OH **UK! WHATEVER NEXT? MULTIMODAL HUMOUR ON BREXIT-RELATED COVERS OF *THE ECONOMIST*

DOROTA MILLER[1]

ABSTRACT

Brexit has undoubtedly been one of the most hotly debated topics in both European and world politics, setting a precedent in the history of European integration. Despite its unquestionably serious repercussions, a considerable part of Brexit media coverage was aimed at amusing the audience. An example of this includes Brexit-related covers of *The Economist*.

  The following paper looks at humour through the lens of the traditional incongruity theory reaching back to Aristotle. Humorous effects are examined and elucidated from a multimodal perspective, including both the visual and verbal layer of the covers and their interplay, as well as intertextual techniques relying on echoing artefacts of the verbal and visual culture.

  The data for the study were collected over the span of approximately four years, between June 2016 (the EU referendum) and February 2020 (Brexit). The empirical section of the study seeks to distil the prevailing trends among the humorous covers focusing on Brexit, paying due attention to the specificity of the genre (magazine cover) and the political background of the topic in question. The intermodal and intertextual relationships involved in creating humour are examined and categorised into the following major types: analogy, addition/extension, antithesis, ambiguity, and allusion/appropriation.

Keywords: Brexit; multimodality; humour; incongruity; *The Economist*; front covers.

1. Introduction

The EU referendum of 2016 and the final withdrawal of the UK from the EU monopolised news reports in the UK and abroad. It was certainly not a trivial or amusing issue, however, a considerable part of the (British) media coverage of Brexit was aimed at causing humorous effects. The following paper offers a closer examination of Brexit-related covers of *The Economist* displaying

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[1]   University of Rzeszów, Institute of Modern Languages, Al. mjr. W. Kopisto 2B, 35–315 Rzeszów, dmiller@ur.edu.pl

humorous potential and an attempt to describe them in terms of the interplay between the verbal and visual code.

The study considers humour from a multimodal perspective, paying due attention to the multi-layered relation between language and image that contributes to the construction of humour. The purpose is to identify how humorous potential arises through both modalities in the multimodal genre of front covers.

The article is divided into nine sections: Following this introduction and a brief outline of the previous research in the field, Sections 3 and 4 present the category of humour through the lens of the incongruity theory and focus on multimodally, i.e., verbo-visually expressed humour. Section "Intertextuality and humour" briefly reports on the notion of intertextuality and its possible applications in humour research. In Section 6, newspaper covers as a multimodal text genre *par excellence* are briefly described. The next Section "Material, methods, and aim of the analysis" outlines the political background and provides information on the collection, method, and analysis of the data. What follows is an examination of the dominant humorous mechanisms in the underlying corpus, with the focus of interest being their multimodality ("Analysis"). The article concludes with "Discussion and final remarks".

2. Research context: Multimodality, humour, and Brexit

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in multimodality in the media in general (cf. van Leeuwen & Kress 1995; Kress & van Leeuwen 1998, 2001, 2006; Stöckl 2004, 2009a, 2009b, 2014; Schmitz 2005; Kress 2011; Machin & Mayr 2012; Klug & Stöckl 2014, *inter alia*), considerable attention has been also paid to multimodally expressed humour in particular (e.g., El Refaie 2009, 2011; Tsakona 2009; Francesconi 2011; Dynel 2016, 2021; Chen & Jiang 2018; Stwora 2020). On the other hand, Brexit has received widespread scholarly attention (cf. Buckledee 2018; Koller, Kopf & Miglbauer 2019; Brusenbauch Meislová et al. 2021 and references therein), especially in the area of linguistics and discourse studies. This resulted in an ample body of literature primarily concerned with the linguistic features (metaphors, intertextual allusions, persuasive strategies etc.) of the media coverage of Brexit (cf. Musolff 2000, 2006, 2016; Buckledee 2018; Đurović & Silaški 2018; Charteris-Black 2019; Miller 2019, 2021), less frequently with the visual mode and/or the verbal-visual interplay, e.g., multimodal metaphors and/or metaphor scenarios in the EU related discourse (Morozova 2017; Silaški & Đurović 2019; Godioli & Pedrazzini 2019; Rodet 2020, *inter alia*) or Brexit-related covers of European newspapers and magazines (cf. Miller 2020). However, the (multimodal) humour in the media coverage of Brexit has been scarcely investigated, with a few notable exceptions

concerning humour and emotions in Brexit-related online commentaries (Miglbauer & Koller 2021), the connection between humour, (stand-up and situation) comedy and populism in relation to Brexit (Weaver 2022), and the humorous aspects of Bexit-induced neologisms (Lalić-Krstin & Silaški 2019). This paper aims to close the above-mentioned research gap by discussing multimodal humour on British magazine covers addressing the process of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. The main purpose of the paper is twofold: 1. pinpointing the underlying incongruity resolution mechanism(s) resulting in humorous effects on the analysed covers and 2. identifying and illustrating the roles and contributions of the particular modes and their interplay in the process of meaning-making and generating humour. This paper is thus a modest contribution to the ongoing discussion about multimodality as a permeating feature of (media) communication in general and verbo-visual ways of generating humour in particular.

3. Incongruity and humour

Several theories have been proposed to explain what humour is. One of the most prominent of them states that humour originates from the perception and resolution of an incongruity that arises "[…] when two normally disparate concepts, schemata, or meanings are juxtaposed in a surprising or unexpected manner" (Chen & Jiang 2018: 66). The incongruity-resolution model drawing on Aristotle's notion of incongruity in the sense of violating the audience's expectations (cf. Rhetoric III), can be summarised as follows: first, a stimulus is perceived as incongruous "[…] when it diverts from the cognitive model of reference" (Forabosco 2008: 45). It is, as Forabosco (2008: 53) rightly points out, potential incongruity: "[…] a given stimulus *may* be perceived as incongruous because of its characteristics, but the actual incongruity perception is a completely subjective experience" (emphasis in the original). The perception of incongruity triggers "[…] puzzlement, curiosity, discomfort, and/or fear; all tendentially accompanied by the need to eliminate (= solve) the incongruity" (cf. Forabosco 2008: 48). Following this, a process of resolving is activated based on knowledge resources enumerated by Attardo and Raskin (1991) within the framework of their General Theory of Verbal Humor.

One of the knowledge resources employed in the resolution phase are the so-called logical mechanisms (LMs) such as analogy, juxtaposition, ambiguity, exaggeration etc. (cf. Attardo 1994; Attardo, Hempelmann & Di Maio 2002) representing different levels of specificity. The following analysis draws partially on the LMs used to solve the (multimodal) incongruity employed in the humorous Brexit-related covers. However, it is important to bear in mind that the traditional

theories of verbal humour in general and LMs employed for the analysis of verbal humour, in particular, cannot be automatically applied to multimodal humorous texts (cf. Francesconi 2011). What is more, there is no fully-fledged list of *all* LMs corresponding to the resolution phase (cf. Attardo, Hempelmann & Di Maio 2002)[2]. Depending on the level of abstraction, the catalogue of LMs could be extended or – quite the contrary – narrowed down to a single abstract mechanism of two clashing interpretations (cf. Attardo, Hempelmann & Di Maio 2002: 29). In light of this, the proposed analysis employs some of the LMs enumerated by Attardo, Hempelmann and Di Maio (2002) such as juxtaposition, analogy, and ambiguity and takes into account different ways of verbal-visual interplay (see Section 7) such as addition/extension, antithesis, allusion/appropriation, to explain how incongruity is multimodally evoked and subsequently resolved in the underlying research material.

In general, the incongruity resolution takes place according to a cognitive rule or pattern that "renders the incongruous element congruent with the remainder of the text" (cf. Dynel 2016: 672). As Forabosco (2008: 49) rightly observes, humour experience necessitates an element of sense that makes a stimulus "cognitively acceptable" and is acquired via the identification of a cognitive rule, whereby the hearer exerts "mental control" over a stimulus. Those cognitive rules and their various manifestations in the verbal and visual mode as well as at the interface of both modes are discussed and illustrated in the following chapters. However, as a case study, this paper does not present a taxonomy of particular types of such mechanisms. All the more so because, as will be shown below, the incongruity resolution may be based on multiple mechanisms, i.e., the humorous effect can include one or more incongruities which can be resolved in different ways (cf. Attardo, Hempelmann & Di Maio 2002).

