

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

**HUMOUR IN THE FILM *MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL*:
A COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC APPROACH**

BA thesis

HENRY KONNO

SUPERVISOR: LECT. PILVI RAJAMÄE, PhD

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ABSTRACT

Humour is a part of our daily lives. Even though we come across humour a lot, it is often not understood exactly why we laugh or what makes us laugh. Analysing humour would give us that insight. One prevalent medium of humour is film.

There are many classical comedy films, but this thesis focuses on one specific film, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, analysing the humour in it using different theories from cognitive linguistics. *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* was released in 1976, and still is one of the funniest low-budget films out there. The paper gives a short overview of the approaches and theories in humour. It also gives an overview of cognitive linguistics and three theories from cognitive semantics. The goal of this paper is to analyse the humour in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* using theories from cognitive semantics. The analysis tries to explain different aspects of humour in the dialogue.

In the first section of the paper there is a short overview on humour, the main approaches to humour and the prevalent theories in humour studies. The second section of the paper gives an overview of the field of cognitive linguistics and gives a summary of the primary metaphor theory, the mental spaces theory and the blending theory. The third section of the paper focuses on the analysis of the dialogue from the film using the three previously mentioned theories.

A LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SSTH – Semantic-Script Theory of Humour

GTVH – General Theory of Verbal Humour

CL – cognitive linguistics

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INTRODUCTION

Humour has been and still is a phenomenon that most people understand, but also find difficult to describe. I have always enjoyed a good laugh, and when I find something very funny, I try to figure out why it is so. Humour studies is an unfamiliar field to me, and this paper was a good way to get more familiar with its basics. Humour studies have several profound theories to analyse humour, but I decided to do my analysis from the cognitive linguistics perspective, using theories from cognitive semantics, since I believe it has the potential to reveal unique points of view to understanding humour.

In this thesis I am going to focus on one of the comedy classics, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, which I have decided to analyse because of its classical status among British comedies, and because I enjoy the humour used there. I am going to analyse the dialogue from four scenes using theories from cognitive semantics, since cognitive linguistics has not been used to study the humour in Monty Python before.

First, I will give a short overview of humour, and explain some of the theories that have come from different approaches to humour, mainly the *Semantic-Script Theory of Humour* and the *General Verbal Theory of Humour*. This will provide us with information about the background of humour studies and shows what the general approach to studying humour has been. After that I will give a short overview of *Cognitive Linguistics* and its history. This provides the background to understand the emergence of the three theories that I will use for my analysis. Those three theories are from cognitive semantics – firstly the primary metaphor theory, which helps analyse specific metaphors and helps understand what connections are made when using those metaphors. Secondly, I will use the mental spaces theory because it provides a nice structure to situations and helps clarify why and how we understand those situations. Thirdly, I will use the blending theory, which helps simplify our understanding and expectations, comparing it with what happens in the film, and blending them together to introduce a new aspect that arises from the combination of the two.

In the analysis part, I will analyse the dialogue from scenes 19 and 20 using the primary metaphor theory, scene 21 using the mental spaces theory, and scene 10 using the blending theory.

1. Humour

Humour is one of the most intriguing and least understood human cognitive abilities. It is an integral part of our life that we encounter daily, which makes it important to investigate and understand its nature. There have been no successful attempts at finding a universal definition to the concept of humour, due to its complex essence "...its philosophical, psychological and physiological nature, its aesthetic value, its relation to truth, ethical standards, customs and norms, /.../ its dependency on the society and culture...". (Raskin, 1979: 326) Because there is no universal definition that would not pertain to some specific theory, I hope to find out what types of theoretical definitions does humour have and what do they encompass.

The word 'humour' goes back to the Medieval medicine's "theory of humors". Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg in their *Introduction: Humour and History* say that English borrowed the word from French, where the word had "...the meaning of one of the four chief fluids of the body (blood, phlegm, bile and black bile)". (Bremmer, Roodenburg 1997: 1) It is speculated that the word "humour" got its present meaning around the 16th century, being used in plays like Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*. The first time it was used in its current meaning was in 1709 in Lord Shaftesbury's *Sensus Communis: an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour*. (Bremmer, Roodenburg 1997: 1)

Historically, humour has been described and understood differently. In ancient Greece, humour, according to Plato is "... a mixture of pleasure and pain." (Attardo 1994: 18) Aristotle was the first to correlate comedy and humour, but he thought that comedy had to be based on real events. His pupil Theophrastus introduced the "comic of character", and proposed that comedy was fictional. Salvatore Attardo cannot overstate the importance of Platonic and Aristotelian thought in the theory of humour "...for example, it establishes the opposition of comedy-tragedy". (Raskin 2008: 102) The Romans were influenced by the Greeks, but still had their advancements on the topic, for example Cicero introduced the distinction between verbal and referential humour. During the Middle Ages there was little theorizing on humour, but during the Renaissance the previous ideas flourished and were mostly repeated. (Attardo 1994: 19-45)

1.1 Approaches to Humour

Humour is an interdisciplinary subject, having different aspects studied in psychology, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, and so on. Salvatore Attardo claims that in most of the disciplines, humour is viewed as "...an all-encompassing category, covering any event or object that elicits laughter, amuses or is felt funny." (Attardo 1994: 4)

Attardo, in his *Linguistic Theories on Humor* categorises the theory types used in humour as essentialist theories, teleological theories, and substantialist theories. (Attardo 1994:1) He also states that in general linguistic theories of humour are essentialist or teleological. The essentialist theories focus on the attributes that are necessary for humour's function and use those attributes to explain what makes humour what it is. Teleological theories focus on the results and goals of humour and use them to explain how humour is structured and used. Both simplify the humour phenomena in order to understand them on a larger scale.

The first developed theory of humour is the superiority theory, being the view on humour in Aristotelic thought. According to this theory, laughter is an expression of feelings of superiority over people and the superiority factor raised moral objections to laughter and comedy. This was the case until the 18th century when other theories arose - the relief theory and the incongruity theory, explained further on. Linguistics follows that tripartite classification. Some approaches that linguistic studies have taken towards humour have been the taxonomic analyses of puns, structuralist analyses of humour (which blend an incongruity-based theory with research done in semantics and narratology), the *Semantic-Script Theory of Humour* (SSTH), and the *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (GTVH). Attardo describes the use of cognitive linguistics in humour research: "It is clear that blending, i.e., the creation of a new "mental space" (domain, idea) out of existing, and not necessarily related, other mental spaces, can account for some aspects of some types of humor..." (Raskin 2008: 128)

1.2. Modern theories of humour

The modern theories of humour are commonly divided into three classifications: superiority theories, release theories, and incongruity theories. The main difference they have is in the focus of the relationship between participants. Superiority theories focus on the target of mockery, release theories focus on the recipient of humour, and the incongruity theories focus on the object of amusement.

