



Names and Humor: A Cognitive Linguistic Perspective

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Introduction

- Names: peripheral in humor research
- Humorous names: rare even in onomastics
- Complex mental representation of names
⇒ effective tools for humor
- Aim: cognitive-linguistic explanation of mechanisms

Structure of the talk

- Previous approaches to name and humor
- Cognitive linguistics
- Basic skills for processing humor
- The cognitive-linguistic toolkit
- The mental representation of names
- Examples of humorous name usage
- Conclusion

Previous approaches to name and humor

- Two main humor theories
 - Incongruity theory (script-based)
 - Mariusz Rutkowski
 - Two opposed scripts
 - Tension and resolution → humor
 - Script opposition in names
 - Magdalena Kawęcka
 - Bergson's theory
 - Manon Philippe
 - Rigidity of proper names
 - Mechanical vs. living behavior
- Traditional overviews

Tamás Farkas, Mariann Slíz, Judit Takács, Elena Kosichenko

Limitations of previous models

- Script theory, GTVH
 - Good for jokes, short texts
 - Less flexible for name-related humor
- Bergson
 - Captures rigidity
 - No detailed mental mechanisms
- Missing: general theory of language use
- Cognitive linguistics as solution

Cognitive linguistics

- Comprehensive theory of language
 - Single, flexible knowledge network
 - General cognitive mechanisms
- Already applied to humor
- Names: special linguistic element
 - Complex mental representation
 - Ideal for humor research

Basic skills for producing and processing humor

- Metalinguistic competence
- Theory of mind
 - Understanding others' mental states
 - Recovering intended meaning
- Linguistic network and norms
 - Internalized norms required
- Name model
 - Expectations about names
 - Background for unusual forms

Cognitive-linguistic toolkit

- Frames
- Mental spaces
- Salience
- Frame-shifting
- Mental mapping
- Blending / conceptual integration
- Current discourse space

Mental representation of names

- Symbolic units
 - Phonological pole + Semantic pole
 - Types of meaning
 - Referential
 - Type
 - Associative
 - Lexical / etymological
- Name model
 - Default: neutral, unanalyzed units
- Analytic processing
 - Usually in background
 - Switched on in humor

Common-word parallels

Surname *Bugyi*

- Same form as *bugyi* 'underpants'
- Unusual conceptual domain
- Clash with name model
- Norm violation → humor

Common-word parallels + Reanalysis

Hugh Jacks (Cormoran Strike)

- Incompatible parses
 - First parse: personal name
 - Second parse: *huge axe*
- Frame-shifting
- Phonological overlap



The screenshot displays the 'STRIKEFANS' website, which is an unofficial site for the Cormoran Strike series. The header features the title 'STRIKEFANS' in large, bold, orange letters, with the tagline 'An unofficial site.' below it. The navigation bar includes links for POSTS, THE BOOKS, TV SERIES, CHARACTERS, LOCATIONS, MORE, ABOUT, and LOGIN/REGISTER. A search bar is located on the left side of the page. Below the search bar, there is a map of Europe with various location pins, labeled with city names like Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester, London, and others. The main content area features a character profile for Hugh 'Axeman' Jacks. The profile includes a paragraph about Robin's acquaintance with Hugh on a New Year's snow-skiing trip to the Alps, near the Matterhorn. It also mentions that Robin's cousin Katie and her husband know Hugh from Masham. The profile further explains the nickname 'Axeman' as a reanalysis of 'Hugh Jacks' sounding like 'huge axe.' and includes a quote from Midge to Strike: 'Why don't parents say it out loud before they choose the name?' from 'The Ink Black Heart, chapter 3'. Below this, there is another paragraph about Hugh's age, work in pharmaceutical chemistry, and his relationship with Robin, including a quote from 'The Ink Black Heart, chapter 4' about Hugh targeting Robin.

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Strike Locations

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Hugh "Axeman" Jacks

Robin makes the acquaintance of Hugh "Axeman" Jacks on a New Year's snow-skiing trip to the Alps, near the Matterhorn. Robin's cousin Katie and her husband know Hugh from Masham, and it's pretty obvious that they're trying to set up Robin and Hugh by inviting them both on this holiday.

