



***Humour as a Carrier of Memory within Culture.
A few Remarks on the English Sense of Humour
and its Relation to the Collective Memory
of the British Society, seen from the Perspective
of Cognitive Integration Theory***

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The purpose of my article is to present the notion of cultural memory as applied to both the English society as well as the English sense of humour, and to examine these in relation to WW2 by means of the cognitive integration theory, aka blending.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The presented research problem hinges around the term of memory, specifically the collective memory of the English, as perceived with regard to its multimodal conceptualization with the culture, together with its inextricable link with the English sense of humour. All this has been scrutinised by a linguistic method, i.e. conceptual integration theory, and the references to the literature in question.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: Having defined the goal of my paper, and the basic concepts pertaining to it (memory, collective memory, English sense of humour), I proceed to the brief explanation of the linguistic paradigm, i.e. blending theory, which is employed within this study. Then, I present the analysis of the English humour tackling the subject of the Second World War, which is performed with the aid of the blending theory.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The result of this argumentation is the preservation of the glorious memories of the British past via the English sense of humour, which helps to deal with the trauma and the not-so-glorious moments of the English history.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: This analysis confirmed that conceptual integration theory can be utilized as a tool with which to analyse the collective memory of the English and their sense of humour. It also proved that the English nation employs their humour into the processing of the historical past, which softens the blow of the horrendous events, and makes it possible for the English to glorify and idealise their role within the world's arena.

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→ **KEYWORDS:** MULTIMODAL COLLECTIVE MEMORY, THE BRITISH, BLENDING, CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION THEORY, ENGLISH HUMOUR, WW2

STRESZCZENIE

Humor jako nośnik pamięci w kulturze. O humorze angielskim w odniesieniu do pamięci zbiorowej społeczeństwa angielskiego, z wykorzystaniem teorii amalgamatów

CEL NAUKOWY: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie pojęcia pamięci kulturowej w odniesieniu do społeczeństwa angielskiego oraz specyfiki angielskiego humoru. Problematykę tę badam w kontekście II wojny światowej za pomocą teorii amalgamatów (*conceptual integration theory / blending*).

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Problematyka artykułu dotyczy pojęcia pamięci, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem pamięci zbiorowej Anglików, rozumianej jako koncept multimodalny w odniesieniu do typowo angielskiego poczucia humoru. Materiał humorystyczny badany jest za pomocą teorii amalgamatów przy uwzględnieniu szerokiej literatury przedmiotu.

PROCES WYWODU: Po omówieniu celu artykułu oraz wyjaśnieniu podstawowych terminów, takich jak: pamięć, pamięć zbiorowa i humor angielski, pokrótce omawiam, zastosowaną do analizy komizmu, teorię amalgamatów. Następnie prezentuję analizę konkretnych przykładów humoru angielskiego w odniesieniu do tematyki II wojny światowej (seriale komediowe *Dad's Army* oraz *Allo, Allo*; skecz grupy komików *Monty Python* na temat Hitlera).

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Badania nad humorem angielskim, dotyczącym przeżyć wojennych, wskazują na fakt, iż naród angielski pielęgnuje głównie wspomnienia chwalebne z przeszłości Wielkiej Brytanii, wykorzystując do tego typowo angielskie poczucie humoru. Pomaga to uporać się z traumatyczną przeszłością i momentami mniej chwalebnyymi z historii narodu.

WNIOSKI, INNOWACJE, REKOMENDACJE: Analiza potwierdza, że teoria amalgamatów może służyć jako narzędzie badań nad pamięcią zbiorową Anglików oraz ich poczucia humoru. Ponadto udowadnia, że naród angielski wykorzystuje typowy dla siebie humor w procesowaniu swojej przeszłości historycznej, co z jednej strony łagodzi wymiar okrutnych wydarzeń z historii Anglii, z drugiej zaś pozwala Anglikom na gloryfikację oraz idealizację ich własnej roli na arenie historii światowej.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** MULTIMODALNA KONCEPCJA PAMIĘCI ZBIOROWEJ, NARÓD ANGIELSKI, HUMOR ANGIELSKI, II WOJNA ŚWIATOWA, TEORIA AMALGAMATÓW

1. Introduction

In this article, I intend to demonstrate the multimodal notion of collective memory in the understanding of a situated culture which is influenced by society, digital revolution and technology as well as language and the mentality of the people who use it. I want to apply this term to English culture and, specifically, English humour pertaining to one of the memory carriers, i.e. Great British history in this case. I would like to prove that Britons' collective memory is mediated via their sense of humour which allows the English to accept the painful moments from their own history via laughter. In this way, there is no need for alterations and manipulations of the British difficult history, since its memory is construed by means of ridiculing or mocking the horrific, yet truthful, events, such as war, in order to make peace with them and progress. All this I would like to demonstrate with the aid of the conceptual integration theory, aka blending.