As noted previously, for a humour experience to take place, an element of incongruity and an element of sense, are indispensable[3] (cf. Forabosco 2008: 49), both of which have to be processed simultaneously. Importantly, humour is not necessarily aimed at solving the underlying incongruence *fully* and *thoroughly*[4]. On the contrary: for the humorous effect to arise, the cognitive tension must be sustained to some extent (cf. Forabosco 2008: 50). On the other hand, a complete resolution, i.e., perceiving the stimulus as perfectly logical, prevents the humorous reaction. The steps mentioned above are preceded

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[2]   See also Ritchie's (2004) critique of the heterogeneity of LMs and his concept of "internal logic".

[3]   Admittedly, not all incongruities trigger humorous effects: "The perception of incongruity is considered to be a necessary, though not sufficient, component of the humor experience" (Forabosco 2008: 45).

[4]   Humour can be based on incongruity alone (e.g., nonsense humour) or – as in the case of the present study – incongruity and its resolution (Forabosco 1992)

and followed by meta-communicative activities, i.e., identifying and interpreting the humour value of the stimulus (i.e., situation or text) at a meta-level. Taking this into account, the above-mentioned conceptualization comprises the following four phases (cf. Forabosco 2008: 50):

1. a prerequisite: "This is a joke" (meta-communication)
2. an incongruity is perceived
3. the incongruity is solved
4. a final conclusion: "It is funny" (meta-communication).

Importantly, a humorous effect is a function of many variables (cf. Tsakona 2020 and her "contextualised" theory of humour taking into account various aspects determining the perception of a stimulus as humorous), including individual and/or culture-specific audience factors, which greatly influence the process of humour perception as well as the right timing and emotional climate which may explain why the same stimulus may (or may not) in some cases be perceived as humorous. Finally, some instances of humour have a cumulative or combinative effect and can be explained by several theories, that are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they offer complementary explanations of the same phenomenon from a different, e.g., cognitive or psychological angle. The former is oriented towards the formal mechanisms evoking humour and the cognitive processes of incongruity resolution. The latter focuses on the psychological causes and effects upon the recipient(s) and highlights the liberating aspect of humour. For example, in the context of crises, relief as a coping strategy (see Martin 2007; Dynel 2021 and references therein) seems to be essential in explaining how humour arises:

> Humour is used as a collective defence mechanism for the sake of 'mental hygiene' […], as well as solidarity building […]. Humour is capable of reframing the source of negative experiences and/or emotions (such as suffering, anxiety and fear) as a source of positive emotions, bringing users psychological relief, at least temporarily […]. (Dynel 2021: 176)

Summing up, in light of the incongruity theory humour is based on a surprising dissonance between the concepts involved, or to put it differently, on "[…] a comic collision of or oscillation between two frames of reference / worlds of discourse / codes / associative contexts" (Krikmann 2009: 17). The tension generated by such opposing elements is perceived and resolved by the audience, providing them with the feeling of 'cognitive mastery' (Forabosco 2008: 50) and intellectual pleasure. The resolution of the incongruity is meant to be "pleasurable and cognitively stimulating" (cf. Stwora 2020: 115), and offer relief. This is especially important in the context of the entertaining function

of mass media. As is well known, apart from informing, the media provide an opportunity for the audience to relax, release tensions, and neutralise negative emotions, in other words, to escape real-life stressors. These aspects are mirrored in the approach of media use as 'escapism' introduced by Katz and Foulkes (1962) and the portmanteau term 'infotainment' referring to entertaining formats of mass media information (cf. Boukes 2019).

4. Multimodality and humour

Our communicative landscape is strongly influenced by pictures. Language, on the other hand, is no longer seen as providing a full account of meaning. Stöckl (2004: 10) argues that "[…] the purely mono-modal text has always been an exception while the core practice in communication has essentially been multimodal all along." Consequently, a holistic approach to human communication is both justified and necessary, in which different modes of expression are viewed as "one coherent, integral field, of – nevertheless distinct – resources for making meaning" (Kress 2011: 38). The particular modes with their different potentials are involved in multimodal discourses (cf. Kress & van Leeuwen 2001; Stöckl 2004; Kress 2011), which not only "provide versions of who does what, when and where" but also "add evaluations, interpretations and arguments to these versions" (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001: 15). The images prevailing in the current communicative landscape, especially in the public and (social) media discourse, are certainly not only illustrative. They do not simply depict reality but have considerable connotative power, i.e., together with the language they communicate ideas, values, and attitudes (cf. Machin & Mayr 2012: 49–56). That is undoubtedly the case in the press coverage of Brexit, where photographs, photomontages, cartoons, and headlines are closely intertwined and involved in the process of meaning-making and humour codification. The popular term 'pictorial turn' coined by Mitchell (1994) signals not only the extensive use of visual elements in public and/or media discourse but also a growing interest of disciplines such as media studies, text linguistics, and (critical) discourse analysis (cf. Machin & Mayr 2012) in visual and multimodal communication. One of the basic observations thereby concerns the semiotic, cognitive, and semantic affordances of language and image[5] and the resulting different ways of creating meaning through words and visual elements (cf. Stöckl 2004). Most importantly, pictures trigger different cognitive operations than language and are "[…] far more likely to be attention-

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[5]   For a more detailed discussion of the affordances of visual images and language see, for example, Stöckl (2004, 2009a, 2014), Schmitz (2005), and Bateman (2014).

getters in perception than language and can also be memorised much more easily and effectively" (Stöckl 2004: 17). Pictorial perception is both simultaneous and holistic and therefore much quicker than in the case of language (Stöckl 2004: 17). Moreover, it is directly linked to emotions and often employed in persuasion activities. As Stöckl rightly observes, pictures "command suggestive powers and can easily create illusions" (Stöckl 2009a: 26). This 'strength' of pictures comes from "[…] their immediacy of understanding, potential instantaneous reception, possibility to cue and evoke thoughts and feelings, semiotic richness, and simultaneous coding" (Rocci & Pollaroli 2018: 11). On the other hand, images are inherently ambiguous and need to be disambiguated through language (e.g., through headlines in print media texts), whose semantics seems to be less vague and polysemous than that of the image (cf. Stöckl 2004: 17). The ambiguity and openness of visual images are thus "[…] limited and fixed by the verbal components, which reduces the natural polysemy of depiction" (Rocci & Pollaroli 2018: 3).

As already mentioned, humour perception relies on the simultaneous activation of two seemingly incompatible schemata, which is experienced as mentally demanding and, ultimately, enjoyable. In the case of multimodal humour expressed on the magazine covers, the operations involving perception and resolution of the incongruity are not triggered by the verbal code exclusively but rely on other modes of expression, including all kinds of (typo)graphical and pictorial material as well as layout.

The most prominent humour theories concern monomodal verbal texts, both oral and written (cf. Attardo & Raskin 1991 and their General Theory of Verbal Humor; Chiaro 1992; Attardo 1994, 2001; Ritchie 2000, 2004)[6]. However, the analysis of covers as paragons of the multimodal genre requires a wider perspective reaching beyond verbally expressed humour and paying attention to the visual mode as well as the verbal-visual interplay. Since all communication is inherently multimodal (cf. Kress & van Leeuwen 1998: 186; Kress & Ogborn 1998: 12), the analysis of humorous discourse should encompass both linguistic and non-linguistic modes of expression. Taking this into account, Francesconi (2011) proposes an approach defined as Multimodally Expressed Humour aimed at adapting theories concerning verbally expressed humour to texts where humour is created cross-modally. Her multimodal analysis covers the following points:

a) subject matter, […];
b) visual codification, that is subject(s), composition, colours, lighting, graphic techniques;
c) verbal codification, as occurring in syntax, lexis, grammar, spelling, punctuation; and

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[6] See also Francesconi (2011) and references therein.

    d) visual and written cross-modality, that is the communicative function enacted by the juxtaposition and interaction of two meaningful semiotic systems. (Francesconi 2011: 7)

As far as the last-mentioned verbal and visual means of producing humour are concerned, two basic types of image and text interrelation and contribution to the humorous effect can be roughly distinguished: complementary and non-complementary (cf. Chen & Jiang 2018). In the former, both modalities are essential and work together to communicate humorous meanings which are beyond the scope of either of them separately. In the latter, the humorous effect is triggered by one of the modalities, i.e., the text and image are of unequal status (cf. Chen & Jiang 2018: 80), as is often the case in the underlying corpus. The incongruity can be thus conveyed verbally (i.e., the text is sufficient for identifying the incongruity), verbo-visually (i.e., both modes of expression are needed to perceive the incongruity) or, finally, visually (i.e., it arises from what is depicted in the image). A similar categorisation can be found in Samson and Huber's (2007: 14) discussion of cartoons:

    (a) the picture can be an illustration of the verbal joke, without adding to the humorous effect; hence, only the text is responsible for the humorous effect;

    (b) the picture provides supporting information not contained in the humorous text; hence, both text and image contribute to the humorous effect;

    (c) the picture is essential for the production of humour; hence, humour is based only on the picture, not on the text, if any.

Francesconi's conclusion reads as follows:

    Although codified in different ways, multimodality functions in the texts as a strategically communicative model, capturing the readers' attention, then engendering a suspension of disbelief and a pleasant psychological attitude, assisting concentration, outlining the reading path, performing functions of emphasis and thus leaving a lasting mental trace. (2011: 17)

In summary, multimodal humour is enhanced through more than one semiotic code as in the case of memes[7], cartoons, comics, sitcoms etc. involving verbal-

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[7] Among the genres that blend verbal and other (especially visual) semiotic elements, internet memes as "remixed, iterated message[s] that can be rapidly diffused by members of participatory digital culture for the purpose of satire, parody, critique, or other discursive activity" (Wiggins 2019: 11) have received particular scholarly attention due to their widespread use. According to Knobel and Lankshear (2007), three aspects contribute to memes' wide circulation: humour, intertextuality, and incongruity, which they share with magazine covers analysed in the present study. For a detailed discussion of memes, which goes beyond the scope of this article see, e.g., Knobel & Lankshear (2007); Shifman (2014); Dynel (2016, 2021); Wiggins (2019) and the references therein.

visual, audio-visual or all three elements (cf. Chen & Jiang 2018: 62). Following this, the main focus of the proposed analysis is the multimodal representations of humour on the covers of *The Economist*. In light of the broad notion of humour, the underlying questions can be formulated as follows: How are both modes employed to convey humour? How is humorous incongruity created and resolved multimodally?

5. Intertextuality and humour

In the relevant literature, intertextuality occurs in the double sense of "[…] an interpretive practice unconsciously exercised by audiences living in a postmodern landscape and a textual strategy consciously incorporated by media producers that invites audiences to make specific lateral associations between texts" (Ott & Walter 2000: 430). The former gives special priority to the role of the reader in the act of interpreting a given text relying on their textual and/or world knowledge. In the latter sense, which is the main point of interest of this study, intertextuality is an inherent feature of texts or a stylistic device, such as quotation or allusion, used, for instance, in media texts to attract the attention of the audience or to elicit their desired response. Within the scope of intertextuality as a key feature of texts, further distinctions between texts relations on at least two different levels can be drawn: (1) a relation between a given text and other exponents of the same genre (i.e., generic intertextuality, cf. Devitt 1991: 338–342), (2) a relation between particular text samples (i.e., referential intertextuality, cf. Devitt 1991: 342–350) encompassing cross-semiotic interdependences between different kinds of codes (e.g., verbal-visual or visual-visual intertextuality).

Intertextuality can be thus roughly defined as allusions to previous texts, typically cultural artefacts – that receivers must be familiar with, recognise, and attribute to the sources for the allusions to be effective (cf. Dynel 2021: 179), that is, to allow for an adequate and reliable interpretation of a given text. Needless to say, humorous texts also rely on previous texts and background knowledge. In fact, the very concept of incongruity as discussed above relies on intertextuality:

> […] incongruity or script opposition cannot […] be established without reference to previous (con)texts, which are considered as expected, conventional, or normal in some sense. Therefore, establishing intertextual connections with previous (con)texts determines what is incompatible or incongruous in a given (con)text. In this sense, intertextuality lies at the heart of humour: there cannot be any humorous text that is not intertextual […]. (Tsakona & Chovanec 2020: 5)

In light of this and as a preliminary step, the following section will briefly define covers as a journalistic genre paying attention to the above-mentioned features of humour, i.e., incongruity, multimodality, and intertextuality.

6. Covers

In the context of what is called a cult(ure) of 'distraction' (cf. Benjamin 1969), where subjects are exposed to multiple stimuli that substantially reduce their capacity for attention, magazine covers reflect a growing need for novelty, surprise, and entertainment.

As Held (2005a, 2005b) rightly observes, covers fulfil three types of functions: they inform, evaluate, and entertain. They are aimed at announcing or summarising selected contents of the issue as attractively as possible to involve the reader in the process of interpretation (cf. Held 2005a: 326). Front pages can be thus said to represent "a kind of summary, signalling both the relation between the paper and its readers and the relation between these two and the events and issues represented on the page, and in the newspaper as a whole" (Kress & van Leeuwen 1998: 205). Due to space restrictions, the information must be delivered in a compact, captivating (often humorous-playful), and innovative way to attract the potential reader. Moreover, covers share some characteristics with advertisements (Held 2005a, 2005b) as well as political cartoons (cf. Page 2020) in that they provide a social and political commentary on the news. As an argumentative genre (cf. Tseronis 2018), covers show two interrelated levels of argumentation: the primary level, that is, promoting the magazine in general and/or inviting the audience to buy a certain issue and the secondary level, i.e., reflecting the magazine's stance on the cover story (cf. Tseronis 2021: 378–379) and arguing for or against a certain attitude.

Notably, magazine covers frequently employ cartoons that can be defined in the following way:

> […] a cartoon is a joke told in a picture (drawing, painting, etc.) comprising one or only a few panels […]. The style of cartoon is mostly characterized by simple lines, exaggerated features, as well as sketch-like and simplified figures. (Samson & Huber 2007: 1–2)

According to Tseronis (2021: 380), cartoons offer an evaluative perspective on the topic in question that is recovered by "[…] an incongruity that the cartoonist creates between what is depicted or said and what the viewer knows about how things should be". They can be further subdivided into 'monodomain' and 'multidomain cartoons' (cf. van den Hoven & Schilperoord 2017). The former utilises one domain only, for example, when the text or the image

provides an evaluative opinion over the topic in question. The latter conveys the incongruity "[…] by using visual or verbal means to establish a reference to an auxiliary domain besides the topical domain, for example when making associations between politics and cooking, or financial crises and natural phenomena" (Tseronis 2021: 380).

Kress and van Leeuwen view magazine texts (including covers) as 'integrated texts' (2006: 177) combining linguistic and non-linguistic elements (such as image, layout, and colour) which are deployed not discretely but relate to each other and are closely intertwined. They fulfil a threefold function (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006: 15): ideational (representing the world and our experience of it), interpersonal (enacting social interactions), and textual (the way representations and communicative acts cohere into meaningful wholes). Following Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the main visual features of magazine texts are layout (the positioning of elements according to the communicative potential of particular areas of the page), salience (the visual 'weight' of particular visual elements), and framing (the use of various visual devices to (dis)connect particular elements on the page)[8].

According to Held (2005a, 2005b), covers deploy three types of codes, namely pictures, typography, and language, the interaction of which contributes to the meaning-making process. This complies with Tseronis' observation (2021: 381): "The semiotic resources that may be exploited or combined on the front cover include the text in the cover line, the image or the graphic illustration, the various typographic elements and the choices in the colouring and framing schemes". The verbal part usually consists of one (key)word or phrase. The linguistic brevity is compensated by visual elements ranging from realistic photography, illustration, and schematic drawings to alienated picture montage, (political) cartoons, and caricatures (cf. Held 2005a, 2005b) that significantly expand the scope of possible interpretations. The visual part usually plays a dominant role, whereas the verbal part often fulfils a supporting and explicative function (cf. Held 2005a: 328). To compensate for the space limitations the covers often employ intertextual references to pre-existing texts and/or images, whereby additional meanings are reactivated. Their density and complexity require knowledge of popular and/or high culture and the current political situation, which is essential for the audience to decode the humorous message. The intertextual references thus appear as an important contribution to understanding multimodal humour on the covers of news magazines, as will be shown in the following.

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[8]   See also Machin and Mayr's (2012: 49–56) discussion of the visual semiotic choices and the way they contribute to meaning-making.

7. Material, methods, and aim of the analysis

In the so-called Brexit referendum of 23 June 2016, a slim majority of British citizens voted in favour of the United Kingdom leaving the EU. Following this decision, on 29 March 2017, the British government initiated the official EU withdrawal process. After two extensions of the deadline, the UK finally exited the EU on 31 January 2020. The EU referendum and the final withdrawal from the EU were undoubtedly unprecedented events in the history of European integration. On both occasions, British newspapers and magazines responded with a series of articles and covers in which they elaborated on various arguments for and against Brexit and declared sides in the Brexit campaign.

The following analysis focuses on the departure of the UK from the EU addressed on the covers of *The Economist*, one of the most widely recognised and well-read British weekly magazines covering global politics and business. By way of example, its combined average circulation (i.e., the aggregated total for the print and digital publication) in the time span July–December 2022 amounted to 1,574,197 per issue[9]. *The Economist* is known for its social-libertarian slant and praise of a free market economy[10]. It describes its public agenda as a blend of left and right, or "liberal in the classical sense"[11]. The articles are published anonymously maintaining a historical tradition and allowing "many writers to speak with a collective voice"[12]. *The Economist* is aimed at well-off, well-educated populations (cf. Peters 2010): "Its extensive use of wordplay, high subscription prices, and depth of coverage has linked the paper with a high-income and educated readership"[13]. Most importantly, the magazine clearly supported the remain option as explicitly stated by the editor-in-chief in the special edition titled "The Brexit briefs" issued in June 2016: "The Economist is not neutral: we are convinced that a decision to leave (a so-called Brexit) would be bad for Britain, Europe and the world"[14].

The data for the study were collected between June 2016 and February 2020, i.e., two culminating points in the Brexit timeline: the Brexit referendum

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[9]   Cf. "The Economist WORLDWIDE BRAND REPORT July-December 2022" issued on 21 February 2023 by the Audit Bureau of Circulations, https://www.abc.org.uk/Certificates/50771707.pdf (accessed 1/03/2023).

[10] https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Economist (accessed 1/03/2023).

[11] https://www.economist.com/frequently-asked-questions (accessed 1/03/2023).

[12] https://www.economist.com/frequently-asked-questions (accessed 1/03/2023).

[13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Economist (accessed 1/03/2023).

[14] https://www.economist.com/sites/default/files/EconomistBrexitBriefs16.pdf (accessed 1/03/2023).

and the final withdrawal from the EU, respectively. The following discussion is based on a sample of nine Brexit-related covers[15] aimed at raising humorous effects. They have been selected from a wider corpus encompassing 19 items. The first conclusion to be drawn is the following: although it was a crisis, almost half of the covers devoted explicitly to Brexit (nine out of 19) were aimed at generating a humorous effect, which is in line with McGraw's theory associating the notion of humour with "violations that are transformed into less threatening and more pleasing benign violations" (McGraw et al. 2012: 1222). Notably, no humorous covers were published around the final EU exit.

As already stated, magazine covers as a multimodal genre are based on a combination of text and image. Accordingly, the multimodal framework contributing to the humorous effect of the analysed covers must be given due consideration. Following this, the proposed analysis starts by investigating both modes independently along with their particular contribution to creating humorous effects. What follows is an integrative look at their interplay to prevent the fragmentation of codes and acknowledge their intertextual interactions with verbal and visual pre-texts.

The concept of incongruity and its consequent resolution are treated as a necessary mechanism, which underlies most if not all occurrences of humour. However, there are additional factors involving 'information linking'[16] (van Leeuwen 2005: 219–247) and logical-rhetorical relations between language and image, outlined below, which coupled with incongruity let the analysed covers appear comic. The reason for discussing them, together with incongruity, is that they provide a broader picture of humour. For this part of the analysis, the following categories were considered: analogy, addition/extension, antithesis, ambiguity and allusion/appropriation, both monomodal (verbal/visual) and multimodal, i.e., construed verbo-visually. Importantly, no pre-classification was made, the analysis was determined by the underlying research material.

Questions about the intermodal relationships between the verbal and visual mode are notoriously difficult. Given the unlimited human creativity and the complex interaction of semiotic modalities, no fully-fledged classification of such interrelations is possible (cf. Stöckl 2009b: 213), all the more so that they often seem to blur or overlap in the analytical practice (cf. Stöckl 2009a). Instead different, heterogeneous, sometimes confusing taxonomies of the verbal-visual interplay are proposed approaching the issue from various perspectives

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[15] The analysed covers of *The Economist* can be found on the website:
https://www.economist.com/weeklyedition/archive (accessed 1/03/2023).

[16] In the sense of "how items of information, whether verbal, visual or otherwise, can be and are *meaningfully linked* to other items of information" (van Leeuwen 2005: 219, emphasis in the original).

and drawing on different research material (see, for example, Spillner 1982; Gaede 1992; Geiger & Henn-Memmesheimer 1998; Nöth 2000; van Leeuwen 2005; Stöckl 2009a and the references therein; Stöckl 2009b).

Generally, "[v]isually and verbally expressed meanings may be each other's double and express the same meanings, or they may complement and extend each other, or even clash or contradict" (van Leeuwen & Kress 1995: 25). Accordingly, van Leeuwen (2005: 229–230) outlines two basic types of verbal-visual linking, namely elaboration (one of the modes repeats or restates information provided by the other mode, either by making it more specific or by explaining/paraphrasing it) and extension (one of the modes adds new information[17], the underlying intermodal relationship is based on similarity, contrast/opposition[18] or complementarity)[19]. In this context, Stöckl's (2009b) taxonomy of particular levels of collaboration of language and image in what he calls 'language-image-texts' is worth mentioning. It encompasses the self-explanatory spatial-syntactic patterns (i.e., the sequence and distribution of the verbal and visual component), as well as the closely connected content-related (i.e., the way informational content of image and language cooperate to form a meaningful whole) and rhetorical-logical patterns (i.e., the underlying logical operation(s) and rhetorical device(s)). The content-related patterns include two above-mentioned types: elaboration and extension that can be defined in the following way: "[…] in elaboration one mode is used to explain, illustrate or specify the other, in extension new information is added in one mode, which is not co-present in the other" (Stöckl 2009b: 216; see also Nöth 2000). The rhetorical-logical patterns, on the other hand, encompass coordinative and hierarchical connections between the two modes. The coordinative connections are based on likeness/analogy, contrast, and spatial/temporal contiguity. The hierarchical connections include cases such as cause-effect, condition-consequence, part-whole or superordinate-subordinate (cf. Stöckl 2009b: 219; see also Nöth 2000), which cannot be considered here further. There is also a wide range of "coincidental, allusive and meta-communicative connections" between the two modes (cf. Stöckl 2009b: 219–220) which seem to defy categorisation.

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[17]   Gaede (1992: 58) terms this type of relation 'addition' since both modes are mutually reinforcing one another in terms of expression and effect. In the following paper both terms, i.e., addition and extension, are used interchangeably.

[18]   In the case study chapter 'contrast/opposition' and 'antithesis' (see below) are used synonymously.

[19]   The terminology introduced by Spillner (1982) and Nöth (2000) makes distinctions such as (reciprocal) extension vs. determination (Spillner 1982) or complementarity vs. contradiction and dominance vs. redundancy (Nöth 2000).

Drawing on the above rough distinction a more fine-grained analysis will be presented below including rhetorical devices such as analogy, antithesis, and allusion. Analogy and antithesis can be considered as "based on some kind of parallel structure that invites comparison" (Tseronis & Forceville 2017b: 168). According to Attardo, Hempelman and Di Maio (2002: 13), analogy can be characterised in the following way: "[…] a and b (possibly multiple elements) are alike in respect to x". False analogy or disanalogy, on the other hand, means that *a* and *b* are *not* alike in respect to *x*, or *x* does not exist or is a marginal aspect of both entities in question (cf. Attardo, Hempelman & Di Maio 2002: 13)[20]. In the first case (i.e., analogy) similarity, in the latter case (i.e., disanalogy or false analogy) a dissimilarity or discrepancy between the semantic content of the verbal utterance and the visual expression is made salient.[21]

Interpreting a configuration as antithesis requires the following three criteria to be fulfilled:

> 1. two states of affairs, entities or persons are present, which are known to be, or are cued, as opposites, 2. in a parallel structure that makes salient the differences between the two, 3. with the aim of raising an awareness of diametrically opposed viewpoints, ideas, or interests associated with the two states of affairs, entities or persons, in the given context. (Tseronis & Forceville 2017b: 168)

Antithesis as "[…] a conceptual figure that presents a saliently contrastive relation between two entities or ideas" (Tseronis & Forceville 2017a: 14) can be conveyed monomodally (e.g., verbally or visually) or in the interaction of two (or more) modes. The same holds for allusion, which is characterised by "a manipulation of content and form that triggers an association with some source outside the text" (Tseronis 2021: 391). On the front cover, the allusive reference to the original text may be triggered through the (manipulation of) verbal text, the image or both the text and the image (cf. Tseronis 2021: 385). While transferring meanings across domains allusion "does not establish one specific relation between two domains, that is of similarity, contrast or other kind, but simply suggests that there is *some* relation" (Tseronis 2021: 385, emphasis in the original). Importantly, this relation is to be discovered and deciphered by the audience depending on the scope of their

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[20] See also examples of 'verbo-visual analogy' ('visuell-verbale Analogie') discussed by Geiger and Henn-Memmesheimer (1998: 63), as well as Gaede's (1992: 56, 66–69) elaboration on 'visual analogy' ('visuelle Analogie').

[21] Following Tseronis, there seems to be no neat borderline between dissimilarity/discrepancy and antithesis: "[…] antithesis relies on establishing that two elements or domains are *opposites* or at least *different* from each other" (Tseronis 2021: 383, emphasis mine). See also Nöth's (2000) discussion of discrepant and contradictory interrelations between the verbal and visual components of multimodal texts.

contextual, situational and world (fore)knowledge. Such a direct and explicit allusion to well-known and recognisable cultural artefacts or to put it differently a "significant reuse of an idea first expressed in the work of an artist" (Young 2008: 6) is a common practice in the contemporary postmodern (art)world and the media where styles, motifs, stories, and other artistic elements are amply and deliberately reworked, re-contextualised (cf. Young (2008) and his discussion of cultural appropriation), and subsequently re-produced by the audience.

The following section presents the analysed covers to demonstrate different types of cross-modal and intertextual interplay and their humorous effect. However, this paper is not taxonomic, its goal is not an extensive classification of (verbal and visual) mechanisms employed for a humorous effect to arise. The purpose of the conducted analysis is qualitative, not quantitative. Therefore, the following case studies focus primarily on pinpointing particular tendencies concerning multimodal humour on the covers of *The Economist* rather than providing statistically valid data.

8. Analysis

Case study 1: "The road to Brexit"

On the whole, the conducted analysis reveals that the economic and political repercussions of Brexit are often addressed (and negatively evaluated) on the visual level, however, without providing any specific details – a result which is in line with one of the key findings presented by Godioli and Pedrazzini (2019: 302): "Most cartoons take a generic stance against or in favour of Brexit, without directly engaging with specific arguments". Britain's withdrawal from the EU is frequently metaphorically represented as an arduous or even dangerous journey (cf. Musolff 2000; Silaški & Đurović 2019; Godioli & Pedrazzini 2019), possibly with a tragic end, of which the front page of the issue of 8 October 2016 is a prime example. Theresa May and Boris Johnson, both metonymically representing Brexit, are depicted in a blue convertible car (with the number plate 'Brit 1', Union Jack and a GB sign unmistakeably referring to the UK) approaching a fork in the road number A50 (alluding to Article 50) with two signposts: 'Hard Brexit' (on the left) and 'Soft Brexit' (on the right), whereby in the former case they are about to face corner lanes, diversions, serpentines, road works, burnt bridges, roundabouts, cliffs etc. A closer look reveals the biblical Tower of Babel in the background meant to symbolise the power of humankind, notoriously resulting in god-sent confusion of languages and bringing about disunity, division, disruption and turmoil – an ample warning against arrogance and megalomania.

The 'Soft Brexit' alternative, on the other hand, means a smooth road ahead. The above-mentioned right-left arrangement is not coincidental: 'right' has positive connotations in most cultures and languages around the world, while 'left' has a mostly pejorative meaning (cf. Casasanto 2009: 353). Interestingly, this correlation between positive and negative emotional valence and the vertical space seems to be insensitive to writing direction: even cultures that use right-to-left writing systems (e.g., Arabic-speaking cultures) reveal the same GOOD IS RIGHT mapping and tend to associate positive attributes like goodness, intelligence, and honesty with the right side of space (cf. Casasanto 2009: 365). Following this, a 'soft' Brexit scenario in the analysed cover correlates with a positive effect whereas the 'hard' Brexit option is implicitly associated with negative (political and economic) consequences.

Visually, the following is communicated: Brexit without a deal is, in many respects, a dangerous and highly unadvisable alternative. This is summarised in the same-titled article ("The road to Brexit") in this issue: "The journey, however, will be complex and perilous, beset by wrong turnings, chicanes and elephant traps". It is an image-dominant cover, on which little is verbalised and instead communicated visually. The image itself is communicatively viable (cf. Stöckl 2004: 280): even without the headline ("The road to Brexit"), the message of the cover is pellucid. The visual code extends the text and adds an evaluative commentary to the neutrally formed headline announcing solely the process of withdrawal, or to be more specific, the invoking of Article 50 and thus preparing for the negotiations. Drawing on the previously mentioned intermodal links as described by Stöckl (2009b) the verbal-visual relationship in the analysed cover could be thus classified as addition/extension or elaboration, since there seems to be no clear-cut boundary between both categories, on the contrary, "there is an element of extension in elaboration and vice versa" (cf. Stöckl 2009b: 217).

The picture in question is a typical (political) cartoon with caricature-like, exaggerated characters (May wearing her conspicuous leopard print scarf, Johnson, typically, in his dark suit with a blue tie) and altogether highly condensed meaning referring to various difficulties arousing in case of 'hard' Brexit. It could be described as a multidomain cartoon (cf. van den Hoven & Schilperoord 2017) with verbal and visual reference to an auxiliary domain (JOURNEY or ROAD) lying beyond the topical domain (BREXIT). The relation between the two domains is that of analogy ("Brexit is *like* a journey/road trip"), or possibly addition: the visual image supports and extends the neutral headline by providing additional information concerning both options (hard vs. soft Brexit) and generating humorous and evaluative meaning. The verbally ("The road to Brexit") and visually cued metaphor EU MEMBERSHIP or, more specifically, BREXIT IS A JOURNEY contributes to the humorous (and persuasive) effect of the cover and

corresponds with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) seminal discussion of metaphors viewed as "[…] conceptual tool[s] for structuring, restructuring, and even creating reality" (cf. Kövecses 2020: 1; see also Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 156). The very essence of the metaphorical conceptualisation and construction of reality, which is reflected in the language, is perceiving, comprehending, and explaining one, mostly abstract domain of experience (target domain) in terms of another more concrete, more clearly delineated (source) domain (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 118) and, consequently, foregrounding or hiding particular aspects of the former (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 4).

The pervasiveness and persuasive power of metaphors in (political) discourse stems from their explanatory power (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 34), i.e., providing "a partial understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another kind of experience" (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 154) and their ability to transport evaluations. In this context, Andreas Musolff in his scenario-oriented approach focusing on the narrative and argumentative-evaluative aspects of metaphor usage introduces the term 'metaphor scenario' in the sense of culturally and historically mediated "[…] discourse-based conceptual structure that incorporates evaluative bias elements, which make it useful for argumentative exploitation" (2016: 30). Such metaphor scenarios "help to shape the course of public debates and conceptualizations of political target topics by framing the attitudinal and evaluative preferences in the respective discourse communities" (Musolff 2006: 28).

In other words, a metaphor is generally characterised by the "[…] depiction of an incongruous image that presents a fusion of two domains and suggests that certain aspects of the one are mapped onto the other" (Tseronis 2021: 391). Since the elements come from different domains there is a likelihood that they may be incongruous and produce a humorous effect (cf. Tsakona 2009: 1180). In the analysed case, the literalisation of the road metaphor or, to put it differently, the incongruity between the literal and the figurative meaning of the metaphor generates humour.

Case study 2: "Just another week in British politics"

Likewise, the front cover of 14 July 2018 is based on the metaphor EU MEMBERSHIP or BREXIT IS A JOURNEY (as an entailment of LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor), which seems to permeate, both verbally and visually, the entire EU discourse (cf. Musolff 2000; Silaški & Đurović 2019; Godioli & Pedrazzini 2019). However, this time it is a journey with a sinking pedal boat that symbolises the UK on the verge of its withdrawal from the UE and alludes to Prime Minister May's lack of strategy in the Brexit negotiations. Published after Theresa May announced Britain's departure plan on 6 July 2018, the cover summarises the political difficulties that the UK is about to face, an agreement

in the final stage of the Brexit negotiations being the most serious of them. The visual image provides additional pieces of information about the current situation in the UK impossible to infer from the headline "Just another week in British politics":

- Theresa May facing a political crisis over her Brexit strategy,
- Boris Johnson's cabinet resignation in protest at the agreed soft Brexit plan (as suggested by the floating buoylike object in the foreground resembling Johnson's head),
- Donald Trump's controversial visit to the UK (represented by the baby blimp flown in London in July 2018 in protest against his policies),
- identity crisis highlighted by the football match England-Croatia in the 2018 FIFA semi-finals (indicated by the English flag in the background and two football teams playing on a beach below the white cliffs of Dover), to name just a few.

The verbal-visual relation can be described as an addition/elaboration (cf. Stöckl 2009b): with the visual layer specifying problems to be dealt with currently and depicting Prime Minister May bailing out the boat desperately to keep it afloat. Interestingly, the headline itself is an intertextual allusion to the idiomatic phrase: "just another day in the office" used for saying that "something someone does as part of their job is routine, especially something difficult, dangerous or unusual".[22] The original noun '(the) office' is replaced by 'British politics'. The allusion is nevertheless recognisable. To sum up, the cover in question seems to employ two mechanisms simultaneously: allusion (verbal: to the aforementioned idiom and visual: with the Union Jack and the white cliffs of Dover symbolising the UK) and addition.

Case study 3: "Anarchy in the UK"

The cover published on 2 July 2016 is a humorous way of utilising the Union Jack. It shows a mast with a flag-like pair of men's underpants and numerous safety pins originally associated with the typical punk style. Notably, they became a symbol of solidarity with victims of racist and xenophobic incidents in the wake of Britain's vote to leave the EU[23]. The image corresponds

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22 Macmillan Dictionary: https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/just-another-day-at-the-office (accessed 22/08/2022).

23 For more details see the articles from *The Washington Post* (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/11/15/safety-pins-solidarity-symbol-or-emblem-of-white-guilt/), *The Guardian* (https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/29/britons-urged-to-wear-safety-pins-in-

with the cover line "Anarchy in the UK" referring to the same-titled song by Sex Pistols and announcing the political turmoil in the UK after Brexit. Replacing the prototypical element (UK flag) with a non-prototypical one (men's pants with the British flag printed on them) leads to incongruity, which, in turn, leads to humour. The cross-modal relation is based on analogy: The visual image sustains what has already been formulated on the verbal level (the state of anarchy) and encompasses an additive humorous component. The humorous effect arises on the visual level and is extended by the verbal allusion to the Sex Pistols song and the visual allusion to the British flag. It could be described as a cumulative effect based on both addition/extension and visual-verbal allusion. The cover in question may be also viewed as an instance of appropriation (art), i.e., utilising well-known texts, images or other cultural artefacts with little or no alteration.

Case study 4: "Facing up to Brexit"

In the examples discussed above, the visual image supported and/or extended the message conveyed verbally, i.e., provided additional meaning. Compared with this, on the front cover of 22 July 2017, humour is enhanced through a verbally and visually construed antithesis: which, as already explained, relies on "[…] the identification of a contrast (negative comparison) either between the two entities placed in a parallel structure or between the ideas to which these two entities give rise" (Tseronis & Forceville 2017b: 168).

The laconic headline "Facing up to Brexit" utilises the idiomatic expression: 'to face up to something', e.g., (difficult) situation, (unpleasant) facts, i.e., 'to accept that a difficult situation exists'[24] while the image communicates exactly the opposite meaning based on the visually conveyed idiom: 'to burry/have one's head in the sand' meaning: 'to refuse to think about unpleasant facts, although they will have an influence on your situation'.[25]

The cover cartoon depicts the cliffs of Dover, the iconic landmark of the United Kingdom and a seashore with several people (representing the British society) burying their heads in the sand except for a little boy with a pail and a shovel, apparently surprised at the way adults behave. A closer look at the cartoon reveals Theresa May: while everyone is having their *heads* in the sand, she is completely buried in the sand, except for her feet with the legendary extravagant leopard shoes.

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solidarity-with-immigrants-safetypin), and *BBC News* (https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-37948762) focussing on the so-called 'safety pin movement' in the UK and United States (all accessed 1/03/2023).

24   Cambridge   Dictionary: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/face-up-to-sth (accessed 22/08/2022).

25   Cambridge   Dictionary: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bury-have-your-head-in-the-sand?q=bury%2Fhave+your+head+in+the+sand (accessed 22/08/2022).

As already stated, strikingly incoherent messages are conveyed verbally and visually. The obvious discrepancy between the two above-mentioned idiomatic expressions with the opposite meaning, one of which is realised verbally and the other visually, reveals British problems and fears arising when confronting the future effects of Brexit. The interplay of the two idioms with contradictory meanings conveys the following message: the British cannot cope with Brexit.

The cover in question is a case of verbo-visually conveyed antithesis, the opposition is made salient by the discrepancy between what is depicted and what is verbally expressed (cf. Tseronis 2021: 383) so that the verbal text causes a reinterpretation of the visual or the other way round. Attardo and Chabanne (1992: 168) claim that the humorous point in cartoons is often based on the contrast between a perfectly 'normal' caption and an incongruous drawing or the other way round: the caption functions as a 'humorous commentary' on the otherwise non-humorous drawing. The former is the case here and holds for the next example as well.

Case study 5: "The negotiator"

The cover of 1 April 2017 is also based on a juxtaposition of two contradictory scripts (cf. Tseronis 2021: 391). The brief headline "The negotiator" suggests reaching an agreement in a discussion and settling a dispute by referring to arguments, i.e., calmly and reasonably. The accompanying picture showing Theresa May (wearing a leopard-printed robe and boxing gloves with the British flag) waiting for the next round to be carried out in a boxing ring covered with the EU flag contradicts the readers' expectations and suggests otherwise, namely boxing, which is typically associated with competition, control (cf. Kövecses 2020: 176), and arguments of force. There is an obvious incongruity between the verbally implied and the visually presented meaning, an apparent contradiction between diplomacy and/or rationale on the one hand and force and/or violence on the other. Taking both codes into account, the audience reassesses the situation and comes to realise that Prime Minister May is leading the UK towards a 'hard' Brexit. The discrepancy between the verbally and visually conveyed meaning refers to the conundrum Theresa May found herself in due to the two-level Brexit negotiations: the national level with all the domestic pressures and the international or EU level. Perhaps another idiom could be activated by the visual image featuring Theresa May resting in her assigned corner and supported by her coach (Boris Johnson): namely 'to be in a tight corner'[26] ('to be in a difficult situation'): alluding to May's

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[26]   Cambridge Dictionary: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/be-in-a-tight-corner (accessed 22/08/2022).

difficulties as a negotiator at both levels. This is corroborated by the facial expressions of the characters in the background indicating considerable dissatisfaction with Theresa May's performance: everyone in the audience including the Scottish Prime Minister Nicola Sturgeon looks disapprovingly, only Boris Johnson and David Davis, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, seem to cheer.

To sum up, the humorous effect arises from a meaning reversal: opposite meanings are communicated by visual and verbal means. The cover raises humour by ridiculing Theresa May as a diplomat responsible for negotiating the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, not ready or willing to reach an agreement.

Case study 6: "Why softer is better"

The front cover of the issue published on 16 June 2018 with the headline: "Why softer is better… and ever more likely" indicates that Britain is heading for the so-called 'soft' Brexit, i.e., retaining a close economic relationship with the EU.

The reader's attention is captured by the first part of the headline "Why softer is better". This ambiguous text, printed in a much larger font size than the following phrase "… and even more likely" contains the adjective 'soft(er)' without indicating its denotatum. The visual layer reveals the double reference by displaying a roll of toilet paper printed with "Brexit". The perception and resolution of the incongruity and, therefore, the humorous effect lie in the polysemous adjective 'soft' which is presented as a positive quality in the case of toilet paper and Brexit.

Printed in white, both the paper roll and the headline are particularly prominent on the blue background, possibly referring to the EU flag. The allusion to the bottom part of the body, usually negatively associated with stupidity, explicitly communicates the negative evaluation of the withdrawal and the above-mentioned anti-Brexit stance of the magazine. The analysed cover appears to merge two strategies: ambiguity ('soft' in the sense of 'smooth' vs. 'soft Brexit') and addition/extension (without the image the reference to Brexit could not be established).

Case study 7: "Very rocky"

The cover with the headline "Very rocky" (published on 15 December 2018) is an obvious reference to the well-known film series "Rocky" starring Sylvester Stallone. Theresa May is again portrayed as a boxer, her intransigence and doggedness are highlighted by her facial expression and her 'ready to attack' posture. Unlike the above-mentioned cartoon-like cover of 1 April 2017 in this case we can only see a minimalistic black and white close-up portrait of Theresa

May wearing eye-catching red boxing gloves. The ambiguous headline alludes to the name of the title hero (even though it is printed in lowercase) and, in a metaphorical sense, to the uncertain and difficult future of the UK outside the EU. The analogy between Rocky Balboa and Theresa May is made salient through the legendary red boxing gloves and the lexeme 'rocky' both of which seem to question May's capacity as a negotiator and/or diplomat suggesting her inability or unwillingness to reach a compromise on terms other than her own. Apart from visual allusion and analogy, the cover utilises the ambiguity of the lexeme 'rocky': "rough and difficult to travel along"[27] or "unstable and full of difficulties"[28] as in the idiom 'rocky road' vs. Rocky Balboa.

The discussed example deploys a caption that may be interpreted as: "Theresa May resembles Rocky Balboa, she is determined, warrior-like, and unlikely to compromise". An alternative explanation suggested by the adjective 'rocky' is the long and difficult Brexit negotiations. It refers to Prime Minister Theresa May's postponement of the vote on her Brexit deal, to avoid almost certain defeat in the UK Parliament: "[…] December 10th a landmark vote on Theresa May's Brexit deal was cancelled at the last minute" (cf. the Leaders of this same issue).

This digitally manipulated cover is a prime example of multimodal, i.e., verbal and visual allusion. The above-mentioned associations are triggered through the interplay between the cover line and the image. The allusion to the Rocky series proposes a frame of interpretation for the situation at the time of the last-minute postponement of the Brexit deal vote: the cover image corresponds with the content of the Leaders: "[…] Mrs May staggers away bloodied to fight another round", referring to the expected voting down of her unpopular EU withdrawal agreement and the following chaos of the parliamentary defeat.

Case study 8: "The Silly Isles"

The cover of 30 March 2019 visualises an imaginary historical map of Great Britain, which – as it turns out on closer inspection – contains quite unusual toponyms: the capital city called Chaos, and city names such as Pandemonium, Havoc, Firkup, Flummox, Carnage, Shambles, Great Floundering, Hell, Maelstrom, Much Shizzle in the Mire, Discombobulation. These are existing nouns or nominal phrases (e.g., Flummox, Pandemonium, Great Floundering), or their easily identifiable alterations (Utter Horlix referring to 'utter horror',

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Ballzup referring to 'balls-up' etc.), all of which can be assigned to the following semantic domains: 1. embarrassment, confusion, chaos, 2. crisis, 3. catastrophe, massacre, horror. The inherent negative valuation of the above-mentioned fictional city names is clear, even though it varies in intensity. The ambiguous headline "The Silly Isles" is based on homophony as the pronunciation of 'Scilly' and 'silly' is the same. "The Silly Isles" may be thus interpreted as an allusion to the Isles of Scilly (English Scilly Isles): a group of mostly uninhabited islands and rocks off the southwestern tip of England. Alternatively, the adjective 'silly' ("showing little thought or judgement"[29]) and the subheading: "Brexit after May" appear to refer to the questionable decision to leave the EU, the uncertain future of the UK after Brexit in general as well as Prime Minister May announcing her departure after the 'negotiation chaos' and asking for an extension of the deadline of 29 March 2019.

Case study 9: "OH **UK! Whatever next?"

On *The Economist's* front page of 16 March 2019, Britannia, the national allegory of Great Britain, is depicted with a trident, a battle shield, and a Corinthian battle helmet. On her shield is the Union Jack, the symbol of national unity. Typically, Britannia embodies qualities such as wisdom and (military) strength[30]. On this particular cover, however, she is neither powerful nor victorious, but rather weak and defeated, as can be judged by her dishevelled hair, broken trident, and the frayed, burnt EU flag. Her facial expression and her disbelief and bewilderment gesture combined with the question "Whatever next?" indicate that she is discouraged, anxious and uncertain about the future of the UK. The phrase "OH **UK!" placed in bold in the right-hand corner is highly ambiguous: on the one hand, the abbreviation UK can refer to the United Kingdom, but because of the double-asterisk typically used to replace letters in swear words and the context, it can be at first glance associated with the well-known swearword FUCK, even though the particular letters have been transposed. This ambiguous exclamation refers to what is being mentioned in the Leaders of this same issue: "the moment the country finally grasped the mess it was in", shortly before the planned exit day, with both main parties divided over Brexit and the Prime Minister losing control over the situation and having done "the worst of a bad job".

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[29]   Cambridge Dictionary: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/silly (accessed 22/08/2022).

[30]   Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: "Britannia, allegory of a nation, emblem of empire, and patriotic icon":
https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-9000222 (accessed 11/03/2023).

The front page is characterised by dense symbolism (the British flag on the shield, an almost completely burnt EU flag and Britannia herself) and is a prime example of image dominance. The same technique of appropriation aimed at adopting and recontextualising recognisable images (cf. Zuschlag 2012) is applied in the above-mentioned examples each time the British flag or national symbols occur proving that the techniques discussed are often combined.

9. Discussion and final remarks

The main concern of the paper was to draw attention to the multimodal or cross-modal ways of generating humour in the Brexit-related media discourse. Summing up the results, it can be concluded that covers in general and especially the covers in question capture attention and generate humorous effects by employing skilfully arranged combinations of the verbal and visual mode. The verbal part may take precedence over the visual part, the visual part may be predominant, or both modes may contribute to the humorous effect in an equal way. At any rate, there are always additional layers of meaning conveyed by one of the codes.

To cause humorous effects, different constellations of multimodal relations are deployed such as analogy, addition/extension, antithesis, ambiguity and (visual) allusion/appropriation. All of them prove that the co-occurrence of both modes is a defining feature of magazine covers. However, as shown above, in the underlying research material visual elements seem to play a far greater role than the verbal. The headlines themselves ("The road to Brexit", "The negotiator", "Facing up to Brexit", "Why softer is better") often lack humour. On the other hand, the visual images themselves are often amusing, but accompanied by the verbal texts, they have a much more powerful, synergetic effect, especially when both codes form an antithesis or employ ambiguity. Notably, all the covers under study include rather short verbal messages easily accessible to the audience. One remarkable exception from this lexical brevity is the cover with the stylised map of the UK containing jocularly modified city names.

To return to visual images, the previous section has shown that the most striking feature is the recurrent choice of photographs or images that are increasingly "contrived and posed, using conventional symbols to illustrate the essence of an issue, rather than documenting newsworthy events" (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006: 30). The analysed covers are not a faithful record of the real world. On the contrary, they oversimplify reality and are overtly manipulative. They thus prove to be a primarily argumentative genre (cf. Tseronis 2018), whose main aim is to reflect or justify the stance of the magazine over a certain subject and fit into the profile of the target audience (cf. Tseronis 2015).

The analysed examples support what Kress and van Leeuwen observed in their outline of the grammar of visual design (2006: 30): "The shift from 'uncoded' naturalistic representations to stylized, conceptual images can be seen […] on the covers of news magazines, which used to be dominated by documentary photographs […] recording events, or portraying newsworthy people." In line with this, the covers in question are invariably photoshopped or designed in a cartoon-like or comic-like manner. They comprise one-panel captioned cartoons[31], with exaggerated emotional expressions of the characters, mostly incongruity resolution cartoons. The recurring characters (Theresa May and Boris Johnson), usually placed against a softer, blurred background, are easily recognisable and metonymically associated with Brexit (negotiations).

The conducted analysis has shown that addressing Brexit takes place from a fairly general perspective: Britain's withdrawal from the EU occurs as a self-destructive decision with no details provided (cf. Godioli & Pedrazzini 2019: 308), a result which is in line with Buckledee's claim that "[…] 'appeals to emotion and personal belief' were bound to have more impact on voters than facts and technical details that were beyond the grasp of most people" (2018: 151). In this context, Buckledee (2018), as well as Godioli and Pedrazzini (2019), call attention to the 'hyperbolic', 'powerful' language and passionate campaigning of the Brexit supporters compared with the 'dispassionate', 'at times spiritless' (cf. Buckledee 2018: 2, 168–169), and 'lacklustre' verbal rhetoric employed by the remainers (cf. Godioli & Pedrazzini 2019: 318–319). Buckledee (2018: 93, 208) also argues that the initially emotionless Remain campaign gained momentum after the final result of the Brexit referendum was known. The analysed covers do not reflect this contrast between the passionless pre- and impassioned post-Brexit language. For the sake of emphasis and arousing humorous effect, they present Brexit in a vivid, emotional or even hyperbolical way comparable to the Brexit opponents (cf. Godioli & Pedrazzini 2019: 320; Weaver 2022), of which the cover mentioned in the title of this paper is a paramount example.

It has been also demonstrated that the covers in question offer a "highly synthesized view of complex phenomena" and present "visually condensed idea[s] that […] [are] capable of captivating or shocking the reader" (Godioli & Pedrazzini 2019: 310). They are "concise, memorable mini-narrative[s]" (Godioli & Pedrazzini 2019: 310–311), whereby the most frequent scenarios draw on domains such as GAMES/SPORTS suggesting competition and control (Kövecses 2020: 176), or TRAVEL BY SEA/ROAD TRIP typical of the

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[31]   According to Samson and Huber (2007: 2–3), captioned cartoons are generally rated significantly funnier than independent ratings of pictures or captions. Furthermore, less compact cartoons tend to be perceived as funnier than those consisting of more panels.

conceptualization of long-lasting processes (cf. Musolff 2000) and long-term activities (Kövecses 2020: 174), These common metaphors permeating the (media) EU debate (cf. Morozova 2017; Musolff 2000, 2006; Godioli & Pedrazzini 2019; Đurović & Silaški 2019) re-emerge in new, humorous variations. This creative application of metaphors to new political circumstances is a characteristic feature of public discourse (cf. Musolff 2000). Interestingly enough, the conceptualisation of the EU as MARRIAGE/FAMILY/ RELATIONSHIP prevailing in the verbal discourse around Brexit (cf. Musolff 2006; Đurović & Silaški 2018) is not present in the analysed material, which is a notable difference between metaphor scenarios in the visual and verbal discourse about Brexit (cf. Godioli & Pedrazzini 2019: 314).

Finally, the conducted analysis has yielded the following trends:

1. Humorous effects are mostly generated by merging or co-presence of different techniques.
2. The audience plays a vital role in co-constructing humour by connecting the seemingly incongruous verbal and visual elements of the covers based on their background knowledge and cognitive capacity. Such co-constructions are frequently anchored intertextually and take the form of verbal and/or visual allusions to artefacts of popular culture such as songs, films and TV series. By relating to a shared repertoire of (general, popular, and cultural) knowledge they foster in-group solidarity (cf. Miglbauer & Koller 2021),
3. Creative use of various cultural artefacts (films, national symbols) is an important resource for humorous effects and demonstrates the verity of Hutcheon's (2006: 3) remark on the "postmodern age of cultural recycling".

Summing up the results, the covers discussed above are based on incongruity understood as a cognitive surprise and/or clash with the receiver's prior beliefs and expectations (cf. Forabosco 2008). They playfully address the viewers by asking them to perform a process of decoding by restoring the congruity between incompatible concepts. Humour in the analysed covers is conceived via (multiple) incongruities, triggered verbally ("The Silly Isles", "OH **UK! Whatever next?"), visually ("The road to Brexit", "Just another week in British politics") or verbo-visually ("Why softer is better", "Facing up to Brexit", "The negotiator", "Very rocky"). At any rate, the covers in question certainly illustrate the humourous potential of incongruity. The traditional humour theory based on the concept of incongruity seems to be a plausible conceptualisation and explanation of humour and a fertile ground for further research (cf. Dynel 2008; Forabosco 2008). On the other hand, humour serves as a coping strategy,

especially in adverse circumstances. Examples from the Brexit media coverage prove what Koestler (1964) called a 'safety valve' effect of humour, referring to the so-called relief theory. As Martin (2007) points out, humour facilitates coping with stress, pain and adversity and helps to alleviate frustration as is the case in "crisis jokes" (cf. Tsakona 2020) and Brexit-related live text commentaries analysed by Miglbauer and Koller (2021). This is in line with the incongruity theory: "Because it inherently involves incongruity and multiple interpretations, humor provides a way for the individual to shift perspective on a stressful situation, reappraising it from a new and less threatening point of view. As a consequence of this humorous reappraisal, the situation becomes less stressful and more manageable" (Martin 2007: 19).

In conclusion, Boukes' (2019: 6) observation on political satire that aims at "[…] critically examining political representatives" holds for political humour in general and the analysed covers in particular. The humour presented above as a way of expressing implicit criticism "[…] allows an escape from power structures, which removes any restrictions that journalists are confronted with" (Boukes 2019: 6).

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