Superiority theories originally concentrated on the aggressive side of humour. The earliest theories had a great influence on the perception of humour. Thomas Hobbes was the most influential theorist in this category. In his book published in 1651 called *Leviathan*, he explained laughter as something that arises from the feeling of superiority over someone. "Sudden Glory, is the passion which maketh those Grimaces called LAUGHTER... by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves." (Hobbes 1651:45) Laughter in this case is taken to mean a self-congratulatory reaction to finding ourselves better off than someone else. In superiority theory, the object of mockery is usually referred to as the 'butt of the joke'. Alison Ross says that this type of humour is used against certain social groups that are perceived as a threat and adds that the type is context-bound: "perceptions of status vary from culture to culture at any one moment and change over time." (Ross 1998: 53-54) The goal of such humour is usually to separate yourself from someone while degrading them, "aggressive humor is also known as "exclusive" humor"; conversely, cohesive uses of humor are known as "inclusive" humor." (Attardo 1994: 50) John Morreall has disputed this theory in his book published in 1983, *Taking Laughter Seriously*. He argues that as with non-humorous laughter like getting tickled, or humorous laughter, a sense of superiority is often not involved. "Many puns, too, are mere verbal play, and are not designed to evoke feelings of superiority." (Morreall 1983: 11) Not only puns, but also absurd or nonsense humour that is not directed at anyone can elicit laughter, without having a sense of superiority involved.

Release theories claim that the effect of humour is the release of psychic energy and tensions, and releasing one from restrictions, rules and laws. In linguistics, the ignoring and mistreating of language rules is labelled as "defunctionalisation" which accounts for various puns and other word-play. The theories are mostly psychoanalytic, focusing on the recipient of humour, on what psychological effects it brings about in them. One prominent advocate of this attitude was Sigmund Freud. He distinguished between innocent and tendentious jokes. "i.e., jokes that do not show aggression aspects and those that do..." (Raskin 2008:

104) Published in 1905 in his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud describes three different sources of laughter: joking, comic, and humour. In joking, energy that would be used as pent up sexual and hostile feelings is released as laughter. In comic, cognitive energy that is used for intellectual thought and is suddenly interrupted is released as laughter. In humour, energy that is being built up for an emotional reaction turns into something that we do not take seriously, and that energy is released as laughter. (Freud n. d.: 170) Morreall argues against this theory as well, saying that “relief of tension or built-up emotional energy... is sometimes part of laughter situations, but cannot be taken for the essence of laughter, since many laughter situations do not include it.” (Morreall 1983: 24)

Incongruity theories were already discussed during the Renaissance, as Aristotle’s take on humour as “something bad” could be interpreted as something out of place or abnormal, not necessarily as “evil”. (Attardo 1994: 48) The main aspect of the incongruity theories is that there is a conflict between what is expected and what happens in reality, and that makes us laugh. Arthur Schopenhauer has proposed a defining version of the incongruity theory in his book *The World As Will and Idea*, first published in 1818, “The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity.” (Schopenhauer 1909: 95) Incongruous jokes are based on structural ambiguity, expressed in various aspects of language like phonology, graphology, morphology, lexis, and syntax. (Ross 1998: 8) Morreall argues that many incongruous situations do not elicit laughter and “incongruity may as well be involved in all humor, but it is not involved in many cases of non-humorous laughter.” (Morreall 1983: 19)

1.3. Semantic-Script Theory of Humour and General Theory of Verbal Humour

The *Semantic-Script Theory of Humour* (SSTH) grew out of generative grammar, developed by Victor Raskin in 1979. “It argued that the central aspect of humor was semantic/pragmatic and moreover presented an articulated theory of semantics to implement this claim.” (Raskin 2008: 107) The theory focused on single short texts that carry jokes. The premise is that a text is a joke if it is compatible in two scripts, and if the two scripts are opposite. Scripts are defined as organised information about some entity like an object, an event, an action, a quality, and so on. Raskin deflected claims that the theory was purely semantic by saying that there was no difference between the lexical and the encyclopaedic information. Attardo

did not agree with this theory, because in his opinion the theory was essentially an incongruity theory, and that “the SSTH makes claims only about jokes, the simplest and least complicated type of humorous text.” (Raskin 2008: 108) He also brought out that SSTH cannot analyse single-word puns.

Attardo and Raskin co-authored a broadening of the SSTH in 1991 under the name of the *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (GTVH). As SSTH is only a semantic theory of humour, GTVH was developed into a full linguistic theory which included other areas of linguistics as well. The broadening was achieved through introducing five other aspects into the analysis. Besides the script opposition (SO) – two correlated scripts that are local antonyms, there were also the logical mechanism (LM) – resolution to the incongruity (in non-congruity jokes the parameter is empty), the target (TA) – defined as the “butt” of the joke (non-aggressive jokes have an empty value for this perimeter), the narrative strategy (NS) – the narrative organization (monologue, dialogue, riddle, etc.), the language (LA) – the verbalization of a text, and the situation (SI) – the props of the joke, the objects, participants, instruments, activities and so on. These aspects are called the knowledge resources (KR). (Attardo 2001: 22-26) This allowed them to include the theory in textual linguistics, in the theory of narrativity, interlingual translation, in broad pragmatics and so on. The improvements on SSTH is that GTVH has no problems with verbal humour like puns. Still, Attardo admits that there are shortcomings to GTVH, “the problem of the analysis of longer texts remains largely unexplored.” (Attardo 1994: 229) When discussing new approaches to the linguistics of humour, Attardo brings up cognitive linguistics and says that there are new developments in cognitive linguistics that can account for aspects of some types of humour. (Raskin 2008: 128)

As has been seen, there are many theories on humour which all define it differently and have a different approach to analysing humour. Humour has many aspects to consider, so there is no definition that would account for all the elements that it incorporates. The prevalent theories in humour studies are theories in which one analyses the textual qualities related to humour. There are still a lot of new aspects in different types of humours that can be studied and analysed.

2. Cognitive Linguistics

I have chosen cognitive linguistics (CL) as the medium to analyse *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, because I believe the theories in it have the potential to analyse the humour from a unique point of view. The main weak point on the theories presented in the previous paragraphs is that the text is treated as the sole source of humour. Cognitive linguistics can improve on this by incorporating the analysis of the people's understanding of the humour to find the reason why something is thought of as humorous.

Cognitive linguists claim that the use and formation of language is related to the work of the mind, not language specific rules. Rather than having a single theoretical foundation, it "...is an enterprise or an approach to the study of language". (Evans 2007: 22) Meaning that the linguistics' branch has a wide variety of theories that overlap, complement, and sometimes compete, having common assumptions, principles, and perspectives.

Cognitive linguists' main drive is to understand how the human mind works, and the central assumption is that the language we use displays our experiences in the world and our patterns of thought, it reflects certain essential properties and design features of the human mind. Vyvyan Evans and Melanie Green describe language as a "... window into cognitive function, providing insight into the nature, structure, and organisation of thoughts and ideas." (Evans, Green 2006: 5) Being an interdisciplinary subject, it frequently overlaps with other cognitive sciences like philosophy, neuroscience, artificial intelligence and psychology.

Formal linguistics, the predecessor to CL, approaches language as more of a mechanical system filled with devices that could be expressed in formalism inspired by mathematics, logic, and computer science. For example, the paradigm of Generative Grammar developed by Noam Chomsky regards the grammar of a language as a system of rules that generate a specific combination of words that form grammatical sentences. In contrast, cognitive linguists treat language like a biological organism that evokes and is affected by other cognitive systems.