2. Conceptual integration theory as a method used to examine memory

The cognitive apparatus that I will use through the paper to analyze English comedy is a well-known theory within the cognitive linguistics, namely conceptual integration theory (CIT for short here), aka blending, as proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). Blending has proved to be a very prolific paradigm for various analyses, in such diverse fields of study as literature, mathematics, sciences, law or music. It has also been applied to humour before, hence the need for it in this study. However, what needs to be stressed is the CIT's capacity to include extra-linguistic elements into semantic contents that is of interest. Not many theories can boast to be able to clarify as well as expand the meaning they analyse, which I believe to be a great strength of the theoretical process in question. Additionally, CIT has never been applied to the studies on memory, which again highlights the innovative aspect of this paper.

Fauconnier and Turner have based their CIT on the notion of mental spaces which was originally proposed by Fauconnier himself. He understands the notion of a mental space as a field of association that is mentally activated when an individual thinks of a certain concept (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998; Turner, 2014; 2015; Brandt & Brandt, 2005; Libura, 2007; Jabłońska-Hood, 2015). According to Fauconnier, mental spaces are regarded as "constructs distinct from linguistic structures but built up in any

discourse according to guidelines provided by the linguistic expressions” (Fauconnier, 1998, p. 16). In particular, mental spaces are interpreted as “partial structures that proliferate when we think and talk, allowing a fine-grained partitioning of our discourse and knowledge structures” (Fauconnier, 1998, p. 11). For instance, when we wish to ponder the concept of an illness such as flu, we immediately activate a mental space of related concepts which will necessarily link with health, or its lack, e.g. doctors, medicine, pharmacy, poor quality of NHS, etc. All these intertwined ideas can be subsumed under a more general term health, and hence we can talk in this case about the mental space of health where illnesses will be present in all their shapes and forms.

According to Fauconnier and Turner, mental spaces can be linked in the course of our communication and cognition (Fauconnier, 1998; Fauconnier & Turner, 2006). A case in point might be an attempt at analyzing the following statement:

Doctor, doctor! Nobody understands me. What do you mean by that? (Jarsz, 2008, p. 239).

In this short joke we can distinguish between two mental spaces: the first one would be the concept of illness, or perhaps a depressive state of being misunderstood by others, we also have a patient who visits the doctor and tells him the symptoms of their condition using the phrase: Nobody understands me. The second mental space is activated when the doctor asks the questions, which in the health mental space would be understood as a request for more detail on the issue. We all know that doctors frequently need clarification and ask for additional details. However, this is just one rendering of the linguistic message, the other possible interpretation activates the mental space of misunderstanding between any two people where one does not seem to get the message of the other, hence a clarification request. Therefore, the question asked by the doctor in the joke exhibits a certain amount of ambiguity, one relating to the mental space of health, the other being associated with the mental space of misunderstanding between people. Also, the doctor from input space 1 becomes equated with the person who does not seem to find sense in a situation and asks for more explanation. Similarly, the patient from input space 1 becomes a person who actually creates the misunderstanding in input space 2. Such relations and correspondences between the mentioned inputs are professionally known as mappings in CIT. “A mapping (...) is a correspondence between two sets that assign to each element in the first a counterpart in the second” (Fauconnier, 1998, p. 1). So accordingly, in our joke, when the two uses of the interrogative and the two situations from different mental spaces are activated and

joined we might project the corresponding elements of the input mental spaces to the output space, which in CIT is referred to as the blend. This mental space unifies the mapped and corresponded elements from inputs, which will obviously show incongruity as they are taken from divergent mental spaces. What is more, the blend allows for extension of its contents via its emergent structure. What this means is that we can add on from other cultural and contextual knowledge to enrich the relations already brought together in the blend (Fauconnier, 1998). In this specific example, we could foresee the situation in which the doctor persists in asking questions for clarification and fails to comprehend the whole situation, simultaneously enhancing the comic effects at hand, and thus annoying the patient to the extremes, whose illness might thus get worse. This is basically just one such addition we could introduce, based on our contextual or encyclopedic knowledge of the scenario with the doctor and patient, as well as of general misunderstandings in communication.

