A COGNITIVE POETIC MODEL OF HUMOUR IN FICTION

ALICE HAINES

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Abstract

This thesis proposes a cognitive poetic model of discoursal humour: the 3D Model of Humour. Previous research has tended to separate aspects of humour in terms of the affective experience it produces, its cognitive basis, or its social inclusion and exclusion effects. However, humour is an integrated form of discourse and the context is a crucial part of how participants interpret a text. This thesis claims that the cognitive process of recognising humour is the basis of the elicitation of the affective state of humour appreciation. The aim of the 3D Model is, therefore, to integrate the findings of the various approaches to provide an account of humour that can explain how the recognition of humour can lead to the affective state of humour appreciation, and how recognition and appreciation relate to the social context and effects.

The thesis draws on Cognitive Grammar, in particular the concept of the viewing arrangement in which either the conceptual content or the conceptualisers and process of conceptualisation of a scene can be emphasised (or figured). It proposes that a construal in which the process of conceptualisation of a source of humour is figured will encourage a playful humorous interpretation. For humour to be recognised and appreciated, a participant must be sufficiently familiar with the source. Rather than the traditional idea that incongruity leads to humour, the proposal here is that the stylistic presentation of a familiar object or concept by one humour participant draws the attention of another participant to the item. If they share this item as part of their experience, this will contribute to their social bonding. The additional effort involved in recognising the item from its presentation also draws attention to the process of conceptualisation. This contributes to the process-figuring of the construal.

In order to illustrate and exemplify the theory, a range of excerpts from 21st century novels by UK-based authors are analysed. The thesis also presents three case studies to demonstrate how the 3D Model of Humour provides a means of analysing humour in a text and explaining how and why that humour can be recognised and appreciated.

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Chapter 1. Humour as an object of study

This thesis proposes a discoursal model of humour. In developing this model, my aim is to produce a model of humour that can be applied to the explanation of humour in literary fiction. There are two primary research questions that need to be answered in considering humour in a text. The first is how a text can be recognised as humorous, and the second is how the text can elicit the emotional sense of humour appreciation. There is also a secondary question related to the effect humour has on the relationship between discourse participants. In proposing a discoursal model of humour, I aim to connect the cognitive recognition, emotional appreciation, and social relationship aspects of humour. To introduce this research, I will discuss here what humour is, what a discoursal model is and why it is needed for the adequate explanation of humour in fiction, and the cognitive poetic approach I take in developing the model.

1.1 Humour

If the aim is to explain the recognition and appreciation of humour, there must be a discussion about what humour is. It sounds simple enough. However, over the past few years I have been informally asking people the question 'What is humour?' and they tend to struggle with the answer. They may start 'It's something that makes you laugh', but then realise that it does not always make them laugh. Or they may begin with something along the lines of 'It's jokes and things like that', but then question whether or not that covers all the ways humour can occur. Very often they admit that, while they know, for themself, what humour is, they find it difficult to explain that. The most flippant answer, 'Something that's funny', tends to be the most satisfactory, but even then this raises the question of the subjectivity of humour and the fact that one can recognise that something was intended to be funny without actually finding it so. To quote the handwritten post-it note I found stuck into a library book on the subject, 'Humour is hard to define'. Nevertheless, in order to work with humour, a working definition must be found.

Although I have mentioned that humour does not necessarily produce laughter, there is a strong association of the one with the other. Laughter is also something that

can be objectively observed and described. There are evident limitations to equating humour with laughter because of the fact that humour does not always lead to laughter and also because laughter does not always signal the experience of humour. However, with this caveat in mind, since humour itself is difficult to describe or define, laughter could be a useful point of access to a discussion of what humour is.

The archetypal laughter tends to be the involuntary pattern of non-verbal vocalisations, changes in breath control and facial expression, and bodily movements that can occur, to a greater or lesser extent, in response to humour (Provine and Yong, 1991). It occurs often in group settings but relatively infrequently in social isolation. Thus, it is seen more as a behavioural response to humour; part of the non-verbal communication of emotional response to humour than the emotion itself. Specifically, what is conveyed is the positive affective state of humour appreciation. This is given various terms, such as mirth or amusement. Although laughter mostly occurs in groups, it can occur when a person is alone but only if the response to humour is strong enough (Provine, 2000). It strikes me that the difference between mirth and amusement is one of scale. While both describe humour appreciation, mirth seems more likely to be expressed in laughter. Since the literary reading that is the focus of this research is an activity that is largely solitary (at least, in terms of real people), and less likely to produce laughter than a group activity, I will use the term amusement in preference to mirth. Although humour appreciation may or may not be outwardly expressed, it is an emotion, or, in other words, a mental representation produced by the interpretation of visceral processes in relation to the cognitive processes that accompany them (Cabanac, 2002). The neurobiology of the visceral aspect of humour appreciation involves the activation of the sympathetic nervous system (Godkewitsch, 1976; Hubert and de Jong-Meyer, 1990), which mediates the adrenaline-related ‘fight-or-flight’ response. Also involved is the activation of the reward network of the midbrain limbic system (Mobbs et al., 2003), which helps explain the motivation for engaging in humorous interactions.

The association humour has with laughter that I have just described is specifically its association with involuntary laughter. However, there are two types of laughter and humour is also associated with voluntary laughter. The importance of this is that, while involuntary laughter can be seen as ‘an expression of strong positive social emotion’ (Scott, 2013: 266), voluntary laughter also has a role in the expression and enactment of social behaviour. Both can signal group inclusion or exclusion depending on whether a

person is part of a group laughing together or not. Therefore, although neither humour nor laughter is exclusive to the other, the fact that humour is one way of eliciting laughter, and that laughter is used in the signalling of social behaviours associates humour with both positive emotion and with group bonding.

Although the modern view of humour generally emphasises its positive social effects, this was not always the case. During the 18th and 19th centuries there was a shift from associating laughter only with the aggressive ridicule of the behaviour of others to include more intellectual and, eventually, more benign forms of humour (Wickberg, 1998). One thing this highlights is that, whereas now the emphasis tends to be on 'laughing with' other people, there is another side to humour – there is something that people sharing humour are 'laughing at'. There is also a greater historical distinction between humour and wit, humour being associated with convivial sharing of positive emotion and wit with aggressive intellectual wordplay (Freud, 1976 [1905]). While wit, being described as 'quick verbal performance of insight' by Michelson (2000: 4), is still associated with wordplay, it would appear that it is now 'generally subsumed' into what is considered humour (Furlong, 2011: 137), with the former being seen as a specific type of the latter. Further, the wordplay associated with wit is one way of carrying out the cognitive-perceptual process that can elicit the emotional response of amusement or mirth and the behavioural response of laughter. There are other ways that may be less reliant specifically on wordplay, and more, perhaps, on social observations.

As I mentioned above, laughter can be seen as the behavioural response to a cognitive-perceptual process, or the outward signalling of the emotional response of mirth or amusement. It is also part of the outward signalling of social relationships affected by humour. Returning to the answers to my question 'What is humour?', these tended to be framed as 'a thing that does something', even if the 'something' was difficult to define. There is a reason for this. Humour, if it is a 'thing', is a thing defined by the effect it has. A better way of thinking about this would be as a process. The jokes and wordplay associated with humour are examples of ways of doing the cognitive-perceptual process that can lead to the elicitation of mirth or amusement, possibly accompanied by laughter. The cognitive-perceptual process is not isolated, however, being situated in a social context. This social aspect both affects and is affected by the cognitive-perceptual process. I propose, therefore, that a working definition of humour could be: *a socio-cognitive process in which participants' shared perception of*

something leads to their social inclusion and the exclusion of the object of humour, accompanied by positive emotion. Different instances of humour will involve the various components of the definition to varying degrees. For example, in the case of a person perceiving something amusing about an inanimate object, the social exclusion aspect would not be explicitly of the object itself but could occur on the basis of human characteristics projected onto the object. If the perception of something amusing about the object happened when the person was alone, the social inclusion aspect could be implicit on the basis of an assumption that other people would share that perception. This is important in consideration of the specifics of this research. As reading is an activity that tends to be solitary, the social inclusion aspect from the perspective of a reader will be, to some extent, on the assumption that other readers will share their perceptions of the contents of the text. They could also have the sense of sharing a perception of something as humorous with textual entities such as characters or a narrator, or with their conceptualisation of the implied author, rather than with real-life people. Similarly, in communicating their humorous perceptions via the text, the author will assume a sharing of these perceptions by an implied reader. The statement above is by no means a perfect definition, but it serves as a starting point to define the object of this research.

1.2 A model of humour

As I stated above, the aim of this research is to develop a model of humour that can explain why a text can be recognised as humorous and why that humour can be appreciated. A model of humour, as I see it, is an abstraction of the mechanics of the cognitive and social process of humour. I use the word ‘mechanics’ deliberately. Metaphorically, social relationships are conceptualised spatially (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). For instance, I could describe myself as being ‘close’ to a friend. This applies not only to real-world relationships, but to the relationships that develop between readers and fictional characters and narrators where, for example, Gerrig (1993) describes readers’ sense of being transported into a narrative world. If humour is a socio-cognitive process leading to social inclusion and exclusion, these effects can also be conceptualised spatially as convergent and divergent movements. In modelling the process of humour, I aim to explain how the linguistic construction of a text encourages

a reader's social divergence from or convergence with a character, or narrator, or author.

In aiming to explain how and why a particular text can have a particular effect on a reader in terms of their recognition and appreciation of humour, I take a substantially different approach to that taken by many humour theorists. A large amount of humour research, particularly with regard to the cognitive-perceptual aspect, has the aim of predicting what can be perceived as humorous. While this can provide information about how humour can be constructed, it seems to me that, since humour is socially-situated, the social relationships of humour participants both with each other and with the object of humour are ineluctable. Therefore, what can be perceived as humorous will depend very much on factors external to the text of, say, a joke. This is especially relevant in consideration of the experimental methods involved in testing a prediction. An experimental set-up testing a hypothesis generally requires participants to be presented with repeated stimuli of a similar type. The stimuli must, therefore, be quick to present and easily understood without additional context. For one thing, this assumes that all participants will have the same understanding of the stimulus. For another, it limits the stimuli not only to self-contained humour such as jokes or cartoons, but also only to one format. This can lead to a situation where a general hypothesis can be considered to be confirmed, but where, in fact, it only accounts for the joke-construction tested.

Considering these problems, my aim, therefore, is not to develop a predictive model. Instead, my aim is to develop an analytic model. I start from the position of a text that I know has been found humorous (or not) and my goal is to explain how and why a text can encourage a reader to have this experience. This is not to say that I ignore the wealth of previous humour research. Predictive models have their limitations, as I have described, but they do provide a starting point for an account of successful and unsuccessful humour. Thus, it is my intention to build on the findings of previous humour research, uniting the various existing theories of humour by considering what they have in common.

It is also, as I have stated, my aim to develop a discoursal model of humour. In one sense, my intention is to propose a model that can account not only for humour based on a self-contained pre-prepared joke but for humour that occurs spontaneously.

In another sense, this involves the idea that humour is a form of discourse, in that the context in which a text is situated is as important as the text itself. One question I have been asked several times since beginning this research is about how I will 'deal with' the subjectivity of humour. This implies that its subjectivity is a problem, but it is only a problem if one treats humour as an objective state. To me, it is not a problem but a crucial part of the process. The contextual factors that make humour subjective are the basis of a humour participant's ability, or inability, to engage with another participant in the process. My interest being in the recognition and appreciation of humour in literature, I take the view that literary reading is also a form of discourse, with reader and author being discourse participants engaged in the co-construction of meaning in a text.

Currently, if consideration is given to the linguistic construction of humour in a literary text, the options, in terms of an analytical framework, tend to be theories of humour developed to explain self-contained jokes. One of the problems here is that, as I have discussed, these do not sufficiently take into account the social context – who the participants are, their cultural background, and so on. The application of such a theory to literature cannot always explain why a text can be found humorous, or, alternatively, a text that appears to comply with the stipulations of the theory is not necessarily found humorous (Triezenberg, 2008). Triezenberg suggests that the reason for this is that literature exhibits an artistry that cannot be explained by theory. I take an opposing view. Since literary language uses the same communicative resources as language in everyday use (Leech and Short, 2007), a theory purporting to account for verbal humour should be able to explain any verbal humour including that in literature. If it does not, this is a problem with the theory, not its application. One advantage this has for the model I propose is that the relationship is reciprocal. Although my model is developed using humour in literature and with a literary application in mind, it will be applicable generally to verbal humour.

1.3 Texts, methodology, and methods

This research has two parts. There is the development of the model, and then there is its application to texts to explain how humour is constructed and the effects this can have on a reader. While the need to select texts to analyse for the application part is self-

evident, the development part also requires the selection of texts, both to analyse to acquire an understanding of how humour is constructed and to demonstrate the working of the model. I have taken the decision to make my selection of texts from novels published in the 21st century by UK-based authors. This is primarily because I wanted the humour participants (i.e. author and reader) to be as socially proximal as would be feasibly possible, to maximise the possibility of shared knowledge. Inevitably, there will be some distance – it is unlikely that humour participants would have exactly the same shared knowledge or experiences – but the authors are at least contemporaries of the readers. However, the choice of range of texts for the development of the model is relatively unimportant. Although I develop it using a specific range of texts and apply it to texts from the same loose grouping, there is no reason that the model could not be applied to any humour.

Regarding the texts themselves, I have selected a range of novels that, on reading, I had found in some way humorous. I have also used community reviews on the website *Goodreads* (2017) to make these selections. Essentially, my use of *Goodreads* reviews is to gauge the extent to which other readers agreed with my opinion of the novels as humorous. The reason I have chosen to do this rather than using focus groups, perhaps, or presenting participants with passages to read and comment on, is because, first of all, I wanted examples of readers' experiences of books they had elected to read. Humour perception and appreciation is affected both by a person's current emotional state and their environment (Martin, 2007). Therefore, if a person reads a text while experiencing a negative affective state or in the unfamiliar surroundings of an experimental set-up, this will have an influence on their experience of humour. My interest is also in reading in a naturalistic setting. Although literary reading is a social activity, and a reader's experience of a novel can be affected by, for example, reviews they have read or their knowledge of an author's previous work, it is also an activity that tends to be carried out on one's own. My interest is in a reader's own experience of a text, rather than the group-negotiated reading that results from discussion in book clubs or focus groups.

With regard to my use of the reviews, for each novel I read the first 60 reviews, noting how many mentioned humour or something related to humour, such as wit or farce, or if the reviewer had laughed. I also noted whether or not the mention of humour related to a positive review. Based on whether or not half or more of the reviews for each novel contained a mention of humour, I selected a list of nine novels. Three of the

novels had an interesting effect related to humour that I wished to explore in greater detail. I reserved these to conduct a series of case studies applying the model to the explanation of these humour-related effects. I will introduce these novels in the relevant chapter. From the remaining six novels I created a small corpus of humorous passages to develop and demonstrate the model.

The first of these six novels is *The Teleportation Accident* by Ned Beauman (2013). This is part farce, part science fiction, part romance set mainly in 1930s Berlin, Paris, and Los Angeles. Of the reviews on *Goodreads*, 42 out of 60 mentioned humour with several mentioning specifically the novel's wit and humorous metaphors. A few mentioned the farcical plotlines as part of their enjoyment of the novel. In terms of readers' ratings, these are very much polarised. However, some readers mentioned humour but rated the novel poorly. The second novel, *Mystery Man* by Colin Bateman (2009), is a humorous crime novel. Of the 60 reviews, all but three very short reviews mentioned its humour. Most readers rated the novel highly and gave their appreciation of the humour as one of the reasons for their enjoyment of it. The third is *The Good, The Bad and The Smug* by Tom Holt (2015), which is part of a humorous fantasy / science fiction series. All reviewers mentioned humour (and, in fact, mentioned little else). In terms of ratings, all gave four or five stars. Interestingly, a number of reviewers giving four stars commented that they did not find the book as funny as others in the series. The next is *Things My Girlfriend and I Have Argued About* by Mil Millington (2006), a novel based on the anecdotes on Millington's website about, unsurprisingly, arguments he had had with his girlfriend. This was another novel for which all reviews mentioned humour, and another that polarised opinion. However, unlike *The Teleportation Accident*, where few of the negative reviews mentioned humour, a large number of negative reviews gave the attempts at humour as the reason for the poor rating. Nonetheless, about two thirds of the reviews were positive.

Black Swan Green by David Mitchell (2014), a semi-autobiographical novel about growing up in the early 1980s, was a novel that I included on my initial list because I had found it humorous in parts but felt that this humour was more incidental than the primary purpose of the novel. The reviews showed a similar collective opinion. Exactly half mentioned humour, all these being positive reviews. However, unlike the reviews for most of the novels above, the reviews for *Black Swan Green* focused on other aspects of the novel. The last novel is *Nutshell* by Ian McEwan (2017). As with *Black*

Swan Green, I felt that this was not intended primarily to be humorous but that it contained humour. However, in places, I found it funny but recognised that this was unintended. This was reflected in a few of the reviews. Just over half mentioned humour (32 of 60), most often commenting on the novel's 'wit' or describing, for example, the prose as 'witty'. Most of the comments about humour came from positive reviews.

I have deliberately chosen novels that are in some way different to each other. My intention is to have a wide range of humour to analyse, as something of a corrective to the type of research that restricts analysis to a limited range of joke formats. It is also my aim to depart from a taxonomic approach. This type of approach seeks out differences in formats of humour whereas I wish to focus on their similarities. Some of these novels are ones that I would consider to have humour and the amusement of the reader as their primary function. Others, as I mentioned above, contain humour but this appears to be more incidental. Again, this decision was part of my intention to maximise, within the scope of the thesis, the range of humour.

As I mentioned above, there are two parts to this research: the development of a model of humour, and the application of the model to three case studies. I use similar methodologies and methods in both parts. However, there are some differences. In the model development part, my aim is to develop an analytic model for the explanation of a reader's recognition and appreciation of humour in a text. My approach involves an inductive exploration of patterns in texts that could be found humorous, asking what could make a reader recognise and appreciate the humour in them. To conduct this analysis, it requires texts that have had some effect on a reader in terms of their recognition and appreciation of humour. While the examination of community reviews on *Goodreads* gives an overview of readers' recognition and appreciation of humour in a novel, the reviewers rarely mention specific parts of the novel that they found humorous. Therefore, this approach needs to be combined with another method of accessing the humour-related effect a text has on a reader. I use the traditional stylistic method of analysing my introspective account of my own reading experience.

For the purposes of the development of this model, this is the best way of accessing a reader's experience of humour in a text. The intention is to be able to account for any humour experience, therefore any reading of a text is equally valid. As I have discussed above, humour is subjective, relying on participants' prior experiences

and knowledge. Byrne (2005) observes that one has privileged access to one's own thoughts and motivations. Therefore, I have better access to my own sense of why I find something humorous or not than I do for anyone else. This makes introspection the most direct method of accessing an experience of reading a text. The fact that my assessment of the novels as humorous accords with those of the *Goodreads* reviewers confirms that my judgements are not eccentric, but, as with every reader, I bring my own knowledge and experience to the text. It is the interaction of this with the text that is part of the construction of humour. Therefore, the analysis requires a detailed familiarity with these prior experiences. As such, the recognition and appreciation of humour in each passage I analyse is my own. Introspective methods are sometimes criticised because of the problem of applying the subjective experience of one reader, positioned as a form of ideal reader, to readers more generally (Allington and Swann, 2009; Whiteley and Canning, 2017). Here, however, one of the advantages of an introspective method is that the recognition and appreciation of humour is subjective and, thus, the consideration of the unique range of experiences and dispositions that a reader brings to the text is vital to the success of the analysis. If I describe something as humorous it is because I have found it humorous, not because I think it is objectively so, since, as I have explained, I do not believe that this is possible. There is also a deductive aspect to the model development, since no analysis operates in isolation, and, humour research being an established field, there is a plethora of theories attempting to explain the mechanics of humour. Part of my intention, as I have described above, is to find commonalities between existing humour theories. Therefore, I discuss my analyses in relation to other relevant accounts of humour.

In the part of the research involving the application of the model to case studies, my aim is still to elucidate how humour in a text can be recognised and appreciated but here my interest is in how this occurs specifically in each particular text. Again, this involves my own observations, but I expand my use of the *Goodreads* reviews to gain an insight into other readers' experiences of the text.

In both the model development and case study parts, I use a cognitive poetic approach. This involves the application of knowledge of cognition, including of language, to explain how a text can elicit the effect on a reader that it does. The model I propose specifically attempts to explain two effects: how a reader can understand that a text is intended to be humorous and how this can lead to humour appreciation. The first

effect is one of interpretation of meaning, the second is one of evocation of emotion. Here, though, the meaning (or the recognition of humour) is connected with the emotion (the appreciation of humour), and the latter cannot occur without the former. Because it uses a principled application of cognitive concepts to text analysis, a cognitive poetic approach is able to account for these continuities between meaning and emotion.

I use a number of cognitive concepts and linguistic models. One in particular is the idea that cognitive resources are limited and that, as such, our attention is drawn to those things around us that have the potential to be most important. The perception of the content of the visual field is arranged so that a particular object, part of an object, or collection of objects is segregated, made prominent, and attended to, while everything else is relatively neglected (Ungerer and Schmid, 2003). The current object being attended to is identified as the *figure* against the *ground* of everything else. One principle of cognitive linguistics is that there is a continuity of physical perception to linguistic conceptualisation. Thus, the arrangement of the text will have implications for the way in which its conceptual content will be perceived. The way in which an object of humour is perceived will, therefore, be dependent on the linguistic arrangement of a text.

I draw extensively on Langacker's (1987, 2008) idea, in Cognitive Grammar, of a viewing arrangement, which uses the concept of figure / ground. This is one part of the construal aspect of Cognitive Grammar, which proposes dimensions along which we can 'conceive and portray the same situation in different ways' (Langacker, 2008: 43). This can be used to analyse the implications for interpretation of meaning of the way in which content is presented. In the viewing arrangement, either the conceptual content of a scene or the conceptualisers can be figured. If the conceptual content is figured, its construal is more objective (See Figure 1.1(a)). If there is an increased presence, or figuring, of the conceptualisers, for example through evidence of their attitude towards the conceptual content, they can be said to be placed more 'onstage'. In this arrangement the construal of the conceptual content is more subjective (See Figure 1.1(b)). If the conceptualisers are figured to a greater extent, this also means that the process of construal is figured.

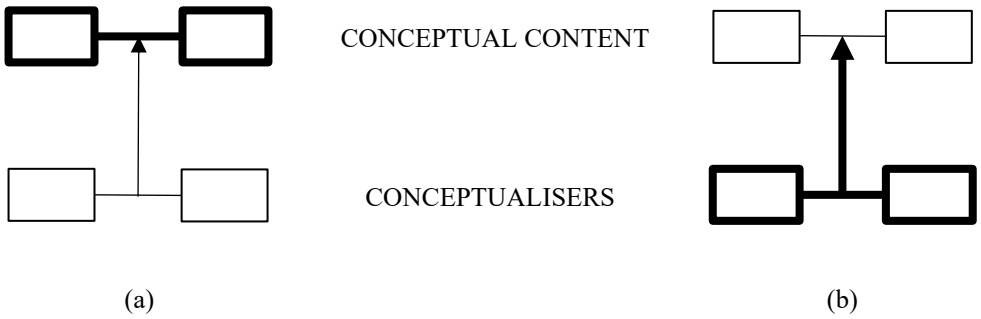


Figure 1.1 – Objective (a) and subjective (b) construal of the conceptual content (adapted from Verhagen, 2007: 61-62)

The idea of attention is also involved in some of the models I use from pragmatics, notably that of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995). I draw on Relevance Theory partly because it is a model of communication that has been applied to humour and, as I have mentioned, one of my aims is to bring together different accounts of humour with the intention of synthesising a better model. However, its principle that a hearer attends to finding a relevant meaning in an utterance as long as the anticipated cognitive effect is not outweighed by the effort in doing so gives linguistic support to other, more psychologically-oriented, theories of the effort involved in humour interpretation.

One of the other key cognitive concepts I employ is that of prototypicality, or the idea that objects are perceived as more or less good examples of each other, rather than as members of discrete categories. This can be conceptualised spatially, as one object being a prototypically central example and others being at varying radial distances from the centre. This idea is involved in my use of Conceptual Integration Theory (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) to explain how the emergent properties of a blend are used in the construction of humour. The concepts of prototypicality and blending also relate to the effort aspect of Relevance Theory, as I will explain in Chapter 4.

Lastly, as I have alluded to, the social relationships that affect and are affected by humour can be conceptualised spatially. This is a manifestation of the embodied way in which abstract concepts are understood in terms of more concrete physical objects (Gibbs, 2005). I draw on Text World Theory (Gavins, 2007; Werth, 1999) as a spatial model of discourse. In particular, I use the idea of the reader's projection into their text-

driven mental representation of the alternative world of the text as distinct from the discourse world that they occupy with the author.

The linguistic models I use, for the most part, originate from a commitment to 'make one's account of language accord with what is generally known about the mind and the brain, from other disciplines as well as our own' (Lakoff, 1990: 40). The reason I have made this decision is that much of the prior research into humour that forms the foundations of the model of humour that I propose comes from other disciplines and is not specifically about the language of humour. The principle that cognition, including language, is based on embodied experience of the world facilitates the integration of this knowledge into a model that can be used to analyse how humour is constructed linguistically.

I have also taken the decision to use a relatively eclectic, although mutually coherent, assortment of models, rather than base this work on the application of one model to the task. This is because each linguistic or cognitive model that I use is either better suited to accounting for a particular aspect of humour or because it brings something new to the account. For example, the construal aspect of Cognitive Grammar, in delineating the choices that can be made in representing conceptual content, emphasises, to some extent, the speaker or author's role in the co-construction of meaning. Relevance Theory, on the other hand, in its proposals relating to the balance of the cognitive effect and processing effort in finding a relevant meaning, places more emphasis on the hearer or reader. The model I propose is, thus, a synthesis of work in cognition and linguistics, and aims to be an improvement on previous models of humour.

1.4 Structure and content of the thesis

In this section I will provide an overview of the content of each remaining chapter to give an idea of the structure of the remainder of the thesis. In Chapter 2, I consider previous humour research. Traditionally, humour research has tended to treat humour either as an affective phenomenon, or as a social phenomenon, or as a cognitive phenomenon. I take each approach in turn and explain why it has, so far, not succeeded in accounting adequately for humour. At the end of this chapter, I outline the

components of my model and its main proposals and how I address inadequacies in previous accounts of humour.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 each focus on one aspect of the model. In Chapter 3, I draw on research into the psychology of attention to explain how the source of humour can be brought to attention through defamiliarisation effects. I argue that this is why the traditional notion of incongruity has been thought of as the basis of humour. I propose, however, that the process of humour brings to attention generally unnoticed contrasts between concepts and that this provides a better explanation for the basis of humour. In Chapter 4, I draw on Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995) to frame my proposals for the way in which a text can encourage a reader to expect humour and, thus, be more likely to find a humorous interpretation of the text. I discuss how a reader's expectations of humour can form before they begin reading. I then go on to propose that the increased presence of a narrator can encourage a humorous interpretation. Finally in this chapter, I discuss how greater effort in recognising the source of humour can lead to a reader's non-appreciation of recognised humour. In Chapter 5, I focus on the role of the reader as an active participant in the co-construction of humour. I argue that a sense of comic timing can be perceived in literary texts and that this can heighten a reader's awareness of their experience of reading participation. I also draw on the comprehension-elaboration theory of humour (Wyer and Collins, 1992) and, in particular, the elaboration component whereby humour participants add detail to their mental representation of textual elements. I suggest conditions that can increase the elaboration potential of a text and propose that increasing the elaboration potential increases the opportunity for a reader's active participation in the co-construction of humour.

In Chapter 6, I use three case studies to bring together the strands of the model presented in the previous three chapters to show how these aspects of humour production and reception combine to affect the reading experience. The novel on which the first case study is based, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* by Malcolm Pryce (2009), is a parody of crime noir / hardboiled detective fiction. I demonstrate how readers can recognise this as a parody of the genre and what factors affect their appreciation of humour in the parody. The second case study is *Man at the Helm* by Nina Stibbe (2014). This is first-person narrated, but the narrator is somewhat ambiguous. For the most part, the focalisation is through the child whose life is the subject of the novel.

However, at times the voice of the narrating adult enactor seems more present in the narration. I demonstrate how these shifts in narratorial voice affect the perception of humour. The third case study is *Crooked Heart* by Lissa Evans (2015). The prologue to this novel introduces a character with dementia and the uncertainties this causes for the child she is bringing up. I will show how, in spite of this situation, the text allows humour to be both recognised and appreciated. Finally, in Chapter 7, I summarise my proposals and suggest future applications of the model.

Chapter 2. Approaches to humour research

In this chapter I will discuss some of the main previous attempts to explain the phenomenon of humour. Research into how humour occurs takes place in many fields and disciplines, such as neuroscience, psychology, linguistics, and sociology. Correspondingly, different emphases are placed on the different aspects of humour. Broadly, humour tends to be considered, alternatively, in terms of its cognitive foundations, or in terms of its social repercussions, or in terms of the affective experience it produces. Here I will take each of these approaches and consider the contribution each makes to the formulation of a holistic theory of humour.

2.1 Humour as an affective phenomenon

It seems somewhat obvious to state that humour is associated with pleasure and enjoyment. However, this is, perhaps, fundamental to any theory of humour: if a theory does not give any consideration to how the affective consequences of humour can occur, I would question its completeness. At the very least, I would wonder why the explanation had been attempted if the theorist did not appear concerned with what, to me, is the allure of humour as an object of study. In fact, this is the aspect of humour that formed the subject of some of the earlier attempts to explain how and why humour occurs. While, understandably, some of these early attempts are now best viewed for historical interest, as I will explain in the first section, their successors are of greater use.

2.1.1 Release theories

Release (or relief) theories formed some of the earliest attempts to explain humour. The main tenet of these theories is that humour leads to a release of tension, either emotional or physiological. Some (most notably Freud (1976 [1905])) also include a release from inhibitions in their account of humour. Beginning with this idea of release from inhibitions, Freud proposed that jokes are enjoyable because they allow the release of aggressive or sexual impulses (which he termed the tendentious element) that would usually be suppressed. He also claimed that the ‘jokework’ involved (that is, the

cognitive processing of, for example, double meanings of punchlines) forms a nontendentious element that distracts from the aggression or sexual release. If this is how jokes are found amusing, it supposes that all jokes are tendentious. However, while many jokes may have a sexual theme or display aggression towards someone in some way, there are many examples that do not. To give two examples, the first a well-known joke, the second made by Linda Smith on the BBC Radio 4 programme *The News Quiz*:

> When is a door not a door? When it's ajar.
>
> (trad.)

> Scientists claim that birds are as clever as mammals. They haven't got a great sense of time, though, have they? They don't know the difference between 4 a.m. and the morning.
>
> (Smith, 2006: 242)

It is difficult to see how jokes such as these are either aggressive or sexual. The second example, however, could be seen as conforming to Freud's proposal that what he refers to as humour (in a narrow sense, and differentiated from jokes) is the ability to be amused at difficulties in life, albeit, in this case, a rather more trivial difficulty than the emotionally-painful situations that Freud indicates. He suggests that pleasure in humour is derived from the release of energy associated with negative emotion. These ideas are similar to those applied in clinical psychological practice, where people can be encouraged to use humour to alleviate psychological tension associated with negative situations (Martin, 2007). While release of psychological tension may have a practical application, it does not necessarily provide evidence as to how humour (in the broader sense) can be found amusing as this would depend on it being based on a negative situation, and I would question whether that is, indeed, the case.

Release of psychological tension is related to ideas about release of physiological tension. Some of the earlier theories of humour (such as Spencer's (1860) and, later, Freud's) involved beliefs that the nervous system operated, metaphorically, like a hydraulic pressure system. As nervous energy supposedly built up, laughter would have the function of a relief valve, releasing energy and relieving pressure. There are three problems with these energy-release theories. First, not all humour (even if appreciated) is accompanied by laughter, and nor is humour necessary for laughter to occur (Provine, 1992, 2000). Second, as Morreall (1987) points out, even if laughter occurs, it does not

necessarily seem to be related to accumulated nervous energy. Third, while Freud and others could be forgiven for working with a contemporary model of neurophysiology, this model has been superseded. Current knowledge of the nervous system and affective psychology has long rejected the idea that it works on the basis of a hydraulic system. Furthermore, rather than confirming the hypothesis that mirth leads to a relief of tension, more up-to-date research shows something that could be described as the opposite: that mirth correlates with an increase in physiological arousal (Godkewitsch, 1976), or, in other words, the same physiological signs produced in a 'fight-or-flight' response, rather than the decrease in tension implied by release / relief theories. I will discuss this in greater depth in the following section.

What is interesting about release / relief theories is that they tend to be formulated such that humour allows the release of something, and that, in turn, allows a behavioural change. Apart from, for example, Freud's suggestion that the nontendentious element of a joke distracts from the tendentious, there is relatively little consideration as to what makes humour humorous in the first place. There are, for example, few proposals as to what creates the tension that requires release. While the downstream effects of humour are important (whether or not they occur as proposed by the theories I have discussed here), what I believe one of the greatest contributions release theories make to an account of humour is to position humour, implicitly, as part of a process through which people achieve (or attempt to achieve) interpersonal goals. My suggestion is that, although the specifics of certain release theories may be somewhat inaccurate, there is benefit in representing humour explicitly as a process.

2.1.2 Physiological arousal

While notions of nervous energy and release valves may be outdated, there does appear to be a connection between increases in the physiological signs associated with sympathetic arousal (e.g. increases in heart rate, blood pressure, and electrodermal activity) and humour. This is arousal in the physiological sense of the word, rather than in the psychoanalytical sense, or in the sense related to sexual desire. Following Hebb's (1955) optimal arousal theory, Berlyne (1972) proposed that this takes the form of an inverted-U relationship: increases in subjective pleasure occur along with increases in arousal up to a certain point, after which further increases in arousal become an unpleasant experience. Berlyne also proposed that the set-up of a joke leads to an

increase in arousal above the optimal level (which he termed an arousal boost), then the punchline brings arousal back to the optimal level (an arousal jag). This could correspond to, for example, incongruity in a joke being perceived, followed by its resolution (a theory I will return to further on in this chapter). Berlyne's hypothesis was that the return to optimal arousal leads to pleasure in amusement. However, since there is, in fact, evidence that the relationship between humour appreciation and arousal is linear (Godkewitsch, 1976; McGhee, 1983), this casts doubt on Berlyne's (1972) proposal that there is an inverted-U relationship between physiological arousal and pleasure associated with humour appreciation.

The fact that humour appreciation is associated with increased physiological arousal but that the amusement is not accompanied by the emotional anxiety-based experience of a threat is one of the foundations of Apter's (1984, 2007) reversal theory. This is a theory that attempts to comprehend a person's behaviour through an understanding of their motivations and the meaning that that behaviour has for that person. Since it is a theory concerning the interpretation of motivation, the frames of mind that affect a person's motivations are termed metamotivational states. Central to the theory is the idea that metamotivational states exist in mutually exclusive binary pairs, and therefore, a person must be in either one state or its opposite pair.

One metamotivational aspect is that concerning means and ends: that is, whether a person is motivated by the end result of an activity or by the doing of the activity. The two states in this pair are termed by Apter as *telic state* and *paratelic state* respectively. If, for example, a person is playing tennis and their focus is on winning the match, if the score is close, they may experience arousal in the form of anxiety. If, on the other hand, they are playing simply for enjoyment, a close match may increase their excitement. To put this another way, if a person's focus is on the goal of an activity they will be in an arousal-avoiding (or telic) state and if their focus is the process of the activity they will be in an arousal-seeking (or paratelic) state. If the person's circumstances change and they change from being in a telic state to a paratelic state (or vice versa), they are said to reverse. The idea of paratelic and telic states therefore incorporates the fact that excitement and anxiety are both states of arousal (and physiologically identical), but excitement is interpreted positively whereas anxiety is interpreted negatively. This has parallels with the 'two-factor' theory of emotion proposed by Schachter and Singer (1962). They found that participants injected with adrenaline while watching an actor

behave either angrily or euphorically experienced, respectively, fear or euphoria. However, these emotional experiences only occurred if the participant had not been informed about the arousal-inducing effect of the injection. They concluded that felt emotion is the result of context-dependent interpretation of physiological changes.

The telic / paratelic pair of states has been used in the study of humour (e.g. Apter, 1982; Murgatroyd, 1991; Svebak and Apter, 1987). Apter suggests that to experience amusement, a person must be in an existing paratelic state or must be induced to reverse to a paratelic state so that they are motivated by the doing of the activity rather than its goal. Extending this idea to incorporate the concept of figure / ground relations, this would mean that if a person is in paratelic state their construal of an activity or linguistic proposition will tend to be one figuring the process of that activity or proposition. It is possible that the construction of humour by one interlocutor, therefore, tends to encourage this interpretation by another. In terms of the viewing arrangement of a scene (Langacker, 2008), if the construal of the conceptual content figures the process of construal rather than the conceptual content itself, this could be a condition favouring its interpretation as humorous.

2.2 Humour as a social phenomenon

While a great deal of humour research has occurred through the analysis of discrete instances of humour such as scripted jokes and anecdotes, in everyday life most humour occurs spontaneously in conversational interaction in forms such as irony, sarcasm, banter or teasing (Norrick, 1993, 2003). If one does experience amusement by oneself, it tends to be either in a 'pseudo-social' environment (Martin, 2007: 5) such as reading or watching television, or through the recall of a social situation. Furthermore, Martin suggests that the source of most humour is the behaviour or appearance of another person, and if we find humour in animals or inanimate objects this is almost always through the personification of that animal or object. The social basis of humour is not only part of its construction, however. Humour, and its use in different social situations, has an effect on social relationships, with the effect being dependent on who is using humour and how it is constructed. I consider an appreciation of the social aspects of humour to be integral to any theory of humour as I believe that both its recognition and

its appreciation cannot be explained without situating a humorous text within its social context.

2.2.1 Play

Humour is often regarded as a form of play (Bateson and Martin, 2013; Gervais and Wilson, 2005). However, it appears that play itself is considered to have differences depending on who is playing. In children, play is considered to have purpose: to develop cognitive abilities, personality, and knowledge of the world (Erikson, 1950; Piaget, 1962). In contrast, adulthood, generally, can be thought of as a phase of life in which goal-driven work predominates (Levinson, 1986), with play being thought of as activity-focused activity confined to leisure time (Brown and Vaughan, 2009; Hunnicutt, 1988). Similarly, with humour, there is a tendency to emphasise the purpose of children's humour as a way of forming attachment relationships with their caregiver adults and socialising with their peers (Foot and Chapman, 1976; Simons et al., 1986). With adult humour, although its outcomes are the subject of research, there is more of a tendency to focus on humour as a ludic pastime carried out for its own sake (Berlyne, 1969), with, it has been said, more of an emphasis on the cognitive basis than the outcome (Martin and Ford, 2018). However, whether adult or child, humour has a social basis, as I will discuss further in the next section, and it seems to me that it is unhelpful to make a distinction between purposeful and non-purposeful humour (or, indeed, play). It would make better sense to acknowledge that even if an activity is activity-focused, rather than goal-focused, this is not to say that it does not have a goal (See Figure 2.1). A person may wish to be entertained, or to be distracted from other events in their life, or simply to be amused. They may, in that case, decide to pursue an activity such as reading a book that they anticipate will have the desired effect, but, while in the process of pursuing that activity, their focus is on the activity itself. Therefore, I consider it more helpful to think of humour (as one type of play) as an activity in which the process, rather than the goal, is figured.

If humour is a process-figured activity, humorous communication will figure the process of communication rather than its goal of, say, conveyance of information. It is obvious that not all non-humorous communication is goal-figured – phatic communication, for example, is also process-figured. I used the example of reading a book in the previous paragraph as an instance of process-figured activity. Regardless of

whether the book is humorous or not, the language of a literary text, and the reading of such a text, figures the process of literary writing and reading as a communicative act. However, figuring the process of communication could aid in the interpretation of communication as humorous. This has implications for the pragmatic negotiation of whether or not the communication between humour participants is process-figured or goal-figured. Therefore, one key part of the recognition of humour will be the construal of a proposition as process-figured. Recalling the difference Langacker (2008) proposes between objective and subjective construal of conceptual content, as I explained in the previous chapter, if humorous communication is process-figured, the conceptual content will also be subjectively construed, with a greater onstage presence of the conceptualisers.

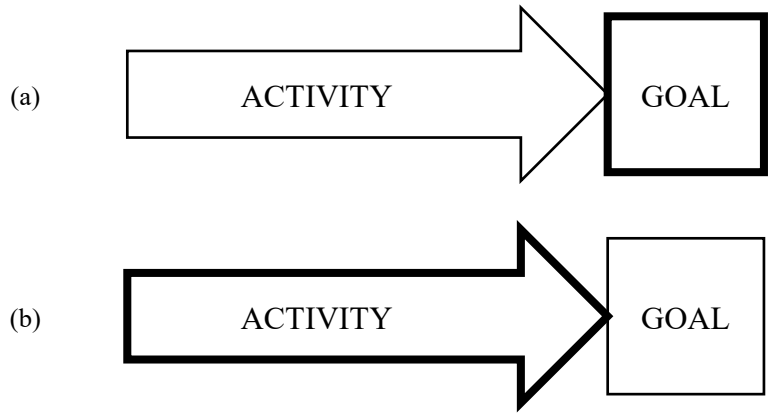


Figure 2.1 – Goal-focused (a) and activity-focused activity (b)

It is suggested that the way in which humorous communication is presented has a part to play in humorous interpretation (Mulkay, 1988). There are a number of factors, including non-verbal cues, such as laughter or smiling (Provine, 2000), or prosodic features (Gironzetti, 2017; Norrick, 2004), that, it is proposed, induce a switch to a non-serious mindset (Mulkay, 1988) which allows the interpretation of communication as, for example, playful teasing rather than aggressive criticism. In reversal theory terms (Apter, 1991, 2007) this would involve the preservation of a person's existing paratelic state or their reversal to this state. Cues such as laughter or smiling are easy to observe in face-to-face communication, and in literary reading, these cues may also occur in, for example, narratorial comments related to a character's speech. While these cues are not

unique to humour (or non-serious, or paratelic, communication), their effect on the humorous interpretation of what is communicated may be explained by the fact that they involve the way in which this communication occurs, thus emphasising the process of communication.

2.2.2 Social effects

Although humour can be regarded as an activity-focused, as opposed to goal-focused, activity, as I explained above, this does not mean that it does not have a goal. While people may or may not make a conscious decision to use humour to achieve social outcomes, a number of humour-related effects have been observed. Broadly, these can be categorised into two groups: social control and social cohesion. The function of humour in achieving these effects has been likened to both a lubricant and an abrasive, acting to help social interactions run smoothly or causing friction between individuals or groups (Martineau, 1972). Basu (1999) adds a third metaphor: that of a glue that binds a group together. Kuipers (2006) also points out that these functions can occur simultaneously and with different effects on different individuals or groups.

With regard to the social control effect of humour, Bergson (1911) suggests that deviation from social rules is corrected through ridicule. Billig (2005), likewise, argues that ridicule is used to maintain the conventions of social conduct. While this might be amusing to the person delivering the ridicule and to other parties present, it would constitute a face-threatening act (Brown and Levinson, 1987) with respect to the person deviating from the rule and so any humour involved would not necessarily be appreciated by that person. Another potentially face-threatening act (albeit one that is somewhat ambiguous in its threatening intent) would be teasing. Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) suggest that an interlocutor who is able to tease another is displaying their power and control. Similarly, Schnurr (2009) finds that workplace leaders employ different teasing styles to help establish their position. However, while some of this communicative behaviour involved a ‘biting’ teasing style (Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997), reinforcing power over subordinates, some of it was less face-threatening and more a ‘bonding’ style of teasing, as I will explain further on. More generally, in terms of the type of humour used, Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001) find that humour production correlates with other behaviours associated with higher status, such as more conversational turns or interrupting others. It is possible that, similarly to the way in

which the ability to tease others can be thought of as a display of power, higher status permits greater use of humour more generally.

