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ARTICLE

Humor Construction through Metaphor in a Stand-Up Comedy under Conceptual Blending Theory: A Case Study of *The King of Comedy*

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ABSTRACT

Humor is essential in daily life and as linguistic research advances, its mechanisms have attracted increasing scholarly attention. Metaphor as a fundamental way humans conceptualize the world plays a key role in constructing humor. And stand-up comedy, combining verbal artistry with social critique, offers rich naturalistic data for linguistic analysis. To better understand how humor can be constructed through metaphor, this study analyzes the Chinese stand-up comedy program *The King of Comedy*, using Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) as the analytical framework. The research aims to investigate how different types of metaphorical blending networks generate humor and to further explore the reasons behind the differences. Through a qualitative analysis of metaphorical humor drawn from the "pure performance" versions of the first three episodes, the study identifies four types of metaphorical blends: simplex networks, mirror networks, single-scope networks, and double-scope networks. The findings reveal that these networks construct humor through role reassignment, structural parallelism, frame dominance, and deep conceptual integration. Moreover, the study argues that the differences in humor construction paths can be attributed to two key factors: the depth of conceptual blending and the emergence of novel structures within the blended mental spaces. By illuminating the cognitive processes behind metaphorical humor, this study not only contributes to a more nuanced understanding of humor construction but also extends the application of CBT to the field of discourse analysis, particularly within the context of live stand-up comedy performances.

Keywords: Humor; Metaphor; Conceptual Blending Theory; Stand-Up Comedy; *The King of Comedy*

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1. Introduction

In human cognition and communication, metaphor plays a fundamental role, influencing the way people conceptualize abstract ideas and express complex meanings. In the realm of stand-up comedy, metaphor serves as a crucial device that enhances humor by blending different concepts. Drawing on Conceptual Blending Theory, this study examines the use of metaphorical humor to offer a new understanding of metaphor in comedic discourse.

Cultural historians and literary scholars have noted that humor and laughter have been integral to the communist discourse since the founding of the People's Republic of China. In daily conversations, humor serves numerous functions, including both positive and negative aspects. For instance, Koester[1] analyzes 60 instances of humor and finds five general functions: building a positive identity, defending one's positive face, showing convergence, negative politeness, and showing divergence. People often use humorous remarks to smooth interactions, ease their emotions, or simply for entertainment. Moreover, an individual's unique sense of humor is also connected to our personality. Tannen[2] argues that the use of humor is a key element of an individual's communication style, noting that it plays a significant role in making one's presence known.

While humor enriches daily interactions[3], it becomes a refined art in comedy settings such as stand-up comedy, where performers carefully craft jokes to resonate with the audience. In recent years, stand-up comedy, as an emerging art form, has got significant attention and become an increasingly popular form of entertainment, driven in part by the promotion of the idea that "everyone can perform five minutes of stand-up comedy"[4]. Unlike spontaneous humor, stand-up comedies represent a form of pre-planned humor, designed to achieve specific purposes and effects. Humor in stand-up comedies is often constructed using complex linguistic and cognitive techniques, with metaphorical humor serving as a key tool for conveying subtle meanings and relatable experiences. In this context, metaphorical humor is particularly effective, as it allows comedians to blend concepts and creatively enhance the comedic impact creatively. Thus, the use of metaphor in stand-up humor becomes a tool not only for amusement but also for deepening the audience's engagement and appreciation of the performance.

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on humor by examining it in contemporary stand-up comedy. Specifically, this research investigates how metaphor functions for humor construction within stand-up comedy. By examining metaphorical utterances under the framework of Conceptual Blending Theory, the study aims to uncover common patterns of metaphorical humor, thereby providing new insights into the cognitive mechanism of humor construction through metaphor

By employing Conceptual Blending Theory, this research explores how metaphorical humor functions cognitively, helping to illuminate how language constructs humor in stand-up comedies. First of all, it offers new insights into the workings of metaphorical humor. By identifying the types of metaphorical humor and analyzing their contribution to humorous effects, this research shows how metaphors are used to create humor and appeal to the audience in contemporary stand-up comedy through cognitive blending processes.

In this way, this study helps to better understand the modern metaphorical humor trend in Chinese media, potentially helping comedians, writers, and content creators refine their approaches to crafting humor. The findings may inform the creative process of comedians and content creators by highlighting patterns of metaphor use that tend to elicit humor. Additionally, it may help performers understand which kinds of metaphorical humor are more likely to succeed, thereby refining their content to enhance comedic impact. In a broader sense, the study reinforces the importance of creating humor through metaphor, which can convey complex ideas in accessible, relatable, and entertaining ways.

2. Literature Review

Humor is pervasive in human communication lack and has drawn attention from many different research areas. Within linguistics, humor has not only been studied for its entertaining function but also for its underlying mental processes, pragmatic strategies, and sociocultural functions.

2.1. Previous Studies

Studies in the cognitive field focus on interpreting the cognitive processes of the generation, comprehension, and appreciation of humor. Using foundational theories such as the Incongruity-Resolution (IR) Theory and Conceptual Blending Theory, cognitive researchers have provided in-

sightful discussions with regard to how the human brain constructs and responds to humor. The IR Theory is based on the early theoretical work by Kant and Schopenhauer, which argued that humor arises from incongruity or unexpected things. It was then further developed by Suls[5], who proposed a two-stage model. He claimed that the first stage is the identification of an incongruity and the second stage involves the resolution of this incongruity by reinterpreting the event in a different way so that the intended humorous effect is achieved. Building upon this foundation, Raskin[6] proposed the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH), which holds that humor is generated when a single text is compatible with two opposing semantic scripts. The punchline of a joke often involves a script shift, helping the audience to interpret the content in a different frame. This kind of humor highlights the importance of previous knowledge in the comprehension process.

Another important theory is the Conceptual Blending or Conceptual Integration Theory proposed by Fauconnier and Turner. Coulson[7] was the first to use Conceptual Integration Theory to explain how humor works. She looked at jokes in cartoons and radio programs and used brainwave tests (ERPs) to show that humor involves quickly switching and merging mental frames. Hu[8] and Wang[9], using the Conceptual Blending Theory, respectively analyzed the Chinese crosstalk and The Ellen DeGeneres Show. They both demonstrated the explanatory power of conceptual blending theory. The former study focused on how the comic effect is produced. Wang[10] confirmed that metaphors can contribute to the production of humor in practice and summarized the factors influencing people's understanding as well as the metaphors' functions in conversation.

Pragmatic studies of humor have been using theories like Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, Grice's Cooperative Principle, and Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory. These researches focus on how humor functions in real interaction situations, investigating its function in social interaction or in the fulfillment of certain communicative goals.