During the inception of cognitive linguistics, the prominent linguists were George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, Ronald Langacker, and Leonard Talmy. They each focused on different aspects of language, trying to establish their own linguistic theory and definition of language. The main principle shared by all of them was that language is driven by meaning and must

be the primary focus of study. Evans describes meaning as a process rather than an element, due to meaning being constructed by other words and linguistic units. (Evans 2007: 131)

There are two main essential ideas in cognitive linguistics: generalisation commitment and cognitive commitment. They were proposed by George Lakoff in his 1991 paper *Cognitive versus Generative Linguistics: How Commitments influence results*, where he argued how these two aspects, which he described as commitments characterize cognitive linguistics. Lakoff described the generalization commitment as: “the commitment to characterize the general principles governing all aspects of human language”. (Lakoff, 1991) This was aimed at empirical linguists (including linguists that study syntax, semantics, pragmatics, morphology, and so on). This makes sure that there are common structuring principles across different features of language. He describes the cognitive commitment as: “the commitment to make one’s account of human language accord with what is generally known about the mind and brain from disciplines other than linguistics.” (Lakoff, 1991) This is the defining commitment of cognitive linguistics, which holds the view that the linguistic studies should reflect research and findings in other disciplines like cognitive and developmental psychology, artificial intelligence, neurosciences and so on.

Cognitive linguistics’ two best developed sub-branches are: cognitive approaches to grammar and cognitive semantics. Cognitive approaches to grammar claim that grammar cannot be distinct from semantics while maintaining its meaning, because grammar and semantics share important properties with the system of linguistic meaning. One of the two focuses with cognitive grammarians is the aim to provide a descriptive account of the units that comprise a language - symbols, by trying to present an inventory of the units. In cognitive semantics, the focus of the study is:” ...the relationship between experience, the conceptual system and the semantic structure encoded by language.” (Evans 2007: 26) Three prominent theories that belong to cognitive semantics which I will use are: Primary Metaphor Theory, Mental Spaces Theory, and Blending Theory.

2.1. Primary Metaphor Theory

One of the first theories presented in cognitive semantics was the contemporary theory of metaphor, presented by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in 1980 in the article “Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language”. Primary metaphor theory was presented in 1997 by Joseph Edward Grady as a development of that theory. One of the aspects of the original theory was how metaphors were generated because of the abstractness of some domains of

our experiences. It was stated that more abstract domains needed more physical and concrete domains in order to be expressed.

“Abstract concepts have a literal core but are extended by metaphors, often by many mutually inconsistent metaphors. Abstract concepts are not complete without metaphors. For example, love is not love without metaphors of ... madness, union, nurturance...” (Lakoff, Johnson 2003: 272)

For example, the abstract idea of *affections* is expressed with the physical experience of “warmth” (e.g. *She greeted me warmly*) or the abstract idea of *emotional intimacy* is expressed with the physical experience of “proximity” (e.g. *My brother and I are very close*). The reason why certain concrete domains are used to express certain abstract domains was not explained by the theory.

In Grady’s *Foundations of Meaning: Primary Metaphors and Primary Scenes*, he argues that specific concrete domains are used to express specific abstract domains because of there being a tight correlation between the two experiences involved. Thus, the AFFECTION IS WARMTH metaphor is generated because of the correlation between affection and the physical sensation of body warmth produced by physical proximity. The EMOTIONAL INTIMACY IS PROXIMITY metaphor is generated because of the correlation between being emotionally intimate with someone and being physically near to that person. (Grady 1997: 293)

Grady’s fundamental claim is that there are two kinds of metaphors: primary and compound metaphors. Primary metaphors are foundational and compound metaphors are formed by unifying primary metaphors. Grady argues that the target and source of metaphoric correlation does not relate to how abstract or how concrete the idea is, but it relates to the degree of subjectivity. “The concepts that are linked by primary metaphors are ones that relate in meaningful ways to our goals and our actions in the world” (Grady 1997: 135) This means that the metaphors are not formed to express something unfamiliar or complex, but they are the product of fundamental cognitive processes.

2.2. Mental Spaces Theory

In truth-conditional semantics the situations are represented as different worlds – the real world and then other worlds where the situations are possible. Mental spaces theory, presented by Charles Fauconnier in 1985 in *Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning*

Construction in Natural Language offers a simpler solution. “Fauconnier replaces the notion of a possible world with that of a mental space, and argues that the mental space is a cognitive structure.” (Croft, Cruse 2004: 33). Normally the situations are construed as events in a base space, representing present reality, and there are elements called space builders, which have the function of setting up a new space, different from the base space and being linked to both of them. For example, in the sentence ‘Either you take the bus, or you walk back’ there are mental spaces in which the situation is true in one space only.

Fauconnier finds it crucial to distinguish roles and values in the process of mapping between spaces. “A role is a linguistic description describing a category; a value is an individual that can be described by that category.” (Croft, Cruse 2004: 34) One of the observations he made was that a value in one space could be described by the role its counterpart has in another space through being related by connectors. This is called the access principle.

To illustrate this: *Romeo’s family is in a feud with the Capulet family. In the play, Orlando Bloom gets to kiss Condola Rashad.* Both sentences set up a separate mental space, having elements like Romeo and the Capulet family in the first one; Orlando Bloom and Condola Rashad in the second one. Romeo Montague and Orlando Bloom – the actor who played Romeo in the Broadway play *Romeo and Juliet* – are counterparts linked by a connector. The name *Orlando Bloom* can be used to identify the character he plays, and we are meant to understand that Romeo is doing the kissing rather than Orlando Bloom. The metaphor in these sentences is that the name *Orlando Bloom* is used to describe the actions of Romeo in the play.

Such analysis is set up in diagrammatic form, using circles that represent distinct mental spaces, and elements linked in both mental spaces are connected by a line.

2.3. Blending Theory

The blending theory was developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, first expressed in their (1995) *Conceptual Integration and Formal Expression*. It derives from two cognitive semantics theories: Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Mental Spaces Theory. It was created to address the most characteristic feature of a metaphor that Conceptual Metaphor Theory does not capture: the blending of two activated domains. This is achieved in the blending theory with a mechanism called conceptual integration, which is held to be a basic cognitive

function being central to the way we think. The theory adopts the architectural components and central concerns from Mental Spaces Theory.

The goal of the blending theory is to achieve an understandable scale in order to analyse a complex idea by viewing it in a new way. This is achieved by reducing the complexity of the ideas in input spaces to simple and short. Similarly, like in Mental Spaces Theory there are two domains that parallel the target and the source. There is also a generic space, which represents what the two have in common, and lastly there is the blended space, where selected material from the target and source domains are combined to form a new space.

“In a metaphoric blend, prominent counterparts form the input spaces project to a single element in the blended space – they are ‘fused’. A single element in the blend corresponds to an element in each of the input spaces. /.../ ...the point of metaphors is precisely that one thing is depicted or equated with another.”
(Grady et al. 1999: 114)

An example to this is the sentence “That surgeon is a butcher”. There are two separate spaces, surgeon and butcher, each being a respectful and a skilful occupation, but in this example the word ‘butcher’ is used in a negative context, and the blending theory helps analyse why it is like that.

Cognitive linguists’ aim is to understand how the human mind works through analysing language, since their main assumption is that the language we use displays our patterns of thought and how the mind works. To better analyse humour, it is important to include people’s understanding of humour. If the source of the humour is a simple metaphor, then the primary metaphor theory can be applied to find the correlation between two concepts and figure out how the metaphor came to be and why is it humorous. The mental spaces theory can be used to understand a humorous situation by analysing the situation as two distinct mental spaces which have different elements that are linked by a line. The blending theory can be used to analyse a complex humorous idea or a situation by viewing it in two mental spaces and creating a blended space where those ideas are combined to introduce a new humorous aspect.