Although these humour-related behaviours by high-status individuals have an effect on the maintenance of a social hierarchy, humour is also used by high-status individuals to aid in group cohesion. For example, Holmes (2000) and Mullany (2004) both find that higher-status individuals use self-deprecating humour as a form of 'repressive discourse' (Pateman, 1980) to minimise their difference in status to their subordinates and reinforce the collegiality of the group. Likewise, the 'bonding' teasing style observed by Schnurr formed part of the way the individuals (leaders and subordinates) in the teams studied constructed and signalled their membership of the group as a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Further, this was used as a way of mitigating directive speech acts towards equals so that, rather than being a face-threatening act, this was face-enhancing as it signalled the recipient's identity as a member of the group. Holmes (2006) also proposes that there is a continuum of minimally to maximally collaborative humour. Collaborating in humour by building on another's humorous proposition can indicate inter-personal support and reinforce group membership. This intra-group behaviour can form part of a group's shared identity.

However, inter-group behaviours can also have an effect on a group's cohesion. Humour requires participants to have sufficient shared knowledge and experience if it is to be recognised and appreciated. This, in itself, could act as an indicator of membership of a group. Additionally, since the object of humour may be another group, the sharing of humour by one group (an in-group) at the expense of another (an out-group) could reinforce the separation of the two groups as well as reinforcing the cohesion of the in-group. It is also interesting that the group identity shared by members of an out-group can also affect that group's cohesion, as Terrion and Ashforth (2002) found in observing the effect of 'putdown' humour on members of a police college training course. The putdown humour directed at the trainees helped develop them from being individual objects of humour to being a collective out-group with enhanced solidarity with each other, and then to being an in-group in its own right.

It is striking how strongly the conceptual metaphor of space and distance is projected through these accounts of the social effects of humour. Humour can be used as a way of separating and distancing individuals and groups from one another by

pointing out the ways in which they diverge from each other in terms of their behaviour. It can also be used to define a group and pull individual members of that group together by referring to the ways in which they are alike. The idea of relative identity comes across in, for example, the Terrion and Ashforth study and with Bergson's suggestion of behavioural correction through ridicule. Those in the in-group are able to share amusement at the behaviour of an out-group member because they have more in common with each other than with that other individual. The spatial corollary of this is that humour appreciation by in-group members is possible because they are closer to each other than they are to members of the out-group.

Individuals can also use self-deprecating humour to mitigate face-threats such as embarrassment (Kotthoff, 2000) or apology (Holmes, 2006). By using a communicative style that involves shared acknowledgment of the individual's past behavioural non-conformity, this could help re-establish that individual's status as part of the group. Holmes also suggests the role humour plays as a tension releaser to this end. However, continuing with the spatial metaphor, the tension could be due to the divergence of a member from a previously cohesive group. In which case, their convergence through shared humour could account for the release of tension.

The findings of research into the social nature of humour can be applied to literary reading. While the entities involved may be separated by time, space, and ontology, readers' perceptions of being brought closer to text world enactors, or being separated from them, have been explored in terms of transportation across text world boundaries (e.g. Stockwell, 2009). This idea is both similar to the idea of metaphorical convergence and divergence in humour and, potentially, of practical use in tracking how and where this occurs in relation to humour in a text.

2.2.3 Superiority

Along with release / relief theories, superiority theories are regarded as a classic account of people's motivations for engaging in humour (Martin and Ford, 2018). The main assumption of these theories is that humour is aggressive in nature and that amusement occurs when one experiences a sense of joy at being superior to another person, described by Hobbes (1651) as a 'sudden glory'. This is an assumption that was prevalent in the earliest humour theories, although historically, 'humour' was not

necessarily thought of in the same positive way that is generally the case now (Wickberg, 1998). However, the assumption that superiority is a factor in the appreciation of humour is still current in various forms in some research. For example, one of the main relatively contemporary proponents of superiority is Gruner (1976, 1978, 1997), who argues that humour is a form of 'playful aggression' comparable to the play fighting of children. He also proposes that the feeling of appreciation of humour is analogous to the triumph of winning in play. This positions humour participants (the person being told a joke and the teller, for instance) in hostile opposition to the object of humour. It also carries a sense that humour is used as a weapon, which would be in keeping with notions of, say, the target or butt of a joke. It is also in keeping with the concept of disparagement, which is how the effect on the object of humour is often described in a superiority theory account. The word 'disparagement' involves the sense that there is one person doing the disparagement of the other. This is interesting because it emphasises the idea of humour as an active process, as I mentioned in relation to release / relief theories earlier. However, it also encompasses the outcome of the process, rather than the process itself.

Although not a superiority theory as such, Apter (1982, 2007) proposes a theory of humour that includes, as one of its components, the idea that the object of humour must become in some way diminished. This is a broader concept than the disparagement associated with superiority theories and encompasses the sense of something becoming qualitatively inferior. Unlike 'disparagement', 'diminishment' does not require an active participant causing the diminishment of another person. In fact, it seems more likely that an inanimate object could become diminished than it could be disparaged.

One thing I find interesting about the concepts of superiority, disparagement, and diminishment is that they all project an idea of space. Superiority implies that there is a vertical distance between humour participants and the object of humour. Although diminishment involves an object becoming smaller, in terms of visual sensation, an object that is small is the equivalent of one that is remote. In both superiority and diminishment there is, thus, an impression of distance between humour participants and the object of humour. There is even, with diminishment, in particular, the idea that this distance increases. With disparagement, on the other hand, in its association with humour being used as a weapon, there is the idea of humour participants and object converging, colliding even, rather than being separated. It is possible, continuing this

dynamic-spatial metaphor, that this is understood in terms of an image schema of collision, in which the impact of the collision forces the separation of the object of humour from the humour participants.

Superficially, it seems somewhat difficult, however, to apply this spatial-dynamic metaphor to a pun, for example, where there does not appear to be an object of humour that is being disparaged, that diminishes, or to whom one could feel superior. Another example, similar to a pun in terms of its lack of an obvious object of humour, would be the following, the culmination of a puzzle presented to me when I was a child:

$$2B \cup \overline{2B}$$

(Bibby, 1983)

My sense of triumph on realising that the solution to the puzzle was 'To be or not to be...' and that it was a joke that I had 'got', was something akin to Hobbes' 'sudden glory'. However, my amusement was related to my feeling of being a person who had been able to 'get' the joke along with the adult readers of the anthology of statistical quotes and witticisms from which my grandfather had taken the line above to adapt into a puzzle. Gruner (1997: 136) suggests that puns and wordplay form a 'duel of wits' in which amusement is the result of evident intellectual superiority over others. This would conform to the idea that one of the effects of humour is social control by an in-group of an out-group that I discussed in the previous section, and which involves an element of social competition with the accompanying element of aggression. The other way of looking at it would be as a generation of group identity: a grouping of people who understand a joke or other form of humour, and who are able to appreciate it, to which people who cannot understand it or do not appreciate it do not belong. To me the difference between these two explanations is that the former involves, metaphorically, an aggressive collision of two social groups leading to the establishment of a vertical hierarchy, while the latter involves simply a spatial separation of the two groups without any implied verticality.

It is possible that the interpretation of the effect and what led to it is steered by the assumptions held by whoever interprets it. If one assumes that all jokes have an aggressive basis, it may be easier to read an aggressive interpretation into a joke. It is also possible that an assumption is acquired through the study of a particular type of

humour. It may even be that the jokes chosen by a particular researcher may reflect their own preferences for a particular style of humour. Certainly, a variety of responses has been found to aggression in humour. Herzog and Anderson (2000), for example found that participants preferred humour involving a moderate amount of aggression, whereas Zillmann, Bryant, and Cantor (1974) found cartoons with only a mildly aggressive nature the funniest. My own opinion is that it is unlikely that all humour involves aggression or superiority. This may be one way of eliciting a humorous response, but its success is probably dependent on the relationship not only between the listener and the object of humour, but also between the listener and the speaker. The social effects of humour seem to concern both of these relationships, albeit not only with aggressive humour. With literary reading there is an additional factor in that a reader can be positioned to a particular relationship with a character that may be different to their ethical position in real life (Stockwell, 2013). The difference between assumptions made about the disposition of the implied reader and the disposition of the actual reader may have implications for the actual reader's appreciation of humour.

2.3 Humour as a cognitive phenomenon

Although release / relief theories and social approaches to humour pay a great deal of attention to the effects of humour in terms of, respectively, the intra-personal and the inter-personal repercussions, neither gives much consideration as to how humour can be recognised as humour in the first instance. By contrast, there is a large body of humour research that takes as its starting point the idea of humour as a cognitive phenomenon, something that can be explained by the mental processing of humorous stimuli. Similarly, though, there is a tendency for research adopting this approach to humour to neglect the social side of humour, even going so far as to propose predictive models that treat humour as an objective state, as I will discuss. While this type of approach gives an undoubtedly incomplete account of humour, the resulting body of research provides a great deal of insight, complementary to the insights of social and affective approaches, into how something can be recognised and appreciated as humorous.

2.3.1 Incongruity

Research into the cognitive nature of humour takes place primarily within the broad field of psychology. It is dominated by a pervasive assumption that incongruity is a

prerequisite factor if something is to be found humorous. In fact, as far as determining a cognitive theory of humour is concerned, this is possibly where the problem starts. The concept of incongruity can be thought of as the state of one object not being perceived as congruous in relation to other objects surrounding it. However, there is some apparent disagreement within the field as to how incongruity is defined. This has implications for the formulation of a cognitive theory of humour, particularly within a research field such as psychology with a positivist research paradigm based on the testing of hypotheses. This is because the way in which incongruity is defined will affect the both the hypothesis made and the experimental design used to test it. I will return, further on in this section, to a discussion of the differences in definitions of incongruity and how this affects the formulation of a cognitive theory of humour. First, though, I will discuss the implications of the hypothesis-testing research paradigm.

As I mentioned above, the research paradigm in research fields contributing to the development of a cognitive theory of humour is a positivist one: hypotheses are made and tested by experiments designed to maximise the objectivity of the measurements and, thus, the data. The aim is to develop a predictive model of humour. This immediately gives three problems with regard to humour. The first is that the experimental set-up requires stimuli that are quick to present to participants and easily understood without additional context. Therefore, the test is not of humour as it more often occurs in natural settings (Provine, 2000), but of self-contained jokes. The second is that the jokes will necessarily be the same type of joke (puns or garden-path narratives, and so on), since the experimental design will require the repeated presentation of similar stimuli. Therefore, the test is not even of jokes, but of one particular type of joke.

The third problem is that researchers predict models of humour and draw conclusions based on whether or not their data fit their predictions. Therefore, since only one type of joke has been studied, the conclusions will tend to give an explanation as to why that type of joke can be found humorous. While that is not necessarily unbeneficial in terms of its contribution to the overall production of a theory of humour, the problem is that the findings of one study, examining one type of joke, are often generalised to humour as a whole. For example, if an investigation has used as stimuli only jokes which rely on a participant's initial comprehension of a different meaning of a semantically ambiguous component, then to reach a conclusion that a realisation of

the incongruity of the initial interpretation at the joke's punchline is a necessary component of humour might be understandable. This may, however, be only the specific manifestation of a wider component common to all humour. The problem lies in the generalisation of this finding to all humour. If a subsequent study uses as test stimuli jokes that do not contain a semantically ambiguous component, the findings of this study may not conform to those of the previous study and a separate theory may develop to explain the second type of joke. The result of this approach is that the current state of research into cognitive theories of humour is multiple competing theories that cannot explain all jokes, let alone all humour (Ritchie, 2004). This is not to say that there is no worth in these findings and in this type of research, but, for the development of a true theory of humour, it would be of benefit for researchers to stand back from the specificities of their own theories so as to appreciate the connections between these theories and the patterns that emerge when they are viewed as parts of a whole rather than in isolation.

Although incongruity theories originate with the idea that humour is dependent on the perception of incongruity (Forabosco, 1992), the perception aspect sometimes seems to be forgotten, with incongruity apparently treated as an objective state (Chan et al., 2012; Vrticka et al., 2013). This may seem like a pedantic complaint on my part (and it may be that the perception aspect is implied and simply not specified) but the difference is important if incongruity theories are to account for unsuccessful humour. Something that may appear incongruous to one person may not appear so to another. In which case, their responses to a particular joke may be very different. In addition, just as something may not appear incongruous to everyone, not everything that does appear incongruous is humorous. Since incongruity itself is not sufficient for humour, researchers look for additional factors that make an incongruity sufficient for humour (Martin and Ford, 2018: 56). As I discussed above, this leads to different theories being applied to different types of joke.

Underlying these problems, moreover, is the fact that there is some disagreement as to what incongruity is. For example, Deckers and Kizer (1975: 213) define incongruity as 'the divergence between an expected and an actual state of affairs'. Morreall (1999: 105), on the other hand, defines incongruity as a 'disparity between the way things are and the way things should be'. This latter definition implies an ethical negativity to the disparity: that is, that an incongruous object is one that should not be

there. The difference in the two definitions is that, while a neutral definition encompasses all incongruity, an ethically negative definition only includes incongruity that is ethically negative. This matters because, almost tautologically, differences in how incongruity is defined will result in differences in what could constitute incongruity. These differences will affect the ability of a theory to account for a particular instance of humour.

The benign violation hypothesis (BVH) (McGraw et al., 2012, 2014; Warren and McGraw, 2016), goes further with its notion of ethical negativity, using the concept of something being perceived simultaneously as a violation and as being distant enough not to pose a threat, with violation being defined as 'a stimulus that is physically or psychologically threatening' (McGraw et al., 2012: 1216). This dual perception is similar to the mechanism proposed by some incongruity theories such as Rothbart's (1976), whereby incongruity must occur in a non-threatening context. One advantage of the BVH is that, rather than relying on an objective incongruity (or violation) state, it allows for contextual interpretation of a violation: an event that may seem like a violation in some way when it has just occurred may seem less threatening after some time has passed. However, the BVH was developed to address the observation that people are able to find humour in violent situations (McGraw and Warner, 2014). As such the stimuli used to investigate this are threatening in nature. To me, the concept of violation (benign or otherwise) seems too narrow to explain a wider range of humour than that with which the BVH was developed. This extract from *The Good, The Bad and The Smug*, in which one of the main characters, Mordak, is inspecting a supposedly magical crystal ball-type object, exemplifies this.

> He leaned forward, twitched the cloak off the globe, and crouched down to listen. Very faint and far away, he heard a voice that seemed to be saying, "Dogger, Fisher, German Bight, moderate easterly, good".
>
> (Holt, 2015: 186)

There is an apparent incongruity in a supposedly magical object announcing the shipping forecast, but it is difficult to see how this could be perceived as a violation. It is possible that, from the point of view of Mordak, an object saying strange words could represent a threat of some sort as he is unfamiliar with it. It is also possible that the voice being 'very faint and far away' could provide the distance needed to perceive it as

benign. However, there is no indication that Mordak finds it amusing, whereas I, as a reader, do. Yet, from my point of view, there is nothing about this passage that could be called a violation by the definition given in McGraw et al. (2012) that I quoted above. The BVH also proposes that something mundane can be found humorous if it is made to seem like a violation. Again, though, while the shipping forecast is fairly mundane, its being broadcast from a supposedly magical globe does not, for me, at least, seem like a violation. An improvement to the BVH might be to revise the use of 'violation' and to replace it with a less unequivocally negative term, such as 'incongruity'.

Returning, therefore, to the ethics of incongruity, it might be possible to argue that the ordinariness of the broadcast compared with the mysterious communication that might be expected from a magical crystal ball could represent an ethically negative incongruity if one believes that magical objects should not broadcast the shipping forecast. However, I would argue that there is no reason that a magical object *should* not do so. It is simply that a prototypical magical object would not. This demonstrates that, rather than Morreall's (1999: 105) deontic 'disparity between the way things are and the way things should be', a better definition of incongruity would be an epistemic 'disparity between the way things are and the way things *could* be'. In fact, taking this further with a consideration of the radial nature of prototypicality, a better way of modelling incongruity would be as an occurrence at a distance from the expected prototypical centre. Thus, if incongruity is integral to humour, it is the difference between actual and expected that is significant rather than the ethical valence of the difference. This has implications for superiority theories of humour, the essence of which is that humour requires someone to perceive their own qualities as preferable to those of the object of humour – a manifestation of the hierarchical conceptual metaphor GOOD IS UP (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). While the elevated position of that person that this implies may not be required, superiority theories could be adapted by allowing the object of humour and the person perceiving it as humorous to be situated on the same horizontal plane, with the horizontal distance between the two being necessary rather than one involving a vertical component. This is not to say that a vertical component to the distance cannot be involved – humour is possible where someone considers themself superior to the object of humour – it is simply that this verticality is not necessary.

Not all versions of incongruity theories require the incongruity to have a negative valence. Examples include those of Shultz (1972) and Suls (1972, 1983) in which they

propose (independently) that incongruity is not the only necessary factor, and specify that the incongruity must be resolved if a situation is to be perceived as humorous. Resolution is defined here, following Suls, as a successful attempt to find a cognitive rule that allows removal of the incongruity. There is some neuroscientific evidence that appears to support this. Several electroencephalogram studies (Coulson and Kutas, 2001; Derks et al., 1997) of participants' responses to either verbal jokes or cartoons have obtained results consistent with the detection of an unexpected stimulus and with semantic categorisation, but only if the stimulus was deemed to be amusing. This might appear to confirm that resolution is a necessary factor in addition to incongruity itself. However, alternatively, this may be an artefact resulting from the joke-form of the experimental stimuli used. Other studies have used methods that show that resolution is not necessary for humour. One example of this is the weight-judgement task (Deckers, 1993; Nerhardt, 1970) in which participants are sequentially given several weights of a similar mass to compare followed by one substantially heavier or lighter. This often provokes amusement even though the incongruity is not resolved.

One of the earlier conceptualisations employed in the cognitive study of humour was Koestler's (1964) notion of *bisociation*. This is the idea that humour derives not from the replacement of an interpretation (as in incongruity-resolution theories) but from the ability to apply two contradictory matrices, or frames of reference, simultaneously to the same object or situation, with the second, introduced by the punchline, being incongruous with the set-up of the joke. This is very similar to Apter's (1984, 2007) idea of *cognitive synergy*, where one object can be interpreted in two conflicting ways, either through *paradoxical sameness* (where the interpretations apply simultaneously) or through *paradoxical change* (where only one interpretation can be applied at one time). I will return to this in greater detail in Chapter 3, but, briefly, the main similarity with bisociation is that of simultaneously applying two interpretations to the same object. Both Koestler and Apter discuss their ideas of simultaneous interpretation in relation to non-humorous situations and so, evidently, neither considers bisociation or synergy, respectively, sufficient for humour. Apter states three other conditions, which he claims that, together with synergy, provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for humour. These are that the joke or comic situation must mislead the person perceiving it to their initial interpretation, that the second interpretation must involve some form of diminishment, and that the person perceiving

the joke or situation must be in a paratelic state (as I discussed previously in this chapter in Sections 2.1.2, 2.2.1, and 2.2.3).

While Apter does not mention incongruity, these four conditions all have similarities with various formulations of incongruity theory or other humour theories. Synergy itself is similar to bisociation, as I have just mentioned, and also, in the fact that it involves a dual interpretation, overlaps with the BVH. In requiring diminishment, there is also a parallel with the BVH in that, in terms of visual sensation and cognitive mapping, something small is equivalent to something remote. There is also similarity here with incongruity in its negative formulation, and, indeed, with superiority theory. The misleading condition could also be considered to overlap with incongruity (either negative or neutral) as this involves a comparison between expectation and actuality – if someone is misled to an initial interpretation, they would not expect the second interpretation.

One thing I have not yet mentioned is the quality of surprise. The so-called 'surprise hypothesis' predicts that jokes with punchlines that are more unpredictable or unexpected will be found funnier (Martin, 2007). While there is conflicting empirical support for this (with the findings of Jääskeläinen et al. (2016) supporting the hypothesis, but Pollio and Mers (1974), for example, finding the opposite), this may be the result of differing experimental procedures and stimuli. However, surprise could be considered to be the experience of unexpectedness, or, in other words, something unexpected enough not just to bring the unexpected object to attention, but to bring the experience of not expecting it to attention. This places surprise and Apter's misleading condition together in terms of their relationship with unexpectedness.

Apter's proposal that humour is conditional on paratelic state, thus aligning it with play theories of humour, makes it, perhaps, more useful in accounting for humour than most theories based on incongruity. While most cognitive theories attempt to provide an explanation for the recognition or comprehension of humour, there is less consideration given to an explanation of its appreciation (Suls, 1983). It seems to me that humour is recognisable without being in a paratelic state. Therefore, Apter's proposals are of benefit because they include a component that is applicable to accounting for humour appreciation.

The other benefit of Apter's proposals is that it is not, in theory, at least, exclusively a theory of jokes (Wyer, 2004). This gives it greater potential for its application to a wider range of humour than self-contained scripted jokes, including the spontaneous humour that tends to be found in conversation (Norrick, 1993, 2003). Given that the language of literary fiction contains the same linguistic patterns that exist in everyday language, it seems likely that humour in literature will also be along (pseudo)-spontaneous lines. This may make Apter's theory a good starting point in attempting to account for humour in literature. However, although it is not a theory of jokes, Apter's (1982, 2007) discussion of his proposals tends towards an account of non-verbal humour. Since humour in literature will be largely verbal, the linguistic aspect will also need to be addressed. In the next section, I will discuss previous attempts to explain specifically how humour can be constructed linguistically.

2.3.2 Linguistic theories of humour

I have separated my discussion of linguistic theories of humour from the discussion in the previous section simply for convenience. The study of jokes that forms a large part of cognitive humour research is often necessarily linguistic, since the verbal jokes often chosen as experimental stimuli are told in language.

The Semantic-Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) (Raskin, 1985) is probably the most well-known theory (indeed, it is claimed to be the first (Attardo and Raskin, 2017)) to depart from a taxonomic approach (classifying verbal jokes into puns, riddles, and so on) and focus specifically on the semantics and pragmatics of jokes. The theory is based on the idea that the lexis of the joke invokes semantic scripts, largely based on those proposed by Schank and Abelson (1977). The claim of the SSTH is that if a text is to be humorous it must contain two scripts that overlap. That is, the text is compatible with each script. These scripts must also be in some sense opposed. Importantly, *script opposition* does not necessarily refer to antonymy, although the model does allow this. Raskin (1985) classifies oppositions into three groups: actual / non-actual, normal / abnormal, and possible / impossible, proposing that the overarching basic opposition is between real and unreal. Where scripts overlap but are not opposed, it is proposed that this would be a metaphor, allegory, or some other form of figurative language, but not humour. There is a third, pragmatic, component proposed. Rather than being communication where Gricean maxims are in operation, humour operates in non-bona-

fide mode, where, essentially, each maxim is made relative to the joke (e.g. 'say only what is relevant *to the joke*' (Raskin, 1985: 103, italics mine)).

The SSTH was revised and developed into the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (Attardo and Raskin, 1991), keeping the script opposition *knowledge resource (KR)* and adding several other knowledge resources:

- *logical mechanism*, or the way script oppositions are brought together (e.g. juxtapositions, figure-ground reversals, false analogies);
- *situation,* or what the joke is about (the objects, participants, and activities involved);
- *target*, or the 'butt' of the joke (if the joke is not aggressive, this does not apply);
- *narrative strategy*, or the format of the joke (question-and-answer, riddle etc);
- *language*, or the verbal arrangement of the text (the functional elements versus the parts that can be paraphrased, for instance).

Attardo and Raskin (2017) differ as to whether or not the SSTH (either in itself or as the basis of the GTVH) constitutes an incongruity theory, with Attardo (1997) making the claim that it is an incongruity theory stated in semantic terms. Either way, there are similarities between the GTVH and aspects of various incongruity theories, and, indeed, other humour theories. For example, Koestler's (1964) idea of bisociation and Apter's (1984) of cognitive synergy both involve the idea of overlap, in that the two interpretations can be applied to an object or concept simultaneously. These theories, by contrast, do not require opposition. The GTVH proposes a three-step structure to jokes: Set-up – Incongruity – Resolution, with the second and third steps being formed by the script opposition and logical mechanism KRs. The incongruity-resolution theories proposed by Shultz (1972) and Suls (1972) use a two-step format, but both these and the logical mechanism KR of the GTVH involve the idea of bringing dissimilar concepts together and finding a way of connecting them. The narrative strategy KR, in forming the structure of the joke, comprises cues that are comparable to Mulkay's (1988) proposed cues that signal a non-serious mindset – itself comparable to Raskin's non-bona-fide mode of communication. Finally, in these examples of similarities, the target KR has a parallel in the notion of aggression or disparagement of superiority theories in that humour is directed at the object of humour. Interestingly, though, this is optional in

the GTVH, making it more in keeping with the idea I discussed previously in this chapter that humour need not have an aggressive basis.

Although Attardo, with colleagues, suggests that the GTVH was 'somewhat infelicitously' named, being 'meant only to apply to jokes' (Corduas et al., 2008: 254), at other times he states (1994, 2017) that it was so named because it can account for 'any type of humorous text' (1994: 222). In spite of this apparent confusion, he and others have attempted to expand and develop the script opposition approach of the GTVH to enable its application to a wide variety of longer narrative texts (e.g. Attardo, 2001, 2002; Chłopicki, 1997, 2009; Ermida, 2008). However, these analyses seem unsatisfactory as they stop short of providing an explanation as to why the script oppositions found make the text humorous. This is a particular problem when the supposed key ingredient, the script opposition, is provided for sections of the text marked as humorous as well as apparently non-humorous sections, as with Attardo's (2001) analysis of Wilde's 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime'. If a script opposition can be found in a non-humorous part of a text, it is not clear what unique contribution script oppositions make to the humorous parts.

One possible reason for the difficulty in applying the GTVH to non-joke humour is that it requires script opposition. It may be the case that the differences in interpretations and the scripts involved in jokes tend to be greater, to the extent that there are elements that are in clear opposition. In humour more widely, the differences in scripts may be more subtle and opposition may not necessarily occur in a way that is relevant to the humour in the text. Triezenberg (2004) uses this reasoning to propose that the GTVH is not capable of explaining humour in literature, although she also claims that the script opposition is the necessary component of textual humour. I would suggest that the problem is not that the GTVH needs expansion or modification to explain humour in literature, but, rather, that a theory that relies on script opposition leading to humour will have difficulty in doing so. The application of a theory that requires script opposition to account for humour to a text where any script oppositions present are not related to humour is bound to be inadequate for the task.

I suggested at the start of the previous section that at the root of the difficulty in finding a truly general theory of humour is the assumption that incongruity is required. The same problem occurs here. Script oppositions may be prevalent in jokes simply

because they are one way of constructing a humorous proposition, and a way that is, perhaps, suited to the self-contained nature of a joke, but not because a script opposition is essential to the process. That is, a script opposition could be sufficient for humour, but not necessary. The formulation of a theory using as its evidence only humour involving script opposition could lead to the assumption that script oppositions are necessary. However, if this is then applied to a text where humour is not based on a script opposition, but where it is the analyst's assumption that a script opposition will be found to explain that humour, it is likely that one could be found. However, it will not necessarily explain the humour in the text. This type of confirmation bias could prevent the critical appraisal of the theory and its application. Added to which, Raskin maintains that a humour theory must be falsifiable if it not to be merely a faith, and claims that the SSTH is falsifiable by the absence of a script opposition as the basis of a joke (Attardo and Raskin, 2017; Raskin et al., 2009). First, this assumes that script oppositions are universally and objectively understood as being opposed, and can be present or absent rather than perceived or not perceived. Second, in expanding the theory to account for a wider range of humour, if the script opposition cited is not the basis of humour, this either falsifies a theory dependent on humour-related script oppositions, or demonstrates that the theory does not apply to all humour but only to the type of humour it was designed to explain.

One of its foundations and, I would argue, one of its main drawbacks, is that the SSTH and, by extension, the GTVH, is based (Attardo, 1994) on the idealised speaker-listener of transformational generative grammar (Chomsky, 1965). As such, it models the competence, rather than the performance, of the speaker and listener, and can, therefore, only account for successful humour. To me this is an unrealistic account of humour as it ignores what I would consider, given the social effects of humour that I discussed previously, to be the essence of the phenomenon. That is, that different people will react to a humorous proposition in different ways depending on their relationship with the speaker and with the object of humour. It is these asymmetric relationships that allow humour and its repercussions to occur. While the GTVH provides a framework for picking out certain elements, such as script oppositions or logical mechanisms, that may (or may not) be present in a humorous text, and so could be said to show what it is about the text that makes it humorous, it stops short of explaining *why* these elements contribute to humour. If the analytical concern is, as mine is, how and why a text can be found humorous, rather than to develop a prescription for an objective humour state, a

model of humour must be able to account equally for successful and unsuccessful humour, and be able to explain why these differences arise.

In my opinion, because the GTVH detaches the cognitive account of humour from its social context, it cannot provide a satisfactory explanation even for joke-type humour. This is because, at the very least, the understanding of the target and situation knowledge resources (i.e. the object of humour, and what the joke is about) will not necessarily be the same for speaker and listener. In fact, they are more likely to be different, however subtly, than they are to be identical, since no person has exactly the same prior experiences as another. This has implications for the script opposition knowledge resource itself, as a different set of prior experiences may affect whether or not someone perceived two scripts to be in opposition. Therefore, the cognitive and social aspects of humour are mutually dependent. The GTVH, however, is reliant on an idealised listener whose understanding of these knowledge resources will be identical to that of the speaker. This does not allow any flexibility in the listener's own construal of the object of humour and relies on a fixed opposition state in which the two scripts involved will always, in all circumstances, be opposed and always, it would seem, be found humorous. This is clearly not the case.

While the concept of script oppositions and logical mechanisms, such as juxtaposition, may be of use in explaining how humour is constructed, an improvement might be to add into the model the concept of prototypicality. Rather than a fixed opposition state, prototypes are context-dependent and flexible. This would allow scripts to be juxtaposed with each other, contributing to humour recognition and appreciation by a listener, and also allow for the non-appreciation or non-recognition of humour by a listener whose own knowledge of the object of humour does not align with the corresponding knowledge of the speaker.

There is a similarity with this addition of prototypicality in the approaches to humour in the field of pragmatics, although the concept of prototypicality is not necessarily employed. One such approach is the application of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986). I will return to this in greater detail in Chapter 4, but the key proposal is that, when presented with a proposition that they expect to be humorous, a listener searches for an interpretation that will lead to their amusement (Yus, 2003). While this does not explain how the listener expects that the proposition is intended

humorously, it allows for flexibility in interpretation on the part of the listener and the possibility that they may not comprehend the speaker's humour in the way in which it was intended, even if they also find it amusing.

By situating a text within its context, this can provide an explanation for, for example, findings that sarcasm is processed more quickly when delivered by, for example, a comedian than when delivered by a priest (Katz et al., 2004). Extending this to humour, if someone is considered a likely humour producer, a listener would be more likely to find a meaning that fits with a humorous outcome. An approach based on the pragmatics of communication offers more to an explanation of humour in literature than, for example, the GTVH because, for one thing, it encompasses a wider range of humour than jokes. For another, it provides a more realistic facet to an account of humour because of its concern with the context in which humour occurs and with the idea that communication is not a unidirectional transfer of information but involves a negotiation of meaning and intention between interlocutors. Specifically with regard to humorous narratives, but also applicable to discoursal humour more widely, Ermida (2008) proposes that a humorous narrative should be seen as a process involving, in partnership, both the production and reception ends of the communicative act. While I would argue that this applies to non-humorous communication as well, the idea that humour lies in the process of communicating something humorous rather than in the end product of the communication is a useful one for two reasons. First, it recalls the notion of humour as a process-figured form of play. Second, since the recognition and appreciation of humour is dependent on each person's own knowledge and past experiences, I very much doubt that there is anything that is inherently funny and so recognised and appreciated by all people everywhere and at all times. Therefore, if someone is to share with another person something that they find amusing, there must be a certain amount of negotiation with regard to how this can be conveyed so that the amusement that the speaker or writer experiences can also be experienced by the listener or reader.

This conveyance of humour has similarities in Nash's (1985: 124) discussion of 'manipulations of meaning'. He compares, for example, the sentence 'My watch fell into the river' with 'Into the Thames toppled my timepiece', pointing out how the fairly banal meaning of both sentences can be made humorous in the second through phonetic, lexical, and syntactic adjustments. He proposes that these bring about the 'rhetorical

heightening and suspense' (125) of a joke and likens the effects to those employed in its performance. Although his actual discussion of the performance element of humour is brief, he suggests that a reader can, to some extent, introduce a performance element into their silent reading of a text. This would be encouraged by the stylistic presentation of the content. The idea of 'rhetorical heightening' is similar to Simpson's (2003) discussion of *saturation* as one method of producing satire. This involves the inflation or exaggeration of a characteristic of the target of satire through either visual or verbal means. He contrasts this with the opposite method, termed *attenuation*, in which lexical underspecificity is used. While I would agree that these are methods of producing satire, I would also suggest that they are not limited to satirical humour. Separately from this suggestion, there is another advantage to Simpson's approach to satire. I have mentioned saturation and attenuation, but other ways of doing satire are discussed. This contrasts significantly with an approach involving script oppositions or one of the many formulations of incongruity theory, where humour is reduced to one factor. I think it is likely that humour involves multiple means of producing the same end, and the study of humour in literature perhaps demonstrates this better than the study of jokes. Whereas a theoretical approach that reduces humour to a single factor tends towards a conceptualisation of humour as a thing, an approach that recognises multiple means tends towards a conceptualisation of humour as a process. In the former, if the factor is present, humour is present. In the latter, humour is something that can be done multiple ways. I would argue that the latter approach supports the idea that humour is a form of play, with the means in use by humour participants being emphasised rather than its social effects.

Recalling the question I asked in the introductory chapter, about whether the key focus of humour research should perhaps be to examine not what humour is, but what it does, in the remainder of this chapter and in subsequent ones my aim will be to explore how the ways humour is constructed relate to its effects. Rather than producing a taxonomy of various ways of doing humour, my intention is to determine what these multiple ways have in common so as to be able to model the functioning of discourse humour.

2.4 A cognitive poetic model of humour

One of the most important things about the variety of humour theories I have discussed so far in this chapter is the extent to which they overlap with each other. In terms of some of the detail each proposes, there is often very little to separate one theory from another. Where they may deviate from each other is in their scope. For example, Koestler's (1964) bisociation idea and Apter's (1984) synergy idea are very similar, but Apter also links this to physiological arousal and paratelic motivation. Similarly, Apter's diminishment condition overlaps, to some extent, with the idea that one must feel superior to the object of humour in order to experience amusement. Therefore, I would agree with Raskin (1985) that release / relief, superiority (and more broadly social), and cognitive theories of humour are not incompatible with each other. The other important thing is that, for the most part, these approaches do not sufficiently take any of the other approaches into account. A release / relief theory tends only to be concerned with the affective effect of humour, a superiority theory (or a social approach) tends only to be concerned with context of humour and the social relationships between humour participants and the object of humour, and a cognitive theory tends to treat incongruity as an objective state, thus failing to take into account the context in which humour takes place. What is needed is an approach that situates the cognitive phenomenon of humour within its social context and that also accounts for the relationship between humour recognition and the affective-arousal response that it produces.

In taking a cognitive poetic approach, as I discussed in the introductory chapter, I take the view that a reading of a text is dependent on the context in which it is read. Thus, the prior knowledge and experiences that a reader brings to their engagement with a humorous novel are as much a part of the humour process as what is written on the page and, as such, the metaphorically spatial convergence and divergence effects of humour will be dependent on the interpretation of a text. I also work from the basis that language is a manifestation of the mental processes involved in the understanding of interactions with the environment. Therefore, the interpretation of a text will involve the embodied cognitive response to it, part of which will be the felt affective aspect of that response. In the following three chapters I will explain and demonstrate how this model integrates the cognitive, social, and affective aspects of humour. However, in the remainder of this chapter I will introduce the basics of the model.

2.4.1 Basic components

In any instance of humour there are two necessary components: the object, person, or situation that has the potential to be found amusing and the person who has the potential to find it amusing. I will term these respectively the *source of humour* and the *receiver*. In this instance of humour, the receiver is likely to be in the same spatio-temporal location as the source to allow their direct observation of whatever it is about the source that they find amusing, although it is possible that this may involve the receiver's memory of the source. It is also likely that humour such as this will be non-verbal as verbal humour will tend to involve an account of the source rather than the receiver's direct observation. It is possible also that someone could unintentionally say something that is humorous to the receiver. In that case, that person might become a source of humour. In most instances of humour, however, there is also a third party, which I will call the *relay*. In the telling of a joke, the relay is, fairly straightforwardly, the person telling it. However, in literary reading, the relay is more complex, as I will explain further on. These parties can be represented as a triangle (Figure 2.2). I emphasise the direction of communication from source to relay to receiver not because I envisage the receiver as a passive recipient of information, but because this is the realistic temporal sequence.

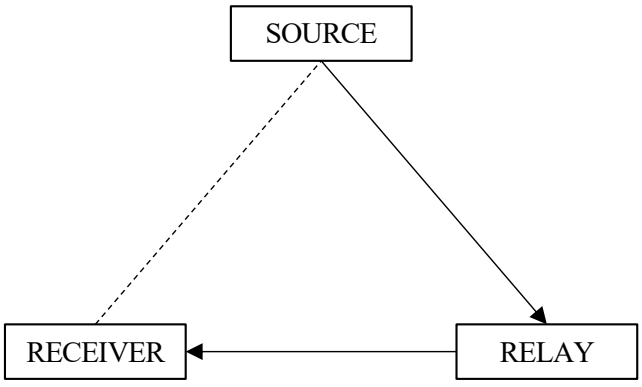


Figure 2.2 – Basic spatial arrangement of humour communication

One of the reasons for which I have chosen the terms *source*, *relay*, and *receiver* is that, particularly with regard to *relay* and *receiver*, they can be used to discuss any medium through which humour is communicated, whether this is spoken or written. The

other reason is that it seems to me that humour originates with something about a particular person or object (the source) that someone else (the receiver) finds amusing. This they relay to another person (a new receiver), generally speaking, in the hope or assumption that they will also find it amusing. In doing so, the original receiver becomes a relay. A number of theories use the term ‘stimulus’ where I use ‘source’ (Martin and Ford, 2018). In my opinion, ‘stimulus’ seems to imply something created by the relay and presented to the receiver. While, as I will argue later, the source is not objectively the person, object, or situation from which humour is derived, but is modified in some way by the relay in their presentation of it, there is still a source entity to which the relay’s presentation refers. Without this source entity the relay’s presentation would be meaningless. Therefore, my terminology attempts to acknowledge the existence of an entity from which the relay’s humour derives and to emphasise the direction in which this is communicated.

My emphasis of the direction of communication from source to receiver might seem to be the reverse of the direction implied in, for example, the GTVH (Attardo and Raskin, 1991), where humour has a target. This might be interpreted as humour being directed towards the source. While some humour can be used aggressively to disparage or satirise a source, not all humour has this aggressive element. In the case, however, of aggressive humour, a relay disparaging a source might well wish that source to hear or read and to understand what it is about them that they find amusing. This may be in addition to a receiver with whom the relay wishes to share their amusement. The concept of enactors (Emmott, 1992, 1997), or different versions of a person or character is of use here. The person being disparaged would have two enactors: as source and receiver (albeit a receiver unlikely to appreciate the humour relayed). The direction of communication would, thus, be from the source enactor, via the relay, to the receiver enactor. The target knowledge resource of the GTVH is stipulated as individuals or groups that have attached stereotypes (Attardo, 1994: 222). This seems to imply that the target is not the stereotype, but the individual or group to which it is attached. Therefore, the implicit direction of humour in the GTVH is from stereotype to target, or, in other words, the same direction that I make explicit.

By defining the labels for these entities in non-aggressive terms, and by using the concept of enactors, my aim is to clarify the way in which humour is communicated. The idea of enactors is also useful in accounting for the fact that people are able to find

their own actions amusing, something that has been difficult to explain in previous humour theories (Martin, 2007). If a person recognises and appreciates the humour in their own actions or appearance, the source would be, in Text World Theory terms (Gavins, 2007), a past-, future- or modal-world enactor of the receiver.

Although the relay is simply the person communicating something about the source that they find amusing, as I mentioned above, the relay in the case of literary reading is more complex than it would be in the face-to-face telling of a joke, or in other forms of humour in which participants are in the same location. This is because the relay could, at any moment, be a character, a narrator, or even the reader's concept of the author. Added to which, the relay is unlikely to remain as one particular entity throughout an entire novel. It is possible for that to happen, but there may be times at which humour occurs in dialogue between characters and at other times humour could occur within the narration. Since all these entities are projections of the author, it would be best not to think of the relay in literature just as more complex but as a complex in which, at any one time, one of its constituent parts will be acting as the active component of the relay. Thus, although, ultimately, the sharing of humour is between discourse world participants (i.e. reader and author), a reader can have a sense that they are sharing humour with an enactor of a character or the narrator across the text world boundary (Gavins, 2007). For the most part, the entity acting as relay is clear and it is sufficient to refer, within an analysis, to that entity simply as 'the relay'. However, at times it is necessary to clarify whether the relay is, for example, a character or the narrator, or whether it is the past- or present-world enactor of a character. In these cases I will clarify this using a subscript notation (e.g. $\text{relay}_{\text{narrator}}$).

Rather than an implied or ideal reader, the receiver here is the actual reader with their own knowledge and disposition that they bring to the text. It is my intention with this model to be able to account not only for successful humour, but also for unsuccessful humour and unintentional humour. Unlike the use of an idealised listener in the SSTH or GTVH, which gives a rigid model of successful humour only, what is needed when explaining how humour in literary fiction operates is a pliable model that can be moulded to the actualities of readers who have different backgrounds and prior experiences. While a relay may model an ideal receiver in their communication of something they find amusing about a source, this is not necessarily the actual receiver who may not have the prior knowledge necessary to comprehend the relay's proposition

in the way intended, or whose prior knowledge may prevent their appreciation of the relay's intended humour.

In the following chapters, the analyses will be based on my own readings, as I mentioned before. The examples I use will be of passages that I recognised and, unless I state otherwise, appreciated as humorous. Because the model does not rely on an ideal reading of texts, any reading is equally valid. The aim is not to describe an objective humour state, but to explain how and why a text can be recognised and appreciated as humorous by those who do. The next two sections will begin to set out the foundations of these explanations.

2.4.2 A spatial model

In Section 2.2.2, I discussed the emergence of a strong spatial metaphor relating to the effects of humour. This idea of space is also associated with theories that attempt to account for how humour can be appreciated. Superiority theories, for example, require what I refer to as the receiver to perceive themself as being superior to the source, or located, metaphorically, at some distance above them in order for humour to be appreciated. The BVH (McGraw et al., 2012) also involves the idea of metaphorical (or, indeed, literal) distance between receiver and source, proposing that a violation can be perceived as humorous only if the perceived degree of violation is accompanied by a corresponding perception of distance.

I would argue, echoing the findings of research into the social effects of humour, that the distance between receiver and relay is also relevant to both the recognition and appreciation of humour, since these two parties must share sufficient knowledge of the source for a receiver to appreciate the significance of the relay's presentation of the source. This, too, could be conceptualised as a distance: the greater the extent to which the parties share knowledge, the smaller the distance between them.

What I have described here so far relates to static distances. These could be seen as prerequisites for the success, or otherwise, of humour. However, as I discussed previously in the section on the social effects of humour, humour can have an effect on these distances, either by separating in-groups from out-groups or by drawing members of an in-group closer together. These effects can be conceptualised, metaphorically, as,

respectively, a divergence of the source from the relay and receiver, and a convergence of the relay and receiver. Therefore, the process of humour can be seen as a movement process, making the dynamics of the relative positions of source, relay, and receiver as important as their initial relative distances. With regard to humour in fiction, a text can position a reader to adopt the point of view of a particular textual entity, thus imposing a preferred response. To a greater or lesser extent, therefore, a text can override a reader's real-world disposition to the events of the plot and the attitudes of characters and the narrator. This can have implications for the humour process, since the interplay between readerly disposition and textual imposition can also result in convergent and divergent effects. As such a reader positioned to a close relationship with a particular character may be more likely to recognise and appreciate their humour.