The nickname "Axeman" comes from "Hugh Jacks" sounding like "huge axe." (As Midge muses to Strike, "Why don't parents say it out loud before they choose the name?" *The Ink Black Heart*, chapter 3)

Hugh is older than Robin by two years, and he works in pharmaceutical chemistry. Robin observes that he's "quite nice-looking, with a neat sandy beard, broad shoulders and large blue eyes." Unfortunately, he's also somewhat "pathetic," as he is fresh from a divorce himself after six years of marriage, and Hugh is wallowing in it. According to him, his wife suddenly left him. "Hugh told Robin the whole story twice in the first few days of the holiday, and after the second, almost identical recital, she did her best to avoid sitting next to him at dinner" (*The Ink Black Heart*, chapter 4).

"Unfortunately, he didn't take the hint, but kept targeting" Robin, something that Hugh continues to do throughout the book (sending her a Valentine's card and repeatedly leaving messages for her at the

Parallel in the onomasticon



author: Daniel K. (<https://www.belabel.cz/potisk/marx-spencer>)

- *Marks – Marx, Spencer – Bud Spencer*
- Conceptual blending
 - Input spaces
 - Karl Marx
 - Bud Spencer
 - Department store
 - Ideological contrast

Lexical vs. Referential meaning

Surname *Apró* ('small')

- Large name-bearer => Expectation vs. reality
- Two mental spaces
- Failed mapping

Referential meaning

Cultural knowledge – historically loaded names

Pigs named *Hitler*, *Stalin*

- New context, new bearer
Historical menace vs. mundane referent
- Incongruity
 - Humor, satire, insult



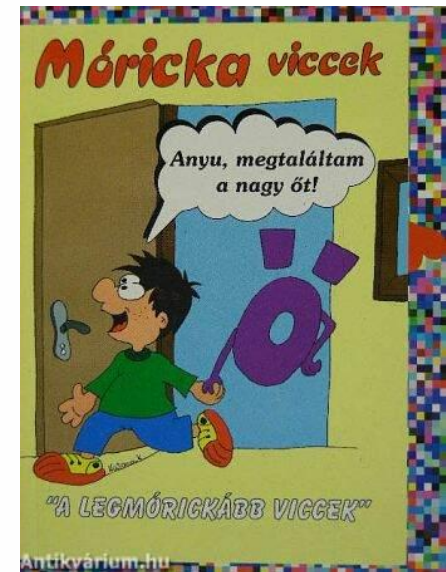
Type meaning

Móricka, Kovács, Kohn, Kolompár

- Stereotypical social types
- Conventional type meaning
- Activate an entire joke scripts

=> Direct frame activation

Joke scripts triggered by name



Phonology + semantics

– *Hogy hívják a lengyel kocsmárost?* – *Mikornyitzky.* / *Mikor nyitsz ki?*

‘What do you call a Polish pubkeeper?’ – *Mikornyitzky.* /

‘When do you open?’

- Foreign-name frame (Polish stereotype)
- Hungarian sentence: *Mikor nyitsz ki?*

- *Hogy hívják a cseh adóellenőrt?* – *Holacsek.* / *Hol a csekk?*

‘What do you call a Czech tax inspector?’ – *Holacsek.*

‘Where’s the check?’

- *Hogy hívják a finn kidobót?* – *Halja Menjeninnen.* / *Hallja, menjen innen!*

‘What do you call a Finnish bouncer?’ – *Halja Menjeninnen.*

‘Listen, go away from here!’

- Simultaneous activation
- Humorous blend
- Frame-shifting + blending

Phonological form

Karakőszörcsök

- Unusual sound structure
 - Repeated velar stops, clusters
- ⇒ “Hard-sounding” form



the poet Ágh István, who grew up there, reportedly preferred to buy a ticket to the next railway station rather than say aloud that he was travelling to his home village, for fear that somebody might laugh

- Phonological salience + Deviation from name model
- Possible evocation of *szörcsög* (‘to gurgle’)

Conclusions

- Names – neutral, unanalyzed units
- Humor: interruption of default processing
 - Salient form, structure, associations
- Multiple mechanisms
 - Frame-shifting
 - Blending
 - Salience
 - Type formation
 - Sound symbolism
- Names – testing ground for humor theory
 - Identifying function <-> rich linguistic, cultural, social knowledge
- Humorous potential: context-dependent

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