

Healthcare challenges in memes. A comparative analysis of American, British and Polish humor

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Healthcare systems around the world are currently struggling with rising healthcare costs and a growing demand on healthcare delivery. The purpose of the present paper is to analyze the common perceptions of healthcare challenges in the US, Great Britain and Poland, as depicted in Internet memes. For this purpose, a corpus of 300 Internet memes (100 from each country) was collected and analyzed. The memes were identified with the help of Google graphic browser, using a list of pre-defined search terms in English and Polish.

The results of the analysis indicate that healthcare accessibility is the main recurrent theme in memes from all three countries. However, there are clear differences in the way healthcare issues are framed in American, British and Polish humorous memes. The differences in selection of cognitive frames cannot be explained by the differences between the actual healthcare systems alone; they are also linked to the distinctive conceptualizations of the purpose and societal goals of healthcare systems. American jokes concerning healthcare are strongly associated with opposing partisan political discourses: Democrats vs. Republicans, while Polish jokes referring to the same subject matter cannot easily be linked to any political option.

Some of the frames used in analyzed memes can only be found in American humor, e.g. the frame of communism, which appears in the humor associated with the Republicans' point of view. Other are typical for Polish jokes, such as the meal frame, often invoked through photographs of inadequate hospital meals. British humor uses the frame of American healthcare system as a point of reference and warning, whereas American humor refers to Canadian healthcare system to criticize the American one. In spite of those differences, the analysis shows interesting similarities in conceptual integration networks across all three sub-corpora. For instance, the frame of medical treatment is often integrated with the frame of Photoshop editing or imprisonment.

The analysis is based on the theory of cognitive frames (Fillmore 1985), which humor researchers often take recourse to (see Ritchie 2005), as well as conceptual integration framework (Fauconnier, Turner 2002), also used to investigate humor (see Coulson 2005; Libura 2017). The perspective recently proposed by Attardo (Attardo 2017) is also taken into account.

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