Explaining this further, in a work of literary fiction, the enactors of characters and the narrator are all, as I mentioned above, ultimately, projections of the author. They can be thought of as forming a series of levels of conceptualiser. Likewise, the projection of a reader into a text world can be considered as the forming of a readerly counterpart to the authorial series of conceptualisers. Literary reading differs from real life in that much of the experience of a fictional text world occurs vicariously through the language of the text. Although text worlds are co-constructed by reader and author, the text-drivenness of the interaction means that the reader's input will be guided by the input of the author (Gavins, 2007). As such, a reader's deictic centre within a text world will always be anchored to a point in the authorial series but will shift in either direction along the series according to shifts in view presentation by the text. Therefore, a reader immersed in a text world will always share a point of view with some component of the text world section of the authorial series (i.e. a narrator or a character), since the only way a reader can experience the text world is through the explicit view given by that component.

Unless the reader is distracted by something in the discourse world and emerges from the text world, the text-drivenness of the experience will keep the reader's point of view directed towards something in the text world. This means that, even though a reader's viewpoint does not align with a character they are observing, their viewpoint will be aligned with another point in the series. This may, to give a few examples, be another character observing the first, a temporally-shifted enactor of the first character, or a narrator. For the most part, therefore, in the context of literary reading, the point of

view of the reader will tend to correspond to the point in the authorial series with which they are most proximal since this is the point from which they are viewing. This is important for the construction of humour because it is likely that the entity with which a reader is sharing a point of view will also be acting as relay. An exception to this would be humour in a conversation between two or more characters, where the relay could be a character other than one through which the narrative is focalised.

Although it is possible for a text to override, to some extent, a reader's disposition, this is not to say that this is always the case. A reader may be resistant to the impositions of a text and resistant, spatially, to being positioned closer to a particular textual entity. Applying this to humour, if a receiver's real-world knowledge and experience positions them closer to the source than the relay, their point of view will align more with that of the source than the relay. From this, with respect to the relay, non-viewpoint-aligned position, although the receiver may recognise the relay's attempt at humour, they would be less likely to share with them the knowledge and experience that would allow them to understand the significance of the relay's proposition. As such, the receiver, in this instance, would be less likely to appreciate the relay's humour.

One key point I am making here is that the spatial convergence and divergence effects of humour are affected, not only by the ability of a text to position a receiver, but by the receiver's existing disposition towards both relay and source. The other key point is that the humour process has spatial dynamics related both to the successful construction of humour (in the form of the positioning of the receiver to proximity with the relay), and which contribute to its social convergent and divergent effects.

2.4.3 A process-figured model

What, in the previous section, I referred to as viewpoint-aligned positions and non-viewpoint-aligned positions correspond, to some extent, with Langacker's (2008) ideas of objective and subjective construal. Langacker uses a visual analogy here where the term 'objective' refers, essentially, to the direct-viewing of an item by a viewer. If the viewer has a direct view of an item in a scene, their view (or construal) of the item is objective. An example of objective construal would be a description of the item by a narrator in which the description includes only facts about the item (e.g. a scarecrow

stood in the field). The narrator here functions only as a conceptualising presence and the focus is on the item (or conceptual content) (see Figure 2.3(a)). The narrator is, thus, construed with maximal subjectivity since their presence is only implicit.

If the viewer's view of the item is deflected in some way, their view or construal of the item becomes more subjective. An example of this would be a description of the item by a narrator in which the description involves the narrator's attitudes towards the item (e.g. a scarecrow stood sadly in the field). The item becomes more subjectively construed here because it is influenced to a greater extent by the narrator's opinion of the item. Since the narrator has a greater influence over the viewer's view of the item they have a greater presence in the scene. They are said to be more 'onstage'. Since the viewer then has a more direct view of the narrator, their construal of the narrator becomes more objective. There is, thus, a greater focus in the construal on the process of conceptualisation and communication of that conceptualisation since the parties engaged in that act of communication have a greater presence in the scene (see Figure 2.3(b)).

The idea that, in a subjective construal of conceptual content, the conceptualisers are construed more objectively may, perhaps, seem counterintuitive in relation to the notions of narratorial subjectivity and objectivity frequently employed in stylistics. The two are not contradictory, however. The stylistic markers of narratorial subjectivity (in the sense often used in stylistics) include features of, for example, stance, emotion, and focal shifts. As such, the term 'subjectivity' (in this sense) refers to features that give an indication of the narrator's attitudes towards the scene they are narrating. A reader reading this narration would not read an objective description of that scene, but one influenced by the narrator's attitude or, in other words, a subjective construal of the conceptual content (in Langacker's terms). A subjective narrator (in the general stylistic sense) forms a greater presence in the construal of the conceptual content of a scene. Such a narrator, thus, has a greater 'onstage' presence, using Langacker's visual analogy. Their presence becomes less implicit and they are viewed more directly by a reader or, in other words, construed more objectively.

Nuttall (2018) uses the analogy of a see-saw to explain the idea that the objectivity or subjectivity of conceptualisers and conceptual content is reciprocal. If, as in Figure 2.3(a), the subjectivity of the construal of the conceptualisers goes up, the

subjectivity of the construal of the conceptual content will go down. Likewise, if the objectivity of the construal of the conceptualisers goes up, the objectivity of the construal of the conceptual content will go down, as in Figure 2.3(b).

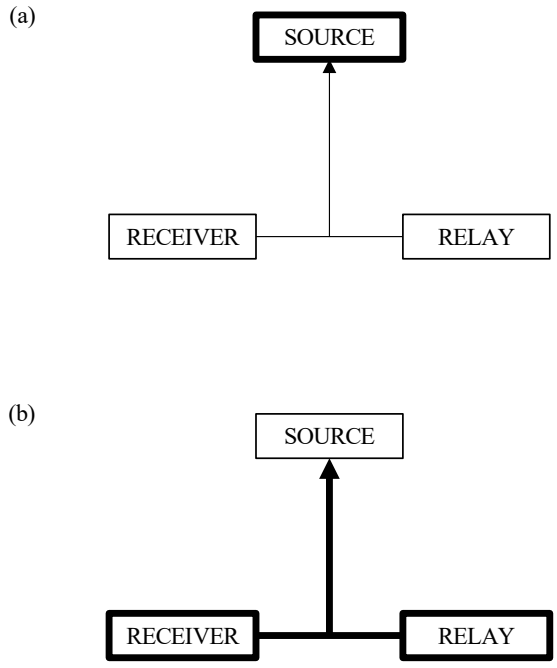


Figure 2.3 – Objective (a) and subjective (b) construal of the conceptual content (adapted from Verhagen, 2007: 61-62)

It is rare for a construal to be completely objective or subjective. Similarly, it is unlikely that a receiver's point of view will be completely aligned either with relay or source, since the prior experiences that they bring to the text will affect how they view the conceptual content. However, if the receiver's position is more aligned with the relay than with the source, the source will be more objectively construed than the relay, and the relay will be more subjectively construed than the source. This proximity in terms of distance and viewpoint-alignment between receiver and relay could be seen as a precondition for humour, since this requires sufficient sharing of experience between these two parties. It would also correspond with a relatively subjective construal of the conceptualisers (or potential receiver and relay), a relatively objective construal of the conceptual content (or potential source) and, thus, the emphasis on the conceptual content as opposed to the process of conceptualisation.

Returning to Section 2.2.1, where I discussed humour as a form of play, one of the ways play can be conceptualised is as process-figured activity. This might seem to be at odds with the viewing arrangement I have just described. However, what I propose is that the process of humour involves the increase in the subjectivity of the construal of the source through its presentation by the relay. The reciprocal change, with respect to the relay, therefore, would be an increase in the objectivity of their construal, with a corresponding increase in awareness of their presence and of the process of communication between relay and receiver. If the receiver becomes more aware of the relay, they also become more aware of their proximity with the relay and of their convergence with them. Similarly, the receiver will become more aware of their relative distance from the source and of their separation. As such, if humour is a process-figured activity, the process that is figured is the dynamic positioning of the receiver in relation to the relay and the source.

Since the dynamic-figuring involves the receiver's relationship with both relay and source, there are, therefore, two ways in which a humorous construal can be encouraged: through the increase in the subjective construal of the source, and through the increase in the objective construal of the relay. I would argue that a third way is through the emphasis of the receiver's part in the process. In each of the next three chapters I will examine one of these parts of the model and show how each contributes to the divergence and convergence effects of humour. Just as the levels of subjectivity or objectivity of conceptual content and conceptualisers can be understood using the analogy of a see-saw, and just as one can know the position of both ends of a see-saw even if only one end can be seen, it is possible that the overall viewing arrangement can be promoted by the construal of only one component of the viewing arrangement. For example, a text promoting a subjective construal of the source would not need the relay to have an explicitly onstage presence for the overall viewing arrangement to be a process-figured one. As an example of this, from *The Teleportation Accident*:

> The evening was blustery, and nearby a hunchbacked balloon seller with two dozen red balloons stood shifting his weight against the tug of the wind like a Zeppelin breeder out promenading a whole litter of excitable pups.
>
> (Beauman, 2013: 21)

The narrator is implicit, as is the character through which the narrative is focalised. However, the conceptual content, through the novelty of the metaphors in the

description, is subjectively construed, leading to a viewing arrangement where the process of conceptualisation is figured. If the process of conceptualisation is figured, there is, by implication, more awareness of the parties engaged in this conceptualisation. Therefore, although the relay is not explicitly onstage, the awareness of their presence increases.

2.4.4 The 3D Model of Humour

As I have stated previously, the model I propose is developed to account for discoursal humour. The approach I take is different to many previous models of humour that have been developed to explain joke humour only and have been subsequently applied more generally. In developing the model, I take a holistic view of humour, encompassing previous research from affective, social, and cognitive approaches rather than focusing on a particular aspect. The benefit of this approach is that, by recognising the ways in which aspects of humour interact with each other, a better account of humour can be achieved – one which accounts not only for successful humour, but can explain why humour can be unsuccessful and how unintended humour can be recognised and appreciated.

Reiterating what I explained in the previous two sections, I use a distance metaphor to model the social relations between the receiver and the relay and source that both contribute to and result from humorous interaction. I also propose that the dynamic convergence and divergence effects that result are figured. To summarise the features of the model succinctly: it is a Discoursal model of humour, it is a Distance-based model of humour, and it is a Dynamic-figured model of humour. It is also a holistic model of humour, viewing humour, its preconditions, and its effects as a whole. In the remaining chapters, I shall refer to it as the 3D Model of Humour.

Before I continue with the next chapters, it is inevitable that neither the distance features nor the dynamic-figured aspects of the model alone can explain the recognition or appreciation of humour. I propose that it is in combination with each other that these aspects can be used to account for humour.

Chapter 3. Subjective construal of source

As I discussed at the end of the previous chapter, I propose that the process of humour involves the increase in subjectivity of the construal of the source. In this chapter, I will start by explaining how the perception of incongruity relates to a receiver's increased awareness of the source and the implications this has for the subjectivity of its construal. Following on from this, I will demonstrate various ways that can be employed in the humour process to enable the increase in subjectivity of the source. Finally, I will discuss how a subjective construal of the source relates to the dynamic effect of distancing the source from the receiver.

3.1 Perception of incongruity

As I discussed in Chapter 2, the presence of incongruity is often taken to be at the root of humour, sometimes conceptualised as a script opposition (Attardo, 1994; Attardo and Raskin, 1991; Raskin, 1985) or synergic paradox (Apter, 2007), or sometimes in combination with surprise or ambiguity (Berlyne, 1960, 1972), diminishment (Apter, 2007), or resolution of the incongruity (Suls, 1972), to list just a few formulations of the theory. Indeed, Vandaele (2010: 780-781), discussing the difference between humour and narrative, asserts that humour 'always requires agents to perceive incongruity'. Similarly, explaining a stylistic approach to humour, Simpson and Bousfield (2017: 159, italics mine) state that 'the first principle is that humour *requires* some form of stylistic incongruity'. While this may be a principle of their approach, it also appears to be an assumption that it is incongruity itself that forms the basis of humour. This assumption is in keeping with incongruity theories in general, which are postulated such that the implied temporal sequence is 'something incongruous' leads to 'something humorous'. There are two, related, reasons for my disagreement with this assumption.

The first is that the incongruities that are proposed to explain humour, particularly in longer texts, can appear somewhat tenuous and irrelevant to humour. For example, in an analysis of a fictional short story, Chłopicki (2017) attributes humour, in part, to a FICTION / REALITY script opposition. I would suggest that this has less to do with humour, and more to do with the ontologies of the fictional text world and of fiction

itself. It could just as easily be found in, for example, a fairy tale or a science fiction novel. In addition, incongruities such as this apply to the whole text, not just to instances of humour. If these incongruities are not specific to humour in the text, and if these are the only incongruities that can be found to attempt to explain humour, this leads me to doubt that incongruity itself is responsible for humour.

The second reason for my doubt that incongruity is the basis of humour is that the various formulations of incongruity theories cannot explain all humour. They can only explain the specific form of humour for which they were developed to explain. Often the only way a theory can be adapted is to add adjunct conditions (such as surprise, resolution, or diminishment) that then do not apply to other forms of humour. For instance, Suls' (1972) incongruity-resolution theory can only explain jokes where the incongruity is resolved. Apter's (1984, 2007) theory involving cognitive synergy requires some form of diminishment where a paradoxical change occurs, but not, apparently, in cases of paradoxical sameness. The script oppositions of the GTVH require a text to be compatible with two interpretations but it is not always possible to find a second interpretation in a humorous text without a thorough analysis that would not be carried out under normal circumstances. The GTVH struggles in particular to explain humour in longer narratives, to the extent that, as I explained above, the requisite script opposition knowledge resource can only be filled by a script opposition so vague that it is one that affects, for example, all fictional narratives. As a solution to this non-applicability, it has been proposed that narrative or literary humour that cannot be explained is a different type of humour and so requires its own theory (Hamilton, 2013; Triezenberg, 2004, 2008). This, to me, seems a very inelegant solution. To my mind, it seems more likely that there is something about humorous incongruity that is common to all humour, but it needs to be more rigorously understood.

I am probably most in agreement with Simpson and Bousfield (2017) in their statement that there must be 'some form of' incongruity. However, this is a relatively vague statement, and, in addition to the vagueness of the incongruities to which humour is attributed, it leads me to wonder if it is useful not just to question 'what is incongruity?', but also 'what is *not* incongruity?'. In answer to this, my reasoning develops along lines of perceptual processing of objects. Everything that can be perceived as an object in its own right, and not belonging to another object, can only be perceived as such because it is in some way different to the objects it is against

(Riddoch and Humphreys, 2001). In terms of visual sensation of its basic components it may, for example, be a different shape, or a different colour, or a different texture. In Gestalt psychology terms, it lacks similarity with its surroundings (e.g. Koffka, 2001 [1935]; Wertheimer, 1938 [1923]). These differences are seen at the limits of objects, at the point where what is sensed stops being perceived as one object and starts being perceived as another – where, in Gestalt terms, continuity is disrupted. These cues are part of the process that allows an object to be figured and segregated from the ground (Peterson, 2003). Therefore, a lack of congruence is key to our general ability to differentiate between objects or, in other words, everything is incongruous to some extent.

The recognition of objects, however, does not rely simply on bottom-up processing using visual information; there is also a top-down process. There are different schools of thought as to how this occurs. One theory is that a familiar object's features are matched with structural descriptions, stored in long-term memory, based on previous experiences. This gives us the ability to recognise objects rapidly and without the need to attend to them (Hummel, 2013). For unfamiliar objects, or familiar objects presented in unaccustomed viewing conditions, the recognition process is necessarily attended and involves the effortful processing of the object's features. Farah (2000: 100) suggests that this 'might more aptly be called visual problem solving than visual recognition'. An alternative theory, scaling up from simple objects to concepts, is that predictions based on context are made about the identity of a concept, with the prediction being refined based on sensory inputs (Clark, 2013). Again, this allows rapid and minimally-aware recognition unless the prediction is substantially at odds with sensory inputs (Lupyan, 2015). This is related to the theory that object recognition involves anticipated sensorimotor interaction with the object (Gibbs, 2005; O'Regan and Noë, 2001). For example, something that can be recognised as a chair is so recognised because it has properties that one can imagine using in the way that one interacts with a chair: a flat surface that can be positioned to be parallel with and raised from the ground in some way, which could be used for sitting on; another surface more or less perpendicular to the first that can be leant against when sitting. The concept of a chair, therefore, involves the perception of its surfaces and the anticipated interaction with them.

For the purposes of discussing how humour occurs, the differences between the object recognition theories are inconsequential. The important thing is that object or concept recognition is usually a process which involves minimal awareness of its properties. It is only when something is presented in such a way that impedes its rapid recognition that its perceptual properties are brought to awareness. The other important thing is that recognition cannot happen without objects also being discriminated from each other. This is the result of sensory contrasts between objects, or, in other words, the points at which objects become incongruous with each other.

Since incongruities form the basis of our perceptual and conceptual knowledge of the world, it is clearly not the case that incongruity is exclusive to humour. Neither is it the case that humour can be detected simply on the *presence* of incongruity since these incongruities will inevitably be present whether or not humour can be detected. What is interesting about object processing is that the incongruities that allow objects to be differentiated from each other generally go unnoticed since the process of object recognition usually involves minimal awareness (Farah, 2000; Lupyan, 2015). However, when there is something about the incongruity that draws attention to itself, or if someone deliberately or accidentally points it out in some way, we become aware of the perception of the properties of objects. Likewise, the less prototypical an object within a category, the more aware we are of the process of recognition. It is possible that the assumption that humour depends on incongruity has emerged because the incongruities that exist between elements of humorous instances are figured to the extent that their conspicuousness leads them to be misinterpreted as cause. I propose that humour does not depend on incongruity itself but, rather, the process of humorous communication draws attention to existing incongruities that have the potential to be recognised by humour participants as part of the make-up of their experience.

This proposal to some extent echoes the observation of La Fave et al. (1976: 85) that incongruity can only amuse if it is perceived. They argue that since participants can fail to perceive incongruities and thus fail to be amused, this goes some way to accounting for the cultural dependence of humour. However, they also mention that the 'misperception of an absent incongruity' can also amuse. My inclination here is to counter this argument: a misperception is still a perception, and, if it has been perceived, the incongruity cannot be absent. It is just that there is something about it that has brought it to the attention of the person who has perceived it. In any case, as I

have already argued, incongruities are simply the perceivable contrasts between concepts, which can only exist as a cognitive construct of the receiver. The argument of La Fave et al. appears, however, to depend on the idea of an objective incongruity state rather than something that is subject to the experiences of the receiver. In formulating my proposal, I deliberately indicate the *potential* of incongruities to be recognised. An object of humour must be sufficiently part of a receiver's experience for them to recognise the existing limits of the object. Otherwise they will not recognise significance of the incongruity, as perceived by the relay, to which their attention is being drawn. This would help to explain why humour is culture-specific. To give an example from *Black Swan Green*:

> That *ace* song 'Olive's Salami' by Elvis Costello and the Attractions drowned out whatever Dean yelled at me…
>
> (Mitchell, 2014: 307)

'Olive's Salami' has the potential to be recognised as an approximation of 'Oliver's Army'; the latter the prototypical centre, and the former some distance from the centre, drawing attention to the limits of what could be recognised as the song's actual title. However, if a receiver is unfamiliar with the song (i.e. they have no stored experience with which to compare the title), 'Olive's Salami' will not be recognised as being a mistake and may be taken to be the actual title of a song, a prototypical centre in its own right. The character's mistake will be unnoticed, as will the associated humour. With reference to the spatial source-relay-receiver arrangement that I outlined in Chapter 2, the potential for a receiver not to recognise the same incongruities as the relay can be conceptualised as a discrepancy in the distances between the source and the receiver and the source and the relay. A relay who has greater knowledge of the source than the receiver will be closer to the source than the receiver.

Arguably, 'incongruities' is not the ideal term for the contrasts between objects that allow their discrimination and recognition. There is sometimes an implied negative valence to 'incongruity' – something incongruous should not be there – whereas 'contrast' does not have this deontic association. My aim here is to work with and improve existing humour theory, including incongruity theories, so for the sake of clarity in showing how my proposals fit with existing scholarship, it might be advisable to continue to use the term 'incongruity'. However, this would also perpetuate the idea that humour relies on the source (or something pertaining to the source) being

inherently out of place. I do not believe this is the case so, in the following analyses that I present as evidence for my model, I will use the term ‘contrast’.

In comparison to the relationship between humour and incongruity implied by previous scholarship, I am proposing two essential differences. First, I propose that humour is not a thing, but a process. Second, the process of humour brings the perception of incongruity to attention. Therefore, to return to the beginning of this chapter and my suggestion that there is something about humorous incongruity that is common to all humour, the ‘something’ is that, through the process of humorous communication, the incongruity (or, without the implied negative valence, the contrast) has been made the focus of attention.

Emphasising the key point about these proposals, if humour is a process, there are people engaging in it and making it happen. A source cannot be found humorous unless there is someone to make it seem so. It is possible for a receiver to perceive a source in a humorous way (through a process of elaboration, which I will return to in Chapter 5). If they are to relay this humorous perception to a second party, the source object or concept takes on the features elaborated by the relay and, as such, the conceptualisation of the source as construed by relay and receiver encompasses the relay’s perspective and attitude towards the source. The source object or concept is not, therefore, objectively construed. If a source is found humorous, it is, in fact, a subjective construal of the source as presented by the relay.

If, as I outlined in the previous chapter, the viewing arrangement in which relay and receiver are the conceptualisers is a subjective construal of the source, the relay will be more present as part of the onstage conceptual content and, thus, more objectively construed. I will return to this and the implications it has for the relay-receiver relationship, and for humour as a whole, in the following two chapters, but it seems reasonably self-evident that drawing someone’s attention to something by, say, pointing it out has the added effect of drawing their attention to the person doing the pointing out. There are other ways a relay can bring a source to the attention of the receiver, however. For example, they can, as I suggested earlier in this section, present an unfamiliar view of the source. This would require the receiver to attend to the recognition of the object or concept. The relay could also juxtapose the source with objects or concepts in combinations that might seem unconventional to the receiver.

This would draw the receiver's attention to the contrasts between these and could also make the source seem incongruous. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore these two ways of bringing a source to attention and show how they are achieved by the stylistic configuration of a text.

3.2 Unfamiliar views

I mentioned earlier in this chapter that the presentation of a familiar object in unfamiliar viewing conditions can render the process of recognition of that object effortful to the extent that it requires the attention of the person perceiving it. If that person must attend to the object, they will become more aware of its properties than they would usually be. One way in which viewing conditions can be changed is by changing the scale of the object in relation to its surroundings. It seems to me that this has parallels with the qualities of overstatement and understatement to which the humour in a proposition can be attributed. Nash (1985: 168), for instance, discusses the 'conventional tropes' of overstatement and understatement (along with counterstatement, which I will return to in Section 3.3). However, apart from pointing out that a particular passage from a short story by Saki 'combines the effects' (169) of these tropes, he does little in the way of suggesting what these effects actually are or why they might contribute to humour. With reference to the idea that humour is a form of play, it could be that altering the size of an object (or, by extension, a concept) is simply a case of playing with scale. On the other hand, changing the size of an object or concept will have consequences for how it is construed in terms of its significance for a potential receiver and in the subjectivity of that construal. In the rest of this section, I will explore how the presentation of the size of a source by a relay can contribute to its perception as humorous by a receiver.

3.2.1 Amplification

Although, cognitively, attention has multiple roles, the overall function is one of selection of what is most important at that moment (Styles, 2006). For example, if an animal is grazing, their attention will be on finding food. If a predator appears, the focus of attention will switch to the predator in order to escape from it. In evolutionary terms, it is thought that the need to alert and orient to potential threats is part of the reason for the development of attentional mechanisms (Cosmides and Tooby, 2013). A person's attention will, therefore, tend to be drawn to things that could constitute a threat such as

things that are new, or moving, or big, or close, or that make a noise. In the presence of a potential threat, indicators of physiological arousal, such as increased heart rate, blood pressure, and electrodermal activity, tend to increase (Gazzaniga et al., 2014). As I discussed in Chapter 2, this also occurs in response to humour, with humour appreciation and arousal tending to exhibit a linear relationship (Godkewitsch, 1976; McGhee, 1983). I proposed in the previous section that the basis of the humorous process is for a receiver's attention to be drawn to objects and concepts that are familiar parts of their experience. However, since attentive resources are limited, attentional cognition operates on a principle of inhibition of return (Posner and Cohen, 1984). In other words, since they are unlikely to constitute a threat, things that are familiar and part of everyday experience tend not to be attended to unless a person is interacting directly with them. Therefore, if a relay is attempting to draw a receiver's attention towards a source, one of the ways they could do so is to make the source appear to have qualities that could be associated with a potential threat so that it becomes figure rather than ground.

In the case of literary reading, elements of the text world will not present a potential real-world threat to a receiver. However, the cognitive processes that allow them to experience the text world are the same as those used to experience the real world. Therefore, elements of a text that involve features that would attract a receiver's real-world attention (such as newness, large size, closeness, brightness, or noisiness) will also tend to attract a reader's attention towards them (Stockwell, 2009). The passage below, from *Things My Girlfriend and I Have Argued About*, contains a large number of these textual attractors which, I argue, amplify the features of the source, drawing the receiver's attention to them.

> Besides price and sturdy, sealable pockets, I decided that it was also best to go for a jacket that was so unrepentantly bulky and protrusive that you could stuff two envelopes of cash into it without it emitting any clue. I eventually found two jackets that seemed agitatedly keen to meet all my requirements, but unfortunately one – presumably being aimed at teenage girls – was only available in a string of sizes all far too small for me. So, in exchange for my credit card's promise of £70.99, I walked away from a factory outlet with a creation in acrylic. It was host to a biblical plague of pockets, placed irregularly about it and all of them having heavy zips (rather giving the impression that, in its youth, it had been badly and repeatedly scarred in a duel). Puffy diamonds of anything up to about eight inches in thickness made up the surface of the jacket, and while the lining (containing three huge pockets) was a matt-green colour the outside was a shiny and vivid

> orange. I put it on and fastened the envelopes in its womb-like innards immediately.
>
> (Millington, 2006: 182-183)

The jacket is personified and given agency, being 'unrepentantly bulky, 'agitatedly keen', 'host to a biblical plague…', having 'womb-like innards', and having 'in its youth…been badly and repeatedly scarred in a duel'. Even the credit card used to pay for it is personified with its 'promise of £70.99'. Its size is repeatedly mentioned and exaggerated (it is 'bulky and protrusive' and 'puffy', its zips are 'heavy', its pockets are 'huge', and it is 'anything up to eight inches in thickness') and it is a bright 'shiny and vivid orange'. It also has the majority of the paragraph devoted to its description. The combination of these textual attractors produces a perception of the jacket as a far larger thing that it actually is. In addition to this the jacket is described as a 'creation', a word which more usually pertains to items that have some sort of artistic merit, and which also has religious associations reflected in 'host' and 'biblical plague' which follow it. This attaches an increased sense of importance to the jacket that enhances its presence relative to the other components in the passage such as Pel (the character buying the jacket), the factory outlet in which he is buying it, the credit card, and even the two envelopes of cash that are the reason for his buying the jacket. Although the jacket is the source of humour, it is not incongruous in the context of the factory outlet text world it is in. It might seem incongruous in another location, but, to me, a factory outlet seems like the sort of place puffy orange acrylic jackets might be found. The magnified figuring of the jacket, however, amplifies its properties to the extent that my attention is drawn to its presence in the text world and my awareness of its presence is increased.

A similar effect is seen in this short extract from *Black Swan Green*:

> All three of them were sixteen, I'd say, and rich. One sidekick had a stoaty meanness and acne not even ornate make-up could cover. The other sidekick'd been turned from a fish into a wide-eyed fat-lipped girl by a third-rate wizard.
>
> (Mitchell, 2014: 242)

The humour here is largely derived from the description of the 'other sidekick'. Her facial features are figured beyond the expected figuring of facial features, with attractors of size being used in their description ('wide-eyed' and 'fat-lipped'). There is also a definiteness to her transformation in 'the other sidekick'd been'; she did not just look

like she had been transformed. Being transformed by a 'third-rate wizard' increases the degree of attraction to the wizard and thus to the transformation process, which reinforces the idea that the girl was actually once a fish. It also implies that the transformation was only partially successful, which enhances the fish-like appearance and implied ugliness of her features. As with the jacket in the previous passage, through their textual figuring, the girl's fish-like features are magnified to almost cartoonish proportions. The way this is created can be seen as the verbal equivalent of a pictorial caricature, with certain features made more prominent to the neglect of others. The magnified size of the figured facial features places them nearer to the receiver than the other components in the scene (the rest of the 'other sidekick', and the other two girls), since larger things tend to be perceived as being nearer. Again, like the jacket, the appearance of the girl's face is not itself incongruous. The receiver's attention is drawn to its features and the resulting increase in awareness of the girl's appearance corresponds to the perception of its incongruity.

Both these passages involve something that is fairly ordinary and which, under most circumstances, would be unlikely to attract someone's attention. Neither the jacket nor the girl's appearance are inherently incongruous in the setting in which they are described. By being described, though, each is figured, but one of a number of similar jackets (as would be found in a factory outlet), or the appearance of an unnamed minor character, is more likely to be ground than figure. The stylistic presentation of each, however, not only figures the item as a whole but the specificity of each description allows the construal of each object with greater granularity than would be expected of the object. One visual depth cue is the extent to which the features of an object are discernible; the closer something is, the greater the granularity of texture that can be observed (Gibson, 1979). The items described in the passages above are relatively unimportant to the narrative and so could be thought of as relatively distant from the focus of the story. By increasing the specificity and thus increasing the observable detail of the source, the source can be mentally represented as something much nearer to the receiver than would otherwise be the case. As something that appears close has the potential, in evolutionary terms, to be a threat, this makes the source salient and the focus of attention.

As I have mentioned previously, the GTVH struggles to explain humour in longer non-joke texts. In particular, accounting for humorous descriptive passages in literary

texts is difficult using a script-opposition approach as it can be a challenge to identify a second script through which the text can be interpreted. Attardo (1994, 2002) proposes an extension to the GTVH in the form of *register-based humour*. He proposes that, in practical terms, register can be specified by lexical choice and that humour in longer texts can be derived from the incongruity of a mismatch in lexical choice and subject matter. He uses the example of a passage from *Headlong Hall* by Thomas Love Peacock (1987 [1816]) and concludes that the incongruity of the 'flowery' register used in relation to the rather unsophisticated events of the narrative is the source of humour.

> Several of the ladies shrieked at the sight of the skull; and Miss Tenorina, starting up in great haste and terror, caused the subversion of a cup of chocolate, which a servant was handing to the Reverend Doctor Gaster, into the nape of the neck of Sir Patrick O'Prism. Sir Patrick, rising impetuously, to clap an extinguisher, as he expressed himself, on the farthing rushlight of the rascal's life, pushed over the chair of Marmaduke Milestone, Esquire, who, catching for support at the first thing that came in his way, which happened unluckily to be the corner of the table-cloth, drew it instantaneously with him to the floor, involving plates, cups and saucers, in one promiscuous ruin … Mr. Escot was a little surprised at the scene of confusion which signalised his entrance.
>
> (Peacock, 1987: 56)

One problem that I have with Attardo's analysis is that the register of a text tends to be a characteristic of the whole text. As with the whole-text script oppositions, such as Chłopicki's (2017) FICTION / REALITY analysis, a register-subject matter mismatch does not just apply to the parts of the text that can evoke a humorous response. There must, therefore, be something else about the potentially humorous parts of the text that enables their recognition as humorous.

It is interesting that the *Headlong Hall* passage, like my examples about the jacket and the girl's appearance, contains a large number of textual attractors. These, in part, form the events of the narrative – there is, for example, a great deal of movement and noise in the passage that attracts attention. However, the manner in which the events are described amplifies them in the same way that the features of the jacket and the girl's appearance are amplified. For example, one character gets up from the table to 'clap an extinguisher… on the farthing rushlight of the rascal's life' (Peacock, 1987: 56) in response to the 'rascal' (a servant) accidentally spilling a cup of hot chocolate. The noise associated with 'clap', the newness in the creativity of the metaphor, the specificity of the source domain, its exaggerated meaning (i.e. that the character getting

up from the table intends to kill the servant, which seems an unlikely response to the accident), and the amount of text devoted to it increase the prominence of the character's action. The receiver's awareness of the action is therefore heightened.

I would argue that, while it is possible that there could appear to be a mismatch between the register of the passage (in terms of the lexical choices, following Attardo's usage) and the subject matter, it is not simply through the mismatch that humour is constructed. The register of a text is comprised of features of lexis and grammar that code a particular usage of language. Altering these components provides the 'ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways' (Langacker, 2008: 43), that is the construal of an object or event. Therefore, if a relay elects to communicate with a receiver using a particular register, this choice will be affected both by the relay's own construal of an object or event and their intentions for the receiver's construal. It will also affect the receiver's actual construal of this object or event. Additionally, any mismatch perceived between register and subject matter is dependent on the receiver. In my own reading of the passage, I did not find this to be incongruous, yet I both recognised and appreciated the humour in the passage. In fact, contrary to being incongruous, I found the register congruent with my humorous interpretation of the story. This is perhaps because the register of a text (in the more usual sociolinguistic usage), while constructed through the lexis and grammar of the text, also involves the associations those choices invoke in terms of the social aspects of variations in language usage. These associations are dependent on an individual's experiences of these variations. If my experience of the 'flowery' lexis and grammar (that Attardo (1994: 263) suggests forms the apparent mismatch) is congruent with what I interpret as humorous intent, the register will appear congruent with its use rather than incongruent. It is, therefore, less likely that I will perceive there to be a mismatch between register and subject matter. This suggests to me that it is not a mismatch between register and subject matter that is responsible for the construction of humour. However, since altering lexis and grammar can alter the construal of an object or event, as Langacker suggests, the stylistic inclusion of a large number of textual attractors amplifies the figuring of the content, increasing its attentional draw.

The amplification effect that I am proposing has similarities with one of the humour enhancers proposed by Triezenberg (2004, 2008), that of *diction*. Both Triezenberg's proposal and mine involve the idea that the stylistic presentation of a

potential source of humour affects a reader's capacity to find it amusing. She suggests that word choices that are more 'artistically pleasing' and 'more interesting' (2004: 413) signal a reader to look for and expect humour, and also increase their enjoyment of the text. I agree that there are indeed cues that signal readers to expect humour, and that these cues form an important part of a receiver's ability to recognise and appreciate humour. However, I disagree with the analysis that the enhancement effect of the diction of a humorous text acts *only* as a cue. I would argue, as with Attardo's register-based humour, that the way the text is constructed will affect a receiver's construal of features of a potential source. By enhancing, or amplifying, the features of a source, a relay can encourage a receiver's increased awareness of these features. Through the process of being made aware of features of the source, the receiver is made aware that they share an awareness of those features with the relay. It is this acknowledgement of shared experience that forms part of the social basis of humour.

3.2.2 Diminishment

The amplification effect that I have just discussed involves the idea that a source is presented as physically or conceptually larger than its objectively viewed form would appear to a receiver. This seems, superficially, to contradict Apter's (2007) proposal that for someone or something to be found humorous, one essential feature is that they or it must be qualitatively downgraded in terms of, say, status, monetary value, or competence. To me there is a connection between something that is of low status or value and something that is diminished either in physical size or in its conceptual properties. This might appear to be difficult to reconcile with my proposal that a source is brought to a receiver's attention, since small objects tend not to act as good attractors for attention simply because of their size. However, in addition to attention resulting from the salience of an amplified source because of its amplified size, both presentations of a source – amplified or diminished – could involve the receiver's attended recognition of the source in an unfamiliar view. In addition to attended recognition, a source could become the focus of attention because its presentation makes it bigger or smaller than might be expected. This would make it stand out from the ground. With diminishment, I would argue that the source would also be figured because, even though it might be conceptually smaller, it would still be an unusual presentation of the source, in an unfamiliar view. It could therefore be an object of attention for reasons of object recognition and unexpectedness.

While Apter's proposal involves a qualitative diminishment of the source, this is not to say that a diminished source cannot be presented in such a way that, in fact, amplifies its diminished qualities. For example, from *The Teleportation Accident*:

> ...he would either have to go out on his own, or he would have to call Ziesel. He knew Ziesel would be free. Ziesel was always free. In Berlin there were typhoid bacteria more socially in demand than Ziesel.
>
> (Beauman, 2013: 57)

The repetitions of 'Ziesel' and either 'free' or its creative variation 'typhoid bacteria more socially in demand' amplify both Ziesel as a figure and the extent to which he is certain to be unengaged. As with her humour enhancer of diction, Triezenberg (2004, 2008) also suggests that *repetition and variation* can act to enhance humorousness in literature. Again, I would argue that this does not just enhance the humorousness but is part of the construction of the source of humour itself through its amplified figuring against the ground. Additionally, the comparison of Ziesel's popularity with that of the supposedly more popular typhoid bacteria amplifies the concept of his unpopularity. In this way, although the source involves a qualitative diminishment, it is through the amplification of the diminished quality that humour is constructed.

It is possible that diminished qualities aid in the interpretation of a proposition as humorous through their associations with smallness or insignificance since things that are small or insignificant are less likely to be perceived as a threat. However, as in the passage here from *The Teleportation Accident*, and the descriptions of the orange jacket and the teenage girl from *Things My Girlfriend And I Have Argued About* and *Black Swan Green* in the previous section demonstrate, these qualities need not be interpreted literally as small. I would argue that the amplifications of all these objects involve properties that are qualitatively diminished in terms of their social or aesthetic value. This could be conceptualised as inferiority and, thus, vertical distance between receiver and source in line with a superiority theory account of humour. However, as this passage from *The Good, The Bad and The Smug* demonstrates, this need not always be the case.

> Mr Winckler opened his eyes and looked down, and saw his feet.
>
> Well, he thought, that would explain the pain. He looked sideways, at his extended arms. Yup, he thought, check. Nails through the palms and ankles will do that to you every time.

He was not alone. On either side of him, nailed to more or less identical crosses, were two men. One of them was nearly gone, his head slumped on his chest, eyes closed, lips slowly moving. The other one caught his eye and grinned.

"Hi," he said. "I'm Mike."

"Albert," Mr Winckler replied. "How's it going?"

"Oh, hanging in there." Mike waited. Mr Winckler nodded wearily. "Great view you get from up here," Mike said.

"If you like desert."

"So," Mike went on after a pause, "what did they get you for, then?"

"You first."

"Thieving," Mike said. "Can't complain, it was a fair cop, they got me bang to rights. You?"

"I think," Mr Winckler said, "I may have invented Christianity."

(Holt, 2015: 340)

There are multiple sources of humour in this passage, mainly based on the contrast between two men having a fairly cheerful conversation while also being crucified, and on Mr Winckler's apparently unperturbed response to finding himself in this predicament. The most relevant feature of the passage, here, however, is humour that seems in some way understated. There are four instances:

(1) Well, he thought, that would explain the pain.

(2) Yup, he thought, check. Nails through the palms and ankles will do that to you every time.

(3) 'If you like desert.'

(4) 'I think,' Mr Winckler said, 'I may have invented Christianity.'

There is contrast in, for example, someone being in the intense pain that would result from having nails put through their hands and ankles and yet having the capacity to think objectively about it. In the last example, there is contrast in an abstract concept such as a religion having been 'invented', which, to me, seems more suited to a more material object, and in this invention having apparently been accidental. Because these concepts are juxtaposed, the contrast in their qualities is brought to awareness, as I will discuss further in the following section. However, two things immediately strike me as interesting about the contrasts in these examples. First, the contrasts do not tend to involve concepts that are qualitatively diminished. Christianity, crucifixion, and pain are not, to me, concepts that would qualify in terms of Apter's notion of diminishment. The second is that they all involve world switches. This, as I will explain, could contribute to a sense of diminishment.

In the comprehension of a text, each deictic shift to a new location or point in time involves the conceptualisation of a new text world in which the content of that spatio-temporal location is represented (Gavins, 2007). In addition, modality requires the construction of a modal world to represent what is being modalised and the attitude towards it. In the understated humour examples above, examples (1) and (2) both involve a switch to an epistemic modal world on 'that would explain' and 'will do that to you' respectively. Example (3) also involves the creation of an epistemic modal world to conceptualise the conditional 'If you like desert'. Example (4) requires two epistemic modal world switches on 'I think' and 'I may'. The second of these is embedded within the first, so that an epistemic modal world is created in which Mr Winkler may have invented Christianity, which is embedded within the epistemic modal world that conceptualises his belief. Both of these modal worlds are embedded within the world created to conceptualise his direct speech, this being in a different temporal location (at least) to that of the narration as indicated by its past-tense verbs. In fact, in all these cases, the world switches I have described occur after a switch from the primary text world in order to conceptualise the speech or thought of Mr Winckler. Therefore, in each example, the source is located in a world at least two world switches from the primary text world in which Mr Winckler is conversing with Mike. Returning to the visual analogy I discussed previously in this chapter, something that is distant is, in terms of visual sensation, the equivalent of something that is small. It is possible that a sense of diminishment could be achieved spatially by positioning the source of humour at a distance from the receiver.

Although, from the examples I have given so far, it might appear that some sort of diminishment would be necessary for humour, I would argue that this is not necessarily the quality of inferiority dictated by superiority theory. While a qualitative diminishment might involve a vertical distance between source and receiver, the spatial diminishment involved in the understated humour in the last example does not suggest a vertical distance, simply a distance. However, since both types of diminishment involve the distancing of a source from a receiver, this supports my proposal in the previous chapter that there is a spatial element to humour involving the divergence of source and receiver.

3.3 Juxtaposition

As I mentioned previously, Nash (1985) mentions what he refers to as 'classic tropes' of overstatement, understatement, and counterstatement. Overstatement and understatement correspond respectively to the amplification and diminishment ideas I discussed above. I have also briefly referred to counterstatement with regard to the juxtaposition of contrasting concepts. In this section, I will explore further this means of increasing awareness of the source.

3.3.1 Object-prototype contrast

Incongruity in humour has been linked to the quality of unexpectedness: either the appearance of something unexpected or as a shift to an unexpected interpretation. Something unexpected has, in evolutionary terms, the potential to present a threat so, as, with the amplification effect, this could be used to direct a receiver's attention to the source. However, Pollio and Mers (1974) show that predictable punchlines are rated as funnier than unexpected ones. An increased sense of a participant sharing the joke with the relay could explain the tendency for predictable punchlines to be rated as funnier, but the fact that the jokes used as stimuli in this experiment employed an interpretational shift can provide a mechanism through which shared experience can be brought to a receiver's attention. Where there is a shift in interpretation, there is contrast between the first interpretation and the second, and the receiver is made aware of the differences between the two. Humour processes that use a reinterpretation mechanism, such as garden-path narratives, exploit the fact that cognitive recognition of concepts uses a top-down process either of predicting an object's identity or of matching stored descriptions of familiar objects to what is presented. Either way, a category prototype is perceived until sensory information dictates changes to what is perceived. Where these bottom-up sensory inputs might generally lead to relatively small updates to the recognised object, reinterpretation will derive from inputs that are substantially incongruous with the prediction or stored description. As Apter (2007) suggests, humour misleads a receiver to an initial interpretation. If the receiver's cognitive processing involves a predictive element based on cues introduced by a text, it is inevitable that inputs that lead to reinterpretation, and the second interpretation itself, will be unpredicted and, therefore, unexpected. Although, as I mentioned, it may contribute to an amplification effect, the unexpectedness is an inevitable secondary effect when the humour process deliberately creates a reinterpretation. The

reinterpretation would require the receiver's attention, and they would, thus, become aware of the contrast in the two interpretations. Even if the receiver can predict the reinterpretation (as in Pollio and Mers' (1974) study), their humorous appreciation may be accounted for by the fact that they are sufficiently cued to the relay's humorous intent, and are playing along by seeking a second interpretation. This second interpretation would not be unexpected but would only have been found by attended processing by the receiver.

The way in which reinterpretations occur can be usefully analysed using schema theory (Cook, 1994; Schank and Abelson, 1977). A first interpretation, or schema, would be preserved or reinforced by inputs made by the relay if consistent with the receiver's interpretation. This initial schema may be added to or tuned if the relay's inputs modify the interpretation, but this would not be refreshed unless an input were incongruous with the initial interpretation. The humour in this passage from *The Teleportation Accident* involves both the tuning of a schema and, subsequently, its refreshment.