Wang[10] examined Russian humor through the lens of the Cooperative Principle and argued that humor often arises from the apparent violation or deliberate inversion of its four maxims. The study also identified six defining features commonly found in humorous language: incongruity, inconsistency, nonconformity, wit and appropriateness, implicitness and subtlety, and the contrast between defeat and victory. More recently, Deng[11] applied Appraisal Theory to analyze stance shifting in Chinese workplace-themed stand-up comedy using data from *The King of Comedy*. The study identifies patterns such as identity reconstruction and value inversion through which comedians subtly critique institutional power while maintaining audience alignment. This pragmatic approach highlights how performers strategically manage interpersonal meaning in comedic discourse.

Using Brown and Levinson's theory, He et al.[12] conducted a quantitative study and analyzed humorous mockery in Rock and Roast in terms of politeness. They show that politeness is a determining factor in the performers' selection of targets for their humorous utterances: when mocking others, contestants target only those who are close to them; when self-mocking, performers target their own looks or their public image. In addition, studies suggest that humor can function as a polite strategy in alleviating the negative effects of some sensitive comments or topics. Holmes[13] showed that it can help workers challenge their bosses or criticize their colleagues without causing offense.

Sociolinguistic researchers analyze how the use of humor reflects or constructs social identities and cultural norms. Here, humor is considered not only a linguistic phenomenon that is used to generate laughter but also a crucial part of social interactions, serving to reinforce or challenge certain societal structures. Scholars argue that comedians use humor to reflect and potentially reshape public opinion on issues ranging from race and gender to politics and religion[14, 15].

Zhao[4] analyzes ten stand-up comedy performances by four individuals with disabilities across five seasons of ROCK & ROAST, focusing on how individuals with disabilities construct their experience of disability through humor, and how such constructions reflect cultural norms and ideologies. From the perspective of disabled performers, disability humor expresses identities and experiences that are often overlooked by mainstream society, challenging and disrupting stereotypes associated with "disability". Also in the context of non-Western performance genres, Simile[16] analyzed Tanzanian stand-up comedy using script-based semantic theory, finding that comedians draw on oppositions such as tradition versus modernity and masculinity versus femininity to create culturally resonant humor through de-

vices including hyperbole, irony, and code-switching

Furthermore, there are also studies exploring the intersection of humor with factors such as gender and ethnicity. Greengross et al.[17] focused on the sex differences in humor production ability and did a systematic quantitative meta-analysis and men's humor output was rated as funnier than women's. Both evolutionary and social reasons were considered and discussed, which include sex differences in mating preferences and strategies. Also being a meta-analysis, Plessen et al.[18] investigate the associations between humor styles and the Big Five personality traits and further support this link, emphasizing the importance of humor styles for subjective well-being. Similarly, Weaver and Lockyer[19] applied an intersectional framework to contemporary stand-up comedy, revealing how comedians construct humor through the representation of intersecting race, gender, and sexuality, thereby challenging existing social hierarchies and inequalities.

2.2. Research Gaps

As discussed above, it can be seen that considerable research has been conducted related to humor from perspectives of cognitive, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic. However, the mechanism of metaphor-triggered humor remains relatively under-explored. Although cognitive theories such as the Incongruity-Resolution Theory and Script-based Semantic Theory have recognized metaphor as a linguistic and conceptual strategy to generate humor and the correspondence between humor and metaphor has been noted[20, 21], studies seldom closely investigate how metaphor functions as a core part in humor generation, especially in performance genres like stand-up comedy. This constitutes a key theoretical gap, as understanding the process and not merely the product is essential for advancing cognitive linguistic accounts of humor.

Despite a number of studies that employed the Conceptual Blending Theory to analyze metaphor-based humor, they are usually based on isolated examples, film dialogues, or television shows. Moreover, most existing research has been focused on Western contexts, leaving metaphorical humor in live performance settings in non-Western societies largely under-studied. Furthermore, few studies have systematically analyzed how different types of metaphorical blends generate humor in different ways.

This research addresses these gaps by focusing on the data from a Chinese stand-up comedy competition program. Stand-up comedy is a performance in which a single standing performer engages with the audience through comedic behavior and/or humorous speech, without relying on properties such as costumes, settings, or other dramatic devices[22]. During this kind of performance, speakers often use various rhetorical devices to create humor, among which metaphor is a very important one, but it has not been fully examined by previous studies. Therefore, by employing the Conceptual Blending Theory, this study aims to explore not only the types of metaphor involved in generating humor but also to investigate how their integration structure contributes differently to the humorous effect. In doing so, it offers new insights into the cognitive mechanisms of humor in spontaneous, performative contexts. Unlike prior studies, this study contributes a cognitive account of how humor is constructed through blending operations. In doing so, it extends the application of Conceptual Blending Theory to Chinese stand-up comedy, a genre that has received limited empirical attention in cognitive linguistics.

3. Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT), also called Conceptual Integration Theory, serves as the theoretical foundation of this study. It derives from two traditions within cognitive semantics: Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Mental Spaces Theory[23]. CBT provides a cognitive mechanism for understanding meaning construction, particularly in creative and non-literal language use. It describes how multiple mental spaces interact dynamically to generate emergent meaning, making it a suitable framework for analyzing metaphorical humor in stand-up comedy.

CBT posits that human cognition relies on the ability to integrate information from different conceptual domains through mental spaces—temporary, structured representations of knowledge activated during thought and communication. Fauconnier[24] and Fauconnier and Turner[25, 26] explain that conceptual integration involves combining two or more input spaces that share structural similarities, which are abstracted in a generic space. These inputs are merged into a blended space that selectively inherits elements from the original inputs while also generating novel structures not present in either source. According to him, such integration

networks are built upon ordinary mental spaces and allow for the emergence of new meanings through dynamic cognitive processes. The network model mainly focuses on the real-time and dynamic cognitive processes through which individuals construct meaning to serve immediate purposes in thinking and interaction [25]. The Basic Diagram in the following **Figure 1** illustrates the central features of conceptual blending.

