and exposing the substance of political language in their humorous examples. The ultimate aim of this humor is not simply to entertain by creating absurd scenarios, but to shed light on absurdities of real political actions and draw attention to the seriousness of their consequences. It seems that the most important role of late-night programs is to provoke an active response from viewers to political and social problems.

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## IZGUBITI NOŽNI PRST: PARODIJA SNJEŽNOGA KRALJEVSTVA UČINIMO AMERIKU OPET VELIKOM STEPHENA COLBERTA I POLITIČKI HUMOR

### Sažetak

Primjenom teorije konceptualne integracije u radu se analizira konstrukcija značenja političke parodije i političkoga humora, u kojem se dnevne vijesti eksplicitno dekonstruiraju. Posebno se fokusira na parodiju i politički humor Snježnoga kraljevstva *Učinimo Ameriku opet velikom* Stephena Colberta. U radu se također analizira kako umjetnička obrada napjeva *Puštam sve* pridonosi isticanju pojedinih aspekata stvarnosti, a time i postizanju retoričkih ciljeva u političkome diskursu. Cilj je rada dvostruk: ispitati stvaranje humorističkoga značenja u multimodalnim formatima unutar konceptualnoga *blenda*, proizašlih kao rezultat nepodudarnosti proizvedene u integriranome prostoru te ispitati ulogu novih zaključaka i konceptualizacija, proizvedenih u integriranome prostoru prilikom postizanja retoričkih ciljeva, odnosno kritike političke i društvene zbilje. Humoristično značenje nastaje u novonastaloj strukturi zbog neobičnoga spoja povezanih elemenata, što rezultira neskladom (Coulson 2002; Marín-Arrese 2003; Fujii 2008). Raznolikost modaliteta korištenih u stvaranju humora, uključujući različite vizualne znakove, pomaže gledateljima razotkriti *blendove* i uspješno razumjeti kritiku političke stvarnosti. Osim toga, budući da konceptualna integracija može poslužiti kao retorički alat koji može utjecati na to da publika promijeni svoju percepciju stvarnosti i poduzme što (Coulson 2006; Coulson and Oakley 2006; Coulson and Pascual 2006; Oakley and Coulson 2008), analizirajući konstrukciju značenja satiričnoga teksta u okviru konceptualnu integracije, mogu se otkriti retorički i argumentacijski ciljevi unutar političkoga diskursa. Na taj način dolazi do promicanja određenih stajališta, odnosno postizanja retoričkih ciljeva humorom. Interpretacija i razumijevanje humora ovisi o općemu znanju o političkoj i društvenoj situaciji te ideološkim uvjerenjima i znanju vezanom za specifične događaje. Gledatelj mora stvarati konceptualne asocijacije između ulaznih prostora koristeći se pozadinskim znanjem kako bi se razumjelo značenje *blenda*.

Ključne riječi: teorija konceptualne integracije, politički humor, politički diskurs, retorički ciljevi