> Scramsfield saw the younger woman stroking the head of a poodle she had in her handbag, except that the poodle was tiny and green and hairless and wore a white lace bonnet and, in conclusion, just wasn't a poodle, even though he knew he wasn't nearly hungry enough yet to be hallucinating.
>
> (Beauman, 2013: 82)

The passage is narrated in terms of what the character Scramsfield perceives, and conveys the idea of a double-take: he has observed something relatively normal that on second glance turns out to have been a misperception. Therefore, from Scramsfield's perspective, there are two interpretations of what he sees, which can be compared. However, the second interpretation is not given immediately. Rather, the impression is given of Scramsfield gradually coming to the realisation that what he is seeing is not what he first thought. Interestingly, Scramsfield's first interpretation is driven by the sensorimotor interaction aspect of object recognition: the woman is interacting with the animal in the way one would interact with a poodle and so he recognises it as such. His interpretation is changed by the incorporation of the perceptual properties of the animal.

The original schema is that of a poodle, which is reinforced by its being carried in a handbag – something that, to me at least, fits with my schema of poodles as pets that

get pampered and elaborately clipped and so on. Schema tuning occurs with the new information that the poodle is tiny, green, hairless, and wearing a bonnet. It might be considered that this unlikely new information would result in schema refreshment. Significantly, though, it is still explicitly stated that the creature is a poodle 'except that' it has these unusual features. As such, the schema is tuned at this point rather than being refreshed. My image of the creature here is of a small green hairless poodle wearing a bonnet, rather than the very different image I have in response to 'just wasn't a poodle', which explicitly requires the replacement of the poodle schema with a different schema rather than the continued schema tuning. I have given this passage to several people to read and, interestingly, most of them report a similar image switch, not replacing the poodle image until the negation, and then replacing it with that of a lizard-type creature. In fact, the creature in the handbag turns out, a few paragraphs later, to be an iguana. The effect seems to be one of moving away from a prototypical poodle and then arriving at a non-prototypical pet.

The humour here could be analysed in terms of a GTVH script opposition: POODLE / NOT POODLE. However, this neither captures the entirety of the humorous construction, nor does it explain why it is humorous. A better explanation is that the increasing radial distance from the prototypical poodle centre provides points of comparison with the centre. As the distance increases, so too does the effort required to recognise the animal as a poodle. This leads to increased awareness of the process of recognition. There is also the switch from a superordinate poodle schema to a basic pet schema initiated by 'just wasn't a poodle'. For me a poodle would be a good pet prototype but my understanding of the creature from its description as being green and hairless is not one of a prototypical pet. It clearly functions as a pet, however, so my pet schema is added to by the possibility that a pet can possess these characteristics and be interacted with in the way described. This requires me to attend to the limits of what I could understand as a pet in this situation and which contrasts with the prototypical centre.

While the passage from *The Teleportation Accident* involves the recognition of an object, the humorous process of contrasting the expected or familiar with what is actually perceived can be applied to more abstract concepts such as behaviour. In this extract from *The Good, The Bad and The Smug*, a prince is consulting a

Rumpelstiltskin-like character as to the possibility of his being able to spin gold from an alternative to straw.

> ‘So I was wondering,’ the prince said, turning on the charm-tap, ‘does it actually have to be straw? I mean, what about hay? We’ve got stacks and stacks of hay. Or nettles, possibly. Do you think you could do anything with nettles?’
> ‘A nourishing if rather bland soup,’ the little man said. ‘Otherwise, no.’
> (Holt, 2015: 135)

The little man’s response is a dispreferred response to the prince’s question. Instead of the preferred, or prototypical, response to the illocutionary meaning of ‘do anything with nettles’ (that is, spin gold from them), his response takes ‘do anything’ literally. A receiver’s comprehension of the little man’s response requires them to refer back to the question and reinterpret ‘do anything’, which cannot happen without the receiver attending to the reinterpretation. This fits with an incongruity-resolution or GTVH script-switch analysis. However, going one step further with the analysis, what is happening is that the receiver then has recognised two meanings of ‘do anything’ which can be compared with each other. The contrast between the two meanings brings each meaning to the receiver’s attention and they become aware of the ambiguity of the question. Additionally, the little man’s response represents a non-prototypical behaviour – it would normally be expected that he would give a preferred response rather than an apparently deliberate dispreferred one. Again, these two behaviours can be compared and the contrast brings to the receiver’s attention the norms of social behaviour that are part of their experience. Whereas the reinterpretation of the prince’s question involves a change from one interpretation to another and the contrast between the two, the little man’s behaviour involves a contrast with an expected behaviour. In fact, his behaviour is only non-prototypical because it is interpreted in comparison with an expected prototypical behaviour. However, the same mechanism of comparison is responsible for raising the receiver’s awareness of both the ambiguity of language and the expected behaviours that they would normally not notice.

3.3.2 Object-object contrast

The examples I discussed in the previous section involved a shift from a prototypical (or expected) interpretation of an object to another, less prototypical, interpretation. While acknowledging that, strictly speaking, all objects are more or less prototypical examples of each other, the comparison of one object with another substantially dissimilar object can allow the contrast between the two objects to appear greater, thus making the

observer more aware of the properties of both objects. In terms of the humorous process, this is less a shift and more a juxtaposition. For example, this short passage from *The Teleportation Accident*:

> Achleitner had pointed, and Loeser had looked over to see a fellow student with all the classical good looks and muscle definition of a shop-window dummy dipped in birthday-cake icing, who sat alone with a glass of beer.
>
> (Beauman, 2013: 27)

There are two contrasts in operation here. One is the contrast in 'classical good looks and muscle definition' with the ironic interpretation. The second contrast is in the interpretation of 'a shop-window dummy dipped in birthday-cake icing'. This involves a conceptual blend (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) of the input spaces 'shop-window dummy' and 'birthday-cake icing', and also that of the 'fellow student'. However, I would argue that, while the qualities of the dummy and the icing add to the emergent properties of the fellow student, they themselves are informed by the ironic 'classical good looks and muscle definition'. There is, therefore, also a blend with the emergent structure of dummy and icing acting as an input space with the ironic 'classical good looks and muscle definition'. Thus, the mental representation I produce in response has properties that are in some way the opposite of those associated with 'classical good looks and muscle definition': the dummy I imagine is the type that has little in the way of facial features and the icing seems rather more viscous than I would usually associate with icing on a birthday cake. As such, to me, the fellow student described has a blank expression, a pale and dull complexion, is slightly flabby, and has a slouching posture. Everything about him appears to droop somewhat and as a character he seems rather insipid. By juxtaposing the conceptual properties of 'classical good looks and muscle definition' with the ironic meaning projected through the properties of the dummy and the icing, the properties of these concepts are contrasted with each other. The result is that that the emergent properties of the student appear amplified with a corresponding increase in awareness of these qualities.

While the example above involves a shift from the 'classical good looks and muscle definition' interpretation prior to the blend, it is possible for humour to occur without any such shift. An example of this is found in *Things My Girlfriend and I Have Argued About*:

> They were all sitting with their backs to the window. It wasn't a sunny day, but the sky was one unvarying expanse of thick, pure white cloud, so the effect behind them was of a Phil Spector of light.
>
> (Millington, 2006: 78)

Again, this involves a blend resulting from the juxtaposed input spaces 'Phil Spector' and 'light'. The mental representation I produced in response combines the qualities of the halo effect seen when someone is backlit with the features of the hairstyle worn by the record producer Phil Spector at the time of publication of the novel – this being a large grey-blond bouffant. The halo effect is enhanced by being given the size and tangibility of the hair, and the name 'Spector' adds to its dazzle through its similarity with words associated with light such as 'spectrum'. The combination of light and Phil Spector-hair qualities has the effect of an increase in conscious awareness in recognising the halo effect. This is not only through the perceptual differences in the physical properties of the two input spaces, but also through their conceptual differences: light has associations with purity, whereas the unkempt appearance of Phil Spector's hair could evoke associations with negligence, and the fact that Spector was on trial for murder at the time adds to the general unpleasant associations he brings to the blend.

The relayed properties of the 'Phil Spector of light' blend are therefore somewhat inconsistent with the anticipated sensorimotor interaction with the halo effect. For instance, there is the expectation of light but also a dull greyness neither emitting nor reflecting light in a way consistent with the expectation. The input spaces are apparently incongruous, but it is the process of putting them together and the effect this has on perception that produces a humorous effect, rather than simply the fact that they seem incongruous. Since anticipated interaction is part of the process of object perception, the blend increases the cognitive effort involved in recognition and so increases the receiver's awareness of the process of recognition and the respective properties of the input spaces.

Both the examples in this section and those in the previous ones involve what Apter (1984, 2007) terms *cognitive synergy*. By this he means that an object is either two things simultaneously (paradoxical sameness or non-transitory synergy) or the object becomes another object while also still being the first object (paradoxical change or transitory synergy). An example of paradoxical sameness would be a landscape

painting where, particularly if the depiction is precise, the image appears to have the same properties as the real view (colour, depth, scale etc.) but is in fact a smaller, flat, delimited, portable illusion. The illusory nature of cognitive synergy also applies to paradoxical change in, for example, the duck-rabbit illusion, where, although the image does not change, only a duck or a rabbit can be seen at one time. Of the examples in this and the previous section, the first two are instances of paradoxical change (i.e. the creature is both poodle and not-poodle and shifts from one to the other, and the prince's question has two meanings but cannot be interpreted both ways at once) and the two in this section are instances of paradoxical sameness.

There is a similarity with Fauconnier and Turner's (2002) Conceptual Integration Theory in that both their proposal and Apter's involve the emergence of new or enhanced qualities through which the concept can be interpreted. Apter applies his proposal directly to humour with the suggestion that the synergic emergent properties of the concept are accompanied by an increase in conscious awareness and arousal. He gives little indication, however, as to why this increase in awareness occurs. What I propose is that the newness of the presentation of the concept requires the receiver to attend to the interpretation in a way analogous to how the recognition of an object in an unfamiliar view requires the viewer's attention. This effortful processing (Farah's (2000: 100) suggested 'visual problem solving') is accompanied by increased awareness of the process. If the receiver is required to attend to a novel view of a concept to interpret it, the properties of the concept will be brought to their attention and their awareness of the concept will increase. If a relay has brought the properties of the concept to the attention of the receiver, this also draws the receiver's attention to the fact that this concept is part of their shared experience and helps encourage social cohesion of the two parties.

3.4 Receiver-source divergence

Rather than the traditional suggestion that incongruity leads to humour, I propose that humour brings existing contrasts to attention. However, this is just one aspect of an account of humour. It is clear that not all contrasts are perceived as humorous and neither can it be expected that drawing attention to a contrast will necessarily lead to a humorous response from a receiver. Indeed, the process of drawing attention to a

contrast may not be motivated by a relay's intention to amuse. However, in terms of accounting for humour, one of the differences between the idea that incongruity leads to humour and the idea that humour draws attention to contrasts that can be recognised by participants is that the latter incorporates the concept of a cognitive distance. If the cognitive distance between a humour participant and the source is too great they may not recognise it as part of their experiences. If, however, the distance between source and receiver is too small, the receiver may recognise humour but not appreciate it because they identify with the source. Therefore, there will need to be sufficient distance between receiver and source. This distance could be the vertical distance between source and receiver alluded to by superiority theories. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, in my discussion of diminishment, I propose that this distance need not only be vertical and, in fact, the crucial distance element here is that the receiver-source distance must be greater than the receiver-relay distance. In reference to the triangular arrangement of source, relay and receiver that I outlined in Chapter 2, humour will lead to a convergence of receiver and relay and a divergence of the source from the receiver.

One, perhaps more obvious, way in which receiver and source can diverge is through the spatial diminishment effect that I described in Section 3.2.2, where distance is introduced through world switches, thus positioning the source at a more remote location to the receiver. This has the qualitative effect of understatement in the presentation of the source by the relay and I would argue that the distance constructed between receiver and source facilitates the receiver's appreciation. Less obvious is the way in which distance between source and receiver can be constructed through the amplification effect. If something is made bigger, it will tend to be perceived as nearer and, therefore, as something that could pose a threat. While this fits with one aspect of humour – that humour appreciation correlates with a state of physiological arousal, as I discussed previously – it appears to be directly in opposition with the receiver-source distancing idea. However, comparing the amplification effect with the other routes to bringing contrasts to awareness that I have proposed, what they have in common is that they are all ways of bringing about defamiliarisation of a source. For example, the blends involved in object-object contrasting represent semantic deviation and amplification is a literal foregrounding of the source.

The term 'defamiliarisation' is apt because, in terms of a receiver's recognition of the source, it is presented in an unfamiliar way. Mukařovský (1964 [1932]: 19) states

that ‘Foregrounding is the opposite of automatization’, which has parallels with my discussion of object recognition in the beginning section of this chapter. If a familiar object is presented in an unfamiliar way, its recognition ceases to be automatic and becomes effortful, necessarily attended, and accompanied by greater awareness of the recognition process. The presentation of the object, therefore, makes the object a less familiar, less prototypical example of its category. If decreased prototypicality can be seen as increased radial distance from a prototypical centre, then, although a source that has been amplified is made bigger, it has also been made more distant. This distance can account for the attenuation of threat and a receiver’s appreciation of a source. This type of distortion, as Simpson (2003) puts it, of the source would be the way in which members of a group could be dehumanised through the creation and propagation of a stereotype, since they would be presented as less prototypically human. More generally, if a receiver’s schema of a source of humour undergoes accretion with the distorted features presented by the relay, this could have the effect of increasing more permanently the distance between receiver and source. Added to which, this schema accretion would increase the extent to which receiver and relay share knowledge of the source, decreasing the receiver-relay distance. This could mean that future humour involving that source might be more readily appreciated by the receiver.

In addition to the distancing of the source through defamiliarisation, the defamiliarisation of the source is also consistent with the idea of humour as a form of play. As I explained in the previous chapter, play can be thought of as process-figured activity, something that has a parallel in Langacker’s (2008) idea of subjective construal, where the conceptualisers and process of conceptualisation are emphasised to a greater extent than the conceptual content. Since the spatial relationship between receiver, relay, and source is triangular, the subjective construal of the source as presented by the relay can be represented as two sides of that triangle: source-relay and relay-receiver. The remaining side represents the receiver’s own familiar – more objective – view of the source (see Figure 3.1).

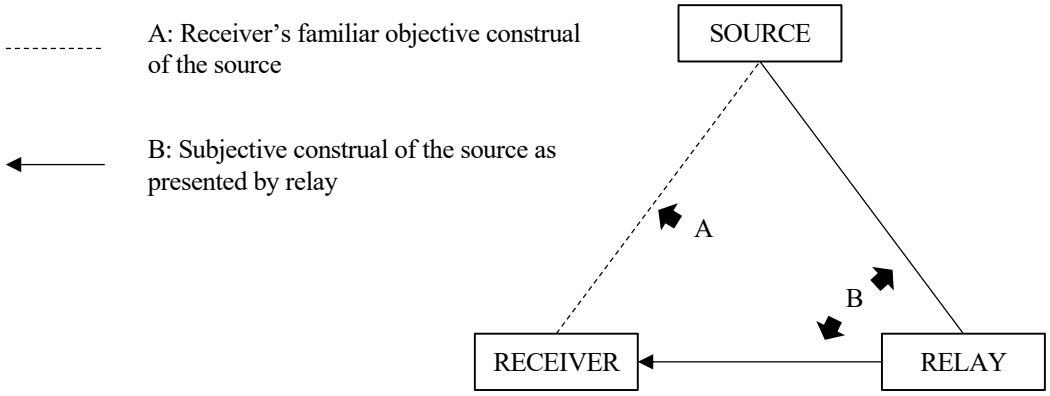


Figure 3.1 – Objective and subjective construals of the source

Whatever the means of constructing the subjective construal, whether through juxtaposition or presentation in an unfamiliar view, the result will be two contrasting interpretations of the source: a usually unnoticed more objective construal of the source and a defamiliarised more subjective construal. In other words, these two interpretations of the source would constitute, respectively, the receiver's disposition towards the source and the relay's imposition. The contrast in these two construals will bring the process of their interaction with the relay to the receiver's awareness, and with it their awareness of the relay. The idea of these two source construals is something I will discuss further in the following chapter with regard to the implications it has for the objectivity of the construal of the relay.

Chapter 4. Objective construal of relay

In the previous chapter I discussed how the subjectivity of construal of the source contributes to the process of humour. However, this is just one aspect of the process. The 3D Model involves the relationship between humour participants as well as their relationship with the source. In the first section, starting with a Relevance Theory account of humour and relating this to other linguistic models and theories of humour, I will discuss how the receiver's expectation of the relay's humorous intention affects their humorous interpretation of the relay's presentation of the source. Specifically, I will discuss the similarities between the Relevance Theory notion of a mutual cognitive environment and the Text World Theory idea of Common Ground. I will also discuss how these concepts both relate to the spatial idea of a shift by a receiver to the relay's point of view. In the section following this discussion, I will discuss how a reader's expectation of humour can be encouraged by the cover of a novel. I will then demonstrate how the relay can draw attention to their proximity with the receiver to encourage a humorous construal. Finally, I will discuss how the effort involved in a humorous interpretation by the receiver is connected to the relationship between the relay and the receiver.

4.1 Expectation and intention

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, one branch of humour research concerns the pragmatics of humour and, in particular, the application of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995) to attempt to explain how one interpretation (that is, in my conceptualisation, the process-figured one) is favoured over another. Relevance Theory proposes two principles of relevance: a cognitive principle of relevance and a communicative principle of relevance (Sperber and Wilson, 1995). The cognitive principle of relevance is the idea that 'human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance' (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 260), where relevance refers to the maximum cognitive effect for the least cognitive effort. In other words, there is a 'balancing act between cognitive effects and processing effort' (Clark, 2013: 30). This means that we tend to attend to things that are worth the effort involved in attending to them. To repeat the example I used in the previous chapter, if a grazing animal senses

the presence of a predator, it is worth their effort to locate the predator to maximise their chance of escape. The effort involved in locating something not likely to affect the animal (or less relevant) would be less worthwhile (or have less effect). In the case of humorous communication, it is proposed that the relevant cognitive effect will be amusement (Yus, 2003, 2016). Therefore, if someone perceives something as likely to lead to amusement, they will continue to expend effort in finding an amusing interpretation either until an amusing interpretation is found or until the effort in doing so exceeds the likely amusement effect. This implies that an increase in effort required to comprehend a proposition does not necessarily result in a decrease in amusement. The crucial factor is whether or not the perceived amusement return is commensurate with the investment of effort.

This might appear at odds with neuroscientific evidence (Derks et al., 1998) that humour appreciation correlates with rapidity of cognitive processing, with the assumption being that something that can be processed more rapidly can be done so because it is easier to process. However, the stimuli used in these studies all had a joke format and, as such, participants would have had a high expectation that they would be humorous. Therefore, they would have expected and have been prepared to expend a relatively high amount of effort in comprehension of the joke in order to 'get' the joke and gain the reward of amusement. They were also in an experimental situation where their goal was to rate the amusement of a joke rather than a natural situation where they might not have been prepared to expend as much effort in trying to comprehend the joke and might have stopped their effortful search for a humorous interpretation after a certain point. It may have been that the experimental procedure led to processing times higher than would normally be the case. In short, besides giving an idea that amusement decreases where the effort involved becomes too great, these experimental findings are unlikely to give the whole picture with regard to the relationship between effort and amusement. For one thing, although Derks et al. propose a negative linear relationship between effort and amusement (with the implication that this line will, at some point, pass through zero), comprehension of any humorous proposition will require some effort if this involves, as I propose, the effortful recognition of the source as presented by the relay.

There are also experimental findings that suggest there is an inverted-U relationship between effort and amusement (Wyer and Collins, 1992). That is,

amusement increases with effort up to a certain point and then decreases. In this study, participants read a story that could either have a humorous or a non-humorous interpretation. The title of the story could suggest either the humorous interpretation or the non-humorous one and, in addition, a sentence at the end of the text could either suggest the humorous theme or the non-humorous theme. Participants rated as most funny the stories where the humorous interpretation was either suggested in the title or at the end, but not both. As such, the conclusion was made that a moderate level of comprehension difficulty maximised amusement. However, this effect may have been seen for different reasons. The end-of-text suggestion could have acted in the way of a punchline, drawing attention to the contrast in the first (serious) interpretation and the second (diminished) interpretation. The effort here would be in the re-interpretation. Giving the suggestion of the humorous interpretation in the title could have increased participants' expectation of humour and encouraging their effortful search for a relevant second interpretation from the start. Again, there would be contrast between the more obvious interpretation and the diminished one, but the diminished interpretation would be more effortfully achieved by the receiver.

The finding that amusement increases when the title of a story indicates that it is humorous is in line with the second principle of Relevance Theory – the communicative principle – that 'every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance' (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 260). In other words, if a receiver expects to be amused by a relay, they will tend to be prepared to expend the effort to find the relevant humorous interpretation whether or not they do, in fact, experience amusement as a result. This suggests that relevance (or the inference that a relay's communication will have humorous intent) is predictive and, if expected, humorous intent will be inferred unless there is a reason not to infer it.

There is evidence, supporting the communicative principle, that the recognition and appreciation of humour is more likely if a person is expecting something to be humorous (Wimer and Beins, 2008). If someone is not expecting a proposition to be humorous, they will be less prepared to expend the effort involved in finding an interpretation that produces the effect of amusement. This expectation may arise from verbal cues, such as the standard beginnings of jokes (e.g. 'What do you call a...') (Morreall, 1987), which can, in fact, lead to the misinterpretation of a serious question as the set-up of a joke. Expectation can also arise from the context of communication

(Zillmann and Cantor, 1976) – for instance, an audience member at a stand-up comedy gig is likely to be running a stand-up comedy gig schema in which the person on stage says things that are intended to be funny. Alternatively, it is possible that expectation of humour could arise from characteristics attributed to a person based on, for example, previous experience of their likelihood of engaging in humorous communication. Sperber and Wilson (1995: 15) propose that each participant has a *cognitive environment* formed of what they term *contexts*, which they define as the 'set of premises used in interpreting an utterance' and which can include any knowledge, beliefs, or assumptions held by the hearer. The cognitive environment is formed of all the contexts that a participant is able to access. It is proposed that factors that contribute to the expectation of humour do so because some contexts are more salient than others at a given moment, and these contexts require less effort to be activated (Giora, 2003; Yus, 2016).

Sperber and Wilson (1995) also discuss the *mutual cognitive environment*. This is the concept that there is a set of shared contexts that are accepted as true by discourse participants and is the equivalent of what is termed, in Text World Theory, the Common Ground (Werth, 1999). Unless a proposition represents information that already exists in the Common Ground or mutual cognitive environment, the new information it represents is negotiated for inclusion. Both concepts involve the idea that the speaker must make assumptions about how the hearer will identify relevant contexts, to use the Relevance Theory terminology. They also involve the idea that the hearer must make assumptions about how the speaker intended their identification of relevant contexts to proceed. If a receiver attributes humorous intention to a relay, this will make salient contexts that have the potential to be relevant to the process of humour, thus decreasing the effort needed to activate them. This could be conceptualised spatially as a movement by the receiver towards the relay.

Browse (2018) suggests a refinement to the Text World Theory idea of Common Ground. This acknowledges the fact that a speaker and a hearer may have different assumptions about the other's knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions. He proposes a differentiation of the *Idealised Common Ground* from the *Actual Common Ground*. The Idealised Common Ground is the knowledge set that a speaker ascribes to an idealised hearer on which the idealised hearer would base their understanding of a proposition. He also proposes the idea of a *proffered text world*, which is the hearer's modelling of

the speaker's worldview on the basis of what they say. Thus, a hearer can compare their own representation of the actual world with their representation of the speaker's. My addition to this is that is that the difference between the hearer's representation of the actual world and their representation of the speaker's will, spatially, constitute distance between receiver and relay. The greater the difference (or spatially, the distance) between these, the more effort will be required for the hearer to accept as true the speaker's proposition.

Returning to the cognitive principle of Relevance Theory, although the cognitive environment of the hearer may include multiple contexts, comprehension of an ostensive stimulus will only involve one context – the relevant context. It is the change to this context, produced by the stimulus, that results in the cognitive effect. The defamiliarisation effects on the source that were the subject of the previous chapter could constitute such changes to contexts. The cognitive effort involved refers to the effort required to search for a context that will be changed by the stimulus, or, to put this another way, the effortful object recognition process that results from the relay's presentation of the source. Although the idea of optimal relevance (Sperber and Wilson, 1995) is that the relevant stimulus is the one giving the greatest effect for the least effort, a receiver will be prepared to expend this 'supplementary effort' (Yus, 2017: 190) if their expectation is that there will be a humorous return. This is similar to the suggestion of Wyer and Collins (1992) that there is an inverted-U relationship between effort and amusement, and is consistent with my proposal that the receiver must be both sufficiently near and sufficiently far from the source. There must be sufficient cognitive proximity between source and receiver in order that they possess a relevant context that they can identify. However, if humour is appreciated, the receiver's proximity with the relay will be greater than their proximity with the source. This is because, unless the receiver happens to be in the same spatio-temporal location as the source, the source will not just be the source as viewed directly by the receiver, but a construal of the source as presented by the relay. Therefore, in recognising the source as presented by the relay, the cognitive distance between receiver and source will also involve the distance between receiver and relay (Figure 4.1).

The recognition of the source as construed by the relay is what, in Text World Theory terms, would be the incrementation into the Actual Common Ground of the

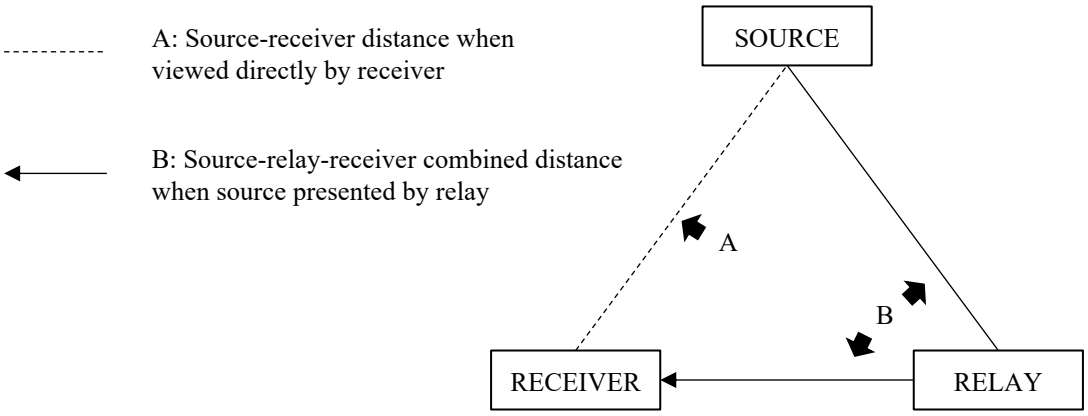


Figure 4.1 – Two cognitive distances between source and receiver

information represented as the proffered text world. The greater the distance between relay and receiver in terms of the difference between the receiver's representation of the world and the proffered text world, the more effort will be required for the information presented by the relay to be incremented into the Actual Common Ground.

Along with my proposal that distance between receiver and source – either literally or metaphorically, temporally, socially, or hypothetically – must be greater than that between receiver and relay, I also propose that humorous communication is process-figured. If this is the case, the viewing arrangement (Langacker, 2008) will be a subjective construal of the source and the relay will be construed objectively. It would follow, then, that a viewing arrangement in which the subjective construal of the source tends towards maximal subjectivity and the construal of the relay tends towards maximal objectivity will be more readily appreciated as humorous. Increased subjectivity of relay and increased objectivity of source would lessen the tendency for humorous appreciation.

Tying my two proposals together, there is a link between distance and subjectivity / objectivity. In a subjective construal of the source, the relay is relatively objectively construed, and so is relatively figured in the construal. Since things that are figured tend to be things that are near, this shows explicitly the proximity of the relay and receiver. In addition, a subjective construal of the source involves the receiver's

reconstruction of the point of view of the relay and involves a shift along planes of space, time, ideology, and psychology, in Fowler's (1986) model. The effort involved in the shift would be consistent with the 'supplementary effort' (Yus, 2017: 190) involved in a humorous interpretation (in a Relevance Theoretical account), or the effort involved in incrementation of information into the Actual Common Ground (in Text World Theory terms), or the effortful recognition of concepts (in my own proposals). However, the smaller the distance of that shift, the more likely the relay's construal of the source will align with the receiver's knowledge of the source, and the smaller the effort that will be needed for the receiver to make this mental shift. This would increase the tendency for a receiver to recognise the source as presented by the relay. A greater shift distance may be perceived as worth the increased effort if the receiver expects that it will result in sufficient humour appreciation. If the shift is too great, though, the misalignment in views could result in unappreciated humour. This could be because the receiver does not have a relevant context that they can (readily) identify (that is, they are not sufficiently familiar with the source to recognise it). Alternatively, it could be because the effort involved in making a change to a relevant context (or, in other words, reconciling their own perception of the source with the construal of the source presented by the relay) is too great.

Simpson (1993) argues that spatio-temporal point of view would be best subsumed into psychological point of view on the basis that psychological disposition is likely to affect how spatio-temporal point of view is presented. This is particularly pertinent to humour as this process relies on the receiver aligning their ideological perception of the source with that of the relay. I would argue that, if the psychological (or ideological) point of view of the relay were greatly different to that of the receiver, the shift (including along spatial and temporal planes) might require too great an effort. An example that springs to mind is the P.G. Wodehouse novel *Thank You, Jeeves* (1982 [1934]), which involves a number of characters 'blacking up'. I usually find it easy with Wodehouse's works to assimilate a time-, space- and ideology-shifted point of view and can appreciate the humour. However, with parts of this particular novel, while I can acknowledge that the actions of the characters might have been acceptable at the time the novel is set (and written), I find it very hard to immerse myself in the text world. Rather than a viewing arrangement involving an objective construal of Bertie Wooster (as $relay_{narrator}$) and me as conceptualisers, the conceptual content comprises an objective construal of Wodehouse writing Wooster's telling of the story. Therefore, not

only is the conceptual content objectively construed (the opposite of what would facilitate humour appreciation), but I diverge from rather than converge with the relay because the effort of aligning my point of view is too great. This is something I will discuss in greater depth in Section 4.4.

There is also a link between effort and subjective construal. Because humour involves the subjective construal of a source, and a receiver's shift to a relay's point of view, the process of recognition by the receiver is less automatic (as I argued in the previous chapter). This means that the corollary of effort involved in recognition of the relay's construal of the source is the figuring of the process of recognition.

In Sections 4.2 and 4.3, I will explore how a text can encourage a receiver to expect humour, something that can be conceptualised as the receiver moving themself towards the source, or facilitate a humorous interpretation, conceptualised as the relay moving towards the receiver. In Section 4.4, I will discuss how the effort involved in the receiver's aligning themself with the relay can result in divergence of the two.

4.2 Author and text expectation

As I mentioned in the previous section, a Relevance Theory account of communication uses the idea that each participant has a cognitive environment comprised of a set of cognitive contexts that are accessible to them and that some contexts will be more readily accessible than others (Sperber and Wilson, 1995). These more salient contexts are primed by the circumstances and the way in which communication takes place. The communication that takes place in literary reading is a different situation from, for instance, a face-to-face conversation. There is greater spatio-temporal distance between (implied) interlocutors and a reader can only access cues such as facial expression or intonation that are involved in humour comprehension (Gironzetti, 2017) by being explicitly told about them, often indirectly through the observations of another party.

Literary reading is also, for the most part, a volitional act. Unless someone is reading a particular literary work because, for example, their course of study dictates that they do, people read because they choose to. Likewise, people generally choose what they read. It seems likely that if people read humorous fiction it will tend to be

because they have chosen to. In choosing to read a humorous novel, certain cognitive contexts related to the comprehension of humour may be activated. This may reduce the effort involved in finding a relevant context to be changed by a stimulus that is interpreted as humorous. However, if a reader wishes to read a humorous novel, their selection of a novel will be influenced by factors that determine their expectation that that novel will be humorous. I have informally asked a number of people, who I know enjoy humorous fiction, how they would go about choosing a book if they wanted to read something humorous. Their answers tend to revolve around authors, either because of their general knowledge about an author, or because they have read other works by that author, or because someone else (a friend or a reviewer) has recommended the author (or a particular book by them) as humorous. The other strategy involves going into a bookshop and picking something that 'looks funny'. Although selecting a book that 'looks funny' was a strategy given by few people compared with the author strategy, the 'look' of a book, whether or not this is the reason for its selection, is likely to have an effect on a reader's interpretation of the content before they have even started reading by making salient contexts that are related to the reader's expectations of the novel's subject matter, or how it may affect them emotionally.

If a book 'looks funny', it is reasonable to assume it looks close to a person's idea of a prototypical humorous novel. It would also be reasonable, given the radial nature of prototypicality, to assume there are novels that are perceived as more humorous, and some that are perceived as so peripheral to the prototypical centre that they are not categorised as humorous. Indeed, in selecting texts to work with in this thesis, I made the decision to include novels that were not, to my mind, primarily humorous, but did involve humour. As Gavins (2013) argues, ideas about literary genre are based on these cognitive groupings. It is also possible for a novel to be perceived as belonging to more than one category, as a hybrid of two or more genres (Steen, 2011). Again, in selecting texts, I tried to find novels that were humorous but that were in some way different to each other. Although it was not my intention to use genre as the basis for this, the novels I selected include, amongst others, a novel crossing genre boundaries of crime and humour (*Mystery Man*), one humorous fantasy / quest / science fiction novel (*The Good, The Bad and The Smug*), and one that could be categorised as, at least, any of science fiction, historical fiction, romance, or humour (*The Teleportation Accident*).

It is possible that the contrast between two juxtaposed concepts of genres contributes to an overall humour effect (in the way I discussed in the previous chapter), but, if one of those genres is 'humour', the perception of that genre must originate prior to that juxtaposition. This also supposes that 'humour' can be considered a genre. Even though the content elements of a humorous novel can be those of another genre, such as with the crime elements present in *Mystery Man*, I think it realistic to make this supposition. This is because, in line with Gavins' argument that genre is based on cognitive groupings, I can certainly cast my eye over my own (uncategorised) bookcases and make an immediate decision as to whether or not I would consider each book to be in a 'humour' grouping. There are very few that I find difficult to categorise. I would also categorise certain books as 'non-humour' even though I know that humour occurs in them and that I found them amusing. There are also books that I would categorise as 'humour' even though I did not find them at all amusing. It seems to me that the difference is that with the books in my 'humour' category I have a sense that the author's primary intention is to amuse their readers. With the 'non-humour' category, humour is incidental. I would argue that inclusion of a text in a 'humour' genre is based on the function of the text rather than its content. Returning to the 'look' of a book, the covers of the books I have categorised as 'humour' also seem to share certain characteristics of appearance. I do not know whether or not appearance directly influenced my categorisation decisions. However, I suspect that the appearance of a book's cover can affect a reading of it through the effect it has on a reader's initial impressions and expectations.

The cover of a novel is multimodal, containing both text and, usually, images. Even where there is no cover illustration, the typography of the title and author's name, the colour of the binding, and even the publisher, for example, can convey to a potential reader information about the content and, especially if it is a literary work, the emotional effects they may experience. Gibbons (2016) gives a framework through which the elements of a multimodal text can combine to lead a reader to form an impression of a genre. This involves separation of the elements of the page into semiotic units and then analysis of how these base units evoke different semantic fields. Figure 4.2 shows the front covers of UK paperback editions of *The Good, The Bad and The Smug* (Holt, 2015) and *Black Swan Green* (Mitchell, 2014). The first of these made me expect humour to a greater extent, the second to a lesser extent.



Figure 4.2 – Front covers of The Good, The Bad and The Smug *and* Black Swan Green

Taking the first cover, *The Good, The Bad and The Smug*, and its first base unit, the title, there are three immediate observations to make. First, each part of the title is a different bright colour, which gives a sense of playfulness. Second, the typeface has a child-like hand-painted quality to it, which, I believe, contributes to the sense of playfulness and increases the sense of it having been drawn by a person, enhancing the process-figuring of the title. Third, it is a play on the title of the spaghetti western *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly* (Leone, 1966). This also immediately gives the impression that the novel is not intended as serious. In addition, it recalls the plot of the film (for those who have seen it) as the competition to find some gold and, thus, a sense that the novel's plot may have a similar adventure or quest theme. Since the film is a well-known western, I would imagine that this might be the case even for those who have not seen the film. The contrast in the two titles also figures the 'The Smug' part, which is also typographically larger. While good and bad have, for me, associations with morality and virtue, especially when juxtaposed, smugness has a baser quality, which in itself contrasts with the more sublime good and bad. The base quality of 'smug' is compounded by its positioning in the usual place of 'ugly' and also by the phonological similarities of the two words. This amplifies the contrast of the smug part of the title with the good and bad parts.

The next base unit, the subtitle ('A novel beyond good and evil'), is similarly brightly coloured. It echoes the 'Good' and 'Bad' of the title, but the deictic 'beyond' gives an idea of the novel being outside the limits of the known world. This idea of an imagined world is also reflected in one of the images on the cover, a silhouette of a dragon. Three of the other images, also silhouettes, are of figures who, it transpires on reading the novel, correspond to the good, bad, and smug components of the title. Two of them have weapons (a sword and a bow and arrows), which contributes to the notion of adventure and also of the setting in a distant time. A smaller scale cartoon-like image depicting a battle between, presumably, the occupants of two castles reinforces this. My first impression and assumption of the battle was that it was 'good' against 'bad', an image produced in response to the title and subtitle and which gives the idea that the plot may involve this theme. Subtly, this is also picked up by the fact that the colours of the pennants and helmet plumes of each side correspond to the typographic colour of 'The Good' and 'The Bad' in the title.

Some of the individual base units of the cover give the impression of a humorous novel and some give the impression of a fantasy adventure novel. However, what I think gives one of the strongest ideas of the novel as a humorous one is the contrast in what the images depict compared with the way in which they are depicted. There is an image of a battle of good against evil, but it is cartoon-like. The 'smug' woman is depicted with weaponry, but she is somewhat reminiscent of a pantomime principal boy. In addition, the way these individual components relate to each other contributes to a sense of humorousness. The individual base units are overlaid on a background which brings to mind aged or slightly singed parchment, which contributes to the distant time / quest idea. However, what is overlaid seems incongruent with this. I would probably expect expert calligraphy on parchment but the typeface used is a brightly-coloured sans-serif one that appears slightly inexpert in its execution. In short, the cover as a whole seems to juxtapose ideas of different genres which contrasts these concepts in the way I discussed in the previous chapter.

The cover of *Black Swan Green* has a very different overall look to the cover of *The Good, The Bad and The Smug*. It seems to be more cohesive as a whole instead of appearing to show a degree of incongruity. For example, rather than the multiple bright colours on a parchment-like background used in *The Good, The Bad and The Smug*, the colours used on this cover are all shades of green or yellow, or black, which even reflect

the title. Examining the individual base units, there are three text base units: the title, the author's name, and a quote from a review. These are surrounded by an image of, to the left, seeds from a dandelion head appearing to float into the spindle hole of a record and a swarm of bees appearing to emerge from the record to the right of the text. Both the dandelion seeds and the bees are, to me, reminiscent of childhood summers, while the record suggests a time before my memory. Instead of the cartoon-like images on the cover of *The Good, The Bad and The Smug*, the illustration here has a realistic quality.

The first text base unit here, the title, does not convey any immediate idea of playfulness and the typeface used is very different to the one used in *The Good, The Bad and The Smug*, without the hand-painted quality that enhances the figuring of the process of play. It is also different to the typeface used for the remaining two text units (the author's name and a quote from a review), a black serif typeface similar to that typically used in print. The quote is from a review in *The Observer*, which, as a serious newspaper, adds a sense of gravity and the idea that the novel is a work of serious (as opposed to humorous) fiction. However, it also gives the only obvious clue that humour can be expected, by describing the novel as, at times, 'extremely funny'.

I would argue that the differences between the covers of *Black Swan Green* and *The Good, The Bad and The Smug* can be condensed into one overall difference: that with the former, there is little contrast between what is written or depicted and how this is done, but, with the latter, this contrast is noticeable. The effect of this is to bring attention to the process of communicating what is on the cover of *The Good, The Bad and The Smug* more so than with *Black Swan Green*. If the communication process is brought to attention, so too is the person doing the communicating. While, in actuality, this would more often be a book cover designer than the author, I think it likely that the designer would be amalgamated into a reader's representation of an authorial relay, possibly because of the prominence of the author's name on the cover. My own impression of the cover of *The Good, The Bad and The Smug* involves a strong sense of it being a Tom Holt novel, whereas my impression of *Black Swan Green* is more that it is a novel that happens to be by David Mitchell. I had read other novels by both authors prior to reading these and, while Mitchell's were quite dissimilar to each other, Holt's were almost identical in style, incorporating a strong narratorial voice and giving a clear impression of the implied author. My sense is that my impression of the cover of *The*

Good, The Bad and The Smug acted in a confirmatory way, supporting my expectation of humour like that I had encountered in Holt's other novels.

I discussed previously that a Relevance Theory account of humour proposes that the inference of humorous intent means that a receiver is prepared to expend additional effort in finding an interpretation that leads to the cognitive effect of humour. My proposal is that this can be conceptualised spatially, as the receiver being prepared to move towards the relay to comprehend their presentation of the source. Therefore, my expectation of humour results in my willingness to converge with the relay. In addition, the strong presence of Tom Holt as the author of the novel, in this process-figured construal of the cover, means that he is construed more objectively as one of the conceptualisers. This decreases the perceived receiver-relay distance as the author becomes an object of attention. As such, the cover of a novel can both increase a receiver's expectation of humour, and also lead to relay-receiver convergence through the objectivity of the construal of the relay. I will expand on this latter effect in the following section.

4.3 Simulating proximity

As I explained in the first section of this chapter, the necessary proximity between relay and receiver tends to be ignored in cognitive theories of humour. In literary reading, it can seem as if one is sharing humour with an author even though the author and receiver are located in different spatio-temporal locations – a split discourse world, in Text World Theory terms (Gavins, 2007). In addition, characters or a narrator can act as relay, requiring the simulation of proximity across the text world boundary. In this section I will explore how this proximity can be achieved.

As an example, the following passage from *Things My Girlfriend and I Have Argued About* demonstrates several ways in which proximity between relay and receiver can be simulated.

> My job in the Learning Centre, on this particular Monday morning, was to be the Supervisor of the Computer Team. Please don't think that this makes me a techie, computer geek type. No, I took great pride in the fact that I really had very little idea what I was doing at all. A few key phrases will get you a long way in IT technical support. 'Ah, looks like a server problem', for example, has kept many a

> technician in paid employment for years. Another invaluable stand-by is to tut out a rueful smile and read aloud the name written on the computer in front of you – 'Yeah, the TX Series are notorious for doing this,' – that'll work for anything from the mouse pointer not moving to a minor fire. If you really want to get ahead, then a few minutes memorising the full meaning of a couple of dozen acronyms turns you from (let's say) some idiot with a degree in social geography and a mad German girlfriend into a powerful shaman. Casually let slip that the 'http' in web addresses is short, *of course*, for Hyper Text Transfer Protocol and your boss will infer that you have more than not the remotest idea whatsoever about how a hyper text transfer protocol functions – and then won't dare sack you for something as trivial as, say, none of the PCs in the building working.
>
> (Millington, 2006: 14-15)

The novel has a homodiegetic narrator who acts as relay here, and the source is constructed through the way he deals with the lack of knowledge he has to do his job. Because the narrator's behaviour is the source, there are two enactors of the character in play: a past / ongoing enactor who has presumably done the things he suggests and who is thus part of the source, and the current enactor acting as relay. As I explained in Chapter 3, the contrast between IT technician-as-expert and IT technician-as-fraud brings both states to the attention of the receiver, whose own experiences with IT support will be used to recognise the humour in the passage. The receiver may use these experiences to elaborate, or add detail to the source (Wyer and Collins, 1992). For example, I imagined the narrator's colleagues being unwittingly fooled and thanking the narrator for his help. This adds another facet to the source in the contrast between the narrator's interpretation of the encounter and that of his colleagues. I also wondered if I had also been fooled in the past by a similar act. This might seem to give me a position at the viewpoint of an unspecified other character in the novel, also being taken in by the act, therefore aligning me with the source. However, my overall sense is of sharing humour with the relay. Thus, even though my real-life experience in this type of situation is closer to the source rather than the relay, the text positions me, as receiver, closer to the relay. I will show here how this happens.

