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## ***BLURRED LINES OR WORD CRIMES? ON COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STUDY OF MUSICAL PARODY BY ‘WEIRD AL’ YANKOVIC***

**Abstract:** The paper argues for the multiple advantages of applying cognitive linguistic concepts and frameworks to the study of basic mechanisms and conceptual, pragmatic and social aspects of musical parody as a polyvalent, flexible, multimodal phenomenon, understood both as a musical genre which revolves around replication or imitation of pre-existing music, and as a comedic statement utilizing the latter technique. Points of convergence, and important differences, between traditional concepts offered by the most influential linguistic theories of humour, *viz.* Raskin’s (1985) *Semantic Script Theory of Humour* and Attardo & Raskin’s General Theory of Verbal Humour (1991) are addressed, with particular emphasis on how the status and treatment of concepts of *incongruity* and its *resolution* are accommodated within the interpretative frameworks of *frame-shifting* (Coulson, 2001) and *Blending Theory* (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). Both emerge as useful heuristics offered within the cognitive linguistic paradigm and are suggested as applicable to (multimodal) humour research. These are argued to encompass and cater for both the sequential and (predominately) non-sequential aspects of incongruity resolution (Ritchie, 2009) underlying musical parodies as sources of humorous amusement. Further motivating factors for the development and appreciation of parodies as humorous stimuli, such as the role of (*word*) *play* and listener familiarity with the borrowed music, are addressed by focusing on the description of the distinctive cognitive-cultural mechanisms and goals underlying the opus of ‘Weird Al’ Yankovic, by applying the abovementioned concepts and interpretative frameworks to the analysis of the techniques and goals behind his use of comedy music.

**Key words:** humour, musical parody, incongruity, blending, frame-shifting

### **1. Introduction**

This study takes a closer look at the basic mechanisms of musical parody. As “an odd offshoot or subset of the music industry that may not deserve to be there” (McKeague, 2018, p.139), parody is approached here as a multi-level

phenomenon. We observe it both as a musical genre which revolves around the replication or imitation of pre-existing music, and as a comedic statement utilizing the latter technique. While humour may not be the only response parodists evoke from listeners, parody is unarguably used to create humorous effect (Thomerson, 2017, p. 64). Its intrinsic humorousness and organic association with irreverence, absurdity, incongruity and pleasure thus make it a polyvalent, flexible, multimodal phenomenon, and apt material for humour studies.

In this respect, surveys of cognitive linguistic (henceforth: CL) work on humour (Brône et al., 2006; Dynel, 2018) indicate that cognitive linguists have repeatedly drawn on verbal and other humour as illustrations of the ‘fluid’ conceptual system. Insights from the most influential linguistic humour theories (Raskin’s (1985) *Semantic Script Theory of Humour* and Attardo and Raskin’s (1991) *General Theory of Verbal Humour*) were shown to be largely compatible with the CL framework.<sup>1</sup> The “shared epistemological basis between major strands in linguistic humour research and CL” (Brône, 2017, p.250) has been recognized and (at times critically) evaluated by proponents of both paradigms (cf. Brône & Feyaerts, 2004; Attardo, 2021).

The present paper embraces the proposed points of convergence between cognitive(ly-based)1 linguistic approaches to humour and CL to argue that a cognitive linguistic approach to (cross-)cognitive, conceptual and social aspects of creative language use proves adequate for the analysis of the intricate interplay of factors involved in musical parody, as an instance of multimodal humour which entails perception and comprehension processes different to those in solely verbal humour. The paper tests the applicability of cognitive linguistic concepts and models proposed to account for aspects of humor production and understanding by focusing on the description and analysis of a particular parodist’s distinctive style, mechanisms and goals underlying his use of comedy music as the comic device of choice. The subject, Alfred Matthew “Weird Al” Yankovic (henceforth: WAY), has garnered world-wide acclaim and a considerable fanbase during his more than four-decade career, resulting in 14 albums, 5 Grammys and a recent biopic covering his rise to fame.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 1 introduces some of the key theoretical approaches and concepts in humour theory and situates them within the CL paradigm to argue for their role in parody analyses. Section 2 addresses the key notions regarding musical parody as pertinent to the present study. This serves to provide both a theoretical and methodological foundation for an overview and analysis of their realization in WAY’s opus. The latter is taken up in Section 3, which presents an analysis of the linguistic, conceptual and social factors both

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<sup>1</sup> Brône & Feyaerts, (2003, p. 3), for example, note that although it does not present itself in the larger terminological-conceptual framework of CL, Attardo’s *General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH)*” is cognitive linguistic in the sense that it explores the interface between language and cognition in highly creative language use.”

motivating and resulting from WAY's choices in song titles and their relation to the lyrics and parody types. The final section revisits the findings and suggests avenues for further research.

## 2. Cognitive linguistic approaches to humour theories and concepts

Humour and *incongruity* have long been recognized as “constant bedfellows” (Veale, 2004, p. 419). Defined as “something unexpected, out of context, inappropriate, unreasonable, illogical, exaggerated, and so forth” (McGhee, 1979, p.10), incongruity has served as a tacitly accepted starting point in humour research. Both incongruity and its *resolution* (I-R) as a source of humour, have been differently interpreted and utilized across individual I-R-based models (Ritchie, 2009).<sup>2</sup> The classical two-stage I-R model (Suls, 1972; Shultz, 1972) assumes that humour ensues as an effect of an incongruity being first observed and later *resolved*, i.e. made congruent (cognitively acceptable, “appropriate”) with the rest of the text according to a relevant rule.

I-R has been widely adopted as a foundation in cognitive(ly-based) linguistic models of humour interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Forabosco (2008, p. 48) succinctly summarizes the cognitive perspective on incongruity, suggesting that “a stimulus is incongruous when it diverts from the cognitive model of reference”, namely a *frame* (Fillmore 1985) or *script* (Raskin 1985). This makes humor a type of cognitive reaction to a (linguistic or non-linguistic) stimulus that violates our mental patterns and normal expectations (Moreall, 2009).