3. *Monty Python and The Holy Grail* – cognitive analysis of humorous situations

Monty Python and the Holy Grail is a British comedy film, written and performed by the comedy group Monty Python. The film is a parody of the legend of King Arthur's quest for the Holy Grail. In the film, King Arthur and his squire Patsy are travelling around Britain in search of knights to join the Knights of the Round Table. After recruiting some knights and deciding not to go to Camelot, God speaks to them and gives Arthur the task of finding the Holy Grail.

After finding a castle occupied by French soldiers who claim to have the Holy Grail and failing to sneak into the castle, Arthur decides that the knights should split up to find the Grail. King Arthur and Sir Bedevere the Wise meet the Knights Who Say Ni, and try to satisfy their requests. Sir Robin meets a Three-Headed Giant who wants to kill him, but Robin manages to escape while the heads were arguing. Sir Galahad the Pure is lured into the Castle Anthrax with a grail-shaped beacon, but Sir Lancelot rescues him. Sir Lancelot gets a message from the Swamp Castle, thought to be from a lady in distress, going into the castle and almost killing all the guests there just to find out that it was a prince in distress.

Arthur and his knights regroup and are joined by Brother Maynard, his followers, and three new knights. They meet Tim the Enchanter who claims to know where the location of the Grail is written. Tim leads them to a cave protected by the Rabbit of Caerbannog. After the rabbit kills Sir Gawain, Sir Ector and Sir Bors, Arthur decides to use the Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch to defeat the creature. In the cave they find the inscription from Joseph of Arimathea but are interrupted by the Black Beast of Aaarrrrggh. Having escaped the monster, they arrive at the Bridge of Death, having to answer three questions from the bridge-keeper to pass. Robin and Galahad get thrown over the bridge after having failed to answer the questions, but after King Arthur confuses the bridge-keeper, making him fall over, Arthur and Bedevere pass safely.

Arthur and Bedevere find the Castle of Aarrgh, but it is occupied by the French. After collecting a large army of knights ready to besiege the castle, a large modern police force shows up and arrests Arthur and Bedevere for the death of a historian, which is a side-plot present in the film.

I have chosen three scenarios from the dialogues that happen in the duration of four scenes, first dialogue is from the scenes 19 and 20, the second dialogue is from the scene 21, and the final dialogue is from the scene 10. I will analyse each of the scenario using one of the cognitive semantics theories, hopefully capturing the humorous intent in the film.

3.1. Analysing scenes 19 and 20 with the primary metaphor theory

I chose the scenes 19 and 20 because there is an interesting situation of the plotline going on. I will scan the transcript for metaphors, and then analyse the metaphors found using the primary metaphor theory by determining the primary source, primary target, and the image content, and then establishing the connection and humorous intent of the metaphor.

Transcript

[Scene: Tim the Enchanter Warns of Rabbit Peril]

TIM: Yes, I can help you find the Holy Grail.

KNIGHTS: Oh, thank you. Oh...

TIM: To the north there lies a cave – the cave of Caerbannog – wherein, carved in mystic runes upon the very living rock, the last words of Olfin Bedwere of Rheged...

...make plain the last resting place of the most Holy Grail.

ARTHUR: Where could we find this cave, O Tim?

TIM: Follow. But only if ye be men of valour, for the entrance to this cave is guarded by a creature so foul, so cruel that no man yet has fought with it and lived! Bones of full fifty men lie strewn about its lair. So, brave knights, if you do doubt your courage or your strength, come no further, for death awaits you all with nasty, big, pointy teeth.

[Scene: Faced With a Killer Rabbit – Who's Got the Grenade?]

GALAHAD: They're nervous, sire.

ARTHUR: Then we'd best leave them here and carry on on foot. Dis-mount!

TIM: Behold the cave of Caerbannog!

ARTHUR: Right! Keep me covered.

GALAHAD: What with?

ARTHUR: W-- just keep me covered.

TIM: Too late!

[dramatic chord]

ARTHUR: What?

TIM: There he is!

ARTHUR: Where?

TIM: There!

ARTHUR: What, behind the rabbit?

TIM: It is the rabbit.

ARTHUR: You silly sod.

TIM: What?

ARTHUR: You got us all worked up!

TIM: Well, that's no ordinary rabbit!

ARTHUR: Ohh.

TIM: That's the most foul, cruel, and bad-tempered rodent you ever set eyes on!

ROBIN: You tit! I soiled my armour I was so scared.

TIM: Look, that rabbit's got a vicious streak a mile wide! It's a killer!

GALAHAD: Get stuffed!

TIM: He'll do you up a treat, mate.

GALAHAD: Oh, yeah?

ROBIN: You mangy Scots git!

TIM: I'm warning you!

ROBIN: What's he do, nibble your bum?

TIM: He's got huge, sharp – eh – he can leap about – look at the bones!

ARTHUR: Go on, Bors. Chop his head off!

BORS: Right! Silly little bleeder. One rabbit stew comin' right up!

TIM: Look!

[squeak, rabbit leaps at Bors's throat]

BORS: Aaugh!

[dramatic chord; clunk; Bors's head falls on the ground]

ARTHUR: Jesus Christ!

TIM: I warned you!

ROBIN: I done it again!

TIM: I warned you, but did you listen to me? Oh, no, you knew it all, didn't you? Oh, it's just a harmless little bunny, isn't it? Well, it's always the same. I always tell them...

ARTHUR: Oh, shut up!

KNIGHTS: Charge!

[squeak squeak squeak; rabbit jumps up to two knights' throats]

KNIGHTS: Aaugh!, Aaugh!

ARTHUR: Run away! Run away!

TIM: Ha ha ha ha! Ha haw haw! Ha! Ha ha!

ARTHUR: Right. How many did we lose?

LANCELOT: Gawain.

GALAHAD: Ector.

ARTHUR: And Bors. That's five.

GALAHAD: Three, sir.

ARTHUR: Three. Three. And we'd better not risk another frontal assault. That rabbit's dynamite.

(Monty Python and the Holy Grail Script, n. d.)

In this scene, Arthur and his companions make progress in searching for the Holy Grail, having found Tim the Enchanter, who claims to know where the Grail is. Tim leads them to the infamous Caerbannog cave. The beast of the castle is a lethal snowy white rabbit. Arthur decides on using the Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch to kill the rabbit. Even though the dialogue was long, the only evident metaphor is the way Arthur characterized the rabbit.

Arthur describes the rabbit as dynamite. As previously discussed according to the primary metaphor theory metaphors have three main parts: the primary source concept, the image content and the primary target concept. We can agree that out of the two domains, the 'rabbit' is the target domain and it is characterized with the source domain 'dynamite'. To be able to analyse the source domain, we first need to define the source concept that is used with the word 'dynamite'.

Dynamite has several characteristics that could be used to describe something. One of the characteristics could be the compounds used in dynamite, to describe them in the literal sense: *that rabbit is dynamite – made from nitro-glycerine*. Another aspect is the explosiveness, which could be used to describe a sudden or unexpected nature of something: *his/her reaction was dynamite*. Dynamite could also be used to describe the entertaining and likeable nature of something/someone: *She/he is dynamite*. None of these could be used to describe the rabbit in that scene, so another meaning that fits this scene more is the killing capability and lethality of dynamite.