Besides having a homodiegetic narrator, the passage also uses a doubly deictic second person address (Herman, 1994): 'A few key phrases will get you…'; 'If you really want…', '…turns you from…'; '…your boss will infer that you have… won't dare sack you…'. This has a dual function, firstly as a generalised 'you' referring to an indefinite addressee, in this case anyone working in IT technical support or who may be considering it. Secondly, it appears also to refer across the text world boundary to the reader. This has the effect not only of emphasising the fact that there is a reader reading

the novel, but of positioning the reader as a second implied interlocutor with the text acting as one half of a conversation taking place in a shared spatio-temporal location. I would argue that this second referent is the primary use. It is reinforced by the directive 'Please don't think…' as the potential threat to negative face (Brown and Levinson, 1987) (that is, a person's desire to be unimpeded by others) in the command is mitigated by the polite 'Please…'. This gives the sense of the narrator's concern for the face needs of their addressee, which implies that this is a specific person, rather than a non-specific group, and that the two parties are occupying the same space. 'No, I took…' also gives the impression of a specific addressee who might have formed an opinion of the narrator that he rejects. The parenthetic '(let's say)' with its contracted 'us' also adds to this impression of a specific addressee and develops the idea of proximity of narrator and reader by including the addressee in the construction of what is being said.

The majority of the passage is comprised of representative speech acts detailing how someone with little knowledge of IT can feign technical expertise. The 'you' addressee would be a generalised *you*, indicating a non-specific group of people. In terms of illocutionary force, however, these statements have the potential to act as directives, suggesting how the addressee – a specific 'you' – can follow the narrator's example. This conveys an assumption that the addressee shares the narrator's ignorance of IT and, thus, proximity in terms of their experience. The illocutionary force of the narrator's statements also increases the figuring of the reader, as potential addressee, and so increases the subjectivity of the construal of the passage. This is through the creation of hypothetical future text worlds in which, for example, the addressee 'want(s) to get ahead'. Although these are remote text worlds, they are participant-accessible with 'you' the receiver / addressee positioned explicitly within them. This increases the receiver's sense of sharing world experience with the relay rather than the source and, therefore, proximity with the relay. The subjectivity of the construal means that their awareness of this shared experience is also increased.

The following passage from *The Good, The Bad and The Smug* also uses direct address of the reader to simulate proximity between receiver and relay. However, there are differences in how this occurs and what the overall effect is.

> Presumably you're aware (the bald man said) of the Law of Conservation of Matter.
>
> You aren't? Gosh. Not to worry, because I was just about to say, forget everything you've ever learned about the Law of Conservation of Matter, ignore it, expunge it from your mind entirely. But you won't have to do that, so that's all right. Actually, you're far better off than most people because they know about the Law of Conservation of Matter, and it confuses the hell out of them when I tell them what they actually ought to know, which is the Law of Conservation of All Sorts of Things.
>
> With me so far? Oh good.
>
> (Holt, 2015: 195)

The source here is again multi-faceted. First there is the bald man's enquiry about awareness of the Law of Conservation of Matter juxtaposed with his instruction (in illocutionary terms) that this be ignored. More generally, in Gricean terms, this flouts the maxim of relation (Grice, 1975), so the construction of this discourse puts it some distance from an expected prototypical example of conversation. Second, there is the idea that the Law of Conservation of Matter is in some way untrue and to be disregarded and replaced with another Law, which contrasts the usual development of scientific theory with this seemingly whimsical replacement. The third aspect of the source is the name of this second Law contrasting the scientific-sounding 'Law of Conservation' and the colloquial-sounding 'All Sorts of Things'. The capitalisation of the latter part itself contrasts the prosaicness of a phrase usually found in everyday speech with the more privileged scientific discourse.

The narratorial arrangement of the passage is heterodiegetic and the speaker is indicated, through the parenthetic 'the bald man said', as one of the characters of the novel, making this an example of free direct speech. My sense, reading the passage, is that this is an instance where the relay is not the speaker. In fact, it feels more that I have emerged from the text world and that I am sharing humour as a discourse world participant with the author, who has a fairly strong presence throughout the novel. This is partly because the bald man's presence is almost negligible. The passage, therefore, almost becomes an example of direct narratorial address, which would encourage my positioning further out along the authorial series of conceptualisers. However, the bald man is still present to some extent but the way his direct address is constructed promotes the sense of emergence and sharing of humour with the author.

The bald man's 'you' addressee here is doubly deictic, potentially referring to another character within the text world or to the reader. There is an indication, though, that the addressee is intended as the reader. The first sentence of the passage ('Presumably you're aware…'), in everyday conversation, would be expected to produce a response either to confirm this or not. The response is absent, however, but the subsequent conversational turn occurs as if the addressee had responded. This is enhanced by the line break before the bald man's next turn. If the intended addressee were another character in the text world, their response would be expected to be given in the text. Because it is not, the reader must first understand that a response is expected and then fill the gap with the implied response. This increases the reader's role in the construction of the text as if the conversation were happening between the bald man and the reader in the same spatio-temporal location, as with the previous passage. However, because the response requires discourse world activity on the part of the reader, I would argue that this helps to increase the sense that this dialogue is happening across the text world boundary. Gibbons (2012: 80) refers to this as a figured trans-world, where a reader is required to adopt an active role in the narrative, resulting in their increased 'self-awareness and heightened involvement with the ... literary experience'. I will return to the reader's role in the following chapter, but, in terms of the viewing arrangement, by increasing the reader's awareness of their role in the conceptualisation, this figures the process of construal, encouraging a humorous interpretation.

The implied response further complicates the source for me because, as an actual reader, I am, in fact, aware of the Law of Conservation of Matter but the implied response of the implied reader is in the negative. The bald man's 'Gosh' indicates his contempt for the implied reader who has not heard of the Law of Conservation of Matter. This contrasts those who have an expected knowledge of the Law with those who do not. Those with knowledge can be taken to be more prototypically central, since the knowledge can be presumed, while those without knowledge are more distant. As such, those without knowledge (including the implied reader) are positioned as part of the source. However, the 'you' is the implied reader, with the actual reader (i.e. 'they', 'them') positioned deictically distal to the bald man. Since the implied reader is closer to both the source and the bald man than me as the actual reader, this allows the formation of a viewing arrangement in which I am one of the conceptualisers and the implied reader and bald man form the conceptual content. I am relatively conscious, however, of there being a separation of me, as an actual reader, from the implied reader.

As such, this is a subjective construal. A subjective construal gives more emphasis to the conceptualisers and the process of conceptualisation (Langacker, 2008), and, as I argued above, the fact that this conceptualisation is occurring across the text world boundary from the discourse world is figured. This means that the conceptualisers must be discourse world-located and, therefore, the authorial counterpart will be the (implied) author, which explains why I have a sense that the relay is the author and that I have emerged from the text world and am sharing humour with them (see Figure 4.3).

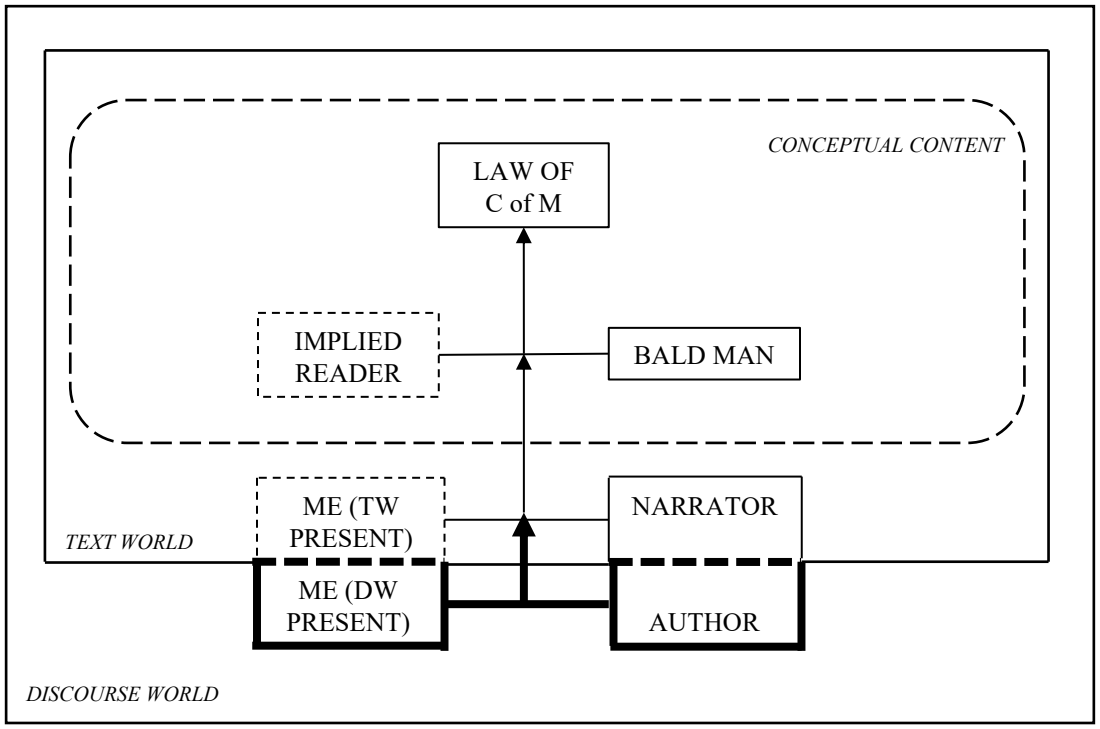


Figure 4.3 – Subjective construal across a figured trans-world

The effect is compounded by the last line, 'With me so far? Oh good.'. As with 'Presumably you're aware…', 'With me so far?' would usually be expected to produce a response. There is no line break this time, so there is no space given for a response. This gives the sense that the bald man is not bothered about whether or not the implied reader is 'with him' and that his actual intention is to confuse them and, thus, demonstrate his superiority. This positions the implied reader further away from the bald man and confirms their positioning as part of the source. As the actual reader, however, my sense is still of being positioned external to the relationship between bald

man and implied reader. In fact, by the end of the passage, the bald man's act of attempting to confuse the implied reader has become the source, contrasting his initial apparent concern for their understanding with the complexities of how he expresses himself. This is, in part, through the flouting of the maxim of manner (Grice, 1975) in the '…forget everything you've ever learned… ignore it…expunge it from your mind entirely' part of the passage, which is formed of three repetitions of one directive speech act with variations in how it is phrased.

In the previous chapter, I referred to one of Triezenberg's (2004, 2008) humour 'enhancers': that of *repetition and variation*. Repetition, for Triezenberg, represents an 'exaggeration of reality', which can 'glorify and embellish' the subject of humour (2004: 416). It is apparent that she considers that it is the variation of each repetition that enhances humour as she claims that the 'craftsmanship of repetition with skilful variation' causes laughter 'in sheer admiration for the construction of the text' (2004: 417) and that, based on the idea that a forced smile can induce feelings of happiness (Matsumoto, 1987), this laughter can induce humour appreciation. While the idea that a forced smile can affect emotion could be evidence of the embodiment of cognition, it seems to me that Triezenberg's analysis overstates the role of laughter in a receiver's response to a text since laughter and smiling do not always correlate with humour appreciation (McGhee, 1979; Provine, 2000). In fact, her analysis appears to imply that humour appreciation is required before humour is recognised, which seems improbable. Simpson and Bousfield (2017: 170) suggest that 'elegant variation' foregrounds propositional content and I would agree that the repetition increases the figuring of the source. However, I also agree, to some extent, with Triezenberg in that the repetition and its variations also increases the figuring of the party doing this communication. Since my positioning in this conceptualisation is emerged from the text world, I have the sense that my counterpart conceptualiser is the author and that they are the relay. Therefore, the repetition and variation increases the figuring of the author and enhances my sense of sharing humour with them.

The use of direct address of the reader in the construction of these two passages has three main effects. The first is in the establishment of who the relay is. Depending on the narratorial arrangement of the text, this may involve a shift out along the authorial series of conceptualisers, as I discussed in the previous section, and as seen in the passage from *The Good, The Bad and The Smug*. The second is to create a sense of

directly addressing the reader by simulating conversational discourse. This creates the perception of a direct relationship between relay and receiver. In writing a novel, although an author may have an idea of who they are writing for and may have certain specific people in mind, the act of publishing the work means that each reader is part of a mass audience. However, a reader can feel as if they are being addressed as an individual. This is much the same as the idea of synthetic personalisation proposed by Fairclough (2015), whereby public institutions create the impression of treating people as individuals rather than as a homogeneous group. This is done to help establish rapport between services and potential users. In the case of literary reading, this technique helps establish rapport between receiver and relay. Going a step further than Fairclough, I would argue that this represents a spatial convergence of receiver and relay. By addressing a reader as an individual, the onstage presence of the party doing the addressing is increased. This increases the objectivity of the construal of the relay, with the inverse effect of increasing the subjectivity of the construal of the source, promoting a humorous construal. Since the figuring of the relay increases, and objects that are figured tend to be near, this also emphasises the proximity of relay and receiver. Thus, it is not only the relay that is figured, but also their proximity to the receiver. The third effect is something I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 5. However, briefly, in increasing the receiver's awareness not only of the relay but also of themself as receiver. Just as I proposed in Chapter 3 that humour brings to attention aspects of people's experiences allowing them to recognise experiences they share, the receiver's awareness of the process of communicating with the relay is also increased. In particular, in the case of literary reading, the reader's part in the process tends to be relatively implicit. By addressing the reader directly, their part in the co-construction of the text becomes more explicit and they can feel more of an active participant, again contributing to the convergence of receiver and relay.

4.4 Effort

In the previous chapter, I argued that the source is a subjective construal, as presented by the relay, of an object or concept that is familiar to the receiver. This requires a shift by the receiver to the point of view of the relay. It also requires effort on the part of the receiver to make this shift and recognise the object or concept as it is presented. This is a spatial analogy of the Relevance Theoretic account of comprehension, which requires

a hearer (or receiver) to find a relevant context to be changed by the speaker's (or relay's) proposition. I also proposed earlier in this chapter that a spatial shift to the relay's point of view will be shorter, and, thus, be less effortful if the receiver has sufficient familiarity with the source.

I have previously discussed Triezenberg's (2004, 2008) humour enhancers of diction and repetition and variation. She also includes in her taxonomy *shared stereotypes*, *cultural factors*, and *familiarity*. I disagree with Triezenberg's proposal that these simply signal to a receiver that a text has humorous intent without contributing to the construction of humour itself. Instead, a stereotype is constructed in the same defamiliarising way that I demonstrated in Chapter 3, with certain features amplified to the neglect of others. With the emphasis on the sharing of stereotypes, I would argue that this is a question of familiarity and could be grouped as such. Further, I would argue that familiarity with the subject matter of humour is simply a necessity if humour is to be appreciated, and the category of 'cultural factors' is the rather obvious manifestation of the fact that people in different cultures will be familiar with different things. However, while I disagree with Triezenberg's analysis of the function of these 'enhancers', I agree that familiarity is an important factor to consider in modelling the recognition and appreciation of humour. Moreover, it is not just a receiver's familiarity with the source that requires consideration, but also their familiarity with the relay's presentation of the source. For example, the recognition of a source presented as a stereotype by the relay will require less effort on the part of the receiver the closer they are to the relay and the greater, therefore, their shared knowledge. In this way, a stereotype can work as a type of effort-reducing shortcut.

An example of this occurs in *Things My Girlfriend and I Have Argued About*, in the description of the team the main character (an IT manager) leads.

> In all my time working with them I'd understood, in total, twelve to sixteen words they'd said. This is not only because they talk the most incomprehensible bollocks–
>
> 'Good weekend, Wayne?'
>
> 'Tuned my TCP/IP stack – *major* socket buffer tweakage was witnessed.' – but also because they couldn't, well, *speak*. They'd mutter, into their own chests. They'd trail off at the *beginning* of sentences.
>
> (Millington, 2006: 16)

The stereotype used is of IT technicians being highly skilled within the limits of their interests, but who are poor communicators, and it is this characteristic that is amplified. This is partly through Wayne's direct speech with, for example, its unusual response to the question, lacking a preferred positive or negative response and conveying the assumption that the questioner will understand the jargon and its significance. The amplification is also partly achieved through the hyperbole in, for example, the total number of words understood and 'the most incomprehensible bollocks'. There is also exaggeration in the typographically-figured illogicalities that 'they couldn't, well, *speak*' and that 'they'd trail off at the *beginning* of sentences' – these also contrasting, first, with the evidence that Wayne has just spoken and, second, with the usual notion of people trailing off at the end of sentences. The sentence 'They'd mutter, into their own chests.' with the comma separating the muttering from its direction, puts emphasis on the idea that they mutter 'into their own chests'. This increases the specificity, and, thus, the figuring, of the chests into which they are muttering. There is also, for me, an object-prototype contrast here, as it implies that there is another chest into which they could mutter, and I am not sure what other chest that might realistically be.

By amplifying a characteristic of the stereotype, rather than the source itself, the effort in recognition of the source by the receiver who shares knowledge of that stereotype will be reduced. This is because, in Relevance Theoretic terms, a relevant context will be more easily found as stereotype-related contexts will be more salient. As I discussed in Section 4.1, in the equivalent Text World Theory terms, the new information related to the stereotype (in the proffered text world) would be more easily incremented into the Common Ground. In spatial terms, the shift made by the receiver to the point of view of the relay is small, and relatively effortless, because the relay is close to the receiver.

As I discussed in Section 4.1, Browse's (2018) ideas of the Idealised Common Ground and proffered text world entail the assumptions made by author and reader, respectively, about the other's knowledge and beliefs. Although these ideas are developed at a discourse level of communication, it is possible to apply it further down the rank scale, at, for example, the semantic level. To explain how, I first need to discuss the notion of semantic distance, which has been used to explain why some metaphors are funny and others are not. This is based on the conceptual domain mapping approach to metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), and, in essence, the idea is

that a metaphor is perceived as humorous when the two domains are sufficiently far apart for the mapping to seem 'stretched' (Pollio, 1996). I would tend to favour a conceptual blending theory of metaphor, and I have used this in Chapter 3 to explain the emergent or synergic properties that are part of the subjective construal of a source. However, applying my proposals, as discussed in Chapter 3, to distance theory, I would argue that the reason a mapping seems 'stretched' is that there is sufficient distance in terms of the prototypicality of one domain or input space in relation to the other for contrast to be perceived. It is, perhaps, unfortunate that there are two concepts here referred to as a distance. To clarify, one distance here is the semantic distance, which can result in contrast being perceived between input spaces. The other distance is the receiver-relay distance.

To illustrate the concept of semantic distance in relation to humour, the following simile, from *Mystery Man*, is one I found amusing:

> ...she might have blushed but it was difficult to tell with all the make-up, which looked like the Max Factor equivalent of stone cladding.
>
> (Bateman, 2009: 16)

There is a large contrast between stone cladding and the foundation I understand specifically from 'make-up' in terms of size, say, or in that one is solid and rigid and the other usually liquid. However, there are also shared properties in that, for instance, they are often similar colours and have similar functions, both being things used to cover a more or less vertical surface with the intention of improving its appearance. The emergent properties of the metaphor are amplified with regard to the uneven texture of the woman's foundation and the thickness with which it has been applied. This is part of the process of elaboration (Wyer and Collins, 1992), or the adding of detail to maximise amusement, that I referred to briefly in the previous chapter and which I will return to in greater detail in the next. Although the input spaces are distant in terms of the prototypicality of one as an example of the other, because the generic space contains a number of shared properties, the effort involved in blending the properties is reduced. That is not to say that the effort is minimal as the contrast in the input spaces increases awareness the properties of the objects and of the process of recognising them. This moderate effort, I would argue, is why the metaphor seems 'stretched' rather than being effortless enough for minimal awareness of the recognition process or too effortful to be understood.

Attardo (2015) argues that the problem with distance theory is that the distance threshold for humour perception cannot be quantified. For me, this is less a problem and more an advantage of the theory: the semantic domain of a word is not fixed but is dependent on the associations the word has for each discourse participant. Therefore, any distance threshold will, to some extent, be a matter of individual difference. This can account for how the same metaphor can be recognised or not recognised as humorous by different people and also how differences in humour appreciation can occur. Moreover, the context in which a word is used will affect which meanings and associations are salient for a discourse participant. Again, the specifics of this will depend on the individual. Bringing in the idea of an Idealised Common Ground, in using a metaphor, a speaker or author will assume that the hearer or reader's understanding of the two input spaces and the shared properties in the generic space will be similar enough to their own understanding that they can comprehend the metaphor. A hearer or reader will also make assumptions about the speaker or author's idea of the understanding of the input spaces. The greater the discrepancy in the salient meanings and associations of each input space for the two discourse participants, the greater the effort the receiver will need to expend in order to align their interpretation of the metaphor with how they impute the relay's intentions for its interpretation – the proffered generic space, to adapt Browse's term.

In comparison with the previous example, this extract from *The Teleportation Accident* involves two metaphors that, for me, require too great an effort to be perceived as humorous, although I recognise humour (albeit weakly) in the extract as a whole.

> Where every single one of his female friends had a bob that looked like a geometric diagram of itself, often snipped so close at the back that in the morning there would be stubble at the nape, pale Adele wore a flock of black starlings, a drop of ink bursting in a glass of water, an avalanche of curls that could hardly be called a cut because if it were ever to come across a pair of scissors it would surely just swallow them up.
>
> (Beauman, 2013: 30)

The metaphors in question are 'wore a flock of black starlings' and 'a drop of ink bursting in a glass of water'. From these, I understand Adele's hair to be dark and with an unruly quality related to the movement of the flock of starlings and the ink diffusing in the water. However, although I have an understanding that these are the qualities of Adele's hair that I am intended to imagine, I find it difficult to blend the properties of

the flock of starlings or the drop of ink with the image I have of dark unruly hair. With the make-up / stone cladding metaphor my mental representation is of a woman wearing foundation that has properties of a type of stone cladding, here I imagine the hair, the starlings, and the ink in water separately. In other words, my understanding is of a proffered generic space in which the shared properties of the juxtaposed input spaces are intended to produce amplified emergent qualities of Adele's hair. In actuality, however, the input spaces are, for me, too distant from each other for there to be sufficient sharing of properties. The result is that the effort involved in blending is too great for the amplification of the emergent properties to occur.

It is interesting that in all the extracts I marked as humorous from the various novels I am using to demonstrate the 3D Model, there is not one where I would consider the contrast between concepts to be too small for me not to appreciate the humour. This is, perhaps, because, if the contrast is too small, it is not recognised as humour. An example, related to the make-up / stone cladding example, might be in describing the woman's make-up as a matt emulsion. Matt emulsion, like stone cladding, is primarily associated with walls, and the idea of uniform coverage might give an impression of a particularly heavy foundation. However, make-up can be described as paint (as, for instance, 'painting one's face' or 'warpaint'), and, like paint, it is applied with brushes, to give a couple of examples of their similarities. Added to which, liquid foundation is an actual emulsion and comes in matt(e) varieties. As such, the distance between input spaces for a type of paint and for make-up could be too small for the contrast between them to be brought to attention as the effort in recognising one in terms of the other is too small. This is dependent on the salience of meanings and associations, however. A sentence such as 'She took the bottle out of her make-up bag and applied the matte emulsion to her face' might not be perceived as humorous if encountered unassociated with any mention of paint or home decorating. Here, however, having just read my discussion of 'emulsion' in relation to paint, or if a reader had a great deal more experience with paint than foundation, I would imagine that their mental representation might involve a woman applying paint to her face and the object-prototype contrast there might lead to amusement.

The examples I have given here support the idea, proposed by Wyer and Collins (1992), that the effort involved in the comprehension of humour follows an inverted-U pattern. They also support my proposal of the previous chapter, that humour is related to

the increased effort of recognition of the source in its subjective construal as presented by the relay. The idea that the effort involved increases awareness of the process of communication echoes several theories attempting to explain the humorousness of some metaphors. For example, Tsur (1992, 2003) suggests that humorous metaphors have a 'split focus' and non-humorous metaphors an 'integrated focus'. Pollio (1996: 248), similarly, suggests a split between the domains, such that in a humorous metaphor the emphasis is on the boundary separating conceptual domains, whereas in a non-humorous metaphor the boundary or 'the act of joining them' is 'obliterated'. I would argue with the idea that a non-humorous metaphor has no 'act' of joining (or blending) but, if there is a noticeable separation between domains or input spaces, the process will be attended to because it requires more effort. Further, the increased awareness of the process also draws attention to the party with whom they are communicating, therefore increasing the objectivity with which the relay is construed.

Increased awareness is not confined to instances of moderate effort where a humorous construal occurs. In the passage above, about Adele's hair, for example, although I was able to derive a vague sense of movement from the metaphor, because my expectation was that the flock of black starlings metaphor would be humorous, I continued to attempt to imagine Adele's hair in a way that involved qualities related more specifically to the movement of a murmuration of starlings, but was unable to do so. In Relevance Theory terms the cognitive effort exceeded the anticipated cognitive effect of amusement. The effect of my awareness of my attempt resulted in a sense of emergence from the text world. From this discourse world position, the conceptual content, therefore, not only involved Adele's hair and the starlings, but also the author as I questioned whether I had misinterpreted the humorous intention of the passage. In other words, my attention was drawn to the difference between the proffered generic space (i.e. my re-representation of the author's intended generic space) and my actual generic space. The result of this was my increased awareness of the distance between me, as receiver, and the relay$_{\text{author}}$.

Although the Adele's hair example resulted in a lack of amusement, it is also possible for a difference in proffered and receiver's actual interpretations to result in amusement. This would be a case of unintended humour. Returning to the discourse level, an example of this occurred in my reading of the following passage from *Nutshell*.

> My amniotic sac is the translucent silk purse, fine and strong, that contains me. It also holds the fluid that protects me from the world and its bad dreams. No longer. Time to join in. To end the endings. Time to begin. It's not easy to free my right arm lodged tight against my chest, or gain movement in my wrist. But now it's done. A forefinger is my own special tool to remove *my* mother from the frame. Two weeks early and fingernails so long. I make my first attempt at an incision. My nails are soft and, however, fine, the fabric is tough. Evolution knows its business. I feel for the indent my finger made. There's a crease, well defined, and that's where I try again, and again, until the fifth attempt, when I feel the faintest rendering, and on the sixth, the tiniest rupture. Into this tear I succeed in working the tip of my nail, my finger, then two fingers, three, four, and at last my balled fist punches through and there follows behind it a great outpouring, the cataract at the beginning of life. My watery protection has vanished.
>
> (McEwan, 2017: 192)

While collecting passages to demonstrate the model, I marked this as '? – for the wrong reasons'. What I meant was that, although I had found it funny and had laughed audibly, there was no indication that the passage was intended to be humorous. In fact, my impression was that it was intended seriously. What I found funny about it, however, was the idea of a fetus wilfully tearing its way through its amniotic membrane. Accompanying this was a sense of emergence and disengagement from the text world. It is interesting that, by contrast, I was willing to accept the fundamental premise of the novel, which is narrated by a fetus with apparently adult cognitive abilities. In Text World Theory terms, the truth of this was easily incremented into the Common Ground. The information in the passage above, however, seemed far-fetched enough to result in my emergence from the text world. The difference, for me, between a fetus thinking mature thoughts and the events of the narrative here is that I have no direct evidence of what a fetus or a newborn baby is thinking, but I know that a newborn does not have the manual dexterity to tear through something on purpose. I also know, from half-remembered physiology lectures some years ago, that the reason the amniotic membrane ruptures has something to do with the remodelling of the collagen that is one of its components, not because the fetus deliberately works its way through it. Therefore, the shift to a position of sharing a worldview in which a fetus can communicate in an adult manner encounters less resistance and is less effortful than the maintenance of a position in which a fingernail is used as a tool to tear through the amniotic membrane. The result is that, on reading this passage, my position in the viewing arrangement shifts to the discourse world and, thus, becomes more distant from the narrator and, indeed, the author as my engagement with the text is affected. Thus, the objectivity of my construal of the author increases so that they become part of the conceptual content, this being, for me, the author's writing of the passage. My construal

of the conceptual content is still subjective, however, as I am aware of my representation of the actual world being different to the proffered text world. In fact, the contrast between these is the source of humour.

The reason that this passage resulted in amusement, whereas the one about Adele's hair did not, was that, in the latter, I continued to attempt to find an amusing interpretation. As such, my interpretative attempt became goal-figured rather than the process-figured interpretation that would encourage amusement. Additionally, this is, of course, my reading of the passage and my experience of emergence. For another reader, without, perhaps, the detail of my knowledge of the physiology of birth, the shared position with the narrator might be easier to maintain. In this case, the contrast between proffered and actual would be less and insufficient for humour recognition. However, these examples show how the 3D Model can be used to explain both unintended humour and instances where expected humour is unsuccessful.

4.5 Receiver-relay convergence

I began this chapter with a discussion of a Relevance Theory account of humour, that humour is dependent on the receiver's cognitive effort outlay being commensurate with the anticipated cognitive effect of amusement return. One advantage of this idea is that it is flexible, not relying on a fixed humour state but being applicable to the individualities of different receivers. Specifically, it is advantageous in that the amount of effort involved in a successful humorous interpretation is not fixed but dependent on, in essence, two factors. First, on the extent to which a receiver's knowledge overlaps with that of the relay and, second, on how much effort a receiver is prepared to expend, this being more if the receiver is expecting amusement. If, as I discussed in the previous chapter, humour involves the defamiliarisation of a source through its presentation by the relay, the effort required for its recognition of the source by a receiver will be increased. Therefore, if a receiver is to engage with a relay in humour construction, they will need to be prepared to expend additional effort. Spatially, this can be conceptualised as the receiver's willingness to converge with a perceived relay to align their view of the source with the relay's. I will return to a receiver's willingness to converge in the following chapter in relation to the receiver's general disposition towards humour – in other words, their sense of humour. This plays a part here, but the

amount of effort a receiver is willing to expend is also dependent on their expectations of a particular relay.

On the opposite side of this transaction, the relay can reduce the receiver's perception of the amount of effort they need to expend for amusement – or, spatially, the distance the receiver will need to move towards the relay. As I discussed in Section 4.3, one way of achieving this is by increasing their onstage presence by directly addressing the receiver. This has two effects. The first is to figure their close relationship with the receiver, with the implications this has for their sharing of knowledge and experience, and establishing their partnership in the co-construction of humour. The second effect is in the ramifications this has for the viewing arrangement. Increasing the onstage presence of the relay increases the objectivity with which they are construed. This has the converse effect of promoting the subjectivity of the construal of the source, as I discussed in the previous chapter. In increasing the receiver's awareness of the relay with whom they are communicating, this also figures the process of their communication in accordance with an account of humour as a type of play. This process-figuring effect will be the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 5. Process-figuring

The focus of this chapter is humour as a process-figured activity. I have already mentioned several times in the two previous chapters the increased awareness of the process of construal associated with humour. In reality it is difficult to separate entirely either the increased awareness of the subjective construal of the source or the objective construal of the relay and their part in the process from the figuring of the process itself. However, there are aspects of the humorous process that increase the receiver's awareness of their own role in the process. In this chapter I will discuss two features of humorous discourse that lead to this.

5.1 The receiver's role

In the previous two chapters, I discussed the subjective construal of the source and the objective construal of the relay and the way in which these contribute to the emphasis being on the process of construing the source. These can be considered to be two ways of contributing to a humorous construal. The third is the explicit figuring of the process of construal itself that is the focus of this chapter (see Figure 5.1). In terms of the spatial relationship between source, relay, and receiver, the subjective construal of the source represents the divergence of source and receiver through the relay's defamiliarising presentation. Because a receiver's increased awareness of the person with whom they are sharing humour involves the increase in the objectivity of the construal of the relay, this represents a convergence of relay with receiver. In this chapter, the focus is on the receiver's role in interpreting these dynamics as humour-related and in their own movement towards the relay.

Taking first the receiver's humorous interpretation, this requires them to interpret physiological arousal as related to positive affective states – in this case, amusement – rather than related to a negative affective state such as fear or anxiety. Previously I discussed the key idea behind reversal theory (Apter, 1984, 2007), that a person's behaviour can be understood through the interpretation of their metamotivational state and their ability to reverse between paratelic (or activity-focused) state and telic (or goal-focused state). In paratelic state, physiological arousal is interpreted positively,

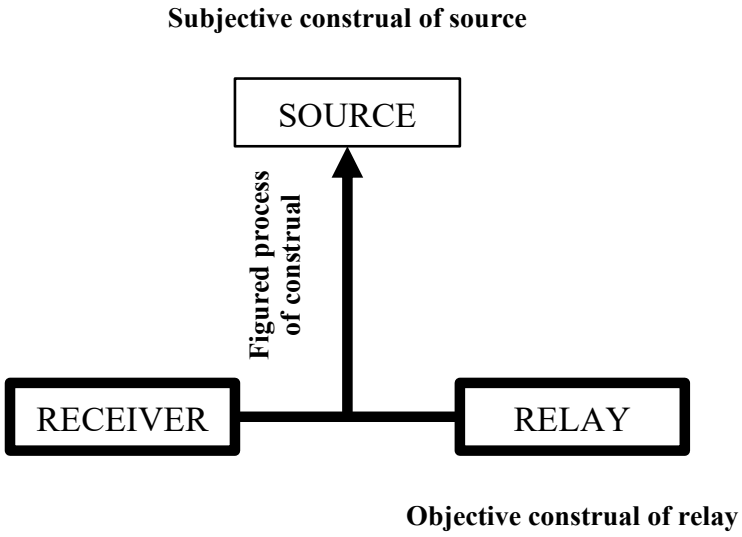


Figure 5.1 – Three aspects of a humorous construal

whereas in telic state, this is interpreted negatively. If a receiver is to interpret arousal positively, their paratelic state must be maintained or they must be induced to reverse from telic to paratelic state.

Another aspect of reversal theory is the idea that a person can exhibit metamotivational state dominance. This is a tendency to be in paratelic state more than telic state, or vice versa. In contrast with more traditional notions of personality employed in humour research, such as in the so-called 'Big Five' inventory (Costa and McCrae, 1992), or the 3 WD test (Ruch, 1992), whereby a person's traits are considered to be relatively fixed, the idea of state dominance emphasises the dynamicity of state reversals. It also emphasises the role of external cues (such as the location in which communication takes place), in conjunction with a person's internal motivational cues, in determining their dominant state as well as the ease with which they reverse to that state from the opposite state. Although sense of humour would be considered a more fixed personality trait, there is an apparent parallel between this and paratelic dominance. Indeed, Martin (1985) studied likelihood of amusement and use of humour as a coping mechanism and found that telic dominance correlated negatively with measures of sense of humour.

While there are undoubtedly individual differences in what people find amusing, the overarching propensity of a paratelic dominant receiver to recognise and appreciate humour could be considered a disposition to understand a relay's communication as humorous. With reference to the spatial source / relay / receiver relationship, this could be conceptualised as a tendency for the receiver to move willingly towards the relay to engage with ostensibly humorous communication, thus facilitating the decrease in distance between receiver and relay. With regard to the Relevance Theoretic (Sperber and Wilson, 1995) notion of a discourse participant's cognitive environment that I explored in the previous chapter, paratelic dominance could be seen as the receiver's cognitive environment having salient contexts potentially relevant to humour. This could have the effect of decreasing the effort with which a humorous interpretation is found.

Although a person may have a dominant state, they can also be cued either to maintain a paratelic state or reverse from a telic state. Apter (1982, 2007) proposes that a qualitative diminishment or downgrading of the source is involved, and he argues this is a necessary condition. I would suggest that this is not, in fact, necessary since qualitatively upgraded features can be involved if presented as spatially distant from the receiver. This is what I discussed in Chapter 3, where the concepts of pain, crucifixion, and Christianity were spatially diminished through the distance introduced by the world switches involved in, for example, conceptualising modality. However, both amplifying downgraded features or distancing upgraded features involves the idea of playing with scale. If humour is a form of play, that is, activity where the focus is on the doing of the activity rather than its outcome, the presentation of a source in such a way that requires the receiver to attend to the process of its recognition could be one way of figuring the process of communication and, thus, promoting a humorous interpretation.

Defamiliarising the source, and increasing the subjectivity of its construal, may be one way of encouraging a humorous interpretation but I would suggest that it is not the only way. As I discussed in Chapter 4, a viewing arrangement with an increased onstage presence of the relay, in figuring the party with whom the receiver is communicating, would also increase the figuring of the process of communication. For example, in Section 4.3, the direct address of the reader increased the presence of the relay and, with it, my awareness of being part of a communicative relationship. Broadly speaking, these two ways I have discussed so far are related, respectively, to the source and the relay. A

third way would relate specifically to the receiver, and their part in the process. In the next two sections of this chapter, I will discuss how a humorous interpretation can be promoted, first, by drawing the receiver's attention to their presence in the moment of communication, and, second, by increasing their role in the co-construction of the construal of the source.

5.2 Comic timing

In this section I will examine how a sense of comic timing can be promoted by a text, and how this can contribute to the receiver's paratelic interpretation. In popular discussion of the performance of humour, successful humour is often attributed, in part, to the performer's 'comic timing'. In spite of this, there is very little scholarly research into what 'comic timing' actually is and how – or indeed, if – it affects the success of humour. Attardo and Pickering (2011), examined the possible composition of timing and, extricating temporal factors from other coinciding effects, narrowed it down to changes in speech rate and length of pauses. However, in analysing successful and unsuccessful performances of jokes, they found no difference in either speech rate or pauses at and around the punchline. Norrick (2003: 1352), however, warns against, 'reifying timing as a unitary notion' that can be 'directly measured in seconds on the clock'. He proposes, instead, that the perception of tempo comes about through the rhythm of performance, which, he argues, is determined by hesitations, repetitions, and the fluency of delivery. 'Comic timing', would appear, therefore, to be less to do with absolute timing, and more to do with a receiver's impression of the passage of time.

Theories about the role of 'comic timing' in humour performance have parallels in several other theories of the cognitive basis of humour that involve an element of rapidity. For example, Apter (2007) proposes that where humour involves paradoxical change, the change must be rapid if it is to lead to amusement. Likewise, in Suls' (1972, 1983) incongruity-resolution model, resolution must be quick if humour is to be appreciated. There is some evidence for this in the results of EEG studies of appreciation of jokes (e.g. Cunningham and Derks, 2005). However, these studies use examples of jokes that involve resolution of an incongruity and, as I have discussed, it does not appear to be the case that resolution is essential for either the recognition or appreciation of humour.

It is also difficult to assess the relevance of rapidity in a medium in which the rate of delivery is ultimately controlled by the receiver rather than by the relay, such as in the case of literary reading. A text may encourage an increased or decreased rate of reading, which may be measurable by, for example, eye-tracking methods. This may correspond with a reader's sense of rapidity in what they are reading. Just as the perceived timing of performed humour does not depend simply on the rate of words spoken and the length of pauses (Norrick, 2003), the sense of pace in reading a text may be affected by factors other than reading speed. To me, therefore, it seems most sensible to consider not what is measurable, but what can be perceived. In any case, it may be that this *perception* of rapidity (or of change in pace, at least) is necessary, rather than rapidity itself.

Below, I give three examples of recognisably humorous passages which all have the same sort of structure. Each begins with what, in a joke, would be termed the set-up and each ending has the sense of a punchline. What I find interesting in these three passages is that, when reading them, I felt a change in pace at or around the 'punchline'. What I also find interesting about this trio is that, while I recognised humour in all of them, my appreciation of the apparent humour in the third (from *The Teleportation Accident*) was noticeably less than with the first two. My aim here is to explore the relationship between the apparent shift in perceived pace and the humour construction and to explain why the third passage is less amusing.

The first passage, from *Mystery Man*, describes the situation that the main character and his girlfriend, Alison, find themselves in returning to his bookshop where they have left another character, Daniel Trevor. In the preceding pages they have come to the conclusion that Daniel Trevor is about to be murdered.

> It was gloomy inside. And quiet.
> Nothing moved.
> The clock ticked on the wall above Columbo. [poster of the TV detective]
> Tick.
> Tick.
> Tick.
> We stood side by side.
> We said nothing for six more ticks.
> There was no blood.
> No smell of cordite.
> No stench of death.

> ‘Do you think…’Alison whispered, but before she could finish, a noise came from the small kitchen at the back of the store. There was a shadow of movement across the gap at the bottom of the door, which slowly began to open.
>
> Alison’s hand found mine.
>
> Daniel Trevor appeared. ‘I hope you don’t mind,’ he said, ‘but I made myself a cup of tea.’
>
> (Bateman, 2009: 131)

In this passage, my sense is of sharing humour with the author of the novel and, therefore, that they are the relay. The source is the mistaken interpretation of Daniel Trevor. However, it also feels that I, having misinterpreted Daniel Trevor alongside the bookseller and Alison, am part of the source. In fact, my overall sense is of amusement at myself realising my mistake.

The second passage, from *The Good, The Bad and The Smug*, involves the thoughts of a character known as The Dark Lord, the leader of the Evil world.

> A circle within a circle; it definitely reminded him of something he’d seen recently, but what was it? It’d make a damn fine logo, he was sure of it – a wheel within a wheel, suggesting intrigue, chicanery and dark goings on; an outer circle, implying division, polarization, us against them, concepts at the very heart of Evil; also a very precise fried egg.
>
> (Holt, 2015: 128)

Here, it feels as if my amusement at the ‘very precise fried egg’ is shared with the narrator of the novel.

The third passage, from *The Teleportation Accident*, is part of a conversation between the main character, Loeser, and his friend, Hildkraut, in which Loeser is being introduced to the recreational use of the drug ketamine.

> ‘What does it do?’ said Loeser.
>
> ‘You feel as if you’re being sucked down this fathomless, gloomy tunnel. Or to put it another way, it’s as if all the different weights and cares of the world have been lifted from your shoulders to be replaced by a single, much larger sort of consolidated weight. Your limbs stop working and you can’t really talk. If you take enough then it can last for hours, but it seems like even longer because time slows down.’ Hildkraut smiled wistfully. ‘It’s fantastic.’ At their feet, somebody groaned softly as if in enthusiastic assent. ‘And it makes Wagner sound really good.’
>
> (Beauman, 2013: 48)

As I mentioned, although I can recognise humorous intent (on the part of Hildkraut) at the idea that ketamine makes Wagner sound really good, my appreciation of this humour, compared with the other two passages is considerably less. If there is any change in pace here, it seems certainly less marked than in the other two passages. In the remainder of this section I will explore how these changes in pace are constructed and how they affect my appreciation of humour.

While the actual reading rate may or may not change, fictional texts can produce a sense of pace (either fast or slow) and urgency. Simpson (2014) proposes six stylistic features that contribute to a reader's impression of urgency in a narrative. These are the use of single-clause sentences, a transitivity profile mainly comprising material and behavioural processes, a lack of modality, an isochronous narrative duration, any speech or thought presentation given in a free mode, and, finally, events of the narrative being contained within the primary text world. Most of these criteria have the effect of minimising a narratorial presence. While Simpson's model does not directly equate urgency with fast pace, the examples and counter-examples he uses do appear, respectively, to have a faster or slower pace. It also seems, superficially, reasonable to merge a sense of urgency with a sense of fast pace; if a task needs to be done urgently, it needs to be done quickly. However, it is possible for a task to be urgent but for its completion to be impeded. The sense of urgency, then, would still be present but the sense of time passing may be altered as one becomes more aware of it. In other words, a sense of fast pace may derive from the urgency communicated by the narrative, but only where not opposed by conflicting factors.

This idea of conflicted urgency is particularly relevant to the *Mystery Man* passage. There is undoubtedly a sense of urgency throughout most of the passage (until Daniel Trevor's direct speech), but the passage of time seems relatively slow. My overall impression is of the tense and eerie atmosphere in the shop. The suspense seems to grow until the apparently sudden appearance of Daniel Trevor, after which it dissipates rapidly on learning of his having made himself a cup of tea. There *appears* to be a change in pace corresponding with this direct speech, but I am not convinced that it is, in fact, a straightforward shift in pace. This is particularly relevant to the findings of Attardo and Pickering (2011) that successful joke performance did not correspond to simple temporal factors, and Norrick's (2003) hypothesis that 'comic timing' happens through the rhythm of the performance rather than absolute timing.

Applying Simpson's model to the first part of the passage, until Alison speaks, it largely fulfils the simple sentences rule. This is emphasised by the presentation on separate lines. This contributes to the isochronous narrative duration aspect of the model. In Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 2008) terms, each line comprises a summary scan of a component of the scene. I would argue, however, that the overall scanning of the scene is sequential, with each line-separation dividing the conceptual content into attentional frames or 'successive windows of attention' (Langacker, 2008: 482). This creates the impression of tracking through the scene in the way that it appears to the characters. Following this, however, in the paragraph beginning with Alison's direct speech, the sentences are complex and the narrative becomes less isochronous with the duration of the scene, largely through presence of the reporting clause and the narratorial comment 'but before she could finish'.