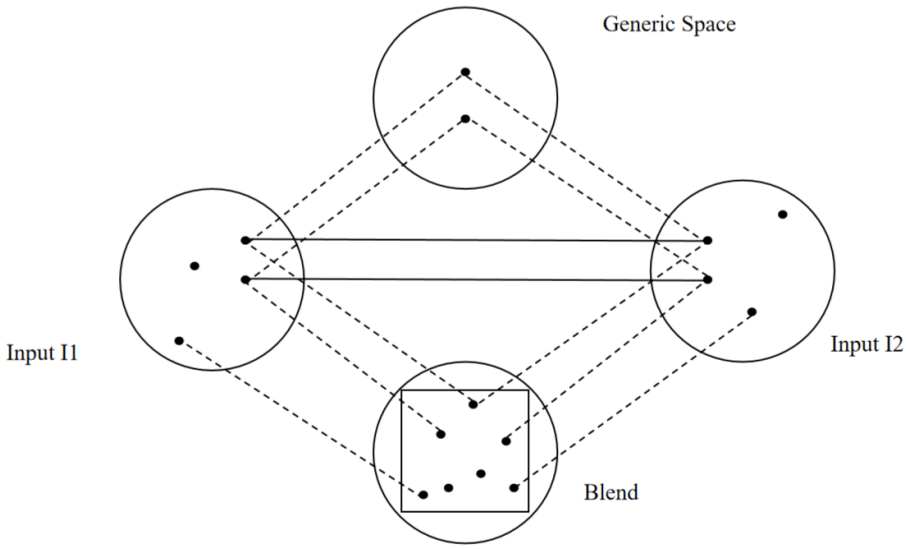

Figure 1. The Basic Diagram.

The circles in **Figure 1** represent mental spaces, which are small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action [25, 26]. There are usually two input mental spaces in a network. In the process of understanding metaphors, the two input spaces are similar to the two domains in Conceptual Metaphor Theory and there exists a mapping relationship between the two. There are partial counterpart connections between input spaces, which are represented by the solid lines. These connections are various, including links between frames and their roles, identity relations, transformations, representations, and metaphorical associations. The shared structure between the input spaces forms what is referred to as the generic space, which maintains a mapping relationship with each input space throughout the blending process. Structural elements from the two inputs are selectively projected into a third space known as the blended space, and this projection is typically partial rather than complete. The emergent structure of the blend, represented by the square in the blend, is not merely a sum of its inputs but a new reconfiguration.

Three basic processes are included in the conceptual blending which gives rise to the emergent structure: composition, completion, and elaboration. In composition, blending composes elements from the input spaces, providing relations that do not exist in the separate inputs [25]. Besides, it also involves the fusion of elements from the inputs. Completion refers to the recruitment of a range of background conceptual structures and knowledge to complete the composed structure. In other words, when the entities in two inputs are projected into the blend, related knowledge as well as cultural information will be activated. Elaboration refers to the simulated mental performance in the blend, which is developed according to principles and logic in the blend [21]. Blended spaces can become extremely elaborated.

The diverse configurations of mental spaces give rise to a wide range of integration networks. Among these, four primary types are particularly significant: simplex, mirror, single-scope, and double-scope networks. A simplex network consists of two input spaces: one provides an abstract frame, while the other supplies specific values to be fitted into that frame. In this type of network, the cross-space mapping between the input spaces is a Frame-to-values connection [26]. For example, in the sentence “Paul is the father of Sally”, one input contains a family frame and the other contains two human beings as values. Through the cross-space mapping, the role father is connected to the value Paul and the role daughter to the value Sally, and in the blended space, Paul is the father of Sally.

In the mirror network, all the spaces share an organizing frame. Different from an abstract frame like competition, an organizing frame for a mental space is "a frame that specifies the nature of the relevant activity, events, and participants"[26]. Usually, the common organizing frame of the network exists in a richer frame that only the blend has. In the sentence "I claim that reason is a self-developing capacity. Kant disagrees with me on this point", all mental spaces share the organizing frame of a philosopher musing on a problem and it's further elaborated as philosophers debate about a problem in the blend.

In a single-scope network, although the two input spaces possess distinct organizing frames, only one of these frames is projected onto the blended space. This means that the conceptual structure of the blend is shaped by an extension of a single input frame, while the other input contributes content without influencing the overall organization. Consider this example: "Microsoft has finally delivered the knock-out punch to its rival Netscape"[24]. One input involves a boxing frame, where the first boxer knocks out the second. The other input features a business frame with two competitors and Microsoft captures Netscape's market share. Only the boxing frame is projected to the blend, where Microsoft and Netscape become two boxers.

A double-scope network also involves input spaces with distinct organizing frames. However, unlike the single-scope network, the blended space in this case incorporates elements from both input frames and gives rise to an emergent structure that is not fully present in either of the original inputs. Consider the familiar idiomatic metaphor "You are digging your own grave"[26] or "You are digging your own financial grave" when a businessman who is considering taking out a loan that stretches his business excessively is warned by someone. At first glance, this conventional expression appears to be a single-scope network, where the organizing frame of graves, corpses, and burial is projected to structure the blend. However, with further examination, it could be discovered that digging a grave doesn't cause death but is usually a response to someone's death while the excessive loan may lead to failure. However, in the blended space, the grave digging causes the death (business failure), which means that it integrates structures from both input spaces: the causality from the business frame and the actions from the grave digging frame.

4. Research Methodology

In stand-up comedy, the process that metaphor generates humor is particularly dynamic, as comedians blend different conceptual spaces in real time to engage their audiences and provoke laughter. The current study aims to explore how humor is generated within this context, focusing on the types of metaphorical humor used and how these blends contribute to the comedic effect. The following content shows the research methods of the current study, including the key research questions, the introduction of the data source, the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), and the data analysis process.

4.1. Research Questions

Based on the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, this thesis focuses on the metaphor in humor construction, particularly within the context of Chinese stand-up comedy, adopting the Conceptual Blending Theory. In particular, it seeks to explore how different types of metaphorical blends contribute to humor differently, which has received little attention in existing studies. By focusing on both the mechanisms of humor construction and the reasons for variation across different blend types, this study aims to offer new insights into metaphorical humor.

Accordingly, the following research questions are proposed.

1. What are the types of metaphorical humor, and in what ways do the conceptual blending processes of those metaphors contribute to the humor?
2. What accounts for the variation in humorous effects across different types of metaphorical blends?

4.2. Data Collection

For this study, primary data were collected from *The King of Comedy* on iQIYI, a recently aired stand-up comedy show that had gained widespread popularity and sparked significant discussion on platforms like Weibo. The choice of this show was based on its broad audience appeal and abundance of humorous utterances. According to data released by iQIYI's official Weibo, the program's peak popularity on the iQIYI platform exceeded 9,400, ranking as the top trending iQIYI variety show in 2024 and achieving

the second-highest peak popularity for an iQIYI-exclusive variety show in its history. Moreover, since it was recently aired and enjoyed wide popularity, the language used in this show reflects mainstream language usage and is neither outdated nor limited to a certain audience. As for the collection of appropriate data, the pure performance version of the first three episodes (which includes only the contestants' performances, excluding judges' comments and contestants' interactions) was transcribed into texts. Only the first three episodes were analyzed in the present study. They were selected for their thematic diversity and high density of metaphor-driven humor. While a larger corpus could potentially yield more generalizable patterns, the objective of this study is not statistical generalization but theoretical explication, specifically, to demonstrate how metaphor triggers humorous effects through conceptual blending in stand-up comedy. As such, a focused case study design is methodologically appropriate and has also been adopted in previous cognitive linguistic research on humor.

