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CONCEPTUAL BLENDING AS AN IMPORTANT THEORY IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

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Annotation: This article presents a comprehensive examination of conceptual blending theory as one of the foundational frameworks of cognitive linguistics. The paper outlines the theoretical origins of the theory in Fauconnier's mental spaces model, describes its core architecture of input spaces, generic space, and blended space, and evaluates its explanatory power in relation to metaphor, analogy, grammar, and discourse. The article also situates blending theory within the broader intellectual landscape of cognitive linguistics, comparing it with conceptual metaphor theory and frame semantics.

Key words: conceptual blending, cognitive linguistics, mental spaces, input space, blended space, emergent structure, Fauconnier, Turner, conceptual metaphor, frame semantics.

INTRODUCTION.

Cognitive linguistics emerged in the latter decades of the twentieth century as a broad intellectual movement united by the conviction that language is not an autonomous formal system but is deeply grounded in general cognitive processes, embodied experience, and conceptual structure. Against the background of Chomskyan generative grammar, which treated syntax as a self-contained module governed by innate formal rules, cognitive linguists argued that grammar, semantics, and pragmatics are inseparable from the broader cognitive architecture of the human mind.

Within this rich and diverse research tradition, conceptual blending theory has emerged as one of the most influential and generative theoretical frameworks. Developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, blending theory provides a general account of the cognitive processes by which meaning is constructed dynamically in real time. Unlike approaches that model meaning as a static relation between linguistic forms and pre-existing semantic representations, blending theory treats meaning as an emergent product of the creative integration of multiple partial mental representations.

The present article aims to provide a systematic and accessible introduction to conceptual blending theory, tracing its intellectual origins, describing its core theoretical machinery, and evaluating its contributions to cognitive linguistics and beyond. The discussion proceeds from the theory's roots in mental spaces theory through to its full elaboration in Fauconnier and Turner's landmark work, and concludes with a reflection on the theory's relationship to other major cognitive linguistic frameworks.

MAIN BODY.

The intellectual predecessor of conceptual blending theory is Fauconnier's mental spaces theory, introduced in his 1985 monograph 'Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning Construction in Natural Language.' Mental spaces, in Fauconnier's framework, are small conceptual packets that speakers and hearers construct on the fly as discourse unfolds. They are not fixed representations

stored in long-term memory but temporary, dynamic structures that are assembled and modified in real time in response to linguistic input. Mental spaces are structured by cognitive frames and models, and they are connected to one another by mapping relations that allow elements in one space to be identified with or distinguished from elements in another [2: 16].

Conceptual blending theory extends this framework by providing an account of what happens when mental spaces are not merely related by mappings but are actively integrated. The canonical blending network involves four mental spaces: two input spaces, a generic space, and the blended space. The generic space captures abstract structure that is common to both inputs, serving as the template for the cross-space mapping. The blended space receives selective projections from both inputs and develops its own emergent structure through three cognitive processes: composition, completion, and elaboration [1: 47].

Composition refers to the projection of elements from the input spaces into the blended space, where they enter into new relations not present in either input alone. Completion involves the recruitment of background knowledge, cognitive frames, and encyclopedic information to structure the blend. Elaboration—also called 'running the blend'—refers to the imaginative simulation of the blended scenario, in which the reasoner follows the