In terms of the transitivity profile, again the passage partially fits with the urgency model. There is a mix of processes present, but few material processes. Those there are are in some way attenuated. For example, '…the door, which slowly began to open.' combines the attentional attractor of the movement of the door with the slowness of its opening, 'The clock ticked…' involves a material process (i.e. what the clock is doing) that is perceived 'statically' since it is heard and the movement of the clock is not observable to the characters. Likewise, 'Alison's hand found mine.' removes the agentive force (i.e. Alison).

Simpson also proposes that the story will be contained in the primary text world if it is to convey a sense of urgency. This is mostly the case here. However, there is a relatively large number of negations: 'Nothing moved.', '…no blood.', 'No smell of cordite.', 'No stench of death.'. There is also a negated world-switch in which Alison has finished what she whispers. Cognitively, a reader must conceptualise the content to be negated as present within the scene, in a negative text world, before removing it from their conceptualisation of the primary text world (Gavins, 2007). This removes the narrative temporarily from the primary text world, which contributes to the slowing down of the perceived pace.

Throughout the passage, until the appearance of Daniel Trevor, there is a sense of urgency, but not of fast pace. I believe this comes about through the conflict in the parameters of the urgency model; where the stylistic profile contributes to urgency in

the passage, it is opposed by patterns that contribute to non-urgency. In creating a sense of impeded urgency, the text creates a sense of heightened awareness of the surroundings of the characters. This primes the receiver to anticipate a threat. Thus, the appearance of Daniel Trevor, which in the absence of the preceding text would be an ordinary occurrence, is perceived as something perilous. The final sentence, Daniel Trevor's direct speech, has none of the hallmarks of urgency: it is direct speech (situating it in a different text world) that includes modality, and the reporting clause is included (making the narrative duration non-isochronous with the story). It is this final sentence that seems to have an element of comic timing. In line with Norrick's (2003) suggestion, the comic timing here is not simply a temporal issue, but appears to be produced through the removal of urgency.

In terms of narrative urgency, the passage from *The Good, The Bad and The Smug* is similar to the one from *Mystery Man*. Apart from a sense of comic timing, there is similarity between this passage and the *Mystery Man* one in the bathos of the shift from the Dark Lord's interpretation of the two-circle image as a symbol of the Evil world to that of a fried egg, and of the shift in the couple's interpretation of Daniel Trevor from threat to harmless. The urgency in the *Mystery Man* passage sets up the expectation of threat, which is then assigned to Daniel Trevor before being removed. There seems to be urgency in the first part of the passage from *The Good, The Bad and The Smug.* The passage, though, is composed of two sentences, the second of which is relatively long and does not conform to the simple sentences part of Simpson's urgency model. However, the conceptual content is divided by the punctuation into individual components, which creates a sense of the Dark Lord's thoughts as they occur to him, in line with the isochronous narration aspect of Simpson's model. This creates a similar urgency effect to the simple sentences in the *Mystery Man* passage.

The set-up of a bathetic anti-climax is added to by the fact that the initial meaning of the image to the Dark Lord is summarily scanned presenting an accumulation of the associations it has for him. To him the inner circle (the 'wheel within a wheel') suggests complexity and mystery and the outer circle suggests separation and conflict. For each circle he lists three associations that are almost synonymous with each other. However, with each item listed, there is an accumulation of negative associations: 'intrigue' can imply deceit but something can also be pleasantly intriguing, whereas 'chicanery' has a stronger association with deceit, and 'dark goings on' are unequivocally malicious.

Likewise, ‘polarization’ has, for me, a sense of pulling apart rather than the static opposition of ‘division’, and ‘us against them’ defines this antagonism and adds a personal element to it. The accumulation of negative associations contributes to a growing sense of perniciousness culminating in the typographically-figured concept of ‘Evil’. This then contrasts with the ordinariness of a fried egg and the shift from one to another is bathetic. It could be that bathos itself creates, or contributes to, a sense of comic timing. However, as with the passage from *Mystery Man*, the shift to the fried egg interpretation is accompanied by a loss of the sense of urgency. This seems to happen at ‘also’, which occurs before the shift in interpretation.

It strikes me that in both passages, the first interpretation is arrived at in a cumulative way and that this corresponds with a growing sense of urgency. In the *Mystery Man* passage, in particular, the first interpretation is never specified, merely implied, and constructed through the same stylistic elements through which the sense of impeded urgency is constructed. Likewise, the second interpretation, of Daniel Trevor as harmless, is arrived at implicitly, through the removal of features of urgency, before this is confirmed by the semantic associations of the cup of tea. In the passage from *The Good, The Bad and The Smug*, although the first interpretation is contributed to by both urgency and the accumulation of negative associations of the image, the sense of bathetic anti-climax seems to occur at ‘also’, before the mention of the ‘precise fried egg’ that confirms this second interpretation. Again, it would appear that it is the removal of features of urgency that are responsible for this. The other thing that strikes me is that I have several times mentioned the ‘shift’ from one interpretation to another. A ‘shift’ implies that the change in interpretation is a movement, with an interpretation something that can be ‘arrived at’. Therefore, the difference in the two interpretations is a distance – and in both cases it is relatively large. The removal of impeded urgency alters the perception of time, and in both cases, since it appeared to be slowed down with impeded urgency, it seems to be speeded up on its removal. As the interpretational distance coincides with this, and this large distance is travelled over an apparently short time, the removal of impeded urgency contributes to the perception of speed in arriving at that interpretation. As such, this contributes to the sense of sudden appearance of the second interpretation, with its enhanced perceived movement and newness making it a good textual attractor (Stockwell, 2009). This contributes to the amplification effect that I discussed in Chapter 3. However, the removal of urgency also corresponds with my

experience, as receiver, of a sense of shifting to a new perspective and I believe this is also the part of the contribution of the comic timing effect.

As I explained previously, the construal of a scene can be objective or subjective with respect to the conceptual content. In the *Mystery Man* passage, in sequentially scanning the interior of the shop as it appears to the bookseller and Alison, this minimises the onstage presence of these characters creating a largely objective construal of the scene. Indeed, the image I have of the scene, in reading the passage, is from the point of view of the couple. They are not visible to me but I am aware of the feeling of seeing what they see. Alison becomes more part of the objectively construed content with her whisper and when her hand finds the bookseller's, but she is still minimised because of the quietness of the whisper and the fact that the finding is done only by Alison's hand. Since my point of view is oriented to that of the characters, I share with them the expectation of threat and initial interpretation of Daniel Trevor. Because of this awareness of the potential for danger, the construal is not entirely objective. I am aware of my (vicarious) presence in the room, making the construal partly subjective. The subjectivity of the construal increases as the awareness of threat grows. The shift in my (and, presumably, the characters') interpretation of Daniel Trevor maximises the subjectivity of the construal. This is interesting because, as I proposed in Chapter 3, subjectivity of the construal of the conceptual content is part of the construction of humour. However, the subjective construal of the source has a defamiliarising effect, as I explained, and this is not necessarily interpreted humorously.

The narratorial arrangement here is homodiegetic and so there are two enactors of the bookseller: one as a character in the narrative, the other narrating. With the shift in interpretation, I, like the narrator enactor of the bookseller, have knowledge of both my past text world enactor's interpretation and my present one and the contrast between the two enhances my awareness of the mistaken interpretation of Daniel Trevor. This is, therefore, a subjective construal of the conceptual content (i.e. Daniel Trevor, Alison, the past enactor of the bookseller, and my past text world enactor) by the conceptualisers (my present text world enactor and the bookseller-narrator enactor) (see Figure 5.2).

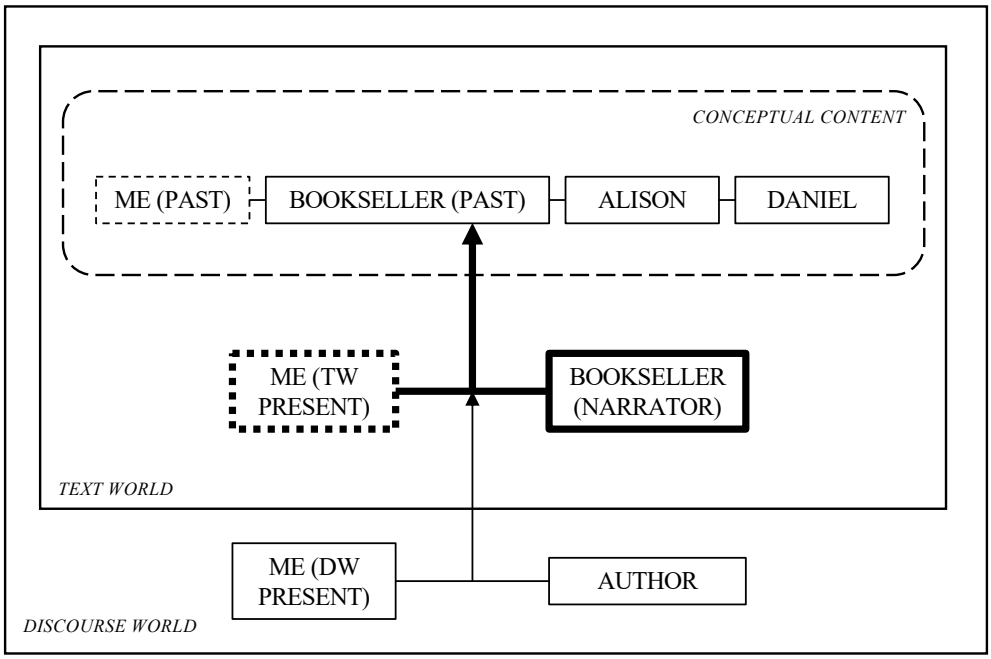


Figure 5.2 – Subjective construal of content from the point of view of the bookseller-narrator

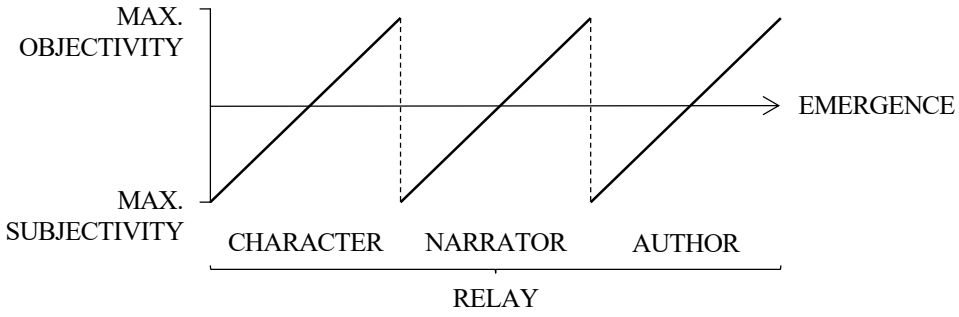


Figure 5.3 – Increasing the objectivity of the relay results in emergence

However, a subjective construal of the conceptual content from the perspective of one set of conceptualisers can be objectively construed from another perspective. In the second, objective, construal, the first set of conceptualisers will also become part of the conceptual content. The other way of looking at this is that by increasing the objectivity of the construal of the conceptualisers, they become increasingly onstage and, therefore, increasingly part of the conceptual content. Because a reader experiences the world of a text through their projection into a text world at one of the levels of the authorial series

of conceptualisers, increasing the objectivity of the construal of, say, a character to the point at which they become part of the conceptual content will encourage a shift out along the authorial series to the narrator level (see Figure 5.3). The shift to the level of the narrator will result in an objective construal of the character as part of the conceptual content.

A shift of this sort occurs in my reading of the *Mystery Man* passage. My sense of sharing humour with the author derives from the subjectivity of the construal of the conceptual content becoming so great that the effect is of looking at myself. In other words, the corresponding objectivity of the construal of the conceptualisers increases to the point where there is a shift from the narrator position on the authorial series of conceptualisers to the next position out – a subjective construal from the point of view of the author (see Figure 5.4). This creates sufficient distance between my enactor that is part of the source and my discourse world self to allow me to be amused at the contrast in my two interpretations of Daniel Trevor.

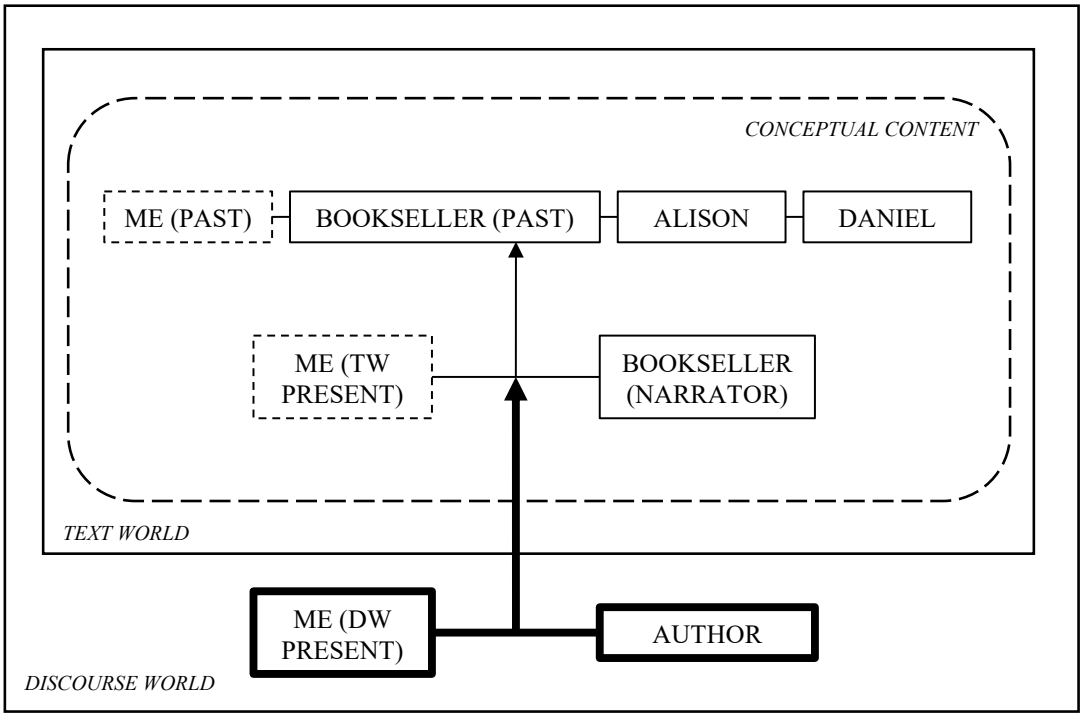


Figure 5.4 – Subjective construal from the point of view of the author

There is a similar effect, although somewhat less complicated, in the passage from *The Good, The Bad and The Smug*. The summary scanning of the Dark Lord's initial thoughts about the two-circle image present a subjective construal of the image where the conceptualisers are the Dark Lord and my counterpart text world enactor. The shift to the fried egg interpretation corresponds with a sense of suddenly shifting out to a position level with the narrator. The source of humour in this passage is the contrast, not just of Evil with a fried egg, but also the contrast in the Dark Lord being brought to mind of something as mundane as a fried egg. Therefore, since the Dark Lord is part of the source, the shift out to the narratorial position creates sufficient distance between receiver and source for humour appreciation. It also creates the impression of sharing humour with the narrator, and that they are the relay. It is possible that the perceived speed of reinterpretation, which increases awareness of the contrast, also increases the receiver's awareness of their construal of the conceptual content. This may involve an increase in subjectivity to the point at which it becomes less a subjective construal from one point, and more an objective one from another.

The third passage, from *The Teleportation Accident*, has a similar structure to the first two passages in that there seems to be a comic timing effect with the final sentence, although this is not as noticeable. As I mentioned, although I recognise humour, I find this passage comparatively less amusing than the first two. My intuitive reaction is that it would have been funnier if the penultimate sentence ('At their feet…') had been omitted. While the first two passages create a sense of impeded urgency prior to a shift in interpretation, this passage does not. Hildkraut lists the effects of taking ketamine, in a similar way to how the descriptive components of the shop are listed in the first passage, and the Dark Lord's associations of the image are listed in the second. Here however, construction of the items in the list features few (if any) hallmarks of urgency. The sentences contain multiple clauses, there is frequent modalisation, and the transitivity profile includes a number of mental processes. Added to which, the description is Hildkraut's direct speech, placing it immediately at a remove from the primary text world. In terms of the shift in interpretation, the effect ketamine has on Wagner is not so much a change in interpretation as an addition to the list of other effects. The distance between the two parts of the description is relatively small: they are both supposedly experiences of taking ketamine. The other difference between this passage and the previous two is that the final sentence, and therefore the second interpretation (if it is to be considered a second interpretation), is separated from the

first by the ‘At their feet…’ sentence. As such, the perception of time is not accelerated because of loss of impeded urgency and the actual time taken to arrive at the Wagner part of the description is relatively large. Therefore, the Wagner part of the description is not arrived at with the perception of speed perceived in the previous two passages and there is consequently little amplification effect. Any humour is derived from the contrast in something of supposed merit, like Wagner’s music, only being made ‘good’ by the use of a pharmacological agent that, for me, has rather more uncultured associations.

The positioning effect with this passage does not involve the same shift out along the authorial series seen with the other two passages. At the start of Hildkraut’s speech the viewing arrangement involves my enactor and Hildkraut as conceptualisers in a subjective construal of the content of his description. Beyond my sense of being slightly more aware of my position – and, thus, the construal is made slightly more subjective – this does not change. I retain the sense that Hildkraut is the relay and that I am sharing humour with him.

Comparing the positioning effect on the receiver on reading this passage with the effect of the previous two passages, it is possible that the removal of urgency and the concomitant alteration to the perception of the passage of time increases the receiver’s awareness of being in that moment, and of the relay’s and their own involvement in the humour process. This would be reflected in the enhancement of their subjective construal of a source to the point at which there they are shifted to a perspective further out in the series of conceptualisers, or even to the point at which they emerge from the text world.

In conclusion, I would agree with Norrick’s (2003) hypothesis, that comic timing is more a perception of timing than something that can be ‘measured on a clock’, and propose that this is produced through, in these instances at least, a *change* in perception of time. I also propose that this change contributes to both increased awareness of the source and to the receiver’s involvement in the humour process with the relay. In addition, it also contributes to a positioning effect on the receiver that relocates them closer to the relay, creating sufficient distance between source and receiver to allow their appreciation of humour. The passages here and the effect they can have on a receiver are interesting because they involve viewing arrangements where the

conceptual content is construed subjectively but, although this also involves the figuring of the process of construal, the interpretation is not always humorous. This might appear contrary to my proposals that humour involves the subjective construal of the source and that it is a process-figured activity. For example, in the *Mystery Man* passage, the scene where the bookseller and Alison enter the shop is a subjective construal, and as a reader I am aware of the sense of being in the room, but the emotional effect is more of apprehension than amusement. However, at this point, my point of view is that of the past enactors of the bookseller and Alison. Therefore, since they are part of the source, I am closer to the source than the relay. What this shows is that a receiver's interpretation of a situation as humorous or not depends not only on the subjectivity of the construal, but also on the receiver's positioning with respect to relay and source.

5.3 Elaboration

I have previously mentioned the process of elaboration, whereby the emergent properties resulting from the blend of contrasting input spaces are added to a source. This is my application of conceptual integration theory (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) to the elaboration part of Wyer and Collins' (1992) theory of humour elicitation. They propose that humour involves two stages: a comprehension stage followed by this elaboration stage. In formulating their theory they draw on Apter's (1982, 2007) reversal theory, proposing that elaboration occurs whether a receiver follows a recognised-appreciated (or paratelic) route or a recognised-not appreciated (or telic) route. However, there are differences in the type of elaboration depending on which route is followed. Elaboration in the telic route involves humour-irrelevant elaboration of the receiver's inferences about the relay's motives for relaying a particular instance of humour and their attitude towards the source. In contrast to this, in the paratelic route humour-eliciting elaboration occurs, which directly expands the mental images the receiver has constructed, either of the elements that contribute to the synergy (or blended space) or to closely related ones, increasing the receiver's amusement. In the main, it is the humour-eliciting elaboration of the paratelic route that I will discuss here.

The existence of an elaboration stage, separate to the comprehension stage, is as yet hypothetical. Wyer and Collins (1992; Wyer, 2004) propose anecdotal evidence for

its existence, however, in the form of the fact that some jokes continue to amuse with repeated telling whereas others do not. The explanation they give for this is that some jokes have a high elaboration potential whereby the elements of the joke are likely to lead the receiver to form mental images of unspecified details about, for example, the appearance or reactions of people in the joke. Jokes with a low elaboration potential do not encourage this. Interestingly, the jokes Wyer and Collins use as examples of high elaboration potential have a narrative format, whereas their examples of low elaboration potential have a question-and-answer format. To extrapolate from this observation, it would seem that elaboration has a role in longer-form humour such as humorous fiction. There is also a small body of empirical evidence that suggests, as Wyer and Collins hypothesise, that the paratelic elaboration potential of a situation correlates with the extent of a receiver's appreciation of humour. Nomura and Maruno's (2011) study of humour in traditional Japanese storytelling, for example, successfully used elaboration potential as a predictive factor for increased arousal associated with humour appreciation. However, this is not evidence that elaboration is a discrete second stage in the humour process.

Paratelic elaboration is proposed as one of the mechanisms through which social cohesion is reinforced (Wyer, 2004). A group may take a scenario with, on the face of it, little humorous potential and collaboratively construct and develop it into humour that may make no sense to outsiders. This has been seen with, for example, online support groups of people with cancer where members of the group in focus shared fantasy scenarios involving personifications of their tumours, collectively adding details to these characterisations and to their hypothetical activities (Demjén, 2016). In the case of literary reading, although relay and receiver participants are separated spatially and temporally – a split discourse world, in Text World Theory terms (Gavins, 2007) – the text worlds created are the product of co-construction by an author's text and the existing knowledge and experiences of a reader. Where a receiver (in this case a reader) is able to enrich a text world though humour-eliciting elaboration, this will contribute to their sense of sharing that world with the relay. This sense of sharing will lead to the receiver's sense of having converged with the relay.

I am not convinced that the elaboration stage is, in fact, a separate stage in humour construction. Wyer and Collins (1992; Wyer, 2004) base the comprehension stage of their theory on Apter's (1984, 2007) notion of cognitive synergy. As with

conceptual blending, as I explained in Chapter 3, cognitive synergy involves the emergence of new or enhanced qualities. This would seem to correspond directly with the expansion of mental images involved in paratelic elaboration. To me, therefore, it seems more likely that elaboration is an integral part of humour perception and must, in fact, occur before something is perceived as humorous and prior to its relay. However, it is possible that some instances of relayed humour have a greater capacity to promote paratelic elaboration. This is in line with Wyer and Collins' proposal that some instances of humour have a greater elaboration potential. As such, some literary texts (or sections thereof) may facilitate elaboration by the receiver more than others. I propose that stylistic features of a text that require more cognitive activity on the part of the receiver in order to enable their comprehension of the text will contribute to humorous elaboration by encouraging the receiver to contribute additional detail to the situation, thus sharing in the humour construction process. In the remainder of this section I will discuss two stylistic features, ellipsis and negation, that I believe facilitate this.

5.3.1 Ellipsis

There is surprisingly little research specifically on the presence of ellipsis in humorous texts, given the number of publications that mention ellipsis in conjunction with humour. In the research that exists, there has been some focus on the use of the three-dot punctuation mark in online communication, where it functions as a marker to indicate humorous intent (e.g. Mak, 2014). Other studies are concerned with elipted information as a source of humour (e.g. Bucaria, 2004). However, the interpretation of the role of ellipsis tends towards an assertion that it leads to ambiguity, which allows the comprehension of humour. Rather than accepting this somewhat incomplete argument, I am more interested in how ellipsis and the ambiguity it creates are involved in humour production.

This passage comprises the end of the last sentence of Chapter 1, and the beginning of the first sentence of Chapter 2 of *Mystery Man*:

> … I was about to phone them when the shop door opened and a man came in and asked if I could recommend the new John Grisham and I said, yes, if you're a moron.

> Well, it turns out John Grisham was on a signing tour of the UK, and not wanting to cause pandemonium wherever he went he was just calling at bookshops unannounced…
>
> (Bateman, 2009: 6-7)

The chapter break allows the timescale of the narrative to be condensed, and also gives a sense of framing to possible events between the end of Chapter 1 and the beginning of Chapter 2. This is enhanced by the discourse marker 'Well', which functions here, in Relevance Theoretical terms, to signpost the receiver to a different set of background assumptions (Jucker, 1993). Specifically, it indicates a shift forwards in time, with 'it turns out' referring to an occurrence in the intervening period. The repetition of 'John Grisham' at the beginning of Chapter 2 recalls the disparagement of 'the new John Grisham' at the end of Chapter 1, and it can be inferred that the man asking about 'the new John Grisham' is, in fact, John Grisham. However, because the events in the intervening period are ellipted, the man's reaction to the bookshop owner's poor opinion of his work, for example, must also be inferred if it is to be imagined.

This elaborated detail, formed through the recursive elaboration process proposed by Nomura and Maruno (2008, 2011), is likely to be different for different receivers. This is in line with the Relevance Theoretical account of humour I discussed in Chapter 4, that is, that interlocutors interpret what is said to maximise its relevance. As Yus (2003) proposes, in humorous communication, the relevant cognitive effect is amusement and, therefore, receivers may continue their search for their interpretation of the man's reaction until they find a reaction that amuses them. My own construction of the reaction on first reading the passage was of grim-faced politeness, and of awkward negotiation by the bookseller. However, on re-reading – having acquired further knowledge that the man is not, in fact, John Grisham and of subsequent events in the narrative – this changed to my imagining the man spontaneously and mischievously deciding to pretend to be John Grisham when faced with the bookseller's obvious dislike of his books. Both constructions were amusing to me, which would seem to support Wyer and Collins' (1992; Wyer, 2004) proposal that repetitions of humour with high elaboration potential will stimulate a new set of mental images on each repetition until no new elaborations can be found. Where humour is derived from ellipted events, the constraints imposed by the text on the possible humour-eliciting elaborations will be minimal, thus maximising the elaboration potential.

The following passage from *The Good, The Bad and The Smug* also relies on ellipsis to generate humour. However, the way this occurs is different to the passage from *Mystery Man* above. Efluviel (an Elf) and Mordak (a Goblin) are in a Goblin-run restaurant, and Efluviel has already made several comments about the strangeness of its architecture and décor.

> "But the really weird thing," Efluviel said, "is that front door. Though it's more sort of a portcullis, really, or a drawbridge. The way the wall sort of opens and that ramp thing drops down."
> Mordak sighed. "I think you'll find the clue is in the name."
> "Excuse me?"
> "The *Old Giant's Head*. Well, you Elves do it, specially when you're trying to be cute. The Old Stables, The Old Mill, The Old Post Office–"
> "I don't quite– Oh."
>
> (Holt, 2015: 298)

Here, Efluviel's realisation that she is sitting in the head of a dead giant is communicated by her 'Oh', but what she actually comprehends is ellipted. It is my inference that she understands the logic (again ellipted) that a building called The Old Post Office would be a building that was once a post office and has extrapolated this to her current surroundings. The ellipted information serves two humour-related purposes. Firstly, because I, as receiver, am able to make these inferences based on knowledge I share with the two characters (and, by extension, the author) my sense of collaborating with the relay in the production of this humorous episode is enhanced. Secondly, because the detail of Efluviel's realisation is unspecified, I am required to supply the detail myself in order to construct a mental representation of the restaurant. This is a case of world-repair (Gavins, 2007), and one in which the precise detail of the repair needed encourages re-reading of Efluviel's comments prior to her realisation about the building to align my image of the restaurant with clues that have previously been given. This leads to multiple re-imaginings of my mental representation: for example, I initially imagined the restaurant to be located in the skull of a giant, but would 'that ramp thing' be the giant's jaw or their tongue? And what implications does this have for the state of decomposition of the head, and the presence of this in a place of food preparation and consumption? As with the passage from *Mystery Man*, the fact that information is ellipted increases the elaboration potential.

A third example of ellipsis contributing to humour comes from *The Teleportation Accident*. Egon Loeser is at home one morning, lamenting his lack of real friends with whom he could go to breakfast.

> Yes, if Loeser went to a party, there were always dozens of basically interchangeable people with whom he could have a drunken good time. But if he woke up the next morning in need of a companion for a rueful breakfast, there was almost nobody he could telephone. These days, the individual he saw most often was probably Klugweil.
>
> ...
>
> But the actor [Klugweil], who had finally come to his senses about dull Gretel the previous summer, never seemed to answer the telephone any more, so one could only assume he'd found some new girl he didn't want to tell anyone about. The result was that Loeser might actually have to resort to – but, no, the thought was too terrible. He'd just have breakfast at home.
>
> (Beauman, 2013: 57)

Loeser's ellipted thought in the penultimate sentence is the source of humour but, as with the example from *The Good, The Bad and The Smug*, it relies on a receiver sharing knowledge with the relay. The difference is that here the necessary knowledge is not common to the discourse world inhabited by the receiver and the relay$_{author}$ but is specific to the text world and is accrued through reading previous sections of the text. In this case, the necessary knowledge is that Loeser and his social circle attach great importance not just to going to breakfast in the right places and with the right people, but to being seen to do so. The inference I make, therefore, is that Loeser might have to resort to going to breakfast on his own – something that would greatly diminish his social standing, and a thought so terrible that he cannot even articulate it. In order to conceptualise this terrible thought for myself, I am required to form a mental representation of a lone Loeser eating breakfast in one of the group's favourite cafés, and of the gossiping and contempt of his acquaintances at his expense. That this image is of a future, hypothetical enactor of Loeser provides a separation from the relay enactor of Loeser also imagining himself eating breakfast alone. As well as the distance between Loeser$_{source}$ and receiver that allows the appreciation of humour, the image shared by receiver and Loeser$_{relay}$ aids the receiver's sense of converging with the relay.

Cook (2001) makes the following observations about the use of ellipsis in advertising, which I believe are equally valid for literary reading: it creates a conversational tone, it suggests a situation immediate to discourse participants, it suggests shared knowledge, and it suggests a trusting relationship where participants

can assume their interlocutors are willing to comprehend incomplete propositions. Thus, in the case of the split discourse-world of a humorous novel, as with advertising, ellipsis promotes in the receiver a sense of proximity with the relay. I would argue that ellipsis provides an additional means of promoting receiver-relay proximity in humorous communication. That is to encourage humour-related elaboration by the receiver. Because these elaborations are the product of input from both the relay's text and the receiver's re-imaginings, they will enhance the receiver's sense of being an active participant in the relationship and of co-operating in the production of humour.

5.3.2 Negation

As with ellipsis, negations are also instances where less information is explicitly given. In order to construct the negation, however, the positive counterpart must also be constructed, but because less information is explicitly given, the construction of the positive counterpart will be relatively unconstrained. This construction will therefore be guided by the text but there is also an opportunity for elaboration by the receiver. The following passage from *Mystery Man* is an example of this.

> …he immediately approached the counter and placed two hands on it as if to steady himself, before asking in a deep yet querulous voice if the new James Patterson was in yet.
>
> 'Sir,' I replied with suitable haughtiness, because I know my onions, 'the old James Patterson isn't in. This is a James Patterson-free zone. Once we begin stocking Pattersons we'll have no room for anything else. We may as well change the name of the shop to Patterson Books.'
>
> I felt confident in being so flippant because I knew straight away that this man was no more interested in James Patterson than he was the man in the moon. It was his voice: choked with emotion. And nobody has ever gotten emotional over a James Patterson novel.
>
> (Bateman, 2009: 53)

With regard to the negations in the passage that contribute to its humour, first there is the response that 'the old James Patterson isn't in', which, with its syntactic parallelism with 'the new James Patterson was in', amplifies the contrast in 'new' and 'old'. This gives emphasis to 'old', which encourages my interpretation of 'the old James Patterson isn't in' as meaning that the book was never stocked, rather than that it has sold out. Second, there is the assertion that the shop is a 'James Patterson-free zone', which emphatically removes any assumption I might have had that a shop specialising in crime fiction would stock the novels of a best-selling author of crime

fiction. This, with the previous sentence, contrasts my expectation of such a shop with the actual one. The construction, resembling notices prohibiting anti-social activities, adds to the sense of undesirability of the author as well as amplifying the absence of the author's work. Third, there is the stocking of 'Pattersons' leaving 'no room for anything else' in the shop, which exaggerates the size of the author's body of work. There is a certain amount of humour here in the amplification effect but the humour in the passage is largely formed, for me at least, through my imagining the shop's shelves filled not just with Patterson's books but also with multiples of the man himself. Lastly, there are the contrasts in the negated image of somebody becoming emotional (in the informal lachrymose sense that I infer here) over a novel by an author whose books are probably known more for being formulaic page-turners than for their poignancy.

However, because these situations do not exist (even in the fictional text world), I am required to engage in 'sequential imaginings and rememberings' (Nomura and Maruno, 2011: 479) to conceptualise them. For example, in this text, I understand 'stocking Pattersons' to mean the stocking of James Patterson's books but it is likely that my paratelic state in reading an overtly humorous novel leads me to maximise my appreciation of the humour in the situation by forming a literal conceptualisation of James Patterson rather than interpreting 'Pattersons' as the more probable metonymy of his books. This is consistent with a Relevance Theoretical account of humour, whereby a receiver may expend additional effort in their search for a relevant interpretation (Yus, 2003). Likewise, it is possible to read 'emotional' in the final sentence of the passage as relating to the tense or fearful emotions more likely to be elicited by a crime thriller. The negation, however, indicates a more unlikely reaction, but the specifics of this are unstated, allowing the receiver to imagine a scenario that maximises their appreciation.

The following extract from *Black Swan Green* also contains a negation that contributes to elaboration.

> Alex dug up the poetry prize again. 'At least tell us what your poem was about, Jason. The blossoms of spring? Or was it a love poem?'
> 'Can't see you getting much out of it, Alex,' said Julia. 'Jason's work lacks the subtlety and maturity of *The Scorpions*.'
>
> (Mitchell, 2014: 61)

The last sentence is ironic, relying on the receiver's knowledge (or inference) that 'subtlety and maturity' are not attributes associated with '*The Scorpions*'. The construction of the sentence can be seen almost as a double-negative: first the semantic negation in 'Jason's work lacks', then the inferred pragmatic negation in the irony of 'the subtlety and maturity of *The Scorpions*'. There may be some guiding of the image produced but it still leaves some freedom for the receiver to conceptualise the negation in the way most amusing to them. For example, this produces, for me, an image of the Scorpions (presumably the hard rock band) with their 'subtlety and maturity' represented by being decorated with the 'blossoms of spring' carried over from Alex's teasing of Jason. However, my mental representation also includes the stadium in which the band is performing and the confusion of their fans in response to the unexpected change to their appearance.

In this extract from *Things My Girlfriend And I Have Argued About*, the main character and his girlfriend are viewing a house being sold by a Mr Richards.

> The room has the doleful, reflective hollowness of most houses bare because the former inhabitants have moved their possessions and their lives elsewhere, but is generally in quite a good state of repair. Something that Mr Richards isn't, I notice.
>
> (Millington, 2006: 73)

There is a blend here, derived from the input spaces of the qualities of a building and those of a person. The anaphoric reference to 'a good state of repair' made by 'Something that' links Mr Richards' appearance to that of the room. Mr Richards' 'good state of repair' is negated, however, which requires the construction of a mental representation of Mr Richards in good state of repair prior to its negation. This provides an opportunity to constrast the positive counterpart with the ellipted image of Mr Richards in a bad state of repair. Both are reasonably free of constraint, but are guided by the mental representation of the room and by the expression 'good state of repair', which is more usually used in relation to inanimate objects than people. Thus, for me, the negative image takes on features more associated with a dilapidated house than a person: Mr Richards is grey-complexioned with skin somewhat reminiscent of blistered and peeling paintwork, for example. As well as this, as part of the contents of the room he also has its 'doleful, reflective hollowness', which is not negated. What I find most interesting about this extract is that, although I find its humorous intent recognisable, in

terms of humour appreciation, I do not find it particularly amusing. The dismal atmosphere of the first sentence is carried over into the second, influencing the depiction of Mr Richards and casting him as a rather forlorn figure as opposed to one whose characteristics elicit amusement. In fact, I feel somewhat uncomfortable with how I have imagined Mr Richards. Wyer and Collins (1992) propose that telic elaboration, as opposed to humour-related paratelic elaboration, is based on the receiver's inferences about the relay's motives for using the source as an object of humour and, thus, their attitude towards the source. It would seem, therefore, that telic elaboration would elicit the receiver's sympathy towards the source and position them closer to the source than the relay. Here, however, my sense is of being positioned to share humour with the relay, but that I do not find it especially amusing. It is possible that the impositions of the text lead to my paratelic elaborations of the appearance of Mr Richards but that my own readerly disposition is to feel sympathetic towards him. The resulting conflict – a sense of convergence with both relay and source – would lead to my slightly uncomfortable feeling of having collaborated in this instance of humour production.

5.3.3 Effects of elaboration

In discussing the elaboration effects of ellipsis and negation, I am not implying that these are the only circumstances in which humour-eliciting elaboration can occur. The 'Phil Spector of light' passage in Chapter 3, for instance, is a good example of humorous elaboration occurring without either ellipsis or negation. Here too, though, the Phil Spector-light blend is composed of input space qualities that are not specified by the text. In particular, the Phil Spector input space is open to attributes that are most relevant to the receiver. My elaborations involved his hair and murder trial but other receivers' elaborations could involve other features associated with Phil Spector to similar amusement-eliciting ends.

However, whatever the actual composition of the elaborations, blends, negation, and ellipsis have commonalities that are relevant to humour. First, these stylistic techniques all require the receiver to contribute significantly to the construction of the text world in order to comprehend it and it is through these contributions that elaboration occurs. Because these elaborations are text-driven, and are therefore co-constructed by the relay and the receiver, the receiver's sense of being an active

participant in humour construction, rather than a passive recipient, will increase. This could increase their awareness of participating in discourse with the relay, thus figuring the process of communication. It could also add to their sense of sharing the experience with the relay which, spatially, can be conceptualised as a convergence of receiver and relay. Second, the elaborations produced are all constructed within a world switch. This displaces the elaboration from the relay and receiver, putting distance between them and the source, contributing to the spatial diminishment effect that I discussed in Section 3.2.2.

Although it is clear to me that elaboration is part of the humour process, I do not agree with Wyer and Collins (1992; Wyer, 2004) in their proposal that elaboration is a discrete second stage that follows their initial comprehension stage. They also adhere to the traditional supposition that a certain set of conditions leads to humour, as opposed to my proposal that the humour process leads to the conditions being brought to attention. If humour is a process, the receiver's elaborations form an integral part of that process, with the contrasting of objects done – at least in part – by the receiver through their elaborations. Where humour has a low elaboration potential it is conceivable that the receiver's input into the expansion of mental images will be minimal because their comprehension of the proposition is adequate with minimal elaboration. However, since receivers (or less specifically to humour, readers or listeners) construct text worlds to conceptualise and understand language with greater detail than that given by a text, it seems to me that elaboration is not only inevitable to some extent but part of the comprehension process. If the receiver is an active participant in the humour process, it is even possible that those particular elaborations are made (or searched for, in a Relevance Theoretic understanding of comprehension) because they contrast concepts, as with my literal imagining of 'stocking Pattersons', which contrasts with my metonymic comprehension. It is also possible that, where a non-humorous proposition is made, a receiver's input into its comprehension may bring to their own attention contrasts associated with the content of the proposition that had not been attended to by the relay or which were not part of their prior experience. This would explain how unintended humour can be recognised and appreciated as humorous by the receiver. It would also be a case where elaboration necessarily preceded comprehension. I think it is likely that in the telling of jokes, as studied by Wyer and Collins (1992; Wyer, 2004), a straightforward comprehension-elaboration sequence might be understood because the very telling of the joke has the purpose of bringing contrasts to the receiver's attention.

The contrasting process would therefore always be initiated by the relay, with further elaborations made by the receiver. However, joke-telling is a relatively infrequent form of humour. Humour in fiction will also tend to exhibit the same relay-initiated process, although it is likely that stylistic conditions, such as ellipsis, for instance, that require substantial input from a receiver, will be more frequent than in jokes. This would give greater opportunity for receiver-initiated elaborations to occur.

As I stated at the beginning of this section, I am not implying that paratelic elaboration is unique to the stylistic conditions I have discussed. I am suggesting that where the text requires more input from a receiver to enable their comprehension, there will be a greater tendency for the contrasts through which humour is recognised and appreciated to be brought to the receiver's attention through their own contributions to the process. As such, their sense of sharing not just experiences and knowledge with the relay but also contributing to the humour process will increase.

5.4 Three contributions to a humorous construal

The essence of the 3D Model of Humour is that humorous discourse is a form of communication that results in a metaphorical convergence of relay and receiver, and a metaphorical divergence of relay and receiver from the source. These shifts can, of course, occur in non-humorous discourse; the difference is that, whereas in non-humorous discourse, the outcome of the shifts is emphasised, in humorous discourse, the dynamics of the shifts are the focus of attention. In other words, as a form of play, humorous discourse is a process-figured or paratelic activity. Applying Langacker's idea of a viewing arrangement to the relationship between source, relay, and receiver, an arrangement where the process of construal is figured will also be reflected in the construal of the source (as conceptual content) and the relay and receiver (as conceptualisers). Therefore, there are three ways in which a text can encourage a humorous interpretation: by increasing the subjectivity of the construal of the source, by increasing the objectivity of construal of the relay, and by drawing the receiver's attention to their own role in the process of conceptualisation.

I propose that the language of a text need not do all these three things for a humorous interpretation to be promoted. For example, the green hairless poodle passage

from *The Teleportation Accident*, in Section 3.3.1, uses a subjective construal of the source but the relay's presence is relatively implicit. By contrast, the passage from *Things My Girlfriend and I Have Argued About* about the narrator's job in IT, in Section 4.3, increases the objectivity of the construal of the relay through an overtly onstage presence and also subjectively construes the source. Similarly, in the fried egg passage from *The Good, The Bad and The Smug* in Section 5.2 of this chapter, the source is subjectively construed, and, although the presence of the relay is relatively implicit, the process of construal is figured through the comic timing effect. It might seem fairly self-evident, but from the examples I have used here and elsewhere it would appear that some form of discernible subjectivity in the construal of the source is required. This would be related to the divergence effect and also the convergence of receiver and relay, since the receiver's recognition of the source as presented by the relay will involve a shift towards the relay's point of view. It is possible that the other aspects of the viewing arrangement serve to enhance the subjectivity with which the source is construed. For example, an explicitly onstage relay or an increased emphasis on the receiver's role in the construal (e.g. through elaboration encouraged by ellipsis) would draw a receiver's attention to their partnership with the relay in the construal and aid in the figuring of the convergence dynamic.

Although the dynamics of the source, relay, and receiver positions are important, the existing distances between them are also crucial to the receiver's recognition and appreciation of humour. If, for example, the distance between receiver and relay is large, the effort involved in recognising the source as presented by the relay (or, spatially, shifting to their point of view) could be too great. While this would relate to the receiver's role in the process, it would represent a situation where the source might be recognised but construed objectively by the receiver. The receiver's attempt to participate in the relay's subjective construal of the source could result in this process being goal- rather than process-figured. Thus, the receiver could be induced to reverse to a telic state, rather than the paratelic state required for appreciation of humour.

In this and the previous two chapters, I have proposed three ways in which humour can be constructed or enhanced: the subjective construal of the source, the objective construal of the relay, and the figuring of the process of construal. In the final analysis chapter, I will explore three case studies of humour in literature, explaining how the three means of contributing to a humorous construal interact.