4.3. Data Analysis

To address the research questions, metaphorical humor needs to be identified. Considering the large amount of humorous utterances, metaphorical expressions were identified first. In terms of metaphor identification methods, although some progress has been made in the development of automatic programs [27, 28], the manual analysis of linguistic data remains the most flexible and widely used approach to metaphor identification [29–31].

The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), proposed by the Pragglejaz Group in 2007, offers a systematic, consistent, and adaptable method for detecting metaphorical word usage within a given context. It has been applied in children's metaphorical language acquisition [32], poetry analysis [33], and newspaper analysis [34], and for each lexical unit, its contextual meaning is identified. Then, it is examined to determine whether it has a more basic meaning in other contexts, which is typically easier to imagine, related to bodily actions, or has existed for a longer time. If such a basic meaning exists, the next step is to assess whether the contextual meaning deviates from it while remaining understandable. If so, the lexical unit is marked as metaphorical. In this study, words or fixed expressions with multiple characters are treated as lexical items because in Chinese single characters often lack independent meaning and require combination to form complete expressions.

MIP's structured approach enhances reliability in identifying metaphorical language, making it a valuable tool for identifying metaphorical humor in stand-up comedies [29]. Considering the nature of humor in stand-up comedy, which often involves quick, contextually embedded metaphors, the straightforward criteria of MIP provide an effective and reliable framework for capturing metaphorical elements essential to the Conceptual Blending Theory analysis. The procedure is demonstrated using the following example:

> 我算是义乌为数不多的进口货吧。(Example 1, E1 S10 No.45)
> I guess I'm one of the few imported goods in Yiwu. (Translation of Example 1)

First, a general understanding of the whole text is established. The speaker is a foreigner born in China, and Yiwu is known as a major export city. Given this context, imported goods are relatively rare, making the speaker's statement notable.

Next, the sentence is segmented into lexical units as follows:

> 我/算是/义乌/为数不多的/进口货/吧。

In this case, the lexical unit "进口货" (imported goods) contextually refers to the speaker himself, whereas its basic meaning refers to actual imported goods. Since the speaker is metaphorically comparing himself to goods, this utterance is classified as a metaphor.

After metaphorical expressions were identified, those with humorous effects were then selected based on the reactions from judges and the audience, such as laughter, body language, or voting responses. According to He et al. [12], a humorous instance typically involves a description of a mini-event and then a punch line, which is signaled by a brief pause after it for a reaction from the audience. So it's relatively easy to identify the instances of metaphorical humor.

To ensure the reliability and transparency of the selection process, three specific criteria were applied: (1) Linguistic cue: The utterance contains a metaphorical expression identifiable through conceptual mapping; (2) Audience response cue: The utterance elicits an immediate humorous reaction from the live audience or judges (e.g., laughter, ap-

plause, or exaggerated body movements); (3) Pragmatic cue: The utterance is followed by a noticeable pause, indicating the delivery of a punch line. Only instances that satisfied all three criteria were included for further analysis.

Once identified, these metaphorical humorous expressions were then analyzed within the framework of Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT), which allowed for a better understanding of how metaphorical humor is constructed[30]. To ensure the reliability of the analysis, the coding process was conducted collaboratively among the authors. The first author initially identified and coded instances of metaphorical humor based on the selection criteria described above. The coding results were then independently reviewed by the second and third authors. Any discrepancies or ambiguities in the coding were discussed and resolved through consensus. This collaborative approach helped minimize individual bias and enhance the consistency of the analytical outcomes.

5. Findings

As has been introduced in the previous content, in the blending process, key concepts include input mental spaces, generic space, blend, cross-space mapping of counterpart selective projection, and emergent structure. In the following sections, the previously identified metaphorical humors are analyzed, accompanied by corresponding diagrams to facilitate understanding, accompanied by the analysis of humor construction through conceptual blending.

5.1. The Types of Metaphorical Humor

In this thesis, a total of 168 metaphorical expressions have been identified in the first three episodes of *The King of Comedy*, with 149 of them having humorous effects. Performances from 56 speakers were analyzed, which means that on average each speaker would employ approximately 2.7 metaphorical expressions in his or her stand-up comedy performance and most of them are humorous. Given that their performances typically last for around five minutes, it is evident that metaphors play a notable role in their humorous delivery.

After a detailed analysis of these metaphorical humors in terms of their mental spaces and the conceptual blending processes, four distinct types of integration networks were identified, which were consistent with the four prominent types described by Fauconnier and Turner[26]. Below, each of the four types of integration networks will be discussed individually, with the cognitive processes analyzed, and diagrams provided for illustration.

5.1.1. Simplex Network

The simplex network is the simplest type, which has two inputs, one containing a frame with roles and the other containing elements that serve as values. The following example, taken from Episode 2, Speaker 10, Utterance No. 89, helps to illustrate this type.

She said, "Rent first, then buy? Haven't you read *Rickshaw Boy*? Yu Xiangyu, if you rent a car, you're done for. You'll just end up working for others forever. **You might as well drop the name 'Xiangyu'—just call yourself Xiangzi."** (Translation of Example 2, E2 S10 No. 89)

The speaker wanted to rent a car but his girlfriend immediately rejected the idea, referencing *Rickshaw Boy*. By comparing him to the protagonist, whose name is similar to his, she warns that renting a car may keep him working for others without personal progress, creating a humorous effect.

In this metaphorical expression, input 1 contains "the speaker" as a value and input 2 has a frame of *Rickshaw Boy* and a role of the protagonist Xiangzi, as shown in **Figure 2** below. Through cross-space mapping, the speaker and the protagonist are linked together and projected into the blend. Then in the process of COMPLETION, background knowledge is activated, which is mainly about the book, i.e., the frame. *Rickshaw Boy* is a classic Chinese novel written by Lao She. It tells the story of Xiangzi, who is a hardworking and ambitious rickshaw puller in Beijing who dreams of owning his own rickshaw but ends up being trapped in endless labor. The novel is widely known to Chinese audiences, making the comparison cognitively accessible and the humorous effect immediately recognizable.