Establishing that the source concept of the word 'dynamite' is its lethality, we can describe the image content, which is the cognitive perception of the source content. In the context of lethality, the perception of dynamite is contact with the skin, and the pain. This helps us also get to the primary target concept, which is our response to perceptions of the world. Our response to the lethality of something would be the sense of danger. The grounding or the relationship between the source concept and the primary target concept is that there is a correlation between the lethality of something and the sense of danger that we perceive. There is a direct connection between the source concept and the target concept, thus we can

conclude that this is a primary metaphor, not a complex one. The metaphor break-down is shown in the *binding table 1* in Appendix 1.

According to SSTH and GTVH, this metaphor would not be the source of the humour but using the primary metaphor theory we can see that this metaphor captures the primary source of humour in these scenes – the tiny rabbit being lethal and killing knights. Using this theory helps us understand the metaphors used. The theory is only useful if the humour is presented in the form of a metaphorical sentence or a pun, thus the use of the theory is restricted due to it being too specific and relying on the context to make sense. For this medium of humour, the primary metaphor theory is not the most helpful way to analyse the humour.

3.2. Analysing scene 21: *Don't Go Near the Castle Aarrggh* using the mental spaces theory

I chose this scene because it follows the scene that I previously analysed and because it is interesting. I will analyse the situation using the mental spaces theory by creating two mental spaces, first one being the base space and the second one being the creative space, and then linking elements in both of those spaces.

Transcript

[Scene: *Don't Go Near the Castle Aarrrrrggh*]

ARTHUR: There! Look!

LANCELOT: What does it say?

GALAHAD: What language is that?

ARTHUR: Brother Maynard! You are a scholar.

MAYNARD: It's Aramaic!

GALAHAD: Of course! Joseph of Arimathea!

LANCELOT: 'Course!

ARTHUR: What does it say?

MAYNARD: It reads, 'Here may be found the last words of Joseph of Arimathea. He who is valiant and pure of spirit may find the Holy Grail in the Castle of aaarrrrggh'.

ARTHUR: What?

MAYNARD: '...The Castle of aaarrrrggh'.

BEDEVERE: What is that?

MAYNARD: He must have died while carving it.

LANCELOT: Oh, come on!

MAYNARD: Well, that's what it says.

ARTHUR: Look, if he was dying, he wouldn't bother to carve 'aarrggh'. He'd just say it!

MAYNARD: Well, that's what's carved in the rock!

GALAHAD: Perhaps he was dictating.

ARTHUR: Oh, shut up! Well, does it say anything else?

MAYNARD: No. Just 'aaarrrrggh'.

LANCELOT: Aaaaugggh.

ARTHUR: Aarrggh.

BEDEVERE: Do you suppose he meant the Camaaaaaargue?

GALAHAD: Where's that?

BEDEVERE: France, I think.

LANCELOT: Isn't there a 'Saint Aaaauves' in Cornwall?

ARTHUR: No, that's 'Saint Ives'.

LANCELOT: Oh, yes. Saint Iiiiiives.

KNIGHTS: Iiiiiives.

BEDEVERE: Oooooohohohoo!

LANCELOT: No, no. 'Aaaaugggh', at the back of the throat. Aaaugh.

BEDEVERE: N—no. No, no, no, no. 'Ooooooh', in surprise and alarm.

LANCELOT: Oh, you mean sort of a 'aaah'!

BEDEVERE: Yes, but I—aaaaah!

ARTHUR: Ooooh!

GALAHAD: My God!

[dramatic chord]

[roar]

MAYNARD: It's the legendary Black Beast of Aaarrrrggh!

[Black Beast of Aaarrrrggh eats brother Maynard]

BEDEVERE: That's it! That's it!

ARTHUR: Run away!

KNIGHTS: Run away!

(Monty Python and the Holy Grail Script, n. d.)

In this scene Arthur and the band enter the cave of Caerbannog and they find some writing on the wall. Brother Maynard, the scholar of the group recognized it as Aramaic. Maynard translated it and found out that those were the last words of Joseph of Arimathea, who claimed that the Holy Grail is in the Castle of Aaarrrrggh.

Maynard proposed that Joseph of Arimathea was dying while carving the text. Arthur commented that if he was dying, he would not bother to carve ‘aarrggh’. Galahad and Bedevere were proposing different reasons. The mental spaces theory states that situations have a base space, where the present reality is represented. It also says that there are elements – space builders, which have the setting up of a new mental space included in their meaning, while still being connected to the base space.

In this case, the reality would be the fact that it is written that the Holy Grail is located in the ‘Castle of Aaarrrrggh’. This is the base space, which is held true in all circumstances, because that is physically carved in the stone. As the space builders, I will incorporate the two ideas that were presented about the carving, first one by Galahad and the second one by Bedevere:

Galahad thinks that Joseph of Arimathea might have been dictating the text carved in stone and might have died during the dictation.

Bedevere thinks that Joseph of Arimathea might have misspelled the castle Camaaaaaargue when carving the text in stone.

In the case of the first sentence, the base space is that the character at hand is Joseph of Arimathea. There is no information on how or by who the text was carved into stone, so the base space for the text is just its existence. It is also not clear whether Joseph of Arimathea was still alive when the text was read, or even when it was written, so the uncertainty of Joseph’s fate is the third certain aspect of the base space.

The new space is formed with the space builders proposed by Galahad, thus the space that is connected to the base space is Galahad’s imaginary space. In that imaginary space, there is still the character of Joseph of Arimathea, but there is a direct link between the carving and Joseph in the sense that Joseph was dictating the text that was carved into stone. In this imaginary space, Joseph of Arimathea died during or right after the dictation.

There are direct connections between the base space and the space builders, both having the same character in interest, both including the text that is carved into stone and both including the fate of Joseph. This is illustrated in *diagram 1* in Appendix 2.

In the case of the second sentence, the base space is similar: there is the character Joseph of Arimathea, there is the presumption that Joseph carved the text into stone himself, and there is the text itself which refers to the castle of Aaarrrrggh.

The new space for the second sentence is created with space builders presented by Bedevere. In Bedevere's imaginary space Joseph of Arimathea is still the base character, and Joseph was the one that had carved the text into the stone. The difference in Bedevere's imaginary space is that Joseph had written the castle of Aaarrrrggh, but had meant the castle of Camaaaaaargue, having misspelled it.

The base space and the imaginary space have direct connections: the character of Joseph of Arimathea, both presuming that Joseph himself carved into stone, and both presuming that Joseph was the one that wrote the castle name, illustrated in *diagram 2* in Appendix 2.

Using the mental spaces theory helps analyse the situation and opinions more precisely, by comparing the views of one person with the reality. It helps capture the humorous intent in this scene which is presented in the erroneous and absurd ideas of Maynard and Bedevere. This theory is quite effective in analysing humorous scenes and can be used with most mediums of humorous situations.

3.3. Analysing scene 10: *The Oral Sects or Sir Galahad Faces Peril Valiantly using the blending theory*

I chose this scene because it is a very colourful and humorous scene that I thought would be interesting to analyse. I will analyse this using the blending theory, by creating two input spaces, first input space having the general thoughts and ideas of the situations and the second one being the input space where the situation present in the transcript is presented. Then I will create a third, blended space that combines the ideas and elements from both input spaces, revealing a new aspect that presents the humorous intent of the situation, and a generic space that includes all the vital relations that connect the two input spaces.