Chapter 6. Integration

In this chapter, I will use the 3D Model to investigate humour-related effects in three novels, bringing together the three main aspects of the model (subjective construal of the source, objective construal of the relay, and increasing the receiver's awareness of their part in the process of construal) that I have set out in the previous chapters. The subject of the first case study, *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* by Malcolm Pryce (2009), is a parody. The second case study, *Man at the Helm* by Nina Stibbe (2014), investigates the effect an apparent shift in narratorial voice has on the construction of humour. The third case study, *Crooked Heart* by Lissa Evans (2015), investigates how humour can be appreciated in spite of a character's serious situation. I have chosen these novels because, when I was reading them, they each seemed to have an interesting effect related to their humour. With *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, this being something I recognised as a parody, I was interested in how it could be recognised as such. My interest in *Man at the Helm* contrasted with my interest in *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*. With the parody, the interesting feature seemed to be the content of the humour, or the source. With *Man at the Helm*, my interest seemed more to do with the relay. My interest in *Crooked Heart* was less to do with how humour could be recognised, as with the first two case studies, and more to do with how humour could be appreciated even though the situation had serious implications for the characters. I will consider each of these matters in turn before ending the chapter with a discussion of how the case studies compare.

6.1 *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*

The first case study is *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* by Malcolm Pryce (2009). Without even opening the book I was aware that the title made reference to another work, although, at the time, I did not make the connection with the film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Resnais, 1959). However, the title sounded like a work in the noir genre and I assumed that there would be an originating title with the construction '[somewhere] Mon Amour'. The novel is set in an alternative 1980s Aberystwyth, with the main character, a private detective named Louie Knight, investigating the murder of schoolboys in the town and the disappearance of Evans the Boot. My own impression of

the novel, gained partly from the title, was that it is a parody of American pulp fiction crime noir, contrasting the usual more glamorous American setting by locating the novel in a Welsh seaside town. I recognised it as humorous, and, in particular, appreciated the humour involving references to specific geographic locations in and around Aberystwyth and to Welsh cultural tropes. I also wondered if other readers who did not share my knowledge of these would share my appreciation of the humour in the novel as a whole.

This was reflected in my exploration of community reviews of the novel on the website *Goodreads* (2017a). Examining the first 60 reviews showed, first of all, that most reviewers mentioned humour (or wit, or amusement, and so on). There was also a definite division in terms of those who had enjoyed the novel and found it funny, and those who had not, with a tendency for the novel to be rated either highly or poorly. For those who had not found it funny, about half made a comment along the lines of having not 'got' the humour (for example, 'missing the vast majority of cultural in-jokes' (*Goodreads*: Reviewer 1a, 2017a) or 'so many jokes going over my head' (*Goodreads*: R2a, 2017a)). Correspondingly, a number of positive reviewers commented on the significance of the Aberystwyth setting of the novel or the Welshness of the humour for their enjoyment of it (for example, 'fun reading, especially for anyone with any connection to or fondness for Wales' (*Goodreads*: R3a, 2017a), 'plenty of Welsh humour thrown in' (*Goodreads*: R4a, 2017a)).

Apart from general comments about the humour in the novel, most reviewers mentioned something about it being a parody, spoof, pastiche, homage, take-off, or satire of crime noir or hardboiled detective fiction. It is not my aim to enter into a lengthy debate as to which of these it is. They can all be humorous and my interest is in how the novel is recognised and appreciated as such. My own opinion is that it is parody and I will refer to it as that. I call it a parody rather than satire, for instance, since satire has a critical element and parody need not (Simpson, 2003), and I do not get a sense, reading the novel, of any critical targeting of a source. I would also not call it a pastiche, for example, as this is more of a straightforward imitation of a style or genre than the use of a style or genre to evoke a humorous response. I would suggest that its ability to amuse is more by accident than design. However, this concern is secondary to the purpose of the case study: to explain how the novel, with its apparent intention to amuse, can be found humorous.

Regardless of the term one gives to describe the novel, parody, satire, or any of these variants all involve allusion to other works. Simpson (2003) proposes that the basis of satire is that there is an intertextually-mediated prime and a text-internal dialectic. This would also be applicable to parody. Access to the prime is through a reader's general knowledge, whereas the dialectic is accessed through their knowledge of typical text structures. Satire (or parody, in this case) is based on a 'schism or fracture' (Simpson, 2003: 9) occurring between prime and dialectic. Aligning this with my proposals, the appearance of a schism results because the prime and the dialectic are not identical and, therefore, contrast in some way.

Further to this, as I discussed in Chapter 3, the reason the contrast between prime and dialectic can result in amusement is that the contrast between the two draws a reader's attention to their knowledge of a particular work or genre. Since they have recognised something that they perceive that a relay intended them to perceive, this emphasises their proximity with the relay. Where a pastiche amuses, it is likely because there is enough contrast between the work and what it imitates so that it draws attention to the construction of the work. If this contrast is not perceived as intended, the producer of the work and their production of it becomes part of the source rather than acting as relay. This would be similar to the passage from *Nutshell* in Section 4.4, where the contrast in my representation of the actual world and the proffered text world increases the onstage presence of the author, such that they become part of the source. In fact, in either seemingly intended or seemingly unintended humour, the prime, being part of a receiver's existing knowledge, would be analogous to their representation of the actual world. The dialectic, being a receiver's re-representation of the relay's worldview, would be analogous to Browse's (2018) idea of a proffered text world.

Part of the construction of humour in a parody is in recognition of the prime as the source of humour. Therefore, my interest is in how this recognition can occur. Nash (1985) suggests that there are two basic elements to an allusion. The first is the content element, or the material or socio-cultural substance. Nash uses the example of a piece of graffiti: *Harwich for the continent: Frinton for the incontinent*. This uses knowledge of the road signs directing people to ferry services departing from Harwich, the nearby town of Frinton (known to have a large population of retired people), and the semantic differences of the words 'continent' and 'incontinent'. The second element is the linguistic element, or the textual form of expression recognisable as that of another

work. As an example of this, Nash quotes from the BBC sitcom *Sorry!* (1981), in which a dustman proclaims that 'a bag is a bag is a bag', something recognisable as structurally identical to Gertrude Stein's (1922) 'a rose is a rose is a rose'. Nash suggests that parody can be constructed from a displacement along the content plane or along both content and expression planes. In Simpson's model this would be the equivalent of the dialectic being a displacement from the prime. Displacing either content or expression from its origin allows one to be contrasted with the other, bringing to attention the characteristics of the prime.

Part of what makes the novel recognisable as a parody of a crime noir novel is the fact that it includes a number of content elements that are found in a prototypical noir thriller. Several of the *Goodreads* reviewers make mention of this. For example, '…every genre cliché is twisted to the setting' (*Goodreads*: R1a, 2017a), 'The clichés are all there…' (*Goodreads*: R5a, 2017a), 'achieves the noir mystery thriller mark containing all of the accepted elements' (*Goodreads*: R6a, 2017a). These elements are identified, collectively, by the reviewers as: a private detective wearing a fedora and trench coat, a bar he frequents that has an insightful and well-informed barman, an underworld organisation with a larger-than-life boss running the town, and a femme fatale.

Taking one of these content elements, the underworld organisation, in *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, the more likely Mafia is replaced with the Druids. They are introduced as part of the scene-setting description of the novel's Aberystwyth:

> In those days, everything in town was controlled by the Druids. Sure, the Bronzinis controlled the ice cream, the tailoring and the haircuts; and the Llewellyns controlled the crazy golf, the toffee apples and the bingo. But we all know who controlled the Bronzinis and the Llewellyns.
>
> (Pryce, 2009: 3)

The Druids then appear a few pages into the story:

> The man from the Orthopaedic Boot shop said he'd seen a group of men leaving the premises hurriedly and driving off in a mauve Montego with blacked-out windows. Only one group of people drove cars like that – the Druids.
>
> (Pryce, 2009: 20-21)

For the Druids to be recognised as the equivalent of the Mafia there needs to be enough similarity between the two. Spatially, this would be represented as sufficient proximity between the two for the effort in recognising the characteristics of an organised crime syndicate in the representation of the Druids not to be too great. For example, both groups are seen to be somewhat separate from most people, with the idea that one cannot simply join that group. Both, for me, have slightly mysterious associations, with the Druids having mystical abilities (at least, in myth) and the Mafia being involved in secret dealings. There is also an element of power, with Druids being high-ranking in Celtic culture and the Mafia forcefully dominating business activities. This element is picked up in the repeated 'controlled' in the first passage, which amplifies this element, establishing a link between the two groups.

A link is also made in the second passage in the description of the Druids' car. The blacked-out windows link the Druids with the secrecy of the Mafia and add to the idea of the Druids engaging in clandestine activities. This is also conveyed in the description of the men 'leaving the premises hurriedly', which gives the impression, in this context, of furtiveness. The last sentence of this passage also adds to the impression of the Druids as a feared group by creating suspense through the syntactic positioning of 'the Druids'. The capitalisation of 'Druids' in the same way that 'Mafia' would be capitalised also contributes to this recognition of the druid group in terms of the Mafia. In addition, there is an association made through the recognisably Italian name of the Bronzinis, one of the families controlled by the Druids.

However, there is also contrast between druids and the Mafia and the contrast between the two groups brings the characteristics of both groups to attention. This is largely in the association of the Mafia with crime and violence, whereas druids have more peaceful associations. For example, my immediate ideas about druids are as members of the Gorsedd, the gathering of druids and bards celebrating Welsh Celtic traditions. There is also contrast in what the Druids control, compared with what the Mafia might be expected to control. The Bronzini family name links the Druids with the Mafia, but the Welsh name of the Llewellyn family connects with the Aberystwyth setting. The businesses these two families control also provides contrast as most of these elements are associated more with British seaside towns than the settings I would tend to associate with the Mafia. The businesses like crazy golf and bingo controlled by the Druids are also trivial in comparison with those I would expect to be controlled by

the Mafia, which would tend to be more to do with, say, drug trafficking, smuggling, or prostitution. This gives a sense of qualitative diminishment to the contrast, which aids in the perception of humorous intent. This qualitative diminishment also occurs in the description, in the second passage, of the car. The secretive associations of the blacked-out windows contrast with the car itself, a mauve Montego. A fairly ordinary car such as this has qualitatively diminished characteristics compared with the more glamorous limousine-type cars I might expect to be used by the Mafia.

The contrasts I have described contribute to the distancing of the source Druids from the receiver. However, there is also a receiver-relay convergence effect. This occurs in the last sentence of the first passage, 'But we all know who controlled the Bronzinis and the Llewellyns'. The narration is in the past tense, which positions the narrative and, indeed, the Druids, remote from the relay and receiver. However, 'But we all know...' is in the present tense, which contributes to the sense of proximity of the relay with the receiver. This also directly addresses the receiver by implying that they are part of 'we'. The sense of being directly addressed is also conveyed by 'Sure...' in the preceding sentence, which contributes to the conversational register. As well as directly addressing the receiver, the last sentence makes the assumption that the receiver shares knowledge of the Druids with the narrator.

Another content element identified by the *Goodreads* reviewers is a bar the detective frequents with an insightful barkeeper. In *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, the equivalent of the bar is the ice-cream stall on the Promenade. This is introduced in the first chapter of the novel.

> Et in Arcadia ego. The fibreglass ice-cream cone was five feet high and the Latin motto curved around the base in copperplate neon. Sitting on top of Sospan's stall, and visible to the sun parched fisherman from ten miles out to sea, it was as much an Aberystwyth icon as the Cliff Railway or Myfanwy's mole. I too was in Arcady. I knew what it meant because I had once looked it up at the library; but if you asked Sospan he would shrug and say he found it in a book and thought it had something to do with the amusement arcade. That was his story and he stuck to it. But he knew better than anyone what strange demons brought the troubled souls to his counter.
>
> 'Morning, Mr Knight! Usual is it?'
>
> 'Make it a double with extra ripple.'
>
> (Pryce, 2009)

As with the Druids, there are similarities between the usual bar and barkeeper and the equivalent elements here. The description of the ice-cream stall, with its large fibreglass ice-cream cone and neon motto, is reminiscent, to my mind, of similar establishments in America and, in particular, in Los Angeles. While this might not be directly equivalent to the bars frequented by the private eyes of crime noir, it links the ice-cream stand in Aberystwyth to this setting. However, the image I have of the ice-cream stall is brightly coloured and, as is suggested in the passage, highly conspicuous. This contrasts with the shadowy, and even dingy, mental representations I have of the bars. The bars, also, seem sophisticated in comparison with the lack of subtlety of the ice-cream stall, which introduces a sense of qualitative diminishment.

There is also a similarity in the idea of the barkeeper / ice-cream seller being wise and a source of insight to his customers. This is conveyed partly by Sospan's use of the Latin motto. Because he has mistaken its meaning and has not checked this before using it on the stall, this creates the impression that he is not, in fact, very wise. There is a qualitative diminishment in this contrast. The motto itself adds to the construction of humour, as the relay, the narrating Louis Knight, indicates that he knows its meaning but does not translate it. For a receiver who is aware of its association with death, this contrasts with the supposedly enjoyable environment of a seaside ice-cream stall. In sharing this knowledge, this represents a convergence of the receiver with the relay.

There is also similarity in the idea of Louis Knight being a regular at the ice-cream stall, which is conveyed in the fact that Sospan knows his name and that he has a 'usual' order. Knight's reply makes a link to the usual American location with the expression 'Make it a...' and in customising his order '...with extra...', both of which I associate more with America than Wales. In asking for a 'double', which I would associate with ordering spirits in a bar, this makes a connection with the more expected whiskey that would be ordered by a crime noir private eye. Almost the entirety of this sentence could be expected in a crime noir novel. However, the final word, 'ripple', belongs to the description of an ice-cream, which changes the interpretation of Knight's order, contrasting it with the more expected whiskey order. Again, the contrasting associations of whiskey and ice-cream – one being for adults and the other being something I associate more with childhood, especially when bought from a stall – add to the sense of qualitative diminishment.

Further to their associations with crime noir, several reviewers made a more specific association with the novels of Raymond Chandler. For example, ‘a mixture of Chandleresque melancholy with occasionally cynical black humour’ (*Goodreads*: R7a, 2017a), ‘ripe Chandleresque metaphors’ (*Goodreads*: R8a, 2017a), ‘(he) narrates the plot like Philip Marlowe’ (*Goodreads*: R9a, 2017a). As the Chandleresque style is recognisable, this makes the novel an example of Nash’s (1985) ‘style-and-content’ parody, where there is a displacement on both content and expression planes. One of my own primary associations with Chandler’s style, as opposed to other hardboiled crime authors such as Dashiell Hammett or James M. Cain, say, is the novelty of the metaphors, rather than simply the use of metaphor. In *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, there are relatively few metaphors that strike me as having the novelty of Chandler’s. However, there are some and these are, perhaps, more noticeable for their rarity. This is one example from a part of the novel set in a bingo hall.

> The lady in the blue scarf shouted, ‘House!’
> Twenty jaws dropped and the crack of Mintos hitting lower dental plates was like a Mexican firing squad taking aim.
>
> (Pryce, 2009)

The source of humour is the reaction of the other bingo players to the woman winning. The other players are not described explicitly but are implied through ‘Twenty jaws dropped’. Their reaction is also not described explicitly, but indirectly through the resulting sound, which is amplified through the implication that each bingo player was eating a Minto and each wore dentures. The sound is metaphorically amplified by its comparison with the sound of a firing squad taking aim. This itself is amplified through the specificity of it being a Mexican firing squad. The ‘Mintos hitting lower dental plates’ and ‘Mexican firing squad taking aim’ input spaces form a blend that amplifies the sound of the dropped jaws. The blend and the implicit description of the players and their reaction encourages humorous elaboration of the detail of the reaction.

In reading Raymond Chandler novels in the past, I have enjoyed the creativity in the language. I have not, however, generally recognised or appreciated humour in the metaphors he uses. It occurs to me that there are two differences between this metaphor from *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* and several I have retrieved from Chandler’s novels. To illustrate these differences, the following extracts are two examples of metaphors from *The Big Sleep*:

> The General spoke again, slowly, using his strength as carefully as an out-of-work showgirl uses her last good pair of stockings.
>
> (Chandler, 1970 [1939]: 7)

> I balanced [the gun] there, and stepped back with my head on one side like a window-dresser getting the effect of a new twist of a scarf around a dummy's neck.
>
> (Chandler, 1970 [1939]: 245)

The first difference is that in the *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* metaphor, the two input spaces are both amplified as well as being juxtaposed. In the examples from *The Big Sleep*, the source domain of the metaphor is a better textual attractor, with the target domain relatively neglected. There is, thus, greater opportunity, in the *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* example, for the contrasts between the source domain and target domain to be brought to attention and for blending to result in emergent properties or, in other words, humorous elaboration.

The second difference concerns the text world configuration of the metaphors. In a Text World Theory account of metaphor, the target domain is located within the primary text world, whereas the source domain is not part of the primary text world and is represented as a metaphor world (Gavins, 2007). Although both feed into the blended world, the primary text world is more proximal to the receiver. Bringing in the idea of qualitative diminishment, in the first example from *The Big Sleep*, the source domain (the care with which the showgirl uses her last stockings) is trivial and, thus, qualitatively diminished relative to the target domain (the care with which the elderly and unwell General uses his strength). Similarly, in the second example, the source domain (involving the window dresser) is qualitatively diminished relative to the target domain (Marlowe considering the gun). In both, the qualitatively diminished source domain is more distant than the more serious target domain. In the *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* example, this relationship is reversed. The 'Mintos hitting lower dental plates' target domain is both qualitatively diminished and more proximal to the receiver than the 'Mexican firing squad' source domain. Thus, the direction of qualitative diminishment helps in the recognition of the metaphor as having humorous intent.

The content and expression elements I have discussed so far enable the recognition of the novel as a parody of crime noir. The ways in which the Welsh seaside elements contrast with the American counterparts brings to a receiver's attention the

fact that they recognise that the elements contrast with the American counterparts and that they share this recognition with the relay. The extensive qualitative diminishment in the Welsh seaside setting compared with the American counterpart aids in the perception of humorous intent. In terms of humour appreciation, the effort involved in matching the Aberystwyth elements with the American counterparts is reduced by figuring the similarities, for example, in the repetition of 'controlled' in the first Druids passage. However, if a reader does not recognise these as crime noir elements, any deviation of the Aberystwyth elements from their American counterparts will not be perceived as contrasting with the prototype but will be perceived as a prototype in its own right. The same applies to the recognition of the Welsh elements. Although the novel is a parody of Chandleresque crime fiction, as I mentioned before, a good deal of the humour I recognised and appreciated was related to the Welsh setting. This was also mentioned by a number of reviewers, some of whom commented that they enjoyed this aspect of the novel. Some, by contrast, commented that, although they recognised that some of the humour was based on references to the Welsh or to Aberystwyth, they did not have enough knowledge of this to appreciate the humour. For example, Reviewer 2a (*Goodreads*: R2a, 2017a) comments in relation to the Welsh humour 'I could really feel it so many jokes going over my head'. The following passage is an example of this Welsh-related humour. The main character has just arrived at his office and is greeted, as usual, by his cleaner.

> '*Bore da*, Mr Knight!'
> '*Bore da*, Mrs Llantrisant! Lovely day?'
> 'Oh isn't it just!'
> At this point the usual formula was for us to spend a few minutes pinning down exactly how lovely a day it was. We did this by cross-referencing it with its counterparts in previous years, the records of which Mrs Llantrisant kept in her head like those people who know all the FA Cup goal-scorers since 1909.
>
> (Pryce, 2009: 4)

The source of humour is the establishment of the fact that it is a lovely day, something that could be attributed to a stereotype of the British, perhaps, not only to the Welsh. However, the use of the word 'lovely' is something that I associate with my Welsh relatives and friends as it is a word that they use to humorous effect in caricaturing, in particular, middle-aged Welsh women, such as Mrs Llantrisant. The use of 'lovely' is amplified by the idea of Louis Knight and Mrs Llantrisant 'pinning down exactly how lovely a day it was', when 'lovely' is something that would be difficult to

quantify. The description of this conversation as a ‘formula’ also amplifies the exchange as phatic communication that they must carry out. In addition, the passage uses a stereotype of which I am aware, of the Welsh being pedantic (Davies, 1977). This is reflected in the associations with precision in ‘formula’, ‘exactly’, and ‘cross-referencing’, which are amplified by contrast with knowledge of FA Cup goal-scorers.

Although the usual conversation does not take place on this occasion, my familiarity with this type of conversation, and with the accents and speech patterns means that I am able to elaborate its detail. I can picture and hear the characters, especially Mrs Llantrisant, debating whether the day is lovelier than the corresponding date some years previously. I can recognise, also, the awareness of the banality of such a conversation that seems to be conveyed by its amplification by Louis Knight as narrator. In recognising that I share knowledge of this characterisation of Mrs Llantrisant as a stereotype of a middle-aged Welsh woman with the narrator (and, by extension, the author) this effects a receiver-relay convergence. However, for a reader without this shared knowledge, although the amplification may be noticed and recognised as intended humour, the concept that is being amplified may not be recognised. Such a reader would, therefore, recognise but not appreciate this humour.

In summary, the main overarching source of humour – American noir fiction – is subjectively construed by juxtaposing its recognisable components with counterpart components recognisable as being associated with the Aberystwyth setting. This defamiliarises and, thus, distances the source from the receiver. In recognising the components of crime noir, and also the Welsh counterparts, a receiver also recognises that they share knowledge of the source with the author. This represents a convergence of receiver and relay. In this novel, the relay is rarely an overtly onstage presence. However, there are a few occasions, such as in the first Druids passage, where the reader is directly addressed by the narrator. This contributes to the subjective construal of the source. There are also a few occasions where humorous elaboration is encouraged, such as in the Mintos / Mexican firing squad passage, which figures the receiver’s role in the process of humour construction. One of the key ways, however, of encouraging a humorous interpretation is through the qualitative diminishment of the Aberystwyth counterparts in relation to the American noir components. This gives a conceptual smallness to the elements which encourages their perception as playful.

In terms of the three aspects of the viewing arrangement that can contribute to a humorous construal (the subjective construal of the source, the objective construal of the relay, and the figuring of the process of construal), the humorous construal here is mainly achieved through the subjective construal of the source. As I suggested in Section 5.4, this would seem to be required if humour is to be recognised. However, the points at which, for example, the relay is made explicitly more objective, or where elaboration is encouraged serve to enhance the subjectivity with which the source is construed.

6.2 *Man at the Helm*

The second case study investigates how a shift in narratorial voice affects humour in *Man at the Helm* by Nina Stibbe (2014). This is a first person-narrated semi-autobiographical novel, focalised mainly through the nine-year-old enactor of the narrator, Lizzie. On reading it, my sense was that, although for the most part the perspective was that of nine-year-old Lizzie, there were times when the voice of the adult Lizzie was more noticeable, including some points at which I had a sense of being directly addressed by the narrator. In addition, there were numerous points at which it seemed that both the voices of nine-year-old Lizzie and of adult Lizzie were present. This idea of there being two voices is reflected, to a degree, in the reviews of the novel on *Goodreads* (2017c). Some reviewers commented on the narration by the adult Lizzie, whereas some wrote about the narration by a child. It is also reflected in reviews commenting on, for example, the novel's 'marry[ing] the believable voice of Lizzie as a child with an adult viewpoint' (*Goodreads*: R1c, 2017c). Several reviewers also commented on the precociousness of the narration, which would seem to be the result of blending childlike features of narration with those of a more adult nature. The presence of the voices of the same person as adult and child has similarities with Dancygier's (2005) work on blending and viewpoint in, for example, Raban's (2003) *Coasting*, which demonstrates that this effect is not confined to humorous texts. However, I argue that, in this instance, this contributes to the construction of humour. Although, in the main, the novel is focalised through nine-year-old Lizzie, in many of the instances of humour it feels as if she is the source of humour. These instances coincide with the increased presence of the voice of adult Lizzie.

The following passage is an example of humour where the voice of older Lizzie is dominant. It is from a part of the novel in which Lizzie and her brother take part in a fancy-dress competition in an attempt to fit in with the residents of the village their family has just moved to. The instructions for entrants to the competition asked them to wear an 'unusual and timely' home-made costume. The setting of the novel being 1971, shortly after the conversion to decimal currency, Lizzie has entered the competition dressed as Miss Decimalization, in a costume that is a large model of a fifty-pence piece. She is very confident about the cleverness of her costume, and disappointed that the judges award prizes to costumes she considers inferior.

> But equally they hated decimalization and saw it as a nuisance foisted on them by London, a no-good, pointless change they'd never asked for. They were angry about the rounding-up of the ha'penny or the rounding-down of it. Shopkeepers like Mrs Worth felt the shopkeeper was losing out and wives like Mrs Longlady felt the housewife was being cheated. And there I was, the living personification of the thing. Bacofoil-covered.
>
> (Stibbe, 2014: 39)

On reading this passage and the preceding text detailing Lizzie's experience of the competition, my feeling is mainly of compassion for Lizzie at her family apparently being ostracised, and frustration at her attempts to fit into the village being disregarded. However, at 'Bacofoil-covered', this changes to amusement at my mental representation of Lizzie's appearance dressed as a fifty-pence piece.

As with the rest of the novel, the past tense narration positions the events of the narrative at a distance from the narrator and the reader. This is particularly noticeable in the deixis of 'And there I was...' which emphasises the distance between the narrator and the event being narrated in terms both of time and space. The voice of adult Lizzie is more apparent than in much of the novel. This is partly through the register of the narration, with the use of words such as 'foisted' and 'personification'. There is also the adult-sounding reflection and reasoning about the villagers' perspective on decimalization and the interpretation of their dislike of it as an explanation for her lack of success in the competition. This creates a conceptual separation of Lizzie from the reason for her lack of success, which distances her from the outcome of the competition. In other words, the situation is unfair, but she is not to blame for being ignored by the judges. However, this also creates one side of a juxtaposition: Lizzie is not decimalization. The other side is that Lizzie, dressed as Miss Decimalization, is

decimalization. She is the 'living personification of the thing' and it was her decision, in an attempt to win favour with the village, to dress as something bound to have the opposite effect. This juxtaposition, bringing to attention the innocence and futility of Lizzie's action, is the basis of the source of humour.

This shift from NOT DECIMALIZATION to DECIMALIZATION is enhanced by the final 'Bacofoil-covered', which is an example of the comic timing effect that I discussed in Section 5.2. The use of the brand name amplifies the associations with domesticity and through this the home-made quality of the costume. This adds a sense of qualitative diminishment to the DECIMALIZATION side of the juxtaposition. The shift, therefore, is made larger: not just NOT DECIMALIZATION to DECIMALIZATION, but NOT DECIMALIZATION to HOME-MADE DECIMALIZATION. The apparent quickness of this shift enhances the impression of shifting from one to the other, thus, amplifying the contrast between decimalization, with its financial associations, and Lizzie's home-made decimalization costume.

'Bacofoil-covered' also has an effect on the elaboration potential of the passage. The brand name, as I have said, amplifies the home-made quality of Lizzie's costume. The idea that she is 'covered' in Bacofoil also adds to this, as there is a sense that something 'covered' is completely concealed. My image of Lizzie's costume here is far more amateurish and uses far more Bacofoil than I know, from the description prior to this, that she used to make it. The result is that I picture Lizzie from my adult perspective as a small child looking slightly pathetic, which contrasts with what I know from the preceding narrative about her pride in her costume. My overall sense is of sharing with the narrator, the older Lizzie, a retrospective acknowledgement of the contrast between how she remembers feeling and how she must actually have looked to the judges.

Focusing specifically on the effect of the narration of the passage in an adult register, this is, first of all, part of the creation of the juxtapositions between decimalization and Lizzie's costume, which is the source of humour. It also allows a sense of distance between young Lizzie and her experiences at the fancy-dress competition, which enables the humour to be appreciated. The adult register of the narration adds to the deictic positioning effect of first person narration in the past tense in creating an idea of the older Lizzie as narrator. This increases the objectivity of the

relay in the construal of younger Lizzie as the source of humour, increasing the receiver's awareness of their proximity.

The passage I have just discussed is one where the voice of adult Lizzie is dominant. As I have mentioned, there are also points in the novel where it seems that the voices of both the younger and the older Lizzie are present. The impression I had at several of these points was that Lizzie's precociousness was the overall source of humour. The following passage is one of these instances.

> My sister asked me to name the top three qualities I'd look for in a husband. It was difficult because I knew so little about men, only really that they loved fires and omelettes and needed constant snacks.
>
> I began by saying that I'd look for an enthusiastic television watcher. And was about to say I'd want someone 'down-to-earth' but could see that my sister wasn't listening. Like all people who ask for your favourite or top three things, she was merely waiting to tell me hers. When I'd noticed other people doing this, I'd always thought it might be better if the person asking just said, 'May I tell you the top three things I look for?' And that way you're not wasting time thinking up your top three things (just so they feel justified in saying theirs). The worst offender in this regard was Little Jack, usually over Roman Emperors or pies.
>
> (Stibbe, 2014: 21)

There are three main sources of humour within the passage. The first is the idea of Lizzie's knowledge of men being only that they 'loved fires and omelettes and needed constant snacks'. There is contrast in fires and omelettes for me as my prototypical fire is a roaring log fire or bonfire rather than the gas flame that might more usually be used to cook an omelette. An omelette for me, therefore, has rather quotidian associations compared with the more uncommon event of a fire. The notion of needing constant snacks also involves contrast as snacks, to me, are meant to be more occasional than something someone would need constantly. That these specific elements are the only things Lizzie knows about men conveys the idea that she knows few men, and that these are things she associates with a particular man – probably her father. There is contrast in the specifics of Lizzie's prototypical man being applied to define men in general.

The second source of humour is in the polite negotiation of wanting to tell someone one's top three things contrasting with Lizzie's more practical and direct preference for this type of conversation. From my adult perspective, asking someone their top three things is something I associate more with a game than with a serious way of establishing the desirable qualities of something. It is something that children I know

sometimes ask, but it is not something I would expect adult friends of mine to ask me unless they were asking jokingly. This contrasts with the apparent seriousness here, which is conveyed by Lizzie's apparent annoyance at having her time wasted by being asked to think of her top three things. It gives a sense that this is something she would put some thought into, rather than being a response where she would give the first three things she thought of, which might tend to be an adult's response.

The third source of humour is in Little Jack's asking of people's top three things. First there is the idea of someone having 'usual' categories, which suggests that he has asked about people's top three Roman emperors or pies on multiple occasions. However, 'usual' amplifies this because it would tend to be applied to activities that occur on a more regular basis. Roman emperors and pies contrast as well, as they are semantically distant, and the shift from one to the other also involves a qualitative diminishment. However, they also contrast as subjects for a top three-type question. It seems reasonable to be expected to be able to name one's favourite pies, but to be asked about one's top three Roman emperors assumes an appropriately expansive knowledge of ancient history.

The passage is narrated, it seems, from the perspective of young Lizzie as it involves her thoughts about the way people should tell each other their top three things. However, my experience is of sharing humour with the older Lizzie. As well as the older Lizzie acting as relay, it also seems to me that young Lizzie is part of the source. This occurs partly because the three main sources of humour are related to child-like behaviours. However, there is an overarching contrast between elements of the passage associated with young Lizzie and elements that are associated with older Lizzie.

In terms of the elements associated with young Lizzie, the overall subject of the passage is the naming of one's top three things, something that, to me, reminds me of childhood. Another element associated with young Lizzie is her knowledge of men, juxtaposing three semantically distant and rather trivial characteristics. There is also her description of Little Jack asking people their top three things. This seems slightly exaggerated but also seems to introduce an element of normality with the idea that someone could have 'usual' categories. However, scattered through the passage are elements of diction that appear more adult in register. For example, 'she was merely waiting', 'just so they feel justified', 'the worst offender', and 'in this regard'. These

elements contrast with the elements associated with young Lizzie bringing her child-like behaviours, attitudes, and language to attention. In contrasting the elements associated with young Lizzie with those associated with the older Lizzie, one thing this does is reinforce the separation of the one from the other. This distances young Lizzie from older Lizzie who, as the deictically more proximal enactor, is acting as relay. In separating the two enactors of Lizzie, each becomes more conceptually defined. Being juxtaposed, the two enactors act as input spaces. I would argue that the resulting blend of adult and child features produces the sense of Lizzie's precociousness that several reviewers commented on.

There is a similarity in the construction of humour here with Attardo's (1994) proposed register-based humour that I discussed in Chapter 3 in that there is a contrast between the content and register elements of the passage. However, the model I propose attempts to explain *why* such a contrast can lead to a humorous interpretation. Although the contrast between the adult and child elements constructs the source of humour, it also has an effect on the relationship between me, as receiver, and the relay. In juxtaposing the child-like elements with the adult elements the child-like behaviours and language of young Lizzie are brought to attention. This also brings the enactor of young Lizzie to attention. In terms of the viewing arrangement, this places young Lizzie onstage as part of the conceptual content of the construal. Thus, she becomes more objectively construed. However, I would argue that this is not an objective construal of young Lizzie and her behaviours. Because her language contrasts with older Lizzie's, the adult-ness of older Lizzie's language is also brought more to attention and, by extension, so is the enactor of older Lizzie. Therefore, the enactor of older Lizzie is also more onstage making this a subjective construal. In placing the relay more onstage, in this subjective construal, it is not just the enactor themself that is brought to attention. It also emphasises the process of conceptualisation. With humour being a form of play, and where the process of an activity is emphasised over the goal, figuring the process of construal enhances the humorousness of the interpretation.

In this instance, the separation of the content and diction contributes to the construction of humour. This is not to say that all such separations are humour-related. In a non-humorous example, Stockwell (2014) identifies in Seamus Heaney's (1990) 'Mid-term break' a similar separation of adult diction and register from the child's experience. As with the second passage from *Man at the Helm*, this contributes to the

indication of the adult enactor looking back. It is possible that the subject matter contributes to the humour in the passage from *Man at the Helm* but the non-humorousness of the poem. However, there is a difference between the poem and the passage. In the poem, the adult diction and register inform the tone throughout the poem and contribute to the conveyed atmosphere of the younger Heaney's experience. The sense is of the older Heaney recalling his younger enactor's experience and, thus, the younger Heaney is relatively implicit. Although there is subjectivity to the construal of the scene, the emphasis is on the conceptual content with the atmosphere created by the adult diction enhancing that. Therefore, the figuration in the viewing arrangement is the recalled experience rather than the process of recalling it, making this an example of an end-figured construal. In the passage, the register is largely that of the younger Lizzie and the moments of adult diction serve less to inform the tone and more to create the separation of the two Lizzie enactors. As such the younger Lizzie is very present as part of the conceptual content of the scene. The separation of the two Lizzie enactors draws attention to the older Lizzie in her recollection of the younger Lizzie's experience. Thus, the figuration in the viewing arrangement is shifted onto the process of recollection rather than the recalled experience. Since this is a process-figured construal it contributes to its interpretation as humorous.

As I have discussed, the main focalisation of the novel is the younger Lizzie but there are points in the narrative where there is a shift to an increased presence of the older Lizzie who is the narrator. The two passages are examples of this. Both involve an increase in the objectivity of the construal of the narrating older Lizzie, which enhances the construction of the younger Lizzie as the source of humour. However, they do so in different ways, and in ways that are more subtle than the direct address of the reader that I discussed in Chapter 4.

In introducing the adult voice into the narration both passages create a separation of the adult Lizzie from the young Lizzie. In the first passage, there is a sense of the adult Lizzie reflecting on the actions of her younger self and, with the greater onstage presence of the adult Lizzie, I am more aware of the narration occurring sometime after the events of the fancy-dress competition and at a time nearer the present. Thus, there is distance in terms of time from the younger Lizzie and her actions as the source of humour and relative proximity with the narrating adult Lizzie as the relay.

In the second passage, the separation of the adult Lizzie from her younger self is created through the contrasting adult and child elements of the register and content. In the first passage distance is created through the deictic positioning of the younger source Lizzie at a spatio-temporal location remote from the adult relay Lizzie. Here, however, although the narration takes place sometime after the events, the spatio-temporal separation of the two Lizzie enactors is less defined by the deictic terms and occurs to a greater extent through the contrast in adult-like and child-like elements. Again, though, the separation of source and relay Lizzie enactors increases my awareness of the presence of the relay Lizzie and her relative proximity to me as well as the relative distance of the source Lizzie. The comparison of these two passages demonstrates that, although, ultimately, humour relies on the relative proximity of receiver and relay compared with the receiver-source distance, these proximity and distance effects can be achieved in different ways.

6.3 *Crooked Heart*

The third case study focuses on how humour can be appreciated even when the situation in which humour occurs is serious for those involved. *Crooked Heart* by Lissa Evans (2015) is a novel set in the first years of the Second World War. It has a prologue, set just before the outbreak of the war, which introduces one of the main characters – a nine-year-old boy called Noel. It is the prologue that is the focus of this case study. In the prologue, Noel is living with his godmother, Mattie, who is showing signs of dementia, forgetting words and becoming disoriented by the preparations for war, such as equipping the house with blackout curtains. It becomes apparent to Noel that he needs to care for her, and he worries who will care for him. In spite of this troubling situation, I recognised and appreciated the humour in the writing.

This being a short prologue to the novel, relatively few *Goodreads* (2017b) reviews mentioned humour specifically in relation to the prologue. However, approximately two thirds mentioned humour in relation to the novel as a whole. What was interesting was that, where the prologue was discussed, a good proportion of reviews commented on, for example, the ‘fabulous character’ (*Goodreads*: R1b, 2017b) of Mattie. These reviewers often mentioned something about their love of the character, or of wanting to know her better. This reflected my own feeling towards Mattie.

Moreover, my feeling was that my liking of Mattie was related to my sense of sharing humour with her. Therefore, in this case study, I will explore how humour can be appreciated in spite of the difficult situation and how humour relates to my readerly relationship with Mattie.

The following three passages are examples of humour that I recognised and appreciated in the prologue. The first is the opening of the novel:

> She was losing words. At first it was quite funny. 'The box of things,' Mattie would say, waving her mauve-veined hands vaguely around the kitchen.
> 'The box of things for making flames. It's a song, Noel!
>
> *'The box of things for making flames*
> *I can't recall their bloody names.'*
>
> Or 'that church', she'd say, standing at the top of Hampstead Heath, gazing down at the scribble of blue and grey that was London. 'The one with the dome – remind me what it's called.'
> 'St Paul's Cathedral'
> 'Of course it is. The architect has a bird's name. Owl … Ostrich…'
> 'Wren'
> 'Right again, young Noel, though I can't help thinking "Sir Christopher Ostrich" has a tremendous ring to it…'
>
> (Evans, 2015: 13-14)

With the second sentence ('At first it was quite funny.'), this immediately introduces the possibility that the text that follows can be interpreted as humorous. One source of humour is in the description 'The box of things for making flames'. The description refers to a box of matches, but it is underlexicalised (Fowler, 1986). The defamiliarisation of referring to a fairly ordinary object by description rather than name brings the concept of a box of matches to attention. This is amplified by the song Mattie makes up, which being a playful act adds to the potential for humorous interpretation. Importantly, the relay here is Mattie, who, possibly for Noel's benefit, makes light of her forgetting the word 'matches'. The second source of humour here is in the contrast between 'Sir Christopher Ostrich' and Sir Christopher Wren. Usually, if I were to think of Christopher Wren, my initial associations would not be of a bird. Because I am familiar with the name of the architect and St Paul's Cathedral, the meaning of Wren's name as a type of bird would tend to go unnoticed. However, juxtaposing it with 'Sir Christopher Ostrich' the meaning of 'Wren' as a type of bird comes to my attention. The contrast between the grand associations of a cathedral architect and the more

modest associations I have with birds is amplified by the use of 'Sir' in 'Sir Christopher Ostrich'.

The prologue also introduces some relatives: Uncle Geoffrey and Auntie Margery. Uncle Geoffrey visits once a month and, each year, brings Mattie a birthday present that either he or Margery has made her.

> 'There are times,' said Mattie, examining yet another cross-stitched antimacassar, 'when it's very useful to have an open fire. What is the one thing that is more important than money, Noel?'
> 'Taste.'
> 'Which is something that Geoffrey and…' she paused, '…bosoms…'
> 'Margery.'
> '…will never have.'
>
> (Evans, 2015: 14)

There is a source of humour in the contrast of materialistic things like money and taste being considered more important than the things that, to my mind, would more usually be considered most important in receiving a gift, such as being appreciative of someone's generosity. This is amplified by its phrasing as a question that is answered immediately and correctly by Noel, which gives the idea that it is a question that has been asked and answered many times before. There is another source of humour in the ellipted reason for it being 'useful to have an open fire'. The inference is that Mattie intends, or would like, to burn the antimacassar, which contrasts her behaviour with the more expected gratitude. The inference also amplifies her behaviour through the involvement of the bright and hot textual attractor of the fire, adding to the perception of this behaviour as more extreme than, for instance, implying that she will quietly dispose of the antimacassar by throwing it away. My interpretation of her speech is that it is more a wry expression of her dislike of the present than an indication that she is actually going to burn it. I would argue that this is partly because the amplification of the potential action of disposing of the present increases the subjectivity of the construal of the future enactor of Mattie. Adding to my perception of her speech as humorous is the fact that it is implied rather than stated, with her actual intended action being ellipted. This increases the elaboration potential of her comment. I also have, from Mattie's previous conversational turns and descriptions of her behaviour, an expectation of intended humour in what she says. However, whether or not she actually intends to burn the antimacassar, her behaviour here contrasts with the expected norm of gratitude

for a present. Mattie's eccentric behaviour also contrasts with the behaviour of Geoffrey and Margery in giving Mattie 'yet another cross-stitched antimacassar'. My memory of cross-stitching as a child is that it was an activity I found somewhat tedious, and antimacassars are something I associate with rather conservative furniture. These associations form part of my assessment of Geoffrey and Margery. While 'yet another' may be an exaggeration, combined with the specificity of 'cross-stitched antimacassar', this amplifies the dullness with which I perceive them.

Another source of humour in this passage is in the way in which Mattie deals with forgetting Margery's name. She asks Noel for a prompt by mentioning a feature of Margery that Noel would recognise as belonging to the person whose name she is trying to recall. First, this is unnecessary. Mattie and Noel are already talking about Geoffrey and Margery, and, in this context, the most expected collocation of 'Geoffrey and...' would be 'Margery'. As an apparent flouting of the maxim of quantity (Grice, 1975) this contrasts Mattie's behaviour with what might be more expected. Second, the feature she selects to identify Margery – 'bosoms' – is not unique to Margery, which suggests that the reason for its selection is that it is something very noticeable about her. I also associate the word 'bosoms' with an informal and non-serious register compared with the word 'breasts', for example, that I would associate with more formal use. The elaboration that this encourages results in a caricature-like image of Margery.

The prologue continues with a description of Geoffrey's visits to Mattie and Noel:

> After tea, Uncle Geoffrey would ask whether there was anything he could do around the house, and Mattie always found something awkward or messy – shifting furniture, oiling a door. When the blackout regulations were published, Uncle Geoffrey was set to work sticking brown paper on the door-panes and checking every shutter for soundness.
>
> 'After all,' as Mattie said, 'you are our war expert.' He had enrolled as an air-raid warden the day after Mr Chamberlain came back from Munich. He had a hat, a whistle and an armband.
>
> 'So all you need now is an air-raid!' said Mattie.
>
> (Evans, 2015: 15)

There is a source of humour in the implication that the jobs Mattie finds for Geoffrey are not things that necessarily need to be done but are found because Mattie wants to give Geoffrey something unpleasant to do. This is not explicit but is suggested by the specification of the jobs as 'awkward or messy', rather than, perhaps, 'useful', and by

the idea that Mattie 'always found' such a job for Geoffrey to do. Mattie's behaviour, again, seems openly ungrateful, which contrasts with what might be expected. The second source of humour, here, is in Mattie's apparent teasing of Geoffrey in his role as an air-raid warden. The suggestion is that, instead of taking on the role out of duty, perhaps, Geoffrey's motivation for volunteering is his enjoyment of the status and authority it brings. This comes from the combination of the speed with which he enrolled and the specification of the hat, whistle, and armband. If the speed of his enrolment were described separately, this could indicate, for example, simply his keenness to help. Similarly, since I have a sense that the prologue is focalised through Noel (with Geoffrey and Margery tending to be referred to in the narration as Uncle Geoffrey and Auntie Margery, for example), the specification of the equipment on its own could just be an indication that Noel is impressed by the equipment. However, as a blend, the speed of enrolment and the specification of the equipment give an emergent sense of the characterisation of Geoffrey as somewhat officious and self-important. The irony in Mattie's apparent teasing of him as a 'war expert' sets up the amplification of this characterisation as it contrasts Geoffrey's implied insignificance with the importance of actual expertise. This characterisation of Geoffrey also invokes, for me, an association with the self-important Chief Warden Hodges in the BBC sitcom *Dad's Army* (1968). This facilitates my recognition of Geoffrey's implied enjoyment of his new role and the contrast someone's enjoyment of a war has with the hardships and suffering surrounding them.