To recap, it is possible to join varying mental spaces together to form novel relations and meanings in language, via blending them and then extending the blended composite as a new unit of meaning through the emergent structure of its own, i.e. we introduce more relevant elements to the blend from interconnected frames or ICMs, the associations being grounded in the culture and background of the language user and conceptualiser who performs blending in their mind¹ (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998; Jabłońska-Hood, 2015).

In this manner, the blend acquires its new meaning which is build out of information processing by the human brain in the real-time. Also, the fact the CIT devotes attention to added components of meaning provides a rather interesting perspective on meaning creation in general. This is exactly how our brains operate, according to Fauconnier and Turner who advocate blending as a basic mechanism of the human mind (Fauconnier & Turner 2002). Our memory, it could be said, also functions in a similar vein. It is shaped and mediated via a great number of memory sites and within social frameworks of certain individuals (Olick, 2007), so these actually constitute the possible inputs that we can incorporate into the process of our understanding how cultures, identities and thus memories form themselves. This is exactly what I would like to display in my analysis below.

¹ Obviously, the basics of CIT that I have introduced do not constitute the whole paradigm in question and form just a part of blending theory. The simplification and the fact that I did not implement all the details of CIT here are imposed by the format of the article. The omission does not mean to suggest that I reject the remaining theorems, but simply that the CIT exceeds the scope of this article.

3. The definition of memory

Human memory seems to be a curious phenomenon. Paradoxically, what a person chooses to remember and all those things they would like to erase from their memories are not entirely down to an individual and their cognitive capabilities. Moreover, the reverse mechanisms of reminiscing as well as forgetting appear to be inextricably linked with each other (Esposito, 2008). Memory, defined as “the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level” (Assmann, 2008), is highly influenced by context people are brought up and exist within. According to Erll, “no memory is ever purely individual, but [it is] always inherently shaped by collective contexts” (Erll, 2008, p. 5). It is, therefore, not only our culture and history that impact on our memory, but it is also, and perhaps even more so, the communities and societies we find ourselves in. As Lotman would put it, people create their memories as part and parcel of their own socio-cultural semiosphere (Lotman, as cited in Clark, 2005 and Grishakova, 2009). Memorisation should also be regarded as a process (Olick, 2007), rather than a basic activity of the human mind; a procedure that is shaped, on par with identity, within the social frameworks of memory which societies as well as contexts provide (Assmann, 2008). Hence, the notion of cultural, or collective memory whose forefather is Halbwachs (Saryusz-Wolska & Traba, 2014; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi & Levy, 2011, introduction). Halbwachs understood the concept of memory as seen via all the minds working together in a particular community, the foundation of which is based on the fact that such common mental collaboration and social relations within a society do not merely constitute a medium for memories to relate to, but, more likely, the manner which the construal of cultural memory hinges upon (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi & Levy, 2011). Halbwachs clearly spells that out: “It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (Halbwachs, as cited in Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi & Levy, 2011, p. 18). These social frameworks of individual memory might be exemplified by means of a family unit or a nation, to mention just a few. Hence, we can refer to the situatedness of memory notion, which is in the contemporary times influenced and propagated by technology, e.g. the Internet, by the institutions such as museums, or finally by external political events as instantiated by wars (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi & Levy, 2011). All the above mentioned factors, together with sites of memory help people construe their identity and nationality. Erll enumerates the possible sites of memory, which might well be collated with Halbwachs and his social