The CL understanding of I-R entails viewing the two as mere perspectives of the same cognitive *construal*, i.e. “different ways of encoding a situation [which] constitute different conceptualizations” (Lee 2001: 2; Langacker 1987). A range of conceptualization phenomena prove to be relevant in accounting for humorous creativity. Many of these rely on the construction of conceptual mappings between cognitive domains, as the notion of *mapping* is broadly understood and extended in cognitive semantics to metonymic and metaphoric reasoning, partitioning of

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<sup>2</sup> Ritchie (2009, p. 314) extracts from the various proposals six aspects useful in describing an I-R-based theory. These involve *scope*, *sequentiality*, *location of incongruity*, *routes to incongruity*, *facets of resolution* and *extent of resolution*, with the related issues interspersed throughout our theoretical overview and the analysis to follow, although their nature and status as indispensable criteria for humour(ousness) has also been debated (ibid.; Veale, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> GTVH as (ultimately) such, and an essentially modular theory of humour (Feyaerts and Brône, 2003), suggests a combination of *knowledge resources* (KRs) as language structural as well as interpersonal, sociolinguistic and purely cognitive contributory parameters. These cooperate in the complex, hierarchically-based process of humour generation and interpretation. Incongruity (perception) thus corresponds to the phase of *script opposition* (Raskin, 1985) between two (or more) background knowledge structures (scripts/ frames) imposed on the hearer, and resolution to a *Logical Mechanism*, a cognitive rule/operation enabling the switch (hence resolution) between them.

structure in different mental spaces, etc. Feyaerts & Brône (2003) suggest and illustrate how the marked, non-prototypical use of routine cognitive mechanisms (e.g. metaphor, metonymy, conceptual blending) simultaneously accounts for the process of I-R.<sup>4</sup>

Two interrelated interpretative frameworks underlying humour (comprehension) in CL proved to be particularly applicable to the analysis of humorous stimuli, viz., *frame-shifting* and *conceptual integration (blending) theory*.

Coulson's mechanism of frame-shifting has been applied primarily to account for instances of verbal humour, such as punchline-driven jokes, puns, irony and sarcasm (Ritchie, 2009). The idea is identical to Raskin's (1985) semantics-based *script switching* in that a humorous stimulus makes the speaker activate alternative frames, whereby "humor comprehension involves some kind of adjustment or change from the cognitive script or frame (in Filmore's (1985) sense<sup>5</sup> that supports the initial, straightforward interpretation of the text of a joke (...) to a new script or frame" (Barcelona 2003, p. 82). The conventional expectation becomes apparent at the punch line, which introduces the element inconsistent with the initial, salient and/ or conventional frame, *disjunctive* or *frame-shift* trigger).<sup>6</sup> The latter triggers the humorous over the conventional, expected interpretation, as the initial frame becomes questioned, contrasted or negated in the process (Ritchie 2005).

Its foundation in Coulson's (2001) *space structuring model* of meaning construction sees frame-shifting as useful in synthesizing different, primarily linear, sequentially-based<sup>7</sup> models of I-R (Ritchie 2009). Unlike the traditional I-R models, Coulson's places more focus on aspects of incremental meaning construction in language processing, emphasizing that the semantic (re)construction does not merely amount to activating semantic frames from long term memory. It primarily revolves around careful integration of cognitive models based on conceptual mappings between *mental spaces*, "small conceptual packets mentally constructed as we think and talk for local purposes of local understanding and action" (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, p. 102), which are manipulated as the hearer gradually builds up a cognitive representation of the described situation based on relevant background knowledge (Coulson 2001, p. 89). Ritchie's (2005) extension

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<sup>4</sup> Resolution is thus established when a hearer manages to *unpack* the marked construal, i.e. recognizes the non-prototypical use of cognitive mechanisms underlying the humorous stimulus, which *motivates* (hence resolves) what is incongruous at first sight (ibid, p.363).

<sup>5</sup> Attardo (2021: 361) points out that "Coulson (2001:20) also adopts Filmore's use of "frame" as a "cover" term, for a variety of constructs that include scripts."

<sup>6</sup> Attardo (1994) originally defines the disjunctive as the element in a joke that performs "the passage from the first sense to the second one." Coulson (2001, p.55) sees it as a word that causes the reader "to revise the default assumption of the frame" and "search the working memory for something that can be reinterpreted" (p. 57).

<sup>7</sup> These stress the cognitive processing aspect of humour interpretation, unlike those which are *non-process-oriented* and which place more emphasis on the content of the stimulus (Ritchie, 2009, p. 316).

of the framework suggests observing frame shifting first and foremost as a meta-theoretical metaphor, i.e. a heuristic compatible with previous approaches while connecting the cognitive and neural<sup>8</sup> levels of language to social and cultural levels.

The theory is thus suggested to advocate two (inter)related ways of humour interpretation (Dynel 2018). One emphasises the aforementioned linear, cognitively abrupt shift of meaning calling for a resolution. The other focuses on (in)congruous juxtapositions of meanings, i.e. a view that a humorous effect emerges if one idea is linked to incompatible frames of reference, necessitating the formation of hybrid conceptualizations, i.e. *conceptual blends*.

Conceptual integration (Fauconnier & Turner 2002), as a cognitive process underlying the latter is another powerful heuristic used in CL approaches to humour. Underlying a conceptual blend prompted by a non(linguistic) stimulus is a *conceptual integration network* (henceforth: CIN) involving (at least) four mental spaces. The *input spaces*, are related through counterpart mappings between their elements based on their shared structure captured in the *generic space* which structures the network (determines its *topology*). Elements and aspects of the input spaces are selectively projected into a novel blended space which develops its hybrid, emergent structure through processes of *composition*, *completion* and *elaboration*. Composition sees counterparts from the input spaces brought into the blended space “as separate elements or as a fused element” (Fauconnier and Turner, 1998, p. 13) in new relations existing only within the blend. Completion extends the image suggested by the initial mapping from the input spaces by drawing on background knowledge underlying circumstances relevant to the CIN. Elaboration involves imaginative mental simulation and inference making (*running the blend*) which extends the rich imaginary possibilities of the blended space<sup>9</sup> Finally, a blend must be open for the hearer to *unpack*, i.e. reconstruct the inputs, their cross-space correspondences, inter-space projections<sup>10</sup> and the entire network. The flexibility of blending with selective projection and contextual elaboration allows for situations that do not fit the usual characterizations, including humour.

Apart from a range of creative verbal phenomena (see Dynel (2011) for an overview of research), the theory has also been applied to humorous multimodal phenomena, such as cartoons and humorous advertisements (ibid.). These involve

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<sup>8</sup> Coulson’s work is particularly commendable for the neuro- and psycholinguistic work done to experimentally test and validate the model as converging with other research in the neurolinguistics of humour. Coulson et al. (2006)’s results from eye-tracking experiments, for example, support an extra processing cost associated with frame-shifting.

<sup>9</sup> This may involve projections from the blend back into the input spaces, and vice versa. Coulson (n.d.) argues that this might change the perception and evaluation of input spaces, which resonate with Ritchie’s (2005) ideas on frame-shifting.

<sup>10</sup> This makes blending observable as GTVH’s Logical Mechanism (see fn. 3), along with other construal operations (see Herrero Ruiz (2019) for conceptual metaphor and metonymy discussed within the frame-shifting framework).

specific presentation and perception processes and often function as highly compressed cues that need to be unpacked into multiple mental spaces in order to be understood. Dynel suggests that accounts of multimodal humour further profit from a (re)examination and adaptation of the notion of I-R as a source of humour and its rapprochement with Blending Theory.