Then at the stage of ELABORATION, the speaker's name and the protagonist both have the character "xiang (祥)" in their name, and the performer wants to do a similar thing: rent the car first and then buy it, all of which makes him very much like the protagonist. So in the blend, the speaker himself as a value fits into the frame of the book *Rickshaw Boy* and fuses with the role of Xiangzi, as can be seen in the following **Figure 2**. This integration illustrates what Fauconnier and Turner[25] term "frame-to-value" map-

ping, where a specific element (the speaker) fills a culturally established role (Xiangzi), generating humor through the unexpected alignment of personal identity with a tragic literary figure.

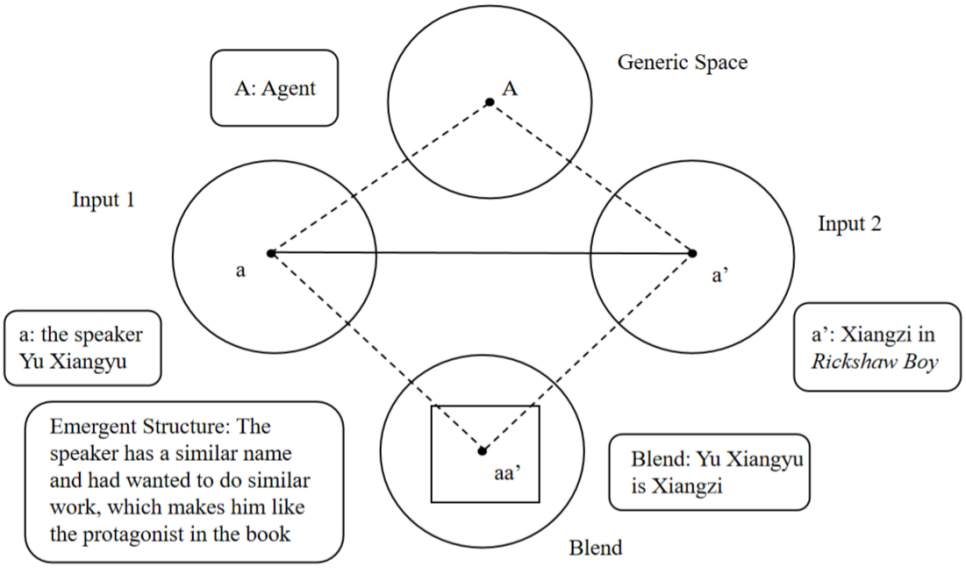

Figure 2. The Network of Example 2.

This type of network appears in the data set often, with a percentage of 19.5%, suggesting that this frame-to-value mapping is a common strategy in metaphorical humor construction. This structure is effective because it can assign many different roles, behaviors, or abstract ideas to another thing.

5.1.2. Mirror Network

The network is called mirror network by Fauconnier and Turner because the multiple mental spaces all share a common organizing frame, despite some differences in specific details. The example below is from Episode 2, Speaker 1, Utterance No. 67.

Well, how should I put it? Our job in property management is kind of like playing soccer—you don't really need any special skills. **As long as you can take the hits, you're good. If you can handle the scolding, you can make money.** (Translation of Example 3, E2 S1 No. 67)

In this piece of utterance, the speaker compares her job to the playing football games. As shown in **Figure 3**, both input spaces share the same organizing frame of "professionals enduring criticism while earning income," with only specific elements differing between the two domains. During COMPOSITION, the similarities between property management workers and football players are mapped, framing them as professionally alike. COMPLETION draws on background knowledge: football players in China are criticized for poor performance but earn high salaries, just like property management workers who face complaints but still earn wages. In ELABORATION, the speaker humorously compares property management to professional football, offering a critique that both can profit despite incompetence, as long as they endure public disapproval.

Mirror network is the least common type of metaphorical humor in the first three episodes, making up only 11.4%. This may be due to the fact that they do not introduce the kind of conceptual contrast or incongruity that humor often relies on. Although this type of mapping can be useful for drawing parallels between similar situations, it sometimes lacks the element of surprise that makes other metaphorical structures more effective in comedy.

5.1.3. Single-Scope Network

The metaphor, which has a single-scope network, blends two inputs with distinct organizing frames, where one frame structures the interpretation of the metaphor. In the following example from Episode 3, Speaker 8, Utterance No. 147, the visually impaired speaker humorously likens a staff member's panicked reaction to a computer crashing.

I was just about to explain when the guy explained that

I was blind. The staff member immediately panicked. **Have you ever seen a person crash? Not the kind where they freeze and stop moving, but the kind where they get a virus and pop-ups start going crazy**—"**Blind**, Blind..." (Translation of Example 4, E3 S8 No. 147)

The speaker humorously describes him as a crashed computer. In this metaphor, Input 1 involves people's reactions while Input 2 involves a computer crash, as shown in **Figure 4**. Through cross-space mapping, elements from the two spaces and the computer frame are connected and projected into the blend during COMPOSITION. At the COMPLETION stage, everyday knowledge fills in the details: a person may freeze and repeat words when faced with difficulty, similar to a virus-infected computer spamming pop-ups. This mapping makes the metaphor intuitive and easy to understand. In the ELABORATION process, the blend of "the staff member acting like a crashed computer" enhances the humor, comparing the staff member's repeated exclamations to a flood of pop-ups, creating a vivid, exaggerated image. This imaginative framing turns a simple moment of panic into an amusing, dramatized scene.

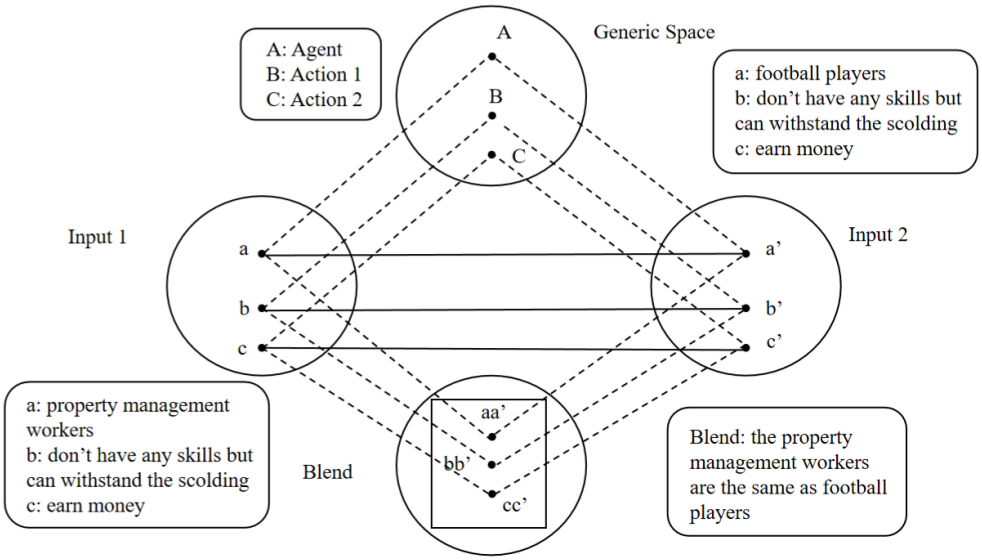

Figure 3. The Network of Example 3.