frameworks, such as broadly understood heritage, but also language and linguistic interaction, visual or bodily forms of past preservation in relation to the present moment (Erlil 2008). This multimodal conceptualisation of memory may be realised in a three-dimensional manner by means of social factors (e.g. people and their relations), by means of material factors (e.g. artifacts or media), or finally by means of mental factors (i.e. cultural awareness and nationality). Thus, we are capable of recognizing certain carriers of collective memory of a nation, e.g. art, religion or history might well be treated as examples of such carriers (Assmann, 2008). What they do is enable communities to preserve their own identity in a certain form, or medium via memories formation. Therefore, what happens is that culture becomes equal with memory, as Assmann cleverly puts it (Assmann, 2008), and the reverse is also true, memory is one's culture. Seen in this respect, collective memory ought to be regarded as a highly complex category with its multifaceted instantiations. And this is exactly the sense of collective, or cultural memory that I would like to apply to my analysis of the English humour and British history, i.e. the notion of memory which is multimodal and both socially and culturally entrenched; memory which becomes culture and history in this case. For the purpose of this article, I would like to apply such an understanding of collective memory notion to the British society, its history and the English sense of humour. With this theoretical hypothesis, I hope to demonstrate that English humour, in fact, shapes the cultural memory of the British. I wish to do so by reference to one carrier of memory, specifically history. I intend to focus on the presentation of various traumatic moments from British history, e.g. the Second World War, and I would like to prove that English comedy softens the blow of historical past and reaffirms the memory of the English as playing a leading role in the world's history, to the extent that it allows the nation to deal with the difficult episodes in their past and accept them in truth, rather than rewriting history, via laughter. It is the English sense of humour that possesses the power to accept, conciliate and remember truthfully the horrendous moments from the war; it is also the English humour whose notion was shaped inextricably in connection with war atrocities that provided the level at which Britons can accept themselves as they are and create memories of perhaps somewhat coloured nature (in the sense that the focus is only on the glorious and triumphant events, shadowing the tragic ones), yet presenting the truthful past of the war period, which, in turn, allows them to progress and move on in a natural manner, rather than forming prejudices or bearing grudges. In a nutshell, English humour has a conciliatory influence on the collective memory of the British, which preserves memories and allows access to

the glorious past but, simultaneously, also links the historical with the contemporary and up-to-the-moment, thus providing a deep insight into the concept of British society and its cultural memory.

3.1. English humour and its influence on the collective memory of the British in respect of WW2

Having introduced the concept of multimodal collective memory which is equivalent to culture in the earlier sections of this paper, I would now like to turn to the presentation of the significance of the Second World War for the British society, which will be followed by the explanation of how it is influenced by English sense of humour. This, in turn, will explain how the British formulate their collective memory, as analysed with the help of blending.

3.1.1. WW2 and its memorisation by Britons

The Second World War has reverberated in British culture for many years now, and still provides a source of inspiration and influence. The collective memory of it is both durable as well as elastic (Noakes & Pattison, 2013, chapter 1). As Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi & Levy (2011), cleverly put it, "(...) the brain is also a technology of memory and (...) even its operations are historically malleable" (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi & Levy 2011, p. 6). Hence, the British identity has been shaped by the tragic event for years foregrounding only heroic or valiant examples of Britain's participation in the fight with Hitler's army, and putting a veil over the less noteworthy moments. To be precise, the whole range of digital and technological artifacts have been created in commemoration of the praised aspect of the war, such as films, radio programmes or documentaries on the British idea of "everyone pulling together" (Noakes & Pattison, 2013, introduction), in the time of the Britain's finest hour for the common good, against the odds, on the memory of Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, the Blitz or the D-Day which dominate the war memories of the Britons (Noakes & Pattison, 2013, chapter 1). The memory boom, that is a common interest in certain events from the past (Noakes & Pattison, 2013) did not escape the British soil, and apart from the creation and implementation of the above, the whole range of paraphernalia has been introduced with propaganda slogans such as the wartime famous "Keep Calm and Carry On" (Noakes & Pattison, 2013, chapter 1, p. 1-3) to encourage people

to share the memories of the war and propagate the triumphant role of the British in the conflict. It is possible to suppose that the majority of the younger population of the U.K. do not perhaps even associate the slogan with the war, since it has been altered and adjusted to suit different contexts, especially commercial advertising and consumerism. Further, even in other times of crisis, not at all associated with WW2, many politicians and authorities in the UK used to refer to the Blitz spirit, i.e. the solidarity and resilience in continuing with everyday chores against the circumstances, e.g. in the context of catastrophes such as natural disasters, or around the times of terrorist attacks (Noakes & Pattison, 2013, chapter 1). The power of the collective memory of the war is so great that it has always worked and brought the people together. It is surprising how much the pride and glorification of this past event has shaped the contemporary society. Even the BBC has decided on introducing a website entitled "People's War" in order to encourage ordinary citizens to share their own or their families' memories with the wider public, thus promoting a special role of the British and their uniqueness in the fight against the evil forces of the Second World War (Noakes & Pattison, 2013, chapter 1). The obvious resonance with the British public allows for such and similar recollections of the wartime spirit to gain popularity and sparkle a curious interest in WW2. Despite the fact that there were many painful and horrific events which could be rendered as utter defeat that the British public conveniently chooses to background. A case in point may be the tragedy of Breton Green tube station where after the bombings many civilians remained trapped underground and did not receive urgent help, consequently passing away. Another embarrassing fact concerns a special unit of pilots referred to as Bomber Command who were to attack civilian towns in Germany rather than military target, thus annihilating innocent lives, including their own. This operation was considered top secret and only after years the Queen decided to publicize the whole affair, which again was not eagerly applauded by the public (Noakes & Pattison, 2013). Such difficult moments are not necessarily forgotten by the British, but they are rather overshadowed by the propaganda of the glorious acts which appear to dominate the cultural memory of the British nation. However, the key function of the collective memory of the war is not merely to preserve the contested truth about the event, but rather to sustain the idea of Britishness and their special role in the world in what we can refer to as post-war Great Britain, at the times of the decline of the Empire and also the political and economic deterioration of the image of Britain as a world power (Noakes & Pattison, 2013). It is as if the British society has the need to create their own "postmemory" of war,