The idea of humorous stimuli as blends “fed by incongruous spaces” goes back to Koestler’s (1964) process of *bisociation*, defined as the perception of a situation or an idea in two frames of reference. Koestler’s classical approach to creativity, including humour, is a pre-theoretical precursor to conceptual integration and sees the comic effect as resulting from “the sudden bisociation of an idea or event with two habitually incompatible matrices”. This largely concurs with Fauconnier and Turner’s (2002) notion of divergent spaces integrated in a blend.

The process of humour perception can then be conceived as “recognising incongruity between two input spaces, which are logically welded in the blended space on the strength of the generic space” with this incongruity cognitively controlled, i.e. resolved/ rendered somehow congruous in the blended space (Dynel, p. 67). The process may differ depending on the nature and makeup of the multimodal stimulus. (Humorous) incongruous blends can be observed almost instantly, with their incongruous spaces prompted by multimodal components instantly merged. On the other hand, the recipient can consecutively observe the stimuli (e.g. components of an image, or an advertisement consisting of these plus potential text) prompting the input spaces, and find them incongruous, which turns interpretation into a problem- solving exercise and requires conscious blending to make sense of the incongruous juxtaposition(s).

In a conceptual integration network, *bisociation* further accounts for what Forabosco (2008) calls “second level processing”, *by which he means* the final stage of humor processing corresponding to full humor *appreciation*. The latter occurs as the hearer “oscillates” (cognitively passes, i.e. projects) between input space elements and reanalyses the nature of the incongruity and similarities between two input spaces, together with the grounds on which they mesh (corresponding to the process of elaboration).

Although the perceived inter-space incongruity *is* initially resolved, Dynel insists that *humorous* (unlike non-humorous) *incongruity*<sup>11</sup> is not, and *must not* be, entirely dissolved, i.e. removed at the (initial) resolution stage, nor should the incongruous elements be completely reconciled in the blend. The key goal is rather to spot an incongruity that makes sense, i.e. *a congruent incongruity*<sup>12</sup> and

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<sup>11</sup> Dynel (2011, p. 68) speaks of *resolvable humorous incongruity*, also taking care to delimit *humorousness* (a binary category capturing the theoretical capability of a stimulus to induce a humorous response) from *funniness* (a gradable category describing the graded nature of recipients’ subjective appreciation of humour).

<sup>12</sup> The idea underlies other influential, non-sequential I-R- based concepts, e.g. Apter’s (1982) *cognitive synergy*, or Oring’s (1992) *appropriate incongruity*.

have it linger, i.e. only *partially resolved* (Ritchie 2009). Sustaining humorousness throughout the stimulus proves of multiple importance in stimuli such as a parody song, which entails development of humor(ousness) over time.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.1. Humour theories meet musical parody

Ritchie's (2009, p. 329) "lowest common denominator" for (humour-inducing) I-R, *viz.* that "all humour involves some degree of incongruity, but this incongruity is not random or arbitrary [but] systematically related to other aspects of the setting", proves suitable for handling musical parody (song) as a phenomenon which involves several levels and aspects of incongruity. As such, it sees the most generic incongruity arising between the composer's choices and listener's expectations. In a parody song the primary tension caused is that between the new lyrics on the one hand and (pieces of) the existing, borrowed melody.

This incongruous juxtaposition results from bisociation of the parody song as a humorous blend with the original song as an input space which produces a perceptual surprise engendering humour, provided that the interpreter experiences cognitive control over the stimulus.

The two key modes, text and music, each with their specific 'syntax' (Zbikowski 2002) prompt the listener to perceive the stimulus either as instantly recognised as one blended entity of (familiar) music and (new) text which somehow clash (Dyrel, 2011) or as two disparate input spaces, initially regarded as distinct, and subsequently consciously blended, then bisociated between.

The latter option foregrounds the issue of listener familiarity with the original, which is routinely adopted as a necessary condition and an important motivating factor for appreciating parodic humour (cf. Carroll, 2014). While it undoubtedly underlies humour perception in parody, Thomerson (2017) questions familiarity as an absolutely indispensable criterion for humorousness and argues that parodists, including WAY, draw on additional kinds of (non-)linguistic devices in their creative process. These "surface" *composing techniques* "augment the incongruous structure provided by the parodists' structural musical borrowing to signal to audience members unfamiliar with the source music that they are hearing something humorous" (ibid, p. 104). The operations are not confined to a single (verbal) code, but are instead distributed among multiple modalities.<sup>14</sup> This leads

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<sup>13</sup> Koestler (1994, p. 37) himself acknowledges that "higher forms of sustained humour, such as the satire or comic poem, do not rely on a single effect but on a series of minor explosions or a continuous state of mild amusement."

<sup>14</sup> Thomerson (2017) draws on Berger's (1994) catalogue of humour techniques to study WAY's style features as a composer. These include *language*, *logic*, *identity*, and *action* techniques too numerous to list individually. Our focus will be on particular instances of language techniques, with others addressed when applicable.

us to adopt Thomerson's holistic view of parody (song) as a result of "a flexible comic technique typically employed in concert with other strategies, both musical and otherwise (ibid, p. 90). As is argued and illustrated below, the techniques depend on the type and nature of the particular musical parody type as stimulus, and the artist's style preferences. We also fully acknowledge the claim that "such laughter originates with a listener's personal experiences, stylistic competencies, and specific contexts" (ibid., p. 104).

On a related general note, *enjoyment* of different kinds and *play* were suggested as key motivating conditions for humour (Moreall, 2009). I-R in this sense is as pleasurable an activity as play is, whereby "with comic amusement the pleasure focuses upon the enjoyment of the incongruity (not incongruity alone)" (Dyner, 2011, p. 68). This is, crucially, seen as a non-threatening test of skills, in a pleasurable and safe context, rather than a serious problem-solving exercise. In this respect, Ritchie & Dyhouse (2008, p.91) suggest *language play*, broadly understood as "exploitation and distortion of every feature of language, including phonology, lexis and grammar", as an element which brings together joking and language. As such, it may serve to induce and perpetuate frame-shifting<sup>15</sup> and blending, resulting in comedic effects.

Moreover, Moreall's (2009, p.256) suggestion that "humour is a pleasure we share" supports the view that the natural setting for humour, as for play, is a group, not an individual. Some of the social functions attributed to playfulness, and so humour (Cook, 2000), include cementing amicable relationships, building and maintaining social status, providing a "safe" and acceptable way to make mild criticisms, reinforcing group behavioural norms, as well as demonstrating linguistic knowledge and social skills. Such scant previous studies of WAY's opus as can be found support this. McKeague (2018) suggests his celebration of individuality, challenges to authority, giving voice to marginal(ized) groups and poking fun at commonplace practices and mainstream/ pop culture. As our analysis will suggest, WAY achieves these by representing perspectives of the underrepresented groups in pop music and mocking both the social/ musical elite and genre conventions through his work.