Transcript

[Scene: the oral sects or Sir Galahad faces peril valiantly]

[lit up shape of a grail on top of a castle]

[angels sing]

[wind is howling]

[pound pound pound]

GALAHAD: Open the door! Open the door!

[pound pound pound]

GALAHAD: In the name of King Arthur, open the door!

[door opens]

GIRLS: Hello!

ZOOT: Welcome, gentle Sir Knight. Welcome to the Castle Anthrax.

GALAHAD: The Castle Anthrax?

ZOOT: Yes. Oh, it's not a very good name, is it? Oh, but we are nice and we will attend to your every, every need!

GALAHAD: You are the keepers of the Holy Grail?

ZOOT: The what?

GALAHAD: The Grail. It is here.

ZOOT: Oh, but you are tired and you must rest awhile. Midget! Crapper!

MIDGET and CRAPPER: Yes, O Zoot?

ZOOT: Prepare a bed for our guest.

MIDGET and CRAPPER: Oh, thank you! Thank you! Thank you!...

ZOOT: Away! Away, varletesses. The beds here are warm and soft and very, very big.

GALAHAD: Well, look, I-- I, uh--

ZOOT: What is your name, handsome knight?

GALAHAD: 'Sir Galahad... the Chaste'.

ZOOT: Mine is 'Zoot'. Just 'Zoot'. Oh, but come.

GALAHAD: Look, please! In God's name, show me the Grail!

ZOOT: Oh, you have suffered much. You are delirious.

GALAHAD: No, look. I have seen it! It is here in this--

ZOOT: Sir Galahad! You would not be so ungallant as to refuse our hospitality.

GALAHAD: Well, I-- I, uh--

ZOOT: /.../ Oh, but you are wounded!

GALAHAD: No, no. It's-- It's nothing.

ZOOT: Oh, you must see the doctors immediately! No, no, please! Lie down.

[clap clap]

PIGLET: What seems to be the trouble?

GALAHAD: They're doctors?

ZOOT: Uh, they... have a basic medical training, yes.

GALAHAD: B-- but--

ZOOT: Oh, come. Come. You must try to rest. Doctor Piglet! Doctor Winston! Practice your art.

WINSTON: Try to relax.

[they start removing Galahad's pants]

GALAHAD: Are you sure that's absolutely necessary?

PIGLET: We must examine you.

GALAHAD: There's nothing wrong with that!

PIGLET: Please. We are doctors.

GALAHAD: Look! This cannot be. I am sworn to chastity.

PIGLET: Back to your bed! At once!

GALAHAD: Torment me no longer. I have seen the Grail!

PIGLET: There's no grail here.

GALAHAD: I have seen it! I have seen it!

[Galahad runs into another room]

GIRLS: Hello.

GALAHAD: Oh.

GIRLS: Hello. Hello. Hello...

GALAHAD: Zoot!

DINGO: No, I am Zoot's identical twin sister, Dingo.

GALAHAD: Oh, well, excuse me, I--

DINGO: Where are you going?

GALAHAD: I seek the Grail! I have seen it, here in this castle!

DINGO: Oh, no. Oh, no! Bad, bad Zoot!

GALAHAD: Well, what is it?

DINGO: Oh, wicked, bad, naughty Zoot! She has been setting alight to our beacon, which, I have just remembered, is grail-shaped. It's not the first time we've had this problem.

GALAHAD: It's not the real Grail?

/.../

DINGO: Oh, wicked, wicked Zoot. Oh, she is a naughty person and she must pay the penalty, and here in Castle Anthrax, we have but one punishment for setting alight the grail-shaped beacon: you must tie her down and spank her.

GIRLS: A spanking! A spanking!

DINGO: You must spank her well, and after you have spanked her, you may deal with her as you like, and then, spank me.

/.../

DINGO: Yes. Yes, you must give us all a good spanking!

GIRLS: A spanking! A spanking! There is going to be a spanking tonight!

DINGO: And after spanking, the oral sex.

GIRLS: The oral sex! The oral sex!

GALAHAD: Well, I could stay a bit longer.

[Lancelot and other knights break into the castle]

LANCELOT: Sir Galahad!

GALAHAD: Oh, hello!

LANCELOT: Quick!

GALAHAD: What?

LANCELOT: Quick!

GALAHAD: Why?

LANCELOT: You are in great peril!

DINGO: No, he isn't.

LANCELOT: Silence, foul temptress!

GALAHAD: You know, she's got a point.

LANCELOT: Come on! We will cover your escape!

(Monty Python and the Holy Grail Script, n. d.)

Sir Galahad gets lured to a castle with the shape of the Holy Grail at the top of it. Galahad gets welcomed by a woman named Zoot to the Castle Anthrax. After escaping several immoral situations, Galahad runs into Dingo, the twin sister of Zoot. Dingo reveals to him that Zoot had lured him using a grail-shaped beacon. She tells him that the punishment for setting alight the beacon is spanking. Then everyone starts requesting spanking, and talking about oral sex, when suddenly Lancelot and other knights break into the castle and save Galahad from peril, taking him away from the castle.

In many classical myths stormy weather indicates an upcoming confrontation, and the presence of an ominous castle indicates that the castle is occupied by a beast or a villain that the protagonist must fight. In *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, the stormy weather and the ominous castle are present, but instead of a villain or a beast to fight, there is a sect of immoral women.

In classical seafaring myths, there are sirens that mimic a lighthouse's beacon, or seduce the boat's crew, and lead both ships and crews to their doom. There are parallels to this in the Galahad scene, the castle having a beacon that is in the shape of a grail which Galahad is following, and the sect of women inside can be compared to sirens, since they also were trying to seduce Galahad.

In the classical Arthurian myths, Galahad is a brave knight, who is resolute to his sworn chastity no matter what temptresses he meets. In the film, the ominous castle is occupied by dreamlike women who are eager to fulfil any of Galahad's wishes. He is quick to forget his sworn chastity and towards the end of the scene is keen to stay there instead of finding the Holy Grail. In the film, Lancelot and the other knights broke in to save Sir Galahad from

‘great peril’, whereas there is no actual threat posing at him, and Galahad even prefers to stay in the castle, but the knights tow him away.

In the blending theory the generic space includes the vital relations between all input spaces. The comparisons above can be summarised as two input spaces, one input space that shows how the scenario would be perceived in classical myths, and the other input space shows their counterparts in the film. In classical myths, the ominous castle would contain a villain or a beast to defeat, but in the film, there is a sect of immoral women. In classical myths, there are sirens that attract their victims with a beacon and lead them to their peril, in the film the sect of women lured Galahad with a beacon in the shape of a grail and tried to seduce him but posed no real threat. In classical Arthurian myths Galahad is a valiant and chaste knight, but in the film, he was impure. The resulting blended space combines the aspects from both input spaces, revealing the incongruity between the world of classical myths and the world depicted in the film. This is illustrated in the *diagram 3* in Appendix 3.

Using the blending theory to analyse a humorous situation provides an insight into the incongruity theory of humour, letting us thoroughly study in what way the incongruity appears. In my analysis, the first input space depicts how the aspects are usually in classical mythology, i.e. what is the general background knowledge and what we assume that would happen. The second input space illustrates what really happens in the film. As the result of a detailed examination of both input spaces and the blended space that results from them, it is understandable where the difference comes from and what creates the incongruity, which according to the incongruity theory makes us laugh.

I used the primary metaphor theory to analyse the situation in scenes 19 and 20, finding a metaphor that Arthur used for the killer rabbit, which captured the essence of the humorous intent, even though according to regular humour studies that would not be considered as the source of humour. Then, I analysed the scene 21 using the mental spaces theory and successfully captured the humorous intent of the erroneous ideas of Galahad and Bedevere. Lastly, I analysed scene 10 using the blending theory, finding the incongruities that are the humorous intent in that scene.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to analyse the dialogue in the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* using cognitive semantics theories in order to get an insight into the humour used there. Three different cognitive semantics theories were applied, each used to analyse a different part of dialogue. This thesis also gave an overview of the concept of humour, the theories in humour studies, cognitive linguistics, and the theories used in cognitive semantics.

In the introductory part, the reason why the humour in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* was chosen was explained. Then the concept of humour was explained, with a short overview of the approaches to humour, and then modern theories of humour, in particular the *Semantic-Script Theory of Humour* and the *General Theory of Verbal Humour* were explained. In *Cognitive Linguistics* a short overview of cognitive linguistics was given, and then three theories belonging to cognitive semantics were explained: the primary metaphor theory, the mental spaces theory, and the blending theory. In *Monty Python and the Holy Grail – Cognitive Analysis of Humorous Situations*, the dialogue from four scenes was analysed with the three cognitive semantics theories.

The primary metaphor theory helped understand the metaphor used in scenes 19 and 20 about the killer rabbit which captured the essence of the humorous intent, but as the name suggests, the theory is restricted to only metaphors, and is not useful in analysing a bigger body of text. The mental spaces theory was more successful, as it helped analyse two different concepts presented in the dialogue of scene 21 about the carvings found in stone, also capturing the humorous intent of the two erroneous ideas. The blending theory was most successful, as it helped analyse a situation in scene 10 with Galahad searching for the grail from an ominous castle and finding a sect of immoral women instead. It points out the incongruities between our expectations and what happens in the film, capturing the humorous intent of that scene.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

<u>Source</u>	<u>Target</u>	<u>Grounding</u>
LETHALITY → DANGER		{Correlation between the lethality of objects and the danger we perceive}

Binding Table 1. Primary metaphor (DANGER IS LETHALITY)

Appendix 2

Diagram 1. Galahad's thoughts

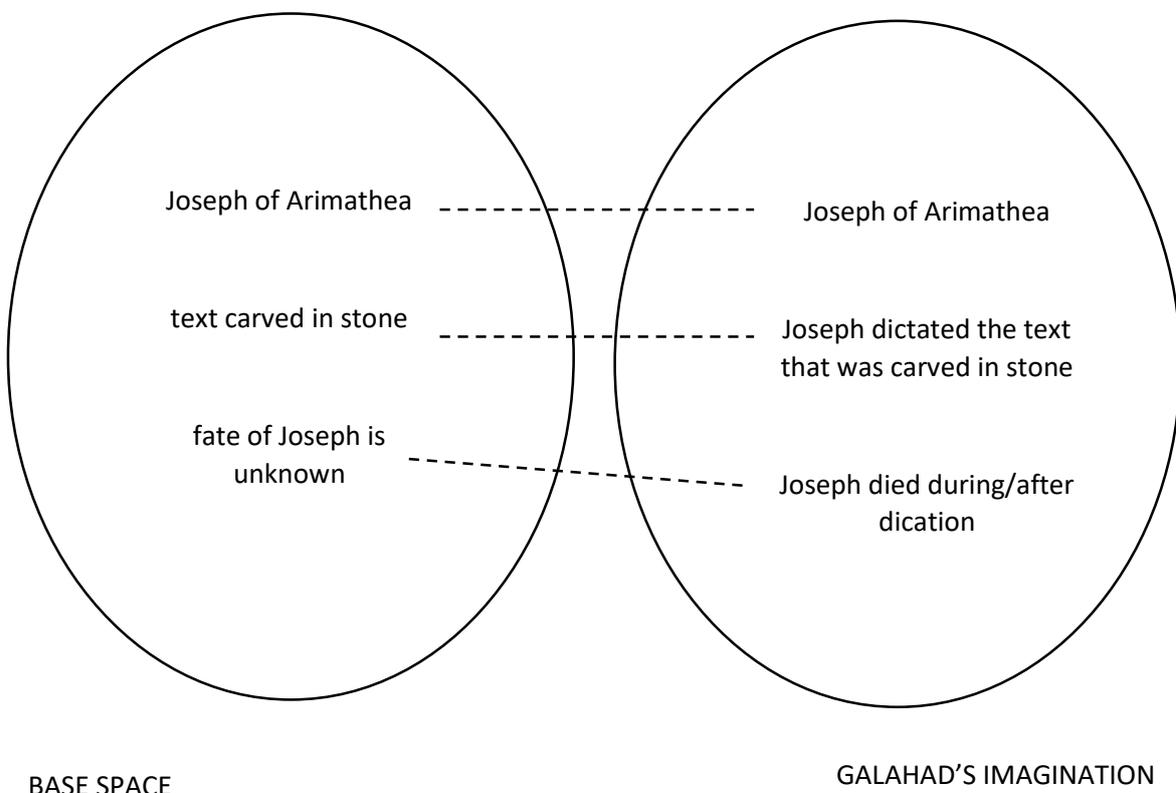
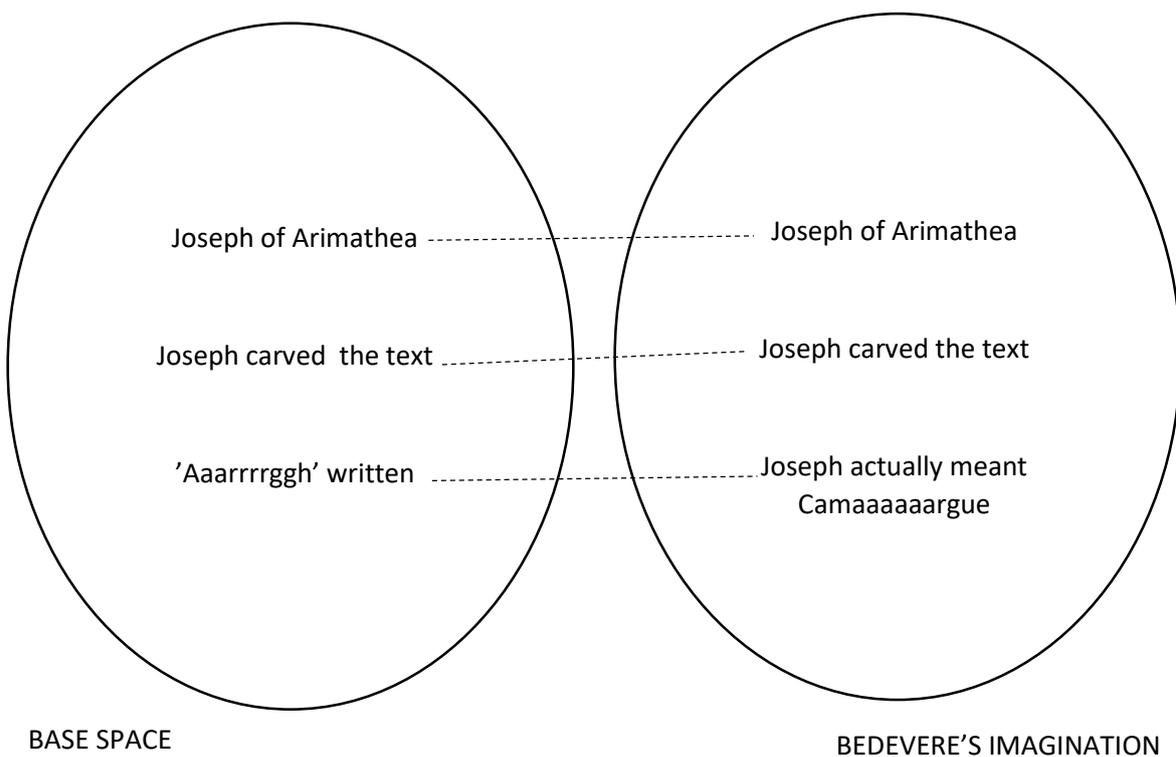
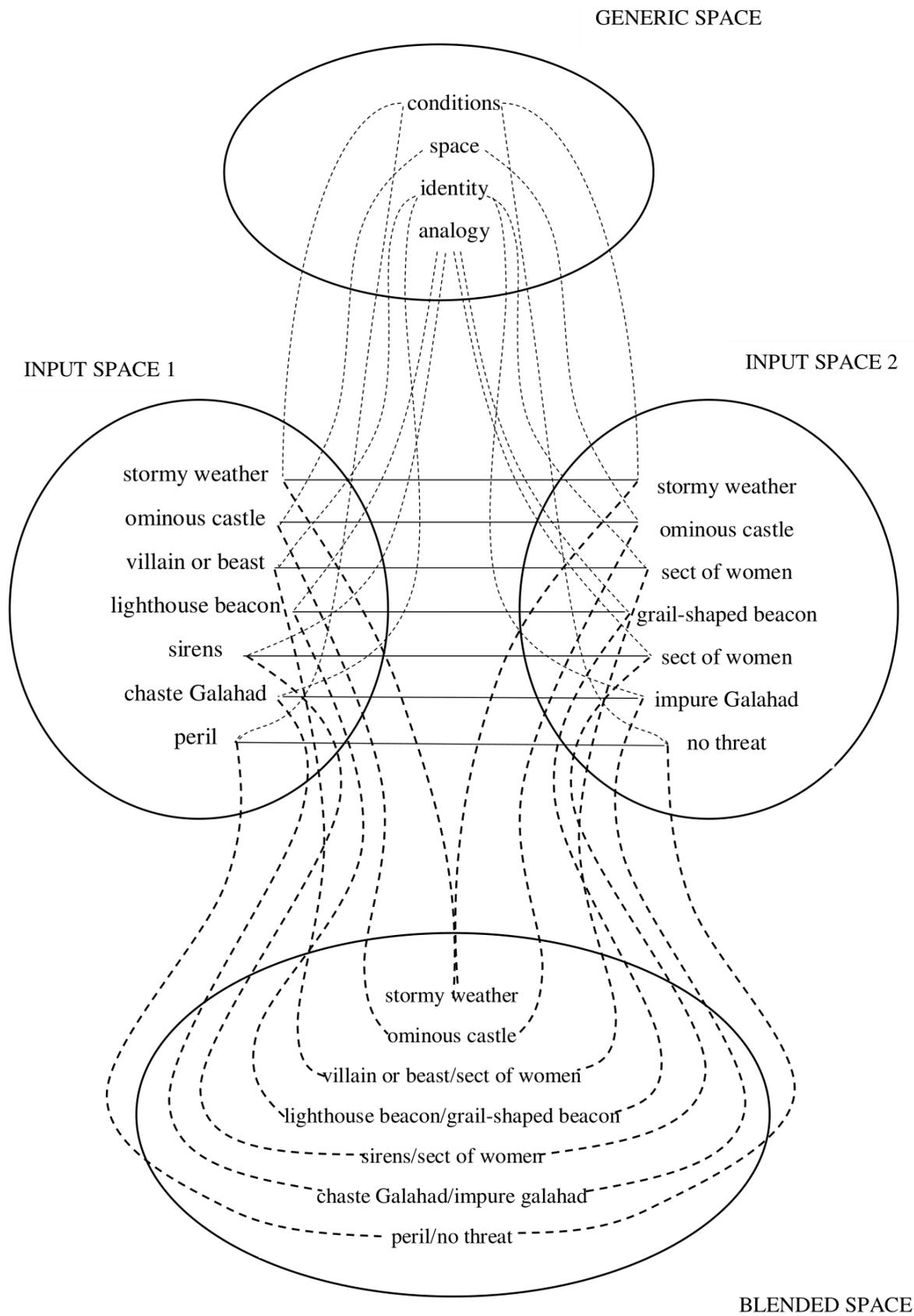


Diagram 2. Bedevere's thoughts



Appendix 3

Diagram 3. Myths versus film



RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Henry Konno

Humour in the Film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach

Huumor filmis “Monty Python ja Püha Graal”: Kognitiivlingvistiline lähenemine

Bakalaureusetöö

2019

Lehekülgede arv: 30

Annotatsioon:

Töö peamine eesmärk on analüüsida “Monty Python ja Püha Graali” dialoogi kognitiivse semantika teooriate abil, selle jaoks, et saada paremini aru huumorist, mida seal kasutatud on. Kasutan kolme kognitiivse semantika teooriat, igauhega analüüsin erinevaid dialoogi osasid. Lisaks annan ülevaate huumori üldmõttest, teooriatest huumoriuuringutes, kognitiivsest lingvistikast, ja kognitiivse semantika teooriatest.

Sissejuhatavas osas selgitan, miks valisin teemaks “Monty Python ja Püha Graali” huumori. Seejärel annan ülevaate huumori üldmõttest koos lühikese ülevaatega erinevatest lähenemistest huumorile, peale mida annan ülevaate praegustest huumoriteooriatest – täpsemalt semantilise käsikirja huumoriteooriast (SSTH) ja sõnalise huumori üldisest teooriast (GTVH). Pealse seda annan lühikese ülevaate kognitiivsest lingvistikast ja selgitan kolme peamist teooriat kognitiivses semantikas: algse metafoori teooria, mõtteliste paikade teooria, ja segunemisteooria. Seejärel analüüsin nelja stseeni dialooge kolme kognitiivse semantika teooriaga.

Algse metafoori teooria aitab aru saada tapja-küüliku metafoorist, mis on kasutatud stseenides 19 ja 20, mis tabas huumori kavatsuse tuuma, kuid see teooria on piiratud metafooridega ja ei ole kõlblik suuremate tekstide analüüsimiseks. Mõtteliste paikade teooria on edukam, aidates analüüsida kahte erinevat ideed, mis stseen 21 dialoogis esinesid kivisse raiutud teksti osas, samuti tabades huumori põhilist kavatsust. Segunemisteooria oli kõige edukam, aidates analüüsida 10 stseeni olukorda, kus Galahad otsis püha graali pahaendelisest lossist ja leidis amoraalsete naiste sekki selle asemel. Segunemisteooria aitas leida vastuolud meie eeldustest ja sellest, mis filmis juhtus, viidates vastuolulisuse huumori teooriale, ning tabades selle stseeni huumori kavatsuse tuuma.

Märksõnad: huumor, Monty Python ja Püha Graal, kognitiivne lingvistika, segunemisteooria, algse metafoori teooria, mõtteliste paikade teooria

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