So far I have described how the main sources of humour in the three passages can be recognised. However, recognised humour is not necessarily appreciated. I have selected these three passages because I appreciated the humour in each but I was also aware at the same time that, with Mattie's dementia, she and Noel are in a difficult situation. Therefore, the construction of humour must, in some way, allow my appreciation in spite of the situation.

The problem Mattie and Noel face is Mattie's dementia. One factor that contributes to my appreciation of humour is that the source of humour is not specifically symptoms of dementia. The source may be indirectly related to Mattie's memory loss, but it is not the memory loss itself that is the source. In the first passage, for example, although the description of the box of matches arises because Mattie has forgotten the word 'matches', the source of humour is in the defamiliarisation of the word through its

description. Similarly, when she forgets the name of Christopher Wren, the source of humour is not the fact that she has forgotten, but in the juxtaposition of Wren with 'Sir Christopher Ostrich'. In the second passage, when she forgets Margery's name, the source, again, is not the forgetting but the selection of 'bosoms' to identify Margery. In the same passage, prior to this, where it is implied that Mattie would, at least, like to throw the cross-stitched antimacassar on the fire, this behaviour could be related to her dementia. However, because of the sense I have that she has regularly instructed Noel in the value of taste, my impression is that this is part of her forthright character and, although eccentric, relatively normal behaviour for Mattie. In the third passage, the source of humour is not related to dementia. Instead, the source is Geoffrey's behaviour and Mattie's apparent opinion of Geoffrey.

Also contributing to my appreciation of humour is the qualitative diminishment involved in a number of instances of humour. For example, whereas usually my associations with Christopher Wren would involve St Paul's Cathedral, when juxtaposed with 'Ostrich' this brings to my attention the bird associations that 'Wren' has. This, to some extent, qualitatively diminishes Christopher Wren. Wrens are, obviously, literally smaller than ostriches, but the word 'Wren' also carries here the grander associations of St Paul's Cathedral and its imposing architecture. Thus, 'Ostrich', in this instance, I would argue, is qualitatively diminished compared with 'Wren'. This is also amplified by its juxtaposition with the important-sounding 'Sir'. In the second passage qualitative diminishment occurs where Mattie, in using a feature to identify Margery, reduces her to 'bosoms', something that is not a unique identifying feature, rather than selecting a feature that would differentiate her from other women.

Qualitative diminishment also occurs in the third passage in the characterisation of Geoffrey as a self-important warden. However, this is done in a different way to the qualitative diminishment in the previous two passages. Geoffrey is asked to help with the blackout preparations on the grounds that he is 'our war expert'. This inflates Geoffrey's knowledge from the probably fairly basic training he has received to the status of expertise. It is ironic, however, apparently intended to flatter Geoffrey but, to a receiver already possessing Mattie's poor opinion of Geoffrey, being interpretable as an expression of Mattie's contempt for Geoffrey. The contrast between these two interpretations amplifies Geoffrey's self-importance. This is added to by Mattie's use of 'our', which emphasises that Geoffrey is not a war expert on a national scale but one

very localised to their family. This use of ‘our’ with ‘war expert’ reminds me of something someone might say, with affection, to encourage a child in their developing interest and ability in a particular area. In saying it to the adult Geoffrey, this also diminishes his importance by adding to the condescension in Mattie’s speech. Another diminishment of Geoffrey is in ‘So all you need now is an air raid!’, which contrasts his rudimentary equipment with that which would be needed in the event of an air raid. It also implies that an air raid is part of the essential equipment of an air raid warden, rather than something that they are trained and equipped to deal with. The contrast here increases the perception of Geoffrey’s relative insignificance as it draws attention to his current irrelevance as an air raid warden when there are no air raids occurring.

Another factor that contributes to my appreciation of humour in spite of the difficult situation is the fact that Mattie, in most of these examples, is the relay. She uses humour, it would seem deliberately, to deal with forgetting words, for example. In the first passage, she makes up a song about forgetting the word ‘matches’, which is a playful action. In forgetting the names of St Paul’s Cathedral and Christopher Wren she attempts to cover this by implying that she has asked Noel a general knowledge question. However, she also then recognises and shares her appreciation of the ‘tremendous ring’ of ‘Sir Christopher Ostrich’. Whether or not she finds the name humorous is not given, but even if it not humorous for her, it is related to humour in that it is the appreciation of the image that the name invokes. She is also the relay in her teasing of Geoffrey. The first example of this (‘After all... you are our war expert’) could be recognised by Geoffrey as flattery or, alternatively, he could recognise its irony. Either way, he is the source of humour and I share with Mattie the recognition of his behaviour as the source. In the second passage, my interpretation is that Mattie is the relay in her ellipted suggestion that she may burn the antimacassar. Her behaviour is a source of humour, with her ungratefulness being contrasted with more expected behaviour, but because this is implied, the conceptualisation of the ungrateful behaviour takes place in a more remote text world, distancing $\text{Mattie}_{\text{source}}$ from $\text{Mattie}_{\text{relay}}$. As well as being the relay in a number of instances of humour, the fact that she is able to act as relay, finding a playful way of dealing with her forgetfulness and using irony in teasing Geoffrey and in commenting on his and Margery’s behaviour, indicates that she still has the cognitive capacity to do so. It is interesting that, as the prologue continues, and Mattie’s dementia progresses, there are few recognisable instances of humour.

Some of the humour in these passages comes from my elaborations in response to the texts. In fact, quite a lot of my interpretations about the characters and their actions come not from what is given explicitly, but from my inferences from what is given. The idea that Mattie will throw the antimacassar on the fire, for example, is ellipted. However, I can infer that this is her intended meaning from what she says about the usefulness of an open fire while examining the antimacassar. In doing so I form a mental representation of her action, which contrasts with more expected behaviour. This gives me a more active role in the process, participating, in this instance, at the level of the $relay_{narrator}$ in the construal of Mattie's behaviour as a source of humour. Similarly, the idea I have that Mattie deliberately finds unpleasant jobs for Geoffrey is not given explicitly but is something that I infer. To this I elaborate the detail of Mattie doing so for her own amusement and I have the sense of sharing this amusement with her. Here, my participation is at Mattie's level rather than at the level of the narrator, as in the previous example. Geoffrey's self-importance as a warden and also in general is an important part, I would argue, of my ability to appreciate humour in the text because he is a source of humour that I infer also to be a source of humour to Mattie. Since she is the relay here and I am positioned to share in the humour process with her, and because I appreciate this humour, this emphasises something I have in common with the character in terms of shared worldview.

The aim of this case study is not simply to analyse what makes the prologue humorous, but to determine specifically what makes it possible to appreciate humour even though the situation of Mattie's dementia is difficult for both her and Noel. In terms of the general appreciation of humour, the passages involve instances of diminishment in the contrasts made, both qualitatively and spatially. This occurs qualitatively in, for example, the contrasting of Christopher Wren with 'Sir Christopher Ostrich', and spatially, for example, in the distancing of Mattie's burning of the antimacassar. In this latter example, the ellipted action increases the elaboration potential of the humour, something that also occurs at other points in the passages that contribute to my conceptualisation of Margery and, in particular, Geoffrey's characters. This increases my sense, as receiver, of sharing in the construction of humour in the passages. However, the main reason that it is possible to appreciate humour in these passages in spite of the difficult situation regarding Mattie's dementia is that, in most of the instances of humour, Mattie herself is the relay. Added to which, her dementia, even if her forgetfulness is indirectly related to a source of humour, is largely occluded by the

ensuing source of humour. Furthermore, in a number of instances the source of humour is unrelated to dementia. In fact, in these instances, the source is Geoffrey either alone or with Margery. My positioning as receiver in relation to Geoffrey, with or without Margery, as the source and to Mattie as relay is in greater proximity to Mattie. This encourages my sharing of humour with her and, combined with sources of humour unrelated to her dementia, means that I am able to appreciate this humour.

6.4 Comparison of the case studies

One of the outcomes of the three case studies is that, although the three texts are substantially different to each other and the precise ways in which each achieves recognition and appreciation of humour are also different, they demonstrate that humour in these texts is produced in ways conforming to the proposals I set out in the previous chapters.

The first two case studies, in particular, contrast with each other in that *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* relies more on the subjective construal of the source, whereas *Man at the Helm* uses the objective construal of the relay to a greater extent. In *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, the overarching source of humour – American noir fiction – is defamiliarised by contrasting its components with counterparts associated with the Welsh seaside setting. In the two passages from *Man at the Helm*, the voice of the older, narrating, Lizzie is brought more onstage creating a separation of the relay enactor of Lizzie from the source enactor either through emphasising the distance in terms of time between the events and the narration or through the difference in the adult and child elements of the register and content. However, whether achieved through increasing the subjectivity of the construal of the source or through increasing the objectivity of the construal of the relay, both correspond to an increase in the figuring of the process of construal, contributing to the receiver's interpretation of the text as paratelic communication.

I investigated the prologue from *Crooked Heart* in a slightly different way, analysing how humour can be appreciated even though the characters are in a distressing situation rather than simply asking how humour can be recognised or appreciated. However, this also occurs as a result of the divergence and convergence

effects associated with increasing the subjectivity and objectivity of the construal of source and relay respectively. In the main, here, appreciation of humour can occur because the character whose dementia is at the root of the problems they face is the relay, and it is her attitude towards her relatives, Geoffrey and Margery, that forms the basis of their subjective construal.

All three texts also use techniques that increase the receiver's sense of being involved in the construal. *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, as a parody of American crime noir, relies very much on the receiver's recognition of the intertextual references to the components of the source. It also relies on a receiver having enough knowledge of Welsh cultural tropes and local references for the effort involved in recognising the source in terms of its counterpart not to be too great to make these juxtapositions. A receiver unable to understand and, therefore, appreciate a recognised instance of humour would become more aware of their part in the process of construal, but also of the fact that the extent to which they share knowledge with the relay is limited. For a receiver able to juxtapose the source component with its counterpart, their awareness of being part of the process of construal would also involve their awareness of sharing knowledge with the relay, thus effecting a relative convergence of these two parties.

Aberystwyth Mon Amour also encourages humorous elaboration through the use of creative metaphors. As well as being recognisable as a technique used by Raymond Chandler and, therefore, as a component of the source, the blend involved allows the development of emergent properties that contribute to elaboration. *Crooked Heart* also encourages elaboration, principally through the use of ellipsis and amplification in the construction of Mattie's attitude towards Geoffrey and Margery. In *Man at the Helm*, similarly, there is amplification of the use of Bacofoil in Lizzie's costume which encourages elaboration of the corresponding mental representation.

In summary, therefore, the three texts all use each of the three means of encouraging a humorous interpretation that I set out in the previous chapters: subjective construal of the source, objective construal of the relay, and increasing the receiver's awareness of their part in the process of construal. They employ each means to varying extents, however. I would argue that these differences correspond to the qualitative differences in the humour in each text. In *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, for example, humour is constructed primarily through the subjective construal of the source and,

while, as receiver, I am aware of sharing knowledge with the relay, I do not feel any strong connection with either the narrating main character or the author. In *Man at the Helm*, where the objective construal of the relay is the greater means of producing humour, I have a far stronger sense of empathy with the narrating relay. This is likely, in part, because of the difference in subject matter. However, the textual positioning that enables this sense of empathy will also be involved in the construction of humour. What the three case studies demonstrate, therefore, is that, while the same principles of subjectivity and objectivity of source and relay construal are used in the production of humour, it is the differences in how these are used that produce the differences in different types of humour.

Chapter 7. Humour recognition and appreciation

In this final chapter of the thesis, I will respond to the research questions set out in the first chapter. I will then discuss the contributions the 3D Model of Humour makes to humour research before suggesting some further applications of the model.

7.1 Recognition, appreciation, and social effects of humour

The aim of this research was to investigate two primary research questions, the first being how humour in a literary text can be recognised, and the second being how the text can elicit the emotional sense of humour appreciation. I also aimed to address a secondary concern: that of the interdependence of humour and the social relationships of discourse participants. In order to answer these questions, I have developed a discoursal model of humour, which I call the 3D Model of Humour. In actuality, the recognition, appreciation, and social functions of humour are intertwined. This is not to say, however, that the three strands cannot be teased apart to provide a better explanation of how humour operates. Indeed, having done so, the principal contribution I make to the field of humour research, in proposing the 3D Model, is that this better explanation of humour is arrived at by treating the recognition, appreciation, and social functions of humour not as separate entities but as mutually dependent parts of a whole. My approach, in developing the model, is to treat an instance of humour as a discourse event in which the humorousness of a source is negotiated by relay and receiver. In my use of cognitive linguistic theory, I develop the understanding of the pragmatics of how this is achieved by elucidating the underlying processes.

The relationship between recognition of humour and its appreciation is not straightforward. It is not necessarily the case that, if something is recognised as humorous, this will lead to humour appreciation. It is, of course, possible to recognise something as humorous but not appreciate this humour. However, this is further complicated in consideration of what it is that is being recognised as humorous: the source of humour, or the humorous intent of the relay. Recognition of a relay's humorous intent can lead to humour appreciation but only if the source of humour is also recognised as humorous. If humorous intent is recognised but the receiver has

insufficient knowledge of the source, they will be unable to appreciate what it is about the source that the relay finds amusing.

As I explained previously, humour appreciation is the sense of finding something amusing. This may be accompanied by an exhibition of the outward signs of mirth or amusement that include laughing or smiling. These behavioural signs are used to signal positive social emotion and can be either involuntary or voluntary. However, even if smiling or laughter is involuntary, as in, say, the contagious laughter that can be exhibited if participants are exposed to laughter in the absence of a stimulus (Provine, 1992), I would argue that this is not truly a display of humour appreciation unless the person recognises that something they have found humorous has resulted in this display. Although humour appreciation, therefore, cannot happen without recognition of humour, it is, perhaps, easier to start by discussing appreciation to explain the relationship.

The outward behavioural signs of humour appreciation are accompanied by physical signs of physiological arousal related to the activation of the sympathetic nervous system and the release of adrenaline, such as increases in heart rate, blood pressure, and pupil dilation (Godkewitsch, 1976; Langevin and Day, 1972). These signs are not unique to humour appreciation but occur whenever a person has cause to be alert, either, perhaps, because they are in unfamiliar surroundings, or are faced with something unfamiliar, or because there is something unexpected in the vicinity. The reason for this is evolutionary. Something unfamiliar has the potential to be a threat, and, if that is the case, the chances of surviving that threat are increased if a person is mentally alert and physically ready to fight or escape the cause of the threat. While most unfamiliar objects are unlikely to present an actual threat, the evolutionary physiological response remains. However, the way the physiological response is interpreted is dependent on its context. If something makes a person sufficiently alert, but there are also factors that make it sufficiently non-threatening, a behavioural fight or flight response does not need to be made to mitigate the potential threat (Apter, 2007). The person, therefore, does not have to focus on the outcome of the encounter with the thing, which allows their focus to be on the thing itself. Humour appreciation can, therefore, be interpreted from arousal that occurs when the source of humour and the processing of the source is figured, rather than when the outcome of processing the source is the focus. This is the difference between Apter's (2007) paratelic (or activity-

focused) and telic (or end-focused) states. There is a superficial similarity with relief theories of humour here, in that someone faced with a potential threat that is discovered to be non-threatening would probably feel a sense of relief. However, whereas relief theories depend on the idea that humour appreciation occurs when arousal decreases, humour appreciation, in fact, occurs in states of relatively elevated arousal but where that arousal is interpreted as related to something non-threatening.

It is worth emphasising that physiological arousal can be subliminal (Sebastiani et al. 2011). Although it may be possible to detect using measures of, for example, electrodermal activity or heart rate, unless a person's level of arousal is significant, they may not notice any change to their arousal state. However, arousal need not be supraliminal to affect cognition. With instances of humour appreciation that tend towards the mild amusement end of the scale, rather than towards the mirthful and laughter-inducing end, it is probable that the level of arousal will be so minimal that it might be better described (certainly in terms of a person's experience) as an increase in awareness. However, awareness and arousal are connected, both being dimensions of consciousness, with the former being the more cognitive phenomenon and the latter being the more affective. With mild amusement the arousal may not be great enough for a person to notice but they may perceive an increase in their awareness of the source. This is not necessarily a case of humour recognition without appreciation, simply that the level of arousal is minimal. Humour recognition without appreciation could involve a substantial increase in arousal if, for example, a person recognises that they are the source of humour, but in this instance the arousal would be interpreted negatively. In the previous chapters, many of the examples of humour were, for me, amusing but mildly so. For this reason, I have tended to discuss humour appreciation in terms of increases in awareness rather than increases in arousal because this better describes my experience of these texts. However, knowledge of the relationship between awareness and arousal would suggest that a corresponding increase in arousal would have occurred but at a subliminal level.

It is possible that the scale of appreciation of humour relates to the scale of arousal-inducement and the extent to which it is non-threatening. To give an example, this is a Tim Vine joke that I found mildly amusing:

> I've just come back from a once-in-a-lifetime holiday. I tell you what, never again!
>
> (Vine, 2010)

The juxtaposition of 'never again' with 'once-in-a-lifetime' draws a receiver's attention to the fact that, literally, they both mean the same thing but that both tend to be used more figuratively. The receiver's awareness of these meanings increases but the arousal-inducement is likely to be minimal. By comparison, in, for example, the farce *Noises Off* (Frayn, 1982), the plot of which involves the lives and relationships of actors in a play-within-a-play while this play is being performed, tension is created by the need for the characters of the actors to pause in dealing with their problems with each other in time to make their entrances in the embedded play. Because of the sense of urgency this creates, the level of arousal experienced by members of the audience is likely to be relatively high. However, this is also highly non-threatening, partly because of the spatial diminishment, which I discussed in Section 3.2.2, of this being the actions of characters in the play rather than the real-life actors. The activity surrounding these entrances – for instance, whether or not a character is holding the right props – also contributes to the non-threat aspect because of the qualitative diminishment of the props tending to be trivial items such as a plate of sardines. The triviality of the props is also amplified by contrast with the importance placed on them by the characters of the actors.

The idea that level of arousal-inducement correlates with level of humour appreciation would be consistent with findings that participants injected with adrenaline report and display greater appreciation of humour than those injected with a placebo (Schachter and Wheeler, 1962). It could also go some way to explain why humour with sexual or violent content has been the focus of, for example, Freud's (1976 [1905]) theory of jokes or the benign violation hypothesis (McGraw et al., 2012; McGraw and Warner, 2014). The embodied cognitive processing of violent or sexual content of a text, whether humorous or not, can lead to an increase in a reader's level of arousal – more so than the processing of meaning in a text such as the Tim Vine joke above. To be clear, this is arousal in the physiological sense, rather than Freud's psychoanalytical sense or in relation to sexual desire. The greater level of arousal resulting from a joke with sexual or violent content could contribute to such jokes being perceived as funnier to those appreciating the humour, or more obviously distasteful to those who do not. This type of humour could, therefore, be of greater interest as an object of research. It is

possible, as with Freud's theory, that humour appreciation could be attributed to the sexual or violent content itself, rather than to sexual or violent content being simply ways of generating an increase in arousal. Applying such a theory to humour without sexual or violent content would require an explanation involving sex or violence to be, somehow, fitted to the humour. By acknowledging, as I do, that arousal is a much more general physiological process, only linked in evolutionary terms to actual threat and with sexual attraction being only one example of its occurrence, this allows the explanation of how humour appreciation can result from humour not involving violent or sexual content.

The fact that humour appreciation occurs in states of relatively elevated arousal, but where that is interpreted positively, is the starting point for any theory of humour that seeks to explain why (not just how) a source can be humorous. If the affective state of amusement or mirth is not explained, the theory cannot give a full account of humour. However, while the interpretation of arousal as being caused by something non-threatening can explain the 'why' part of an account of humour, there also needs to be an explanation of 'how' this interpretation can be made or, in other words, how humour can be recognised as such. This is equally important as humour can be recognised without being appreciated. If humour appreciation is related to the interpretation of arousal, or, at least, increased awareness, as being caused by a non-threatening source, then, fairly obviously, there must be something about the source that induces a state of arousal in a receiver and also something that allows them to perceive the source as non-threatening. The essence of my proposal with regard to the recognition of humour is that a source is construed in such a way that brings it to a receiver's attention so that they recognise it as part of their experience of the world. However, the process of construal of the source is emphasised over the source itself, making it a paratelic or playful act. The subjectivity of the construal of the source defamiliarises the source so that it is brought to the receiver's attention but, in a subjective construal of the source, the relay is construed more objectively (see Figure 7.1). If the relay has a greater onstage presence, the process of construal is also figured. Thus, there are three ways of contributing to the process-figuring of the communication between relay and receiver: increasing the subjectivity of the source, increasing the objectivity of the relay, and figuring the act of communication itself.

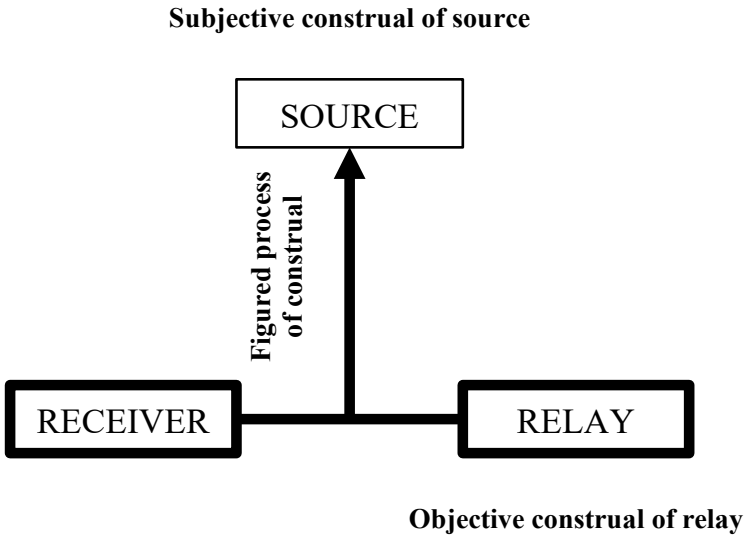


Figure 7.1 – Three ways of encouraging a humorous construal

Considering the subjective construal of the source, the arousal- or awareness-inducement in a receiver can occur through the defamiliarisation of the source, causing the receiver to attend to their recognition of the object or concept being made the source of humour. This can happen in several ways. The source can be amplified, making it or its features bigger and, thus, better attractors. It can be diminished, either by emphasising its qualitatively insignificant features or by positioning it, metaphorically, at a distance from the receiver. The source can also be constructed through contrasting one object or concept with another, bringing the features of both to attention. These ways of defamiliarising the source need not happen in isolation. For example, in Section 3.2.1, I used the passage about the orange jacket from *Things My Girlfriend And I have Argued About* to demonstrate the amplification effect but it also contrasts the many zips on the jacket with duelling scars. In doing so, this emphasises the qualitative diminishment of the jacket compared with the more consequential concept of a duel. It is possible that these three ways of defamiliarising the source are not the only ones. I have grouped the instances of humour from the texts I have been working with to arrive at, to my mind, the best way of explaining how the configuration of these texts contributes to the effect they can have on a reader. I have not tried to present an exhaustive taxonomy of mechanisms for eliciting a reader's increased awareness of a

source. However, what is important is that the amplification, or diminishment, or contrasting of a source can all lead to a receiver being made aware of an object or concept that is part of their experience.

What these ways also have in common is that, in defamiliarising the source, they make it a less prototypical example of its category, thus contributing to its divergence from the receiver. In making the source more distant this can account for the attenuation of the perception of the source as a threat. The diminishment of the source, either qualitatively or spatially, can also contribute to the perception of the source as non-threatening in what could be described as a more direct way. In my analysis of the case study texts in Chapter 6, qualitative diminishment formed a large part of the perception of conceptual smallness in *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* and *Crooked Heart*. In *Man at the Helm*, spatial diminishment occurred in the form of the time between the events and the narration. Apter (2007) regards qualitative diminishment as essential to humour and, while I would argue that spatial diminishment can achieve the same effect, I think it likely that the occurrence of some form of diminishment at least aids the ease with which a proposition can be perceived as humorous. What is certain is that the defamiliarisation of the source by the relay increases the subjectivity of the construal of the source. Increasing the subjectivity of the construal of conceptual content corresponds with an increase in the figuring of the process of construal, which, thus, helps to promote a paratelic, or playful, interpretation.

However, the receiver's increased awareness of the source is only one part of the process of recognition of the source as humorous. The receiver's relationship with the relay also plays a part. In real-world humour, it is possible for a relay to communicate the non-threat aspect through cues such as laughter or smiling. This can also occur in fiction in descriptions of characters or reporting clauses. In describing the way in which a character communicates, this increases their onstage presence and, thus, the objectivity of their construal. Another way of increasing the objectivity of the relay's construal, that occurs frequently in the novels I have worked with is the direct address of the reader. This has the effect of emphasising the proximity of relay and receiver. However, there are other, less direct, means through which a receiver's humorous interpretation can be encouraged. For instance, a receiver can be encouraged to expect to interpret something humorously, which, as proposed by a Relevance Theory account of humour, would encourage them to expend additional effort in the search for a

humorous interpretation. I have suggested, in Chapter 4, that this additional effort can be seen as the effort involved in reconciling the subjective construal of the source as presented by the relay with the receiver's existing objective view of the source. The effort in doing this would be analogous to the distance between receiver and relay. For example, in Section 4.4 I discussed a passage involving the amplified stereotype of IT technicians as poor communicators. For a receiver aware of and accepting that stereotype it would require less effort to reconcile their view of IT technicians with that proposed by the relay. If a receiver were to expect to expend effort because the return would be the cognitive effect of humour appreciation (say, if they were reading a novel they had been told was humorous), they will be prepared to do so. The closer the metaphorical positioning of receiver and relay, the less effort involved in reconciling the two construals of the source and the more likely the receiver will be to experience humour appreciation. However, there will always be some distance between receiver and relay, and the receiver's effort expended in their shift to the relay's point of view will increase the figuration of their communication with the relay, so contributing to a process-figured humorous construal of the source.

As I have discussed in the previous chapters, there are several other ways in which the process of construal can be figured. One other way would be through the effect of comic timing, which can change a receiver's perception of the passage of time, thus increasing the receiver's awareness of the communication taking place. The relay can also contribute to the receiver's perception of taking an active part in the process of by using stylistic features, such as ellipsis or negation, that require greater cognitive activity on the part of the receiver for them to comprehend the text. This contribution by the receiver would be in the form of elaboration of the detail given in the text and would enhance the figuring of the process of construal by giving the receiver a more active role in the process. Thus, the receiver's perception of sharing the construction of humour with the relay would increase and add to their sense of convergence with the relay.

The idea of sharing by relay and receiver is not restricted to the construction process. In fact, in terms of the social effects of humour, the recognition of a source by the receiver as part of their experience is only part of the process. If a receiver's attention has been drawn to a source that they recognise by a relay, the implication is

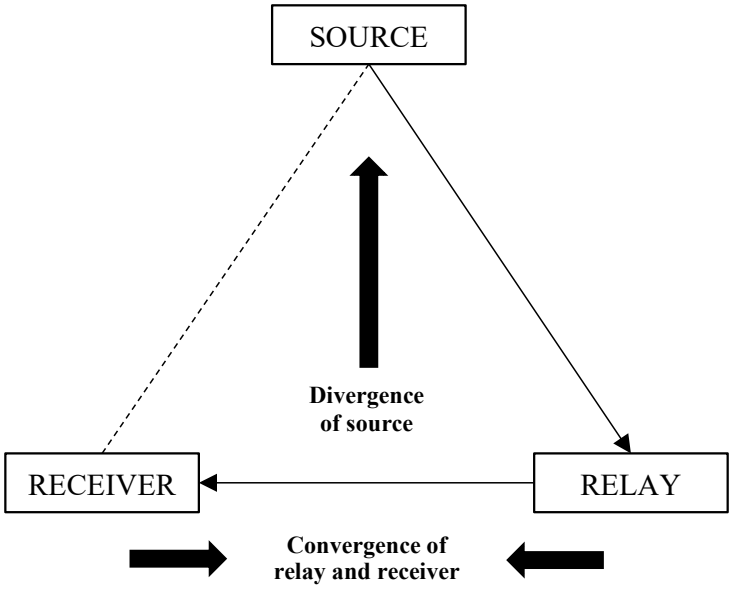


Figure 7.2 – Spatial dynamics of humour

that receiver and relay both have sufficient knowledge of the source. Since they share this experience, this marks the proximity of the two parties. However, if a receiver does not have sufficient knowledge of a source to recognise the significance of what their attention is being drawn to, this increases the sense of distance between them and the relay. It is, of course, possible to experience the recognition of a source as humorous on one's own. For example, I was recently (in July) walking past a local shopping centre with a large advertising hoarding above the entrance encouraging people to go in and buy items such as sunglasses and suncream, with the line 'Quick! The sun's out!'. As it happened, the sky behind the hoarding was very dark and it was starting to rain rather heavily. I was the receiver in this instance and the contrast between the sign and the weather formed, for me, the source of humour. However, also contributing to this were my elaborations, remembering episodes of making the most of brief periods of good weather in otherwise miserable British summers. This being something of a cultural trope, some of my elaborations were based on the thwarted optimism of not only my experiences of British summers but those communicated to me by others. The sharing of humour with others in this instance was therefore implicit.

Whereas the divergence of the source from the relay and receiver contributes to the exclusion of the source, the convergence of receiver and relay through

acknowledgement of their shared experience contributes to their social inclusion. These spatial dynamics form the social effects of humour studied in intra- and inter-group behaviours (e.g. Holmes, 2006; Schnurr, 2009; Terrion and Ashforth, 2002). However, what the 3D Model demonstrates is that these dynamics are linked to the cognitive and affective processes involved.

It is clear that no one factor in this account of humour can explain why or how a source can be found humorous. Increasing the subjective construal of a source does not necessarily lead to it being found humorous. Defamiliarising an object could lead to it being found eerie or frightening. However, increasing the subjective construal of the source when, for example, a receiver has been cued to expect humour would make its interpretation as humorous more likely. An objectively construed relay would not necessarily correspond with their humorous intent – being reprimanded by another person would also increase their onstage presence. The content of that person's communication as well as, for instance, the amplification of that content or their deictic positioning of themself in relation to a potential receiver could, however, encourage the receiver to interpret their communication humorously. It is possible that the extent to which various factors are involved in the construction of humour can account for the qualities of different types of humour. For example, in Chapter 6, the examination of *Man at the Helm* showed that the objective construal of the relay through the separation of the two enactors of Lizzie played a large part in the construction of humour, whereas in *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, the subjective construal of the source was the dominant process. Correspondingly, I felt a greater sense of empathy with the relay in *Man at the Helm* and my sense of convergence with the relay in *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* was more implicit. The analysis of the qualities of instances of humour can only be achieved by modelling the interactions of multiple factors involved in its construction.

7.2 Contribution of the 3D Model of Humour

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the principal contribution I make to humour research is a rationale for bringing together the many factors involved in humorous communication and analysing and explaining why, if a text has been found humorous (or not), this could have occurred. I believe the main reason the 3D Model is able to do this is because I have not attempted to formulate a predictive model of what will be

found humorous. I would go so far as to speculate that this would be a futile ambition. There are many factors that contribute to a person's recognition and appreciation of humour and many that contribute to their non-recognition or non-appreciation of humour. Some of these factors are only peripherally connected to a potentially humorous communicative act, such as a potential receiver simply being in a bad mood. To attempt to predict these factors precisely and the combinations of these factors that would or would not result in humour recognition or appreciation would be a task limited by a researcher's time rather than the boundaries of the solution.

To my mind the best way of dealing with this multitude of factors is not to try to isolate them but to consider, when they arise, what effect they have on the recognition and appreciation of humour and why that could be. I think it probable that one of the reasons that, for example, the GTVH (Attardo and Raskin, 1991) cannot account adequately for either successful or unsuccessful humour is that it fails to consider why the various knowledge resources can have an effect on the interpretation of a proposition and how these knowledge resources interact. Taking as an example the script opposition knowledge resource, while I would hesitate to say this is essential to humour, it is not incorrect to say that script oppositions are one way in which a receiver's attention can be drawn to a source. Scripts are considered to be in opposition because the contrast between a prototype and another object (in other words, SCRIPT X / SCRIPT Y) is so great that the other object is considered to be in another category. It is the effect of the contrast (or opposition) on a receiver's perception rather than the presence of opposition itself that is key. Taking another aspect of the GTVH, the narrative strategy knowledge resource, as another example, the format of a joke could cue a receiver to expect humour, thus encouraging them to expend the effort involved in finding a humorous interpretation. The situation knowledge resource, or the content of a joke, could have the effect of qualitative diminishment and the language knowledge resource could involve spatial diminishment through the effect of, say, modalisation on the distancing of the source from the receiver. Without consideration of the effects of these knowledge resources and the way in which they interact, there is no way of connecting the recognition of humour to its appreciation or accounting for non-recognition or non-appreciation since these outcomes are not the result of the presence of one factor, but on the interaction of a number of factors.

Although I have developed and tested the model using examples of humour from contemporary literature, there is no reason that its application need be limited to these texts. As I have discussed previously, since literary language uses the same resources as language in ordinary use, the model could also be used to explain spontaneous humour in everyday conversation. It can also be applied to joke humour, as I have demonstrated with, for example, the Tim Vine joke earlier in this chapter. Equally, although developed as a model of verbal humour, the principles could also be applied to non-verbal humour. For example, after an absence from the office of a few days while I was working at home, one of my colleagues greeted me on my return with feigned shock and a display of pretending to faint at my appearance. Her exaggerated movements and facial expressions were an amplification of behaviours that might be associated with actual surprise. Because my absence had been relatively short, her movements and expressions also contrasted with behaviour that might be considered prototypical on greeting a friend after not seeing them for a week. By performing behaviours more suited to the unexpected return of someone not seen for, perhaps, some years the implication was that my absence had been lengthy even though we both knew that it had not been. This example of non-verbal humour is, therefore, also an example of ironic humour. Because the principles of the model – in this instance the amplification of a behaviour – are not restricted to verbal communication, it is possible to apply them to non-verbal forms of humour occurring in media such as cartoons or dramatic performances.

7.3 Further applications of the 3D Model of Humour

As I suggested in Section 7.1, the characteristics of various types of humour could be analysed through the consideration of how the factors involved in humour construction interact. One such type is that of ironic humour. The non-verbal example above is an example of ironic humour and in previous chapters there have also been other examples of ironic humour. I have tended not to focus on the irony in these examples since not all irony is humorous and not all humour is ironic. My interest has been in the humour in these examples rather than the irony. However, the 3D Model could provide a useful way of demonstrating how irony relates to humour. To give an example, I will use the BBC sitcom *Till Death Us Do Part* (1965) to sketch out how this could work. This programme centred on a bigoted main character, Alf Garnett, contrasting his prejudiced

views with the more liberal outlook of his daughter and her husband. The intention, in drawing attention to intolerant views such as those held by Alf Garnett, was to criticise and challenge such views, the irony being in the contradiction of the words spoken by Warren Mitchell (the actor playing Alf Garnett) and written by Johnny Speight (the writer) and their own views. As such, the source of humour would be Alf Garnett, and the relay would, essentially, comprise Warren Mitchell, Johnny Speight, and, in addition, the production team. For viewers sharing the knowledge that the relay's intention was in opposition to the statements made by Alf Garnett, this would represent their convergence with the relay at the level of the actor / writer / production team (see Figure 7.3). The contrast between viewers' understanding of the views of Mitchell and Speight (the proffered text world, to use Browse's (2018) term) and the words spoken by Alf Garnett would increase the subjectivity of the construal of Alf Garnett's views.

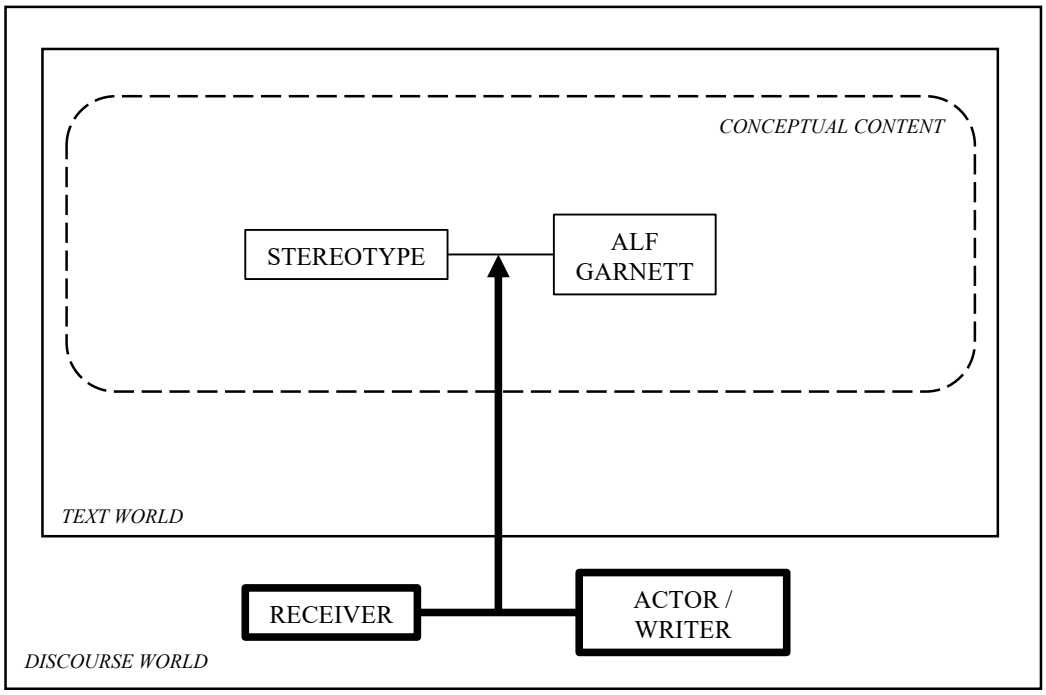


Figure 7.3 – Convergence at the actor / writer level

However, some viewers found humour not in Alf Garnett's behaviour, but, unironically, in his views (Bebber, 2014). The relay for these viewers would include the character of Alf Garnett and the convergence would be at the level of the character (see

Figure 7.4). For these viewers, the increase in subjectivity of the source would be largely through the effect of amplification.

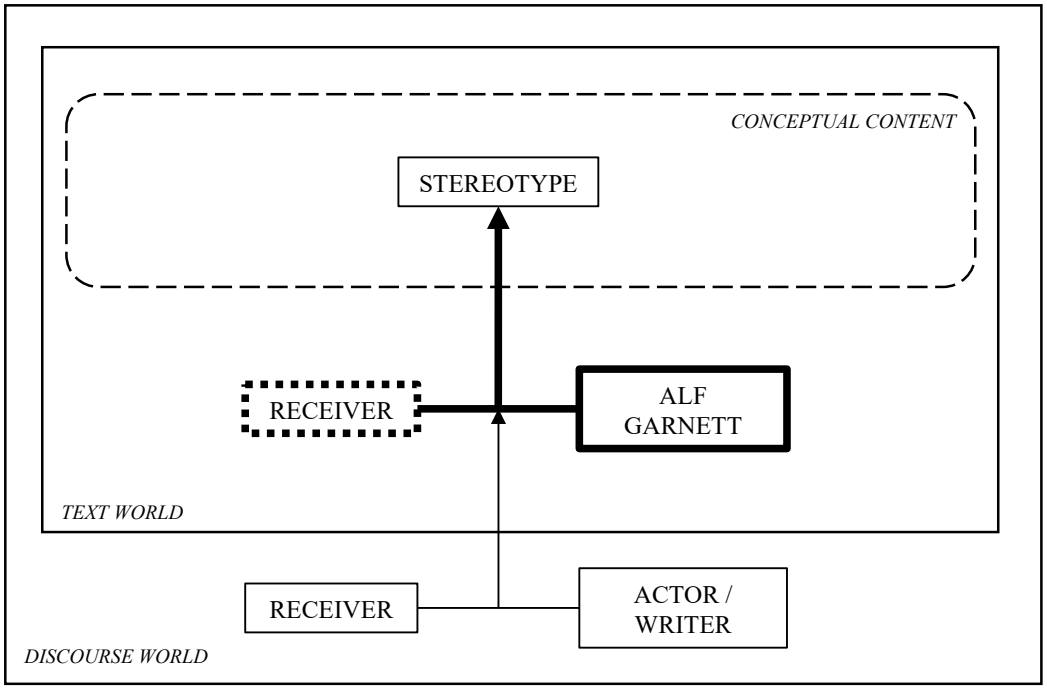


Figure 7.4 – Convergence at the character level

Viewers finding humour in, for example, the racist stereotypes communicated by Alf Garnett would do so because they would already be positioned metaphorically closer to the character, in terms of their shared opinions, than to the actor and writer. As I discussed in Chapter 4, the receiver's shift to the subjective construal of a source from their own more objective construal involves the receiver-relay distance; the smaller this is, the less effort is involved in recognising the source. Therefore, the effort in recognising the ethnic groups stereotyped through amplification by Alf Garnett would be less for these viewers than for viewers not already holding similar racist views. For viewers rejecting such stereotypes, and thus metaphorically closer to Mitchell and Speight, reconciling their views with the proffered text world of Alf Garnett would involve too great an effort. For such a viewer this would be an obstacle to their immersion into the text world. The character of Alf Garnett would remain part of the subjectively construed conceptual content, rather than becoming an objectively construed conceptualiser. The ironic humour of the programme would be shared at the

level of the actor / writer (as shown in Figure 7.3) and, therefore, at a position enabling a critical viewing of Alf Garnett rather than one of immersion in the text world.

The example above is just one example of how the 3D Model could be used to account for a specific type of humour. As well as being applied to the analysis of different types of humour, the model could also make a contribution to informing practice in, for example, the advertising industry. One of the key aims of advertising is to establish a relationship between brand, or product, and potential buyers and humour is often used as a means of doing so. The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, the professional body that supports and advocates for UK advertising agencies, has, in recent years, made one of its focuses the promotion of effectiveness in advertising and marketing. To this end it has established EffWorks, an initiative that aims to collate cross-industry research to provide a better understanding of how advertising and marketing works and to develop understanding of the 'best models, tools and techniques to plan, monitor, direct and measure the impact of marketing activity' (IPA, 2019).

Examining the articles and videos collated on the EffWorks website (EffWorks, 2019), it is apparent that much of this research centres on use of the right metrics to assess the effectiveness of a campaign. There is also an emphasis on the effectiveness of creativity, and it is evident that methods based on behavioural economics are growing in popularity as ways of testing the emotional appeal of an advertisement. However, it is surprising, given the extent to which humour is used in advertising, that this is scarcely referred to beyond brief mentions of the risk of using humour and its polarising effect. It is possible that this is because the models used in assessing the non-specific emotion evoked by advertising (for example, the difference between Kahneman's (2011) intuitive System 1 and analytical System 2 thinking) are more accessible and useful to those in the field than previous models of humour. A better understanding of why and how humour can have an effect on the relationship between brand and buyer would undoubtedly be of benefit to the development of effective strategies in advertising. The 3D Model of Humour that I propose provides an ability to explain the most relevant effect of humour to the advertising industry, that is, why and how the divergence and convergence effects of humour occur as they do. It strikes me that a simple heuristic tool, based on the principles of the 3D Model, could be developed to help advertising practitioners to assess and, importantly, evidence the likely effects humour in a

particular advertisement will have on potential buyers in the target audience as well as those not in the target audience.

My intention in beginning this research was to examine, first, how humour is recognised and appreciated in fictional texts, and, second, the effect humour has on participants in this discourse. The cognitive poetic approach I have taken has allowed me to model the relationship between the cognitive and affective aspects of humour because it has at its core a commitment to the embodiment of cognition. This enables the continuities of meaning in the recognition of humour and emotion in the appreciation to be accounted for. I have developed the model using a small range of 21st century novels by UK-based authors. However, the linguistic and cognitive neuroscientific models that form the basis of the 3D Model are not restricted to this type of text. This means that the 3D Model has the flexibility to be applied to any verbal humour and, in principle, non-verbal humour. In addition to the findings demonstrated here, the 3D Model contributes to humour research by providing a potential means of improved analysis of humour. Applying the model to a wider range of types of humour and humour in other media, and by employing a range of methodologies to do so, would enable not only a greater understanding of humour itself but the refinement of the 3D Model of Humour.

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