### 3. Musical Parody: Types and Techniques

Thomerson's (2017) extensive study of parody identifies five basic techniques based on their relationship to preexisting music as the base for classification. These include *contrafactum*, *stylistic allusion*, *medley*, *quotation* and *adding words to a*

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<sup>15</sup> Coulson (2001, p.32) observes that "the ubiquity of frame-based meaning construction is thus supported by the suggestion that people play with each other's ability to update their representations adaptively when they tell each other jokes."

*previously untexted melody*. Three of these predominate in WAY's opus.<sup>16</sup>

The first, *contrafacta parodies*, involve replication of full songs with great specificity and attention to musical detail. The new song and the piece it borrows from are related in type and origin, with just enough features, most notably the text (and length), changed to result in a new song. The choices of parody targets differ, but overwhelmingly feature recent or classic hits, to better cater for listeners' acquaintance with the source (see above).

Stylistic allusion, as a technique underlying *style parodies*, involves borrowing and/or freely reworking multiple musical aspects (melody, form, rhythm, harmony, orchestration) to allude to the original genre or artist's distinguishing features through melodic associations. The obvious similarity to *contrafacta* lies in the general practice of drawing on the specifics of existing musical material, including the genre- or artist-specific vocal mannerisms, as a model for the new song. In both, the recognition of the original material aids the more enjoyable perception of the incongruity-based comic effect of the newly composed lyrics. The difference between the two is therefore a matter of degree, whereby *contrafacta* retain more features of the (single) template song. WAY's style parodies tend towards multiple borrowings and are grounded in his extensive research on the targeted genre, song, or artist.

Finally, *medleys* feature excerpts from popular songs, not necessarily genre-related, but often organized around a concept or a theme. Original lyrics are normally retained, but refashioned by manipulating aspects of musical delivery and orchestration. WAY's trademark turns out to be the polka medley, whereby he uses the particular genre as his musical foundation.

Available insights into the creative process by the author himself<sup>17</sup> make these parody types apt starting points in the analysis. First, WAY emphasizes the markedly different approach he takes to composing each of the three subtypes. Similarly indicative is his stance on listener familiarity with the original as a prerequisite for humorous amusement: "that became my first rule of parody: It's got to be funny, whether or not the listener is familiar at all with the source material". This somewhat questions the above theoretical claims of knowledge of the congruities (i.e. the original song) as a crucial prerequisite to the perception of the incongruity, but fits in with Thomerson's holistic approach to parody. The analyses below

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<sup>16</sup> (Musical) quotation, as a marginally relevant technique, involves terse use of specific excerpts of original melodies and harmonies, embellished, melodically paraphrased, placed in a new context and referenced only in passing to mark an important event in the new song to lend character through association. Thomerson (2017, p. 43) finds the technique of adding words to a previously untexted melody, which consists of "add[ing] a text to an originally textless melody from the cultivated tradition" to be even less utilized, and practiced by a single parodist (Allan Sherman).

<sup>17</sup> *Master Class: "Weird Al" Yankovic On How To Make A Great Parody* (2012, October 29 retrieved April 13, 2023 from <https://www.fastcompany.com/1681833/master-class-weird-al-yankovic-on-how-to-make-a-great-parody>) was used in subsequent related references to the issue.

tacitly take the listener's acquaintance with WAY's role as a parodist and with the parody template ("the original") as presupposed, so as to address the secondary, sociocultural effects of frame shifting (and conceptual integration) as suggested by Ritchie (2005).

Faced with the vast inventory of devices and strategies at the author's disposal and in complex interaction, we opted to pay special attention to the nature and role of WAY's song titles. The author himself (see fn.17) acknowledges the original titles as frequent starting points for the parodying process, in that he starts from these and produces multiple versions based on word play. These then evolve into a rhyme-based text enhanced by other parodic techniques. Their overall function and subsequent relation to the lyrics and music was taken to cater for the non-process oriented, content-based dimension of the analysis (see fn. 8). Song titles are thus seen as both potent framing devices used by the artist and the (competent) listener, and one of the levels that frame-shifting and subsequent blending process(es) may start from. Both of these are seen here primarily as potent heuristics for addressing musical parody. The following analysis therefore echoes Zbikowski (2002) in that

what I am concerned with here is the overall discourse set up by the text and the overall discourse set up by the music. Although there are interesting details at more local levels, I am most intrigued by what conceptual blending can tell us about song and by what song can tell us about conceptual blending. (p. 254)

The same applies to frame-shifting, primarily as a *metatheoretical* metaphor in Ritchie's (2005) terms. We will, in fact tacitly place more emphasis on this approach, which "is potentially less constraining than the metaphors of "conceptual space" and "blending," and avoids the multiplication of "spaces" implied by entailments of the "space" and "blending" metaphors" (ibid., 276).

#### **4. Methodology and analysis**

The corpus comprised 14 studio albums amounting to 167 songs, carefully listened to by the present author. The origin of all songs was double-checked by consulting Wikipedia entries covering the individual albums, which supply both the authorship credits for the original song, as well as pointers to the original song/artist and the type for the parody. The lyrics were extracted from several online sites for textual analysis. The procedure sees WAY's original, non-parodic songs accounting for 19% of the corpus. As for parodies, contrafacta dominate with a 42% share in the corpus, followed by style parodies (32%) and polka medleys (7%). WAY's original songs, while undoubtedly also humorous, were excluded from the present study, as were the numerous musical videos.

## 4.1. Contrafacta parodies

A selection of 50 of WAY's song titles in Figure 1,<sup>18</sup> compared to the originals and the corresponding artists, illustrates underlying tendencies, the key of which in WAY's contrafacta parodies being his apparent propensity towards wordplay in titles. These are hypothesized to appeal to the listener in their simultaneous familiarity and creativity, as they confront them with the initial, sequentially-based incongruity. The (provisional) radial organization serves to illustrate their underlying prototype-based nature, and point to several patterns.

