

12 - 14 March 2026

Berlin , Germany

Humor Mechanisms in Hanoch Levin's Dramatic Sketches: A Cognitive-Linguistic Analysis

Nimrod Mishori

Bar

Ilan University, Israel

Abstract

Hanoch Levin is one of Israel's most prominent playwrights. Although he received limited recognition outside of Israel during his lifetime, his plays have been translated into multiple languages and have attracted increasing international interest since his death.

Drawing on both foundational (Raskin 1985 & Attardo 1994) and contemporary theories of verbal humor (Coulson, 2001; 2015), the paper demonstrates how Levin evokes and shifts frames to pursue different communicative goals and guides the audience's construction of meaning.

Specifically, the paper proposes distinguishing between three communicative goals – and corresponding modes of meaning construction – that Levin achieves through humorous means: eliciting enjoyment, exposing existential truths about death and temporality, and articulating socio-political critique of Israeli society.

The paper's central claim is that Levin relies on humor mechanisms grounded in the activation and shifting of frames to manage audience interpretation. These mechanisms enable movement between light, entertaining humor, and darker forms of humor that confront the audience with existential insights and socio-political commentary of Israeli society.

By analyzing Levin's comic strategies, the paper contributes to research on applying the cognitive linguistics approach to literature, demonstrating how humor can operate as a multi-layered tool for meaning construction in dramatic text.

Keywords: Hanoch Levin, Cognitive-Linguistic Approach to Humor, Dramatic Sketches, Frame-Shifting, Israeli Satire, Dark Humor