

The Parallax View:

Mining Subjective Humour from Ironic Frame Collapse

Abstract

Humour is a highly subjective phenomenon. A joke that leaves some people clutching their ribs or slapping their thighs may leave others entirely cold, for humour divides audiences into those that “get” the joke and those that do not. This division is most often a side effect of humour, but with verbal irony it is usually the intended goal. An ironic speaker *wants* to be divisive, to divide audiences into an *in*-group that recognizes and agrees with the latent criticism of an ironic conceit, and an *out*-group whose beliefs it undermines. The humour of irony arises in large part from the parallax between the contrastive meanings that it double-deals to competing groups. In this talk I will model parallax as a frame collapse, in which a benign framing of listener expectations is shown to be unsustainable in the face of reality, or at least the reality portrayed by the speaker, and collapses into a competing and much less generous framing. I will explore two linguistic forms of this humorous frame collapse. The first is the figurative construction X is the Y of Z, which can be used to target X with comparisons to a Y that collapse under the weight of their own assumptions. In this way, X is damned not with faint but with *fierce* praise. The second is the classic joke pattern that combines a brief setup with a snappy punchline. In both cases I explore frame collapse from a computational perspective, to ask: how can we elicit creative wit from a machine, specifically a Large Language Model (LLM), by explicitly framing the problem in cognitive-linguistic terms? I will present this work in the context of my research in comics generation, to show how both textual and visual metaphors can be harnessed within machine creativity.

Keywords: irony, humour, metaphor, frames, comics

List of references

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