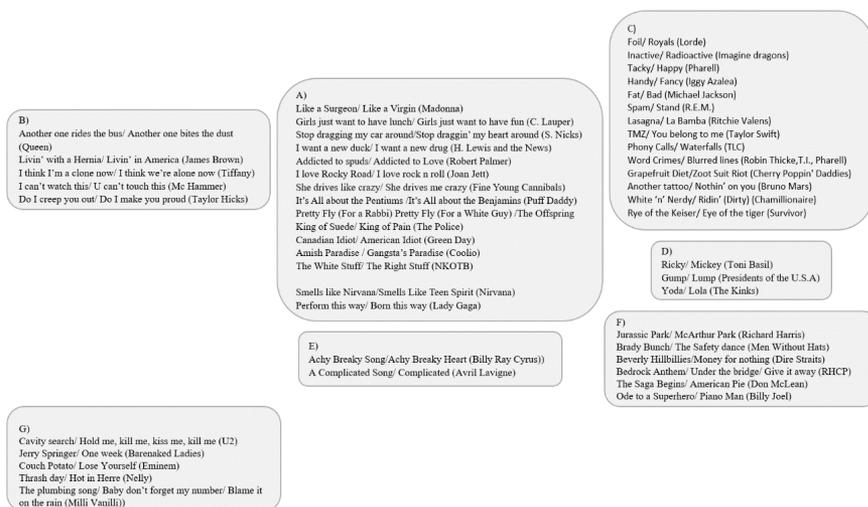


Figure 1: WAY's contrafacta parodies and corresponding originals

The central grouping (A) shows WAY's predominant strategy of altering the original title by substituting a single word/phrase, taking care to keep the rhyme, meter and syllabification of the original. The new item serves as a (frame-shifting) trigger which prompts the listener to spot the incongruity with the original title.

This lexical level process alone triggers the conceptual integration process, involving a blend drawing on the recognition and elements of two incongruent mental spaces.

As an example, take Madonna's *Like a Virgin*, which becomes *Like a Surgeon*.<sup>19</sup> The rhyming lexeme triggers the blend of two incongruous spaces, based on the

<sup>18</sup> The featured songs make up 70% of the total contrafacta in the corpus (70). Due to space limitations these were chosen primarily to conveniently present the reader with the myriad subtypes and degrees of word play-based manipulation analysed below.

<sup>19</sup> Urban legend has it that it was Madonna herself who suggested the title to WAY, which supports the productivity and ubiquity of the strategy and the blending process.

awareness of the original and juxtaposes a girl in love from the original to an (imaginary) surgeon in the new input space, featuring a new, surgery- based scenario. The two are blended in the parody blend, which features WAY as a performer bisociated with Madonna in the same role (as captured in the generic space), thus ‘congruously incongruous’, i.e. initially and partially resolved in the blend. The two performers are conceptually present, yet clearly distinguishable, by WAY’s conscious attempt not to imitate Madonna’s voice and impersonate her, but to sing in his specific nasal voice. This basic contrast creates a playful space between the hearer’s expectations based on the original, and the current congruously incongruous listening experience. A playful space is created between the two, which makes the speaker aware they are hearing a parody.

As a result, the listener familiar with the original song is afforded an immediate opportunity for humorous amusement. By recognizing the wordplay, and the generic, structural incongruities, the listener unpacks the humorous blend into the original and the ‘new’, incongruous space and is easily transposed into it. The ontological shifts driving the conceptual integration process function on the basis of achieving a sharp contrast between the original song’s frame and the frame which stands in for it (without totally suppressing it in the listener’s mind), whereby the blend inherits most of its structure from the new song frame/ space, featuring WAY, rather than Madonna as the protagonist. The subsequently developed world becomes that of a(n inept) surgeon ‘cutting for the very time’, whose ‘patients die before they pay’ as suggested by the new lyrics set to the familiar melody, instead of (but “bisociable” with) Madonna as a (figurative) “virgin” being “touched for the first time”. The scenario developed based on the SURGERY frame becomes progressively elaborated in the blend, by drawing on extra elements from it once the concept has been set up. These severely clash with the components of the ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP frame of the original, between which the competent listener can oscillate based on the basic cross-space correspondences.

The basic incongruity is both established and further supported by the shared melody as a generic space element. Delivery-wise, WAY occasionally relies on both mimicry and vocal imitation to simultaneously create and evoke existing musical frame(work)s.<sup>20</sup> The usually faithfully reproduced musical settings are rarely funny themselves. They serve primarily to provide a structural backdrop to new lyrics which get elaborated into new scenarios in the blend, and serve to perpetuate the lyrical incongruities supported by rhyming lyrics and rhythmic imitation as further structural factors underlying the basic cross-space correspondences between two conceptually incongruous domains.<sup>21</sup> We argued earlier, and exemplify below, that

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<sup>20</sup> The first album(s) saw accordion renditions of the melody as a potent incongruity-inducer. This was later increasingly abandoned in favour of faithful musical reproduction by the whole band, reserving the accordion for polka medleys.

<sup>21</sup> Apart from rhyming as the basic structural resource, the lyrics often work on the basis of partial lyrical quotation and mannerisms rhythmically attuned to the lyrics and further motivating

WAY relies on other techniques to generate concepts and humorous material for his lyrics. Still, the melody, as a whole, and/or set of musical motives (Zbikowski, 2002), as a generic space element, provides a sound (pun intended!) basis for constant oscillation between the two spaces (the original and the new text), especially in contrafacta parodies.

The language play observed in the titles obviously differs in kind and degree between cases, with group (A) suggested as the prototype. Examples in other groupings, which often emerge(d) from a slew of possible options involve more radical lexical and/or phrasal substitutions and stray further away from the original (B →F)), with group G) completely lacking wordplay, and group E) partially pairing the source to a generic term.<sup>22</sup> The most central cases in (A) tend to involve what Attardo (1994) calls *phonosymbolic alteration*, the idea that sound-based associations are able to carry meaning in *puns*.<sup>23</sup> Driven by playfulness and (assumed) familiarity with the original title, the listeners find it acceptable to relax their threshold of phonemic difference and treat the two items or strings as congruently incongruous, which results in a pleasurable surprise effect based on unanticipated similarity. Crucially, the new form simultaneously evokes a novel meaning and allows for the recoverability of the salient phrase on which it builds. Both help establish the input spaces underlying the parodic song as the blend.

In terms of a humorous effect, the practice becomes increasingly effective the more semantically different the two words and their respective frames (cf. *I want a new duck* vs. *I want a new drug*, *I Love Rocky Road*, substituting Joan Jett's original *Rock 'n' Roll*, *Spam* for R.E.M.'s *Stand*, his breakthrough hit(s) *My Bologna* (salami) for *My Sharona* etc.). The finding sits well with previous hypotheses on capturing resolvable humorous incongruity through the choice of incongruously juxtaposed concepts as a prerequisite for humorous blending. The notion of semantic difference is, however, difficult to operationalize<sup>24</sup> with the evaluation of whether the distance is humorous still intuitive and left to the listener as well as the researcher to evaluate.