a term devised by Hirsh who describes it as an event from the past that is in a multifaceted way being preserved to impact on the lives of the people who survived it and their future generations as well (Hirsh, as cited in Noakes & Pattison, 2013). This postmemory seems to be living in the hearts and minds of the British people, allowing them to believe in their own nation as a chosen one despite the fact that they no longer rule the world and are no longer regarded as the master race pioneering in civilization, education and good manners.

Noakes and Pattison (2013, chapter 1) go even so far as to claim that the Second World War is such a prominent part of the Britishness that it is frequently utilised for comic purposes (also Marr, 2009). This is hardly surprising, since the idea of a modern and contemporary English humour was heavily influenced by the wartime experiences of both WW1 and WW2. The atrocities people saw and the trauma it brought had to somehow be processed and dealt with, so the comedy groups started appearing who would present the ridiculous subjects aimed at exceeding the preposterousness of war in general and thus bring a smile to the tired faces of everyone affected. A case in point might be the legendary troupe The Goon Show who actually directly shaped the notion of the English sense of humour via the introduction of the absurd and nonsensical elements into their shows, the ridiculous as well as taking it to the extremes, too, no infrequently alluding to war experiences that they themselves absorbed and were touched by (Marr, 2009). (It is absolutely necessary to mention the other significant comedians who have affected the concept of the modern English humour, and whose lives have also been tinged by war experiences which they used in their comedy to take it to the absurd, nonsensical or ridiculous level. These were star comedians such as Dick Emery, Benny Hill, Frankie Howerd, Tommy Cooper, Peter Sellers and finally Michael Bentine, the last one famous for the precursor of using surrealist motifs in humour [Marr, 2009]).

It is not surprising then that war features in numerous examples of comedy, where its horrific elements were distorted and presented without a twitch in the eye and in a nonsensical manner, only to try and restore order of things and make peace with the past via foregrounding the glorious and backgrounding the not so prestigious moments of the wars. Why not make comedy of war if the Second World War propaganda itself resorted to humour to diminish the enemy and boost morale? I am specifically referring to a popular song created for the British Council by one of their publicists in 1939 with the aim of thwarting the Nazi image. The song is entitled "Hitler has only got one ball," and it was written to be used with the well-known music of "Colonel Bogey March." It immediately became

a hit during the war, both adopted by the army as a marching song and as a popular tune to hum or sing by anyone, with its many variants diminishing the top men of the German army and their leader (Jamieson online). This is a remarkable usage of English humour to give strength and fight the enemy in the time of war via ridiculing the manhood, or rather the lack of it, on the part of the German leaders. In terms of CIT, what happens in such an example of propaganda which for year has been shaping the collective memory of the British is that the mental space of the enemy and war, with such elements as Hitler, the Third Reich and all the armed forces of the Germans, invasion, fighting, etc. is mapped on the other mental space which provides its input in the form of the mental space of a certain disability, i.e. monorchism. The series of projections take place, where Hitler and other high-ranking officers appear to be attributed with varieties of monorchism. Sometimes there is even a word poor used in relation to the generals in question, which brings associations not only with physical disability, but it also generates pity and perhaps not sympathy but certainly a degree of mismatch between the great role of the generals in the Nazi army and the condition they have been attributed with. Such mappings are projected to the blended space, whereabouts they form a composite unit and can further be manipulated. Additionally, when the blend is composed, we can think of superimposing on it a third mental space, which will secure the multimodality, i.e. the mental space of Colonel Bogey March (which should be applied to the text of the song in question). This is such a jolly and invigorating tune that the blend's already diverse nature can be further enhanced by the very incongruity it brings with its lively and cheerful tones, in comparison with its grim subject. Seen in this light, the concept of the enemy is altered to denote a bunch of unmanly German officers who should rather be pitied for their physical disorder, and certainly should not be feared at all. In this manner, via laughter and the multimodal blend that appealed to the British public, the collective memory of the enemy has been preserved up till the present times.