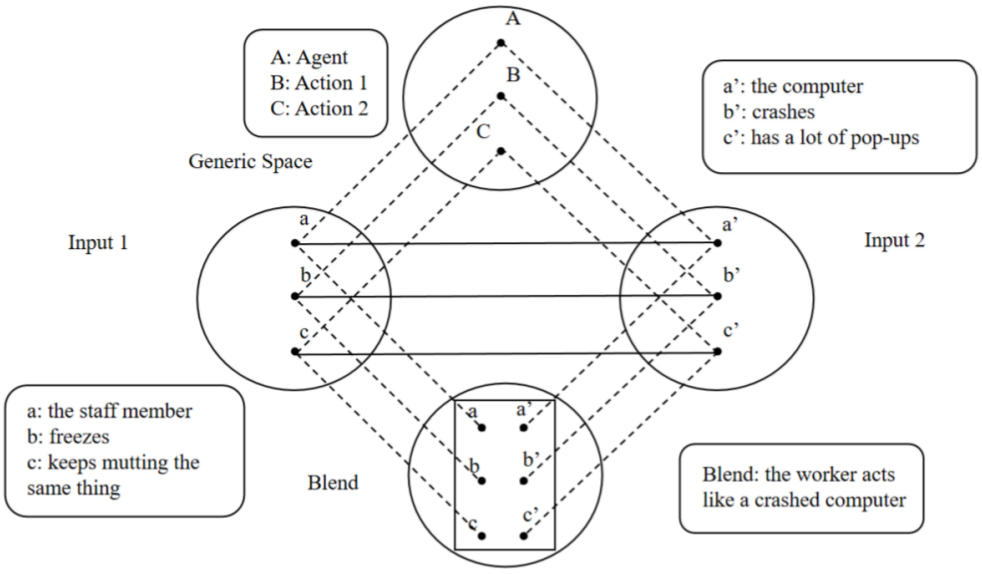

Figure 4. The Network of Example 4.

Metaphor with single-scope network is the most common type in the data, accounting for 51.0% of all instances. It shows how humor often stems from mapping one conceptual frame onto another to form a surprising yet coherent blend. Its strong contrast and quick comprehension make it ideal for stand-up, where timing is important.

5.1.4. Double-Scope Network

This type of metaphor combines elements from two input spaces with different organizing frames, creating a blend that incorporates aspects of both frames and generates a new emergent structure. So it's called double-scope network by Fauconnier and Turner. The following example is from Episode 3, Speaker 7, Utterance No. 55.

My oppa loves sending me selfies—basically just pictures of his torso. After sending them, he always adds a line: "Well? Handsome, right? A shrimp-style boyfriend." I always have to reply, "Oppa, **you're so handsome, so lifelike. The one taking your photos wouldn't happen to be Qi Baishi, would they?"** (Translation of Example 5 E3 S7 No. 145)

"Shrimp-style boyfriend," an internet slang, refers to those with a well-shaped body but a less attractive face, drawing a metaphor to shrimp, which is typically eaten without the head. This metaphor helps understand the following one and has a simplex network, so it won't be analyzed in detail here. The speaker describes her interaction with a man online and how she replies to his photo. Building on the shrimp metaphor, the speaker complicates the network by introducing the element of Qi Baishi.

The two inputs here contain different frames, i.e., the photo-taking frame and the drawing frame, and they are both projected into the blend. The corresponding elements are connected and projected into the blend. After this COMPOSITION process, more information and background knowledge are involved to better develop this metaphor at the stage of COMPLETION. It's commonly known that Qi Baishi is a famous Chinese artist known for his vivid and lifelike paintings of animals, particularly shrimps. Also, we're aware that the photographer can't capture some people in the shape of an animal.

Then, in the ELABORATION process, the blend creates humor by exaggerating the comparison. In the new structure, photos taken by Qi Baishi are also very vivid and lifelike, just like his drawing and the man looks just like a living shrimp, which is obviously absurd and thus funny. So here is the blend: the man looks so much like a shrimp in the photo that it seems it's Qi Baishi who takes the photo, as shown in **Figure 5**. The absurdity of suggesting that a selfie could be as lifelike as a master artist's work also adds a playful and ironic twist, making the metaphor both surprising and funny.

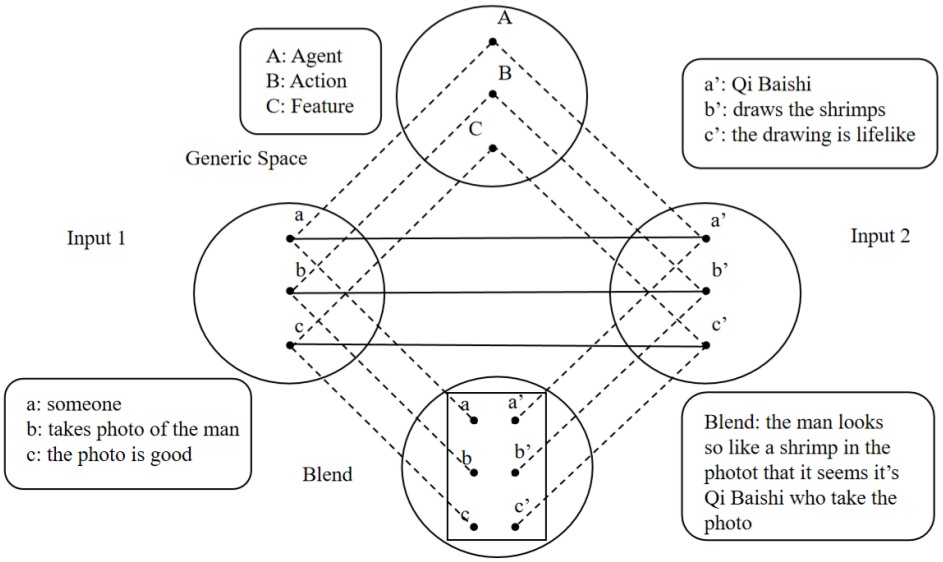

Figure 5. The Network of Example 5.

This complex metaphor type appears in 18.1% of the data, similar to simplex networks. The strength of it lies in forming unexpected links between unrelated ideas, making the humor more original and thought-provoking. The lower

frequency may reflect comedians' need to balance audience processing effort with comedic impact.