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the bisociation. Consider, the chorus of *Like a virgin*: *Like a virgin, hey!/ Touched for the very first time; Like a virgin/ With your heartbeat next to mine* vs. WAY's *Like a surgeon, hey! Cuttin' for the very first time; Like a surgeon/ Here's a waiver for you to sign*. The practice continues throughout the song and features heavily in other contrafacta (cf. Thomerson's analysis of *Fat* as a parody of M. Jackson's *Bad*).

<sup>22</sup> *Achy Breaky Song* is a rare example of a *meta-parody*, where he pokes fun at the original song or singer, differentiating it from the other two cases using a generic title and involving a significant shift in domains (plumbing problems in the eponymous song and constipation as the 'complicated' part in *The Complicated Song* (instead of teen love qualms). The other two meta-parodies include *Perform This Way* and *Smells Like Nirvana*.

<sup>23</sup> Koestler (1964, p.179) refers to a pun as "two strings of thought tied together by a purely acoustic knot" and considers it a bisociative pattern.

<sup>24</sup> Dynel (2011) and Attardo (2021) lament the lack of reliable distance measuring techniques based on subjects' ratings in attempted studies. This leads Dynel to suggest that the distance between the domains escapes mathematical computation and measurement.

Moreover, Dynel (2011, p. 86) also suggests that “[h]umorous blends may hinge on inputs which are perceived as being innocuously and playfully inappropriate or even tabooed (e.g. violation of politeness norms, sex, or bodily functions), i.e. “may recruit mental spaces which are circumscribed by social standards and political correctness, yet not abominable, thereby promoting a humorous response” (ibid, p.69). We point to some of these in WAY’s opus below.

As hinted above, the often stark semantic contrast of a newly formulated title thus lets WAY further expand on the new concept as a blend lyrically by using Berger’s (1993) language, logic, and identity techniques to create additional layers of incongruity that do not (necessarily) rely on borrowed music.

This sees him developing absurd, exaggerated<sup>25</sup> scenarios, populated by both everyday and eccentric characters. The wordplay-driven titles and the ensuing rhyme-driven songs transpose the often more serious lyrical themes and settings to the drudgery of everyday existence and activities, thereby creating *lyrical incongruities* (Thomerson 2017). Queen’s *Another one bites the dust* thus becomes *Another One Rides the Bus*, Aerosmith’s *Livin’ on the Edge* is reconceptualized as *Livin’ in the Fridge*. Both, and many others of a similar nature, are turned into accounts of an Average Joe, often the first-person narrator, coming to grips with banal situations in the blended mental space established and subsequently elaborated. In our two examples, these amount to daily bus rides and food long past its use-by date due to the narrator’s laziness, respectively, and are juxtaposed to the original ‘socially serious’ ones.

In choosing the borrowed material, an additional common generic motivation might thus also be the author’s suggested intention to subvert (cf. Ritchie 2005) the genre conventions, strongly characterized by their respective general themes, e.g. social issues/criticism<sup>26</sup> in (hard) rock as featured above. Similarly, in line with Dynel’s claim above, love (and sex), the bread and butter of pop as a genre, along with its accompanying ups and downs, is often relegated to more prosaic, and thus incongruous, domains. Exaggerated, absurd or simply ‘uncool’ scenarios develop, (e.g. an ode to one’s love of potatoes in *Addicted to Spuds*, or the raunchy *Blurred Lines* turned into *Word Crimes*, gracing this paper’s title and transposing one into the ever-thrilling world of folk-linguistic issues). Oscillation (i.e. projections) between such blended spaces through selective projection of elements back to the original space may serve to expose the artificial, commercialized nature of love and its treatment within the genre in a harmless, playful, thus humorous way.

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<sup>25</sup> Ritchie (2009, p.319) suggests that “sometimes, the incongruity (particularly if it is what might informally be called “absurdity”) is produced by altering some normal, everyday state of affairs in some way, whereby this transformation from mundane to absurd contributes to (but does not resolve) the incongruity.” Absurdity falls under Berger’s (1994) logic or ideational humour techniques.

<sup>26</sup> Although parody can also serve a didactic and critical function, WAY admits he has “always gone for humour that is less biting and derogatory”, making his parodies “more a poke in the ribs than a punch in the face”.

Finally, WAY also tends to gravitate towards topics and domains significant to specific groups. His public (self-) image of a nerd and consciously nurtured anti-fame attitude, carried over from his early career, matches with stereotypically nerd-related domains he is found to draw upon.<sup>27</sup> Group (F) in Figure 1 above thus features allusions or direct references<sup>28</sup> to TV shows (e.g. *Brady Bunch*, *Beverly Hillbillies*), superhero lore (e.g. *Ode to a Superhero*<sup>29</sup>), as well as movies (e.g. *Star Wars*) as key frames. *Yoda* is, e.g., set to The Kinks' *Lola* and recounts the *Star Wars* character's well-known narrative, in stark contrast to the original, which involved a transvestite-related episode. *The Saga Begins* follows suit and leans almost organically on an equally period-defining and 'epic' *American Pie* by Don McLean, catering for the 'incongruent congruity' which motivates and sustains the humorous blend.

To sum up, we hope to have at least hinted at how "these secondary effects of conceptual integration and "frame-shifting" on the notion of common ground make an important contribution to meaning at the social and cultural level" (Ritchie 2005, p.289).

## 4.2. Style parodies

Examples in Table 2 serve to illustrate the sheer breadth of WAY's borrowing pool and indicate that wordplay seems to play little to no role in the titles of his style parodies. The titles primarily serve to frame the song in terms of the general topic, effectively reserving the onset of incongruity for the song itself. The competent listener can at best be triggered to expect a *thematic incongruity* (Thomerson 2017) from the title alone, in that the topics, i.e. concepts, clash with the conventional themes and moods of the original song(s)/ artist once the song is heard, i.e. the blend is formed and unpacked in the listener's mind when (un) consciously perceived (per Dynel's (2011) options).

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<sup>27</sup> One of his later greatest hits, "White & Nerdy", a spoof on rapper Chamillionaire's *Ridin' (Dirty)* is dubbed "the ultimate nerdcare anthem, a defiant howl of Poindexter pride". (Rabin & Yankovic, 2016). Similarly, *It's all about the Pentiums* flips the wealth-centred world of modern day hip hop in Puff Daddy's *It's all about the Benjamins* (a metonymy for dollars) on its head in favour of nerdy tech preoccupations triggered by the processor brand name, thus subverting it. Such a reorganization of cognitive elements within a particular frame results in an increase in the salience of the stereotype introduced by the subversive frame. This can, if accepted, increase solidarity among members of the in-group by reaffirming the common ground within the group and contrasting it to that of the out-group (Ritchie 2005, p. 288, cf. McKeague, 2018).