3.2. Examples of English humour in relation to WW2

Having thus introduced the British cultural identity in relation to WW2 and their formulation of collective memory in this respect, I would like to now turn to specific examples of post-war comedy, which I hope will demonstrate that English humour does play a major role in shaping the cultural memory of the Britons in respect of war. To this means I will use

the following examples of comedy: Dad's Army, Monty Python and their sketch on Mr Hilter, and Allo, Allo.

3.2.1. Dad's Army

Let us then have a look at the first comedy sketch chosen for this analysis, namely the comedy series Dad's Army (which has recently even been transformed into a movie version with the cast of British stars participating proudly in the enterprise). Firstly, it is necessary to mention that the original series is accompanied with a song beginning each episode that runs as follows: "Who do you think you are kidding Mr. Hitler if you think we're on the run? We are the boys who will stop your little game, we are the boys who will make you think again. 'Cause who do you think you are kidding Mr. Hitler if you think old England's done?" (YouTube online¹). The lyrics already introduce two mental spaces that will function as inputs here, i.e. the mental space of the British army and the mental space of the German army. Clearly, the song also introduces a third space of a discourse with participants who talk to each other politely. The mappings between the three are as follows: a British soldier, who is singing, is mapped onto the speaker from the discourse space, and Hitler, referred to as Mr Hitler, which suggests politeness despite all, functions here as the hearer from the input space three. There are questions asked, and though there will be no response, we have discourse. In addition to that, it is also possible to introduce the fourth space of the song and music which is characteristic of the wartime period, which ensures the multimodality here. If we move on to the series itself, the gist of it is the following: during the Second World War the standing army is mobilized to protect the country and organise defence, which will further realise the elements of the input space 1 of the British Army from the introductory tune to the series. However, the army-men are not your ideal soldiers, but rather the Home Guard (namely older men incapable of conscription, hence the name of the series Dad's Army), which constitutes a collection of characters that make up the series: you see the older generation in the form of Captain Mainwaring who is in charge but is also incompetent as can be. He certainly does the unit proud, as they are all as incompetent, but for Sergeant Wilson who does exhibit common sense more than often, which is striking with comparison to the others like Private Pike (one of the few younger members of the regiment), Private Frazer, Private Walk and Lance Corporal Jones. Thanks to Wilson's intelligence and through his efforts the life is going on as planned,

which presents a striking contrast with the silliness of all the others, who operate as underdogs – a favourite type of character for the British in terms of comedy. Also, we encounter many ridiculous adventures of the regiment who would not defend anybody or anything if their life depended on it, not because they do not wish to, but because of their old age which makes them inadequate candidates for the army and war, as well as being incompetence and foolishness. Nevertheless, the Home Guard somehow does seem to end up triumphantly, despite their age, lack of resources or common sense, which again is the favourite motif in English humour, and simultaneously creating this divine intervention over Britain and its history as to propagate the special character of the British who might well be less able and supposedly the losers, but somehow they are chosen to persevere with their sense of humour, determination to complete the mission and resilience. All this content of input space 1 is contrasted with the input space two of the German army, which we can add on ourselves from the encyclopedic knowledge pertaining to WW2. Thus we can see serious and ruthless generals and young army-men who fight to death for the Third Reich. The mappings which are projected onto each other and the incongruities that arise, when we compare the efficiency and ruthlessness of the Nazis with the lovable and incompetent aging Home Guard, give vent to laughter and sympathy always goes to the underdogs, i.e. the British army winning the hearts of the viewers by default. What is more, the English humour which trivializes and ridicules the grave concept of war and makes it into a light-hearted affair at which we can all collectively laugh, also acts as a coping mechanism which affords the Britons to come to terms with the horrendous wartime experiences, at the same time allowing them to accept the truth, or perhaps a slightly distorted version of it, but still not altered completely, and pass it onto the younger generations. Thus, the cultural memory of WW2 is construed in a multimodal way, which affects the perception of the war as a “positive and glorious time,” enables acceptance at what happened via laughter that brings peace with it.

