

COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGISTS OF HUMOR

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Introduction. Humor has been a subject of fascination for cognitive psychologists as it reveals how the human brain processes complex phenomena such as incongruity, social interactions, and emotional responses. Cognitive psychology provides insights into how humor is perceived, understood, and appreciated. This thesis explores the contributions of key cognitive psychologists to the study of humor and its implications for understanding the mind.

Main Theories and Psychologists

1. Incongruity Theory

Proposed by cognitive theorists such as Victor Raskin and Jerry Suls, this theory suggests that humor arises from the recognition of incongruity—when there is a mismatch between expectation and reality. Raskin introduced the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH), which posits that humor relies on the cognitive switch between two overlapping scripts (e.g., serious vs. playful).

2. Cognitive Humor Model by Rod Martin

Rod Martin, a leading cognitive psychologist, studied humor's role in mental health, social bonding, and coping mechanisms. He proposed that humor involves cognitive appraisal, where the mind evaluates a situation as benign and amusing, triggering laughter.

3. Peter McGraw: Benign Violation Theory

McGraw's theory states that humor emerges when a situation is perceived as a violation of social or personal norms but is simultaneously considered benign.

For example, a joke is funny when it breaks rules in a way that does not cause

harm.

4. Paul McGhee's Cognitive-Developmental Model

McGhee explored how humor develops in children, focusing on their cognitive growth. He identified stages in humor development, from simple visual incongruities in infancy to more complex verbal and situational humor in later childhood.

5. Relevance Theory and Humor

Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson contributed to humor studies through their Relevance Theory, suggesting that humor involves finding relevance in unexpected or hidden meanings. Their theory explains how cognitive effort is rewarded with amusement when the mind resolves incongruity in a humorous context.

6. Cognitive Neuroscience of Humor

Researchers such as Jessica Black and Scott Weems have studied the brain's role in humor processing. Their studies highlight the activation of the prefrontal cortex and limbic system during humor comprehension, linking it to problem-solving and emotional regulation.

Practical Implications

The findings of cognitive psychologists studying humor have broad applications:

Mental Health: Humor therapy is used to reduce stress and anxiety, promoting psychological well-being.

Education: Humor enhances learning by engaging students and making complex material more relatable.

Cross-Cultural Communication: Cognitive models of humor help bridge cultural gaps by understanding differences in humor perception.

Artificial Intelligence: Cognitive insights into humor are used to develop AI systems capable of understanding and generating humor.

Conclusion

Cognitive psychologists have significantly contributed to our understanding

of humor as a complex mental phenomenon. Their theories demonstrate how humor is deeply tied to cognitive processes such as problem-solving, pattern recognition, and emotional regulation. Further research in this field continues to shed light on the intricate relationship between the mind and humor, with applications spanning mental health, education, and technology.

References

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