<sup>28</sup> Thomerson (2017, p.92) suggests the two, alongside *puns and wordplay*, and *exaggeration* as the principle language techniques utilized by WAY to generate and develop his humorous concepts.

<sup>29</sup> Spiderman is juxtaposed to B. Joel's Piano Man here, supported by the (lyrical) quotation of the original song's sing-along (part of) refrain to make the listener bisociate between the familiar gestures of the original and the incongruous new whole.

Style parody	Parodies:	Style parody	Parodies:
Generic Blues	The blues	Craigslist	The Doors
Sports Song	Fight songs	The Biggest Ball of Twine in Minnesota	Harry Chapin and Gordon Lightfoot
Slime Creatures from Outer Space	1950s sci-fi soundtracks	Trigger Happy	The Beach Boys and Jan & Dean
This Is the Life	1920s and 1930s music	I Was Only Kidding	Tonio K
Good Enough for Now	country love songs	Young, Dumb & Ugly	AC/DC
Christmas at Ground Zero	Phil Spector-produced Christmas songs	Frank's 2000" TV	R.E.M.'s early work
One More Minute	Elvis Presley-like Doo-wop	Traffic Jam	Prince
Mr. Popeil	The B-52s	Waffle King	Peter Gabriel
Cable TV	Hercules by Elton John	Stop Forwarding That Crap to Me	Jim Steinman
Dog Eat Dog	Talking Heads	Lame Claim to Fame	Southern Culture on the Skids
You Make Me	Oingo Boingo	My Own Eyes	Foo Fighters
Velvet Elvis	The Police	Mission Statement	Crosby, Stills & Nash
Twister	Beastie Boys	First World Problems	Pixies
Good Old Days	James Taylor	Jackson Park Express	Cat Stevens

Table 1: WAY's style parodies and parody targets

Musical quotation (see fn. 6) is used here occasionally to achieve other types of incongruities. e.g. *aesthetic*<sup>30</sup> and *evocative* (Thomerson 2017). With the latter, listeners may experience an incongruity as their memory of the partially replicated musical features clashes musically with their current listening experience. In this respect, Zbikowski (2002) acknowledges that, in some cases, any correlation between text and music is simply too general to generate a compelling blend or so tenuous as to be virtually nonexistent. Style parodies might be a variant of such a case, where the musical portion of humorous amusement comes about in musical motives dispersed throughout the song. The use of musical motives does, however, cause the competent listener to constantly oscillate between the two experiences, which results in an otherwise familiar gesture becoming “congruously incongruous”, particularly when paired with the lyrics in the blend.<sup>31</sup>

Concept-wise, WAY often positions some of these within a tradition of similar songs, but treats the topic sarcastically, creating a cognitive dissonance in a sufficiently competent listener familiar with the artist's or genre conventions. Consider, e.g. the lyrics to a country music-inspired (and delivered) melody of *Good Enough for Now* in (1), where the characteristic longing and declarations of love are systematically attenuated and thereby made vacuous by juxtaposition to the lyrical conventions of the ‘template’:

- 1) Oh, I couldn't live a single day without you  
 Actually, *on second thought*, well, *I suppose I could*  
 Anyway, what I'm trying to say is, honey, you're the greatest

<sup>30</sup> This generic-level incongruity does not necessarily presuppose listener familiarity with the artist or genre. but may instead trigger a clash with general cultural expectations of, e.g. an upbeat melody associated with upbeat topics, juxtaposed with more serious lyrical content, or vice versa. See Thomerson's (2017, p. 83ff.) analysis of *Craigslist*, parodying The Doors, for an elaborate musicological account of both incongruity types referenced above.

<sup>31</sup> A fuller account of the way concepts combine within this song, and within the underlying network would require a series of CINs as snapshots of “the musical syntax”, from which we abstain here due to space limitations, but invite in future case studies.

Well, at any rate, *I guess* you're *pretty* good  
Now, it seems to me I'm *relatively* lucky  
I know I *probably* couldn't ask for too much more  
I honestly can say you're *an above-average lady*  
You're *almost just what I've been looking for*  
You're *sort of* everything I ever wanted  
You're *not perfect*, but I love you *anyhow*  
You're the woman that I've always dreamed of  
*Well, not really*, but *you're good enough for now*

Similarly, in *Young, Dumb and Ugly* the chorus-related title itself introduces the pending incongruity between the mundane (turned absurd) actions of the song's protagonists<sup>32</sup> (average Joes) and the über-cool life of hard rock gods AC/DC, whose vocal mannerisms and musical delivery style are mimicked by WAY('s band):

2) We wear black leather in the hottest weather  
You can't imagine the smell  
We got three-day stubble, our names spell trouble  
T-are-you-be -E-L  
Raisin' hell, bendin' the rules just a little  
We're livin' only for thrills  
We squeeze our toothpaste tubes from the middle  
And wait until the last minute to pay our telephone bills

The two kinds of incongruities driving the humorous blends thus seem also to be dependent, or at least “playfully contingent” (Dyne1 2011:80) on some socially-circumscribed domains which sees one of the input spaces “socially restricted, yet playfully deployed in humour” (ibid.) and open to bisociation between the elements of the original and their deployment in the style parody. It is, again, this subsequent practice of bisociation that makes them similar to contrafacta in terms of the lyrical strategy and the social effect achieved.

### 4.3. Polka medleys

The 12 polka medleys are a prime example of how WAY playfully adapts music to what best suits his purposes,<sup>33</sup> in that he keeps the original lyrics of a number of songs constituting a medley but refashions these musically in polka style, i.e.

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<sup>32</sup> These exemplify the use of *catalogues*, i.e. listing of items and actions revolving around a concept, which surface as a common lyrical technique used by WAY used to enhance the humorous potential of the lyrics and the lyrical incongruity when juxtaposed to the original lyrics.

<sup>33</sup> Once again, WAY provides a potential glimpse into his creative (and cognitive) process: “if there’s a song that I think is really ripe for parody but I just can’t think of a clever enough idea, sometimes it’ll end up in the polka medley”. This accounts for a frequently (but, as argued above, not always) haphazard selection of medley components.

transposes them to the specific genre, which is meant to serve as a disjuncton on the musical level.