5.2. Humor Construction across Different Types of Conceptual Blending Networks

Conceptual blending theory provides a framework for understanding how humor emerges from the cognitive integration of distinct mental spaces. And it can be seen that the humorous effect is often generated by metaphor through the re-construction of certain conventional structures and the formation of unexpected mental integration. This section mainly focuses on how different types of blending networks contribute to the humor construction in *The King of Comedy*.

5.2.1. Simplex Networks: Reassigning Identity with Comic Surprise

In simplex networks, humor typically emerges when the speaker reassigns identity or role unexpectedly, leading to a kind of reclassification that challenges audience expectations. Following the frame-to-value mapping mechanism identified by Fauconnier and Turner[25, 26], it imposes some abstract and conventional frames onto some more concrete and unconventional values, generating surprising mismatch or absurdity. This finding aligns with Nahi's[35] recent analysis of conceptual blending in stand-up comedy, which demonstrates that semantic networks formed through blending processes across disparate mental spaces are enhanced during humor appreciation.

For example, in "I should call my business trips exiles" (No. 32), the speaker fits his job into the frame of a kind of historical punishment frame of exile, assigning a new role (exile) to a familiar element (business trip), creating humor through absurd redefinition. Similarly, in "I'm one of the few imported goods in Yiwu" (No. 45), the speaker maps human self-identity onto commodity categories, treating a person within a commercial frame, which is absolutely absurd.

What distinguishes simplex humor from other types is its emphasis on providing a certain framework for values in another input mental space. They may seem unrelated on the surface and it's likely that the audience has never linked the two things together. But through assigning that element a surprising identity within an existing frame, the performer succeeds in achieving comic absurdity and a kind of reframement of familiar things.

5.2.2. Mirror Networks: Parallels within Shared Frames

Mirror networks involve input spaces that share the same organizing frame, allowing for structural alignment between corresponding elements. The humor here often arises when the audience finds a surprising similarity between the two input spaces, noting that certain familiar structure can be used to interpret another situation. This kind of covered parallelism produces humor by revealing a kind of cognitive symmetry that is unexpected yet resonant. Unlike simplex networks, which introduce incongruity through role-value mismatches, mirror-network humor usually derives from unexpected mappings within the same structural frame. As Colston[36] argues in his analysis of humorous analogies, the humor lies not in what is being compared but in the realization that such a comparison can be made at all, challenging the audience's assumptions and rewarding them with a sense of cleverness or irony.

Consider the line "You get what you pay for. You paid for an ordinary phone, so why are you expecting iPhone quality?" (No. 38). By comparing the boss's requirement for a high-quality joke as expecting the quality of iPhone and the wage that he gives as the money paid for an ordinary phone under the same transaction framework, the audience could link the boss's absurd behavior with more common behavior, buying a phone. Spotting the uniformity between the two behaviors generates funny results. Similarly, "I made you hike 10 km to see trash" (No. 29) compares a long comedic setup with a disappointing punchline to a literal exhausting journey ending in garbage, using the shared frame of a purposeful journey to draw humor.

These mirror blends emphasize alignment and collapse: when two structurally similar domains are mapped onto each other, the failure or reversal in one becomes comic when mirrored in the other.

5.2.3. Single-Scope Networks: Overextension of a Dominant Frame

In single-scope networks, one input provides the organizing frame and offers the dominant structure and humor often arises from the over-extension of features and structure from one input while suppressing the other's logic.

For instance, "My dad probably thought this account

was ruined, so I was born that year" (No. 71) uses the frame of video games to interpret personal life decisions, reducing the decision to have a child to creating a new account in a game. The humor comes from the absurdity of treating a child simply as an account, which neglects the real logic of rearing a child. Similarly, "You say something to him, and the response just echoes back. I say: 'I'm unhappy.' And it returns being 'Happy, happy, happy.'" (No. 74) applies the acoustic reflection frame of a mountain to the father, which is a clever extension of the common metaphor "A father's love is mountain-like". It points out the similarity between a father and a mountain from a novel perspective, not eulogizing the solidity of a father's love but emphasizing how he doesn't understand what the child feels.

Single-scope blends thus produce humor by applying one dominant logic or frame to a domain where it clearly doesn't belong, inviting audiences to laugh at the absurdity and inappropriateness of the mapping.

5.2.4. Double-Scope Networks: Deep Conceptual Integration

Double-scope network is the most complex one, as it involves two distinct frames, both contributing to a blended space. These blends often yield the most surprising and intellectually engaging humor because new structures are created. Unlike single-scope networks which prioritize one single input, double-scope humor arises from the fusion of both domains.

For instance, "I have money that passes by my door three times without entering." (No. 55) integrates the speaker's financial situation with the myth of Yu the Great. The blend creates a contrast between the speaker's everyday problem and the legendary sacrifice, leading to an amusing effect. As Coulson and Oakley[37] explains in her framework of frame-shifting, such blends require the audience to actively construct a new conceptual structure that integrates potentially conflicting frames. The emergent structure creates a novel image of money as a person with a noble, mission, always in a hurry but never entering the speaker's life for long. Similarly, in "The one taking your photos wouldn't happen to be Qi Baishi, would they", the photo-taking and picture-drawing frames are fused together, generating a creative and somehow absurd meaning of the photo taken by Qi Baishi, which could be very vivid as he is good at drawing.

So double-scope network generates humor not only by mapping familiar elements but also by generating an entirely new conceptual structure that offers interesting points to the audience and challenges their imagination. Therefore, the cognitive effort required is also greater, offering a richer amusement.

6. Discussion

Having outlined the primary findings of this study in the previous section, this chapter shifts to the discussion of the reasons behind the difference in humor generation. By situating the findings within the broader context of metaphor research and humor studies, this section aims to explore the relationship between these findings and existing literature, providing a deeper understanding of the cognitive mechanisms of the metaphorical humor.

6.1. Four Different Types of Metaphorical Humor

As discussed in the last section, four different types were identified and the number of metaphorical humor in each type was counted. **Table 1** shows the number and percentage of those metaphors in the four different integration networks.

Table 1. The Number of Metaphorical Humors across the Four Distinct Types.

Classification	Number	Percentage
Simplex network	29	19.5%
Mirror network	15	10.0%
Single-scope network	78	52.4%
Double-scope network	27	18.1%
Total	149	100%

The statistics in **Table 1** suggest that single-scope networks are the most frequently employed type of metaphorical humor, accounting for 52.4% of all instances identified in the first three episodes. Simplex networks and double-scope

networks are used to a lesser extent, comprising 19.5% and 18.1% of the total, respectively. Mirror networks are the least common, making up only 11.4% of the metaphorical humors. This distribution indicates a strong preference for single-scope networks in the construction of metaphorical humor within stand-up comedy performances. As Fauconnier and Turner[38] noted, the single-scope network is the prototype of highly conventional source-target metaphors. In this kind of metaphor, the input that provides the organizing frame for the blend, known as the framing input, is often called the "source," while the input being interpreted within this framework, known as the focus input, is typically referred to as the "target." The dominance of the single-scope metaphor in this study aligns with their observation, which further confirms the applicability of this theory, and it also resonates with Xu[39]'s study on internet memes. He further argues that "integration intensity is positively correlated with meme transmission efficacy," a finding that parallels the present study's observation that single-scope networks balance cognitive accessibility with creative impact. This finding is also consistent with recent research by Deng[11], who found that workplace-themed stand-up comedy frequently relies on single-scope framing devices to construct power dynamics and social critique.

6.2. Reasons for the Variation in Humor Construction across Blending Types

Metaphor-based humor is not uniformly generated across all types of conceptual blends. Different integration networks structure meaning differently, which can be attributed to the degree of conceptual integration and the presence or absence of emergent novelty in the blend. As Coulson and Oakley[37] argue, the humorous effect of conceptual blends is closely tied to the degree of structural complexity and the nature of the emergent structure generated in the blending process.

For simplex networks, the integration is very simple and largely one-directional, in which the element from one input is reassigned to another frame. This type of integration involves what Fauconnier and Turner[25] describe as "frame-to-value" mapping, where a role from one frame is filled by an element from another input. The resulting blend does not possess emergent novelty. Thus, humor is constructed mainly through identity misplacement, which relies on the audience's recognition of the incongruity between the expected and the assigned frame. Similarly, a mirror network also involves relatively simple integration among different networks and lacks emergent novelty. However, it does have the same frame in the two inputs, creating a parallel structure between the two scenarios. As Colston[36] observes in his analysis of humorous analogies, mirror network humor arises from the recognition of structural alignment between two domains that are not typically associated. The humor here comes from the recognition of the similarity between the two scenarios in the mental spaces that the listeners may have never thought of before.

In contrast, a single-scope network has a moderate degree of integration among the mental spaces, in which one input provides the organizing frame for the other and humor mainly comes from this kind of overextension of a conventional conceptual structure into an unexpected domain[26]. Although this network does not fully generate novel emergent structure, the frame in the blend is usually more elaborated than that of the input space as more background knowledge is added through what Brandt and Brandt[40] term "semantic tension" between the two inputs. So single-scope networks move beyond mere parallelism in that they create exaggerated reinterpretation of the concept being discussed. This type of humor construction aligns with the finding of Krasikova and Korovina[41] that linguistic ambiguity and conceptual opposition account for the majority of humorous devices in anecdotal discourse.

Double-scope network, being the most complex one, possesses the highest level of integration and is the only kind of conceptual integration that generates novel emergent structure. In this type, both input spaces contribute to the blend not only in the elements but also in their structures, and the fusion of their otherwise incompatible structures creates new meaning that neither input space could have alone. This complex process, as Coulson[7] demonstrates in her analysis of frame-shifting in humor, requires the audience to actively construct a new conceptual structure that integrates potentially conflicting frames. Such a complex process leads to a humorous effect that is characterized by greater creative novelty and a higher degree of cognitive engagement from the audience.

In summary, the different humor construction across the four blending types of metaphorical humor can be attributed

to the different structural integration degree and the novelty that the blend allows. These differences shape the cognitive mechanism of how the the metaphorical humor is built in stand-up comedy.

7. Conclusions

This study investigated the use of metaphorical humor in the first three episodes of *The King of Comedy* under the theoretical framework of conceptual blending theory. In the following parts, the major findings of this research, research significance and limitations as well as directions for future research will be discussed.

7.1. Major Findings

To start with, the thesis figured out four distinct types of metaphorical humor based on the blending structure analysis under the Conceptual Blending Framework. The four types are: single-scope network, double-scope network, simplex network, and mirror network. Each type utilizes a different blending mechanism, yet all contribute significantly to the overall humor. These types of metaphorical humor reflect the show's rich use of conceptual blending to create humor in varied and dynamic ways.

Also, this research revealed that the above-mentioned different types of networks construct humor in distinct ways. For simplex networks, humor is built mainly through role reassignment, in which some familiar frames are applied to other notions. In mirror networks, when the audience spots unexpected similarities or parallelism between two domains that share an organizing structure, humor may arise. Single-scope networks construct humor by extending the dominant frame from one input and creating over-generalization or conceptual mismatch. Lastly, the most complex double-scope networks generate humor through deep integration among the mental spaces and the fusion of the distinct structures in them. Reasons behind this difference have also been discussed and it's mainly because of the different degrees of conceptual integration and the presence or absence of emergent novelty.

7.2. Implications and Limitations

First of all, this study further confirms that metaphor plays a significant role in humor production, which may expand the perspective of humor study, offering a cognitive perspective that complements existing research. Also, the findings offer valuable insights into the ways in which conceptual integration networks contribute distinctively to humorous effects of stand-up performances. The findings also demonstrate how different types of conceptual integration networks contribute distinctively to humorous effects, providing performers with practical insights into crafting more effective comedic material. By adopting Conceptual Blending Theory, this study further illustrates how the theory can be applied to interpret humorous language in a dynamic and comprehensive manner. These insights are beneficial not only for stand-up comedians but also for humor studies more broadly.

One limitation of this study is that only the first three episodes of *The King of Comedy* were analyzed due to time and resource constraints. Future research could extend this analysis to include a complete season or multiple seasons, providing a more comprehensive view of the patterns and trends in metaphorical humor across a larger body of work. Additionally, the current study focused on a single set of performances. Future studies could explore how different comedians employ various forms of metaphorical humor, comparing their approaches and examining how different performance styles influence the types of metaphors used. Beyond expanding the corpus, future research could also investigate metaphorical humor in other comedy genres, such as sitcoms, improv comedy, or online comedic content, to test the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, cross-cultural comparisons would be valuable to examine whether the patterns observed in Chinese stand-up comedy are culturally specific or more universally applicable. By expanding the scope of the research and incorporating a wider range of performers, episodes, and cultural contexts, future studies could offer deeper insights into the role of metaphor in humor generation across different performance settings.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, L.L. and H.C.; methodology, L.L.; software, L.L.; validation, L.L., H.C. and H.L.; formal analysis, L.L.; investigation, L.L.; resources, L.L.; data curation, L.L.; writing—original draft preparation, L.L.; writing—review and editing, H.C. and H.L.; visualization, L.L.; su-

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