3.2.2. Monty Python on Hitler

Another example which I want to analyse is the Monty Python’s sketch about Mr Hilter, an obvious allusion to the German leader (YouTube online2). The title already introduces two mental spaces: the first input relates to the contents of the sketch about a Mr Hilter, the second one being obviously a reference to the actual person Adolf Hitler. Throughout

the comedy sketch the viewer is constantly bombarded with this name and its confusing origin so as to rub it in, to some extent, and make it even more funny. This mapping of the real leader of the German army onto the fictitious character of Mr Hilter, who actually is only pretending to be an ordinary person, whereas in fact he is the Hitler everybody feared and despised, is the original mapping on the mega, more abstract level of blending, so to say. It is a central thought on which the humour hinges, and the other mappings will only reinforce the comedy. Namely, Mr Hilter who is really Hitler himself is living under cover in postwar Britain in one of the B&Bs and we find him with two other undercover generals while making plans to capture and divide Europe. The other soldiers are introduced to the viewer alongside the new guests of the hotel, by its owner who does not realise what truly goes on under her roof. The names of the other two generals accompanying Mr Hilter at all times also provide two other mappings between the already mentioned inputs, i.e. Bimmel which is the nickname of Rimmel as one can obviously guess from the sound correspondence, while the second general's name Ron Vibbentrop is a clear allusion to a real person called Von Ribbentrop who was a German Prime Minister and diplomat. Owing to Von Ribbentrop's political workings the WW2 was started, and his mere presence in the sketch introduces the third input space of the political life and propaganda which is also presented in the sketch. These characters collaborate with Mr Hilter in planning to win the by-elections and gain supporters in London. Nonetheless, nobody wants to listen to them, and they are presented as ridiculous, and therefore small and silly, rather than scary and ruthless, as they were in real life. Also, we see the campaign that Mr Hilter runs for the oncoming elections, which bears resemblance to the speeches and performances that real Adolf Hitler made to gain political support and power in Germany. These two relations constitute another mapping between original inputs, as well as the one of political life, too. Basically, John Cleese who impersonates Hitler is exquisite in the manner he applies slapstick and absurdity to what we map onto historical perspective of Hitler's performances. There are many details in the sketch that add on more fine-grained information which provides more correspondences among inputs. For instance, Bimmler and Ron Vibbentrop wear the Nazi uniforms continuously and when asked about their careers, Bimmler pretends to have started in the north of the country, and then casually drops into the conversation that he served many years in Gestapo. Initially, he does not notice this ad Freudian slip, and when awareness finally comes he corrects himself saying Gestapo only employed him for five years, which is still bad enough and raises eyebrows. So he resorts

to making it into a joke. All the above mentioned correspondences are projected by the viewer to the blend as mappings, which are characterized by their incongruity. The incompatibility is also maintained in the juxtaposition of reality and sketch perspectives and intermingling these. Thus, the comedy is attained and humour follows, which definitely adds to the construal of collective memory of the Britons in respect of the war. The enemy is mocked and his role is diminished by the absurd presentation and ridiculous context of it, and, therefore, by comparison the role of the British in the war present more integrity and gains more respect in their cultural memory.

3.2.3. Allo, Allo and the Second World War

The final example which I would like to refer to is again a well-known British sitcom called *Allo Allo*. It is a comedy on WW2 which is presented from the supposed perspective of the French people, the plot is centered around Rene's coffee shop where the French, the Germans and even the English appear. Rene is a Frenchman who wants to make money and run his business in peace and quiet, without all the fuss of the second world war. He does not want to fight, as he is a peaceful man, but he is introduced to the war via a French resistance movement and Michelle, a beautiful girl working on behalf of it. As Rene loves women, he cannot do anything else but involve with the French resistance, and the saucy Michelle. This sparkles a series of ridiculous events, including two German generals who themselves do not feel animosity towards anyone, and wish to survive war calmly at all costs. The series also provides a perspective on Gestapo with the infamous HerFlick who is a limping man with a big ego and little intellect, and hence incompetent and unsuccessful, too. Additionally, the German officers who are supposed to be on his side during the war, often act in support of Rene and the French people, as they have a common goal of securing the valuable piece of art, namely the Madonna with a big Boob. This motif is clearly a take on Nazi interest in stealing art of all kinds they could put their hands on during the military conflict. Nevertheless, real Germans had a soft spot for real art, and the mapping with incompetent Generals in the series who admire the nonsensical Madonna with exposed chest does provide a rather amusing mapping in the evaluation of comedy at hand. Further, there are many romantic meanders in the series which complicate the plot, as well as the life of Rene, who although balding and aging seems to be a local hunk with women, and men alike. There are also British pilots present from time to time in

the series, who are presented as gawky as they do not communicate with the others, although they speak English, just like the remaining characters in the sitcom (another incongruity present which enhances humour, but this time between the inputs space of a sitcom and another input spaces which can be added onto it, namely the real-life cast of the series, who were mainly English). If we take this simplified version of the sitcom as input space one, we can safely map onto it the real-life situation of WW2, with the Nazis and Gestapo who were known for ruthless behaviour and uncouthness, too. They were feared and generated hatred. We would also have to distinguish in the WW2 the British army who, according to the British were few in the fight against the odds, at the time of the finest hour, while the French with their non-attitude to war, cowardice and submission to the Germans, except for the Resistance, would also have to be taken into account. Now, if one juxtaposed all the elements of input space 1 and 2, we end up with numerous correspondences which are then projected into the blend and construed into one composite meaning. We create incongruity and absurdity, which culminates in laughter. Additionally, if we think of the complexity of the plot and all the silly adventures that the character undergo, as compared to the atrocities of the wartime experiences, the incongruities are further ensured and strengthened. So is the laughter, too. Seen in this light, via the zoom lenses of English comedy, the Second World War is not trivialized though, but rather becomes accepted as a real event with which the British must come to terms and memorise it as the glorious time for the British nation, without focusing on the unspeakable truths and horrendous stories of individuals. Thus, the truth gets appreciated and favoured, without reference to the negative experience of war, via laughter at the nonsensical, absurd and ridiculous adventures of all the characters of the sitcom in question who are in fact underdogs and succeed despite all odds. Even the Germans are presented in this manner, as if they were human rather than machine-like and brain washed monsters who are trained to kill and capture for the III Reich exclusively, which makes us love them the same as we do all the other characters. I would also like to add that all the depicted examples of blends can be enriched by the individual memoirs of the British who fought in the war themselves or whose families experienced the war, thus mixing the reality with the fiction and construing the collective memories which will later be further reformulated in relation to the needs of the British public. Thus, the glorification of the Second World War is further preserved showing the British nation as a specially chosen few who at their finest hour stood against all the odds to triumph in victory over the enemy. This myth of their cultural memory actually constitutes

reality which they refer to and which they treasure in place of the fallen Empire and the loss of their exceptional position and power in the world, both politically and economically.

3.3. Conclusions and recommendations

In this article I have utilised the conceptualisation of multimodal collective memory which constitutes a given culture, and applied it to the notion of English humour which helps to shape the collective memory and the identity of the British nation with regard to the Second World War. With the use of *Dad's Army*, *Monty Python* and *Allo Allo*, as well as with the cognitive linguistic paradigm of conceptual integration theory advocated by Fauconnier and Turner, I hope to have demonstrated that English humour does have a bearing impact on the creation and formulation of the collective memory of WW2 in the eyes of the British. The examples that I have employed in my analysis are simply just a few out of many instances of English comedy which alludes to the war and creates its glorious memories by laughing off the feared, the horrendous and the traumatic by means of total absurdity, nonsense and ridiculing grave matters to the extremes. It is only a small part of repertoire of of English humour alluding to WW2, and perhaps it would be advisable to study all the available instances of comedy to fully confirm my hypothesis, but also to find out any other potential inputs spaces that might be activated by the British in their memories on the war. The obvious ones that were used in my illustrations of the point were: the mental space of the Third Reich with all its elements, the mental space of the British society in their finest hour with all this element, but also the mental space of political propaganda during the war, and also the contemporary times and our perspective on the war. Linguistically, we have encountered an abstract mental space of discourse with its participants, and we also noticed the multimodal allusions to poems or music associated with the memory sites analysed. Summing up, via such a laughter at the clash of the incongruities that English comedy employs, which can be best understood when analysed with blending input spaces at hand, British people reinforce the noble role they think their nation played in the tragic times of the war, thus letting the Britons believe that Britannia might still rule again, even if merely by means of having the last laugh.

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- YouTube online 2, Monty Python's Flying Circus sketch entitled Mr Hitler and Minehead by-electio. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VSTzGwkMiM>

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