	Polka medley	Songs per medley	Sources (genre/ artist)
	Polkarama!	15	contemporary hits(2000s), original polka (1)
	Polka Party!	13	contemporary hits (1980s)
a)	NOW That's What I Call Polka!	13	contemporary hits (2010s), original polka(1)
	Polka Power!	15	contemporary hits (1990s)
	Hooked on Polkas	13	contemporary hits (1980s)
	Polkas on 45	13	popular rock songs (1960s, 1970s)
	The Hot Rocks Polka	12	The Rolling Stones songs, original (1)
b)	The Alternative Polka	14	contemporary alternative rock songs (1990s), original polka (1)
	Angry White Boy Polka	17	contemporary (1990s) Christian metal, nu metal, rap metal, garage rock & rap hits, original polka (1)
c)	Polka Face	18	contemporary (2010s) dance-pop, hip hop, R&B hits, original polka (2)
	Bohemian Polka	1	Bohemian Rhapsody (Queen)
d)	Polka Your Eyes Out	16	contemporary hits (1990s), classical polka (1), original polka (1)

Table 2: WAY's polka medleys

Table 2 indicates there are hints at the role of word play in medley titles albeit a lot more subtle than those in contrafacta, and a bonus for the connoisseur. Those with extra knowledge will derive pleasure from spotting one of three repeating patterns as potential clues to activate the initial framing. In the bulk of set a) cases, e.g., the exclamation mark evokes in a competent listener the domain-specific knowledge of conventional practices in naming song compilations (mainly albums), or they involve subtler references<sup>34</sup> and may hint at what is to be expected and subsequently shattered by the actual content. B), as the second most common pattern, hints at the genre of the borrowed song, thus preparing the ground for abrupt incongruity when juxtaposed with polka-style delivery. Set c) potentially utilizes word play with specific songs as templates (e.g. *Polka face* for Lady Gaga's *Poker face*, or *Bohemian Rhapsody* reconceptualized as *Bohemian Polka*<sup>35</sup>. *Polka Your Eyes Out* brings us back to wordplay as WAY's ubiquitous strategy, priming the listener for a frame-shift, followed by a series of blend elaborations resulting in humorous amusement.

The main incongruity here, however, arises from the juxtaposition of manner of delivery, which subverts existing knowledge and conventions of pop music, as well as from its tempo which WAY routinely steps up to create a contrast with most of the originals included. This induces a pleasurable, incredulity-driven clash with the original genre(s). The clash involves rearranging rhythms, harmonies, and timbres in a polka style for polka-typical instruments: trumpets, tuba and the accordion. The latter, WAY's signature instrument, is used to recreate the melody of the parody targets and is itself enough of a trigger to signal the incongruity in a

<sup>34</sup> *Polka Power!* hinges on the (then-popular) *Girl Power* movement championed by *Spice Girls*, whereas *Hooked on Polkas* references a specific 1980s compilation, and *Polkas on 45* hints to a particular song by a 1980s medley-releasing band.

<sup>35</sup> The former is introduced by the original song as the first one to spoof, strengthening the input space activated by the title. The latter is an outlier among polkas in that Queen's song is (lyrically and melodically) rendered in polka-style, which makes it a kind of 'reverse contrafactum'.

playful way, based on a stark contrast between the original genres and the resulting medley. A high-level, thematic incongruity is also created between the songs in his medley by removing a section of pre-existing music from its original context and placing it in an incongruous one with respect to the lyrical content and to other songs. The lyrical topics, style, period, and social function of each song are often markedly different,<sup>36</sup> but brought together “in a bizarre, almost surreal listening experience” (Thomerson 2017, p. 83) by polka-related orchestration and delivery. The texts serve as valuable support to uplifting music, working to the benefit of a playful, open-minded audience who is amused by the clash.<sup>37</sup>

## 5. Conclusions and prospects for further research

The rather broad-brushed approach taken in this paper has aimed at exploring some of the points of convergence between traditional linguistic theories and concepts in humour research and possible contributions of CL(-based) approaches applicable to the study of musical parody as a multimodal phenomenon.

In line with the non-sequential understanding of incongruity-resolution (Ritchie, 2009), deemed suitable given the fluid nature of parody, emphasis (however general) was predominantly placed on the content side of WAY’s parodies. The sequentially-based, process-oriented, frame-shifting approach was adopted primarily as a more generic-level framework in the analysis of titles as powerful framing devices which may (help) trigger the initial thematic incongruity at the linguistic level, and set the tone for its subsequent development of the remaining humorous stimuli, dependent on the interaction of music, lyrics and manner of delivery in the song itself as a full comic statement utilizing additional (non)linguistic techniques.

Frame-shifting was further supplemented by recourse to the basic constructs of the Blending Theory as a potent heuristic applicable both to (the author’s) humour production and (the listener’s) interpretation of parodic content. Particular emphasis was placed on acknowledging the notion of bisociation, i.e. selective inter-space projections, which supply the much-needed motivation for WAY’s multilevel development of the general concept and sustainment of humorousness throughout the song. It also accounts for the suggested socio-pragmatic effects of the parodies. Some of these were suggested and argued to be (un)deliberately woven into the (types of) individual parodies. The approach also seems to naturally accommodate the issue of listener familiarity with the specifics of the original template(s) and resources.

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<sup>36</sup> Thomerson (2017, p. 97) points to the stark contrast of the upbeat polka-style delivery and Papa Roach’s dismal nu-metal lyrics in *Last Resort* as part of *Angry White Boy Polka*. We find it additionally motivated by the CHARACTERISTIC PROPERTY FOR INDIVIDUAL metonymy in the title.

<sup>37</sup> The lingering incongruity perpetuated musically provides WAY with a chance to seamlessly include both his original, and other authors’ polka excerpts, as a bonus for those in the know and hard-core fans.

A myriad of possible projections opens the issue of the option of intentional vs. ‘automatic’ blending, with the latter more applicable to listeners familiar with (or at least versed in) the original template. Opportunities are still left to ‘naïve’ speakers to experience humorous enjoyment, if so inclined, by the use of additional techniques intended to provoke the perception of the additional types of incongruities presented. To be sure, both options might well be superseded by the general knowledge of WAY’s role as a parodist and the funniness is inevitably open to subjective interpretation by his audience. However, we argue that it is still heavily motivated by the suggested resources which help the recognition and appreciation of the humorous intent. These concepts, notoriously difficult to verify, would, of course, necessitate experimental testing (cf. Brône & Feyaerts 2003, p. 46ff).

Finally, the sheer heterogeneity of WAY’s techniques and the underlying creative process naturally entails further individual, more elaborate case studies of specific examples, whereby the blending theory again emerges as the most suitable choice. Fauconnier & Turner’s ‘standard’ model does provide a sound basis, but we see great promise in later, semiotically-based elaborations by Brandt & Brandt (2005). These necessarily more elaborate analyses would help accommodate the different incongruity types, their causes and effects on the listener’s perception and appreciation of the humorousness (and funniness) of the different (types of) parodies presented here as a sound starting point at varying levels of analytic specificity.

One must, however, also pay heed to cautionary pleas by cognitive linguists that the compatibility holds the risk of overstating the contribution of the CL apparatus, leading to repeated claims and circular arguments. The aim of the present paper has been to mitigate this by acknowledging contributions from other approaches, argued to cater to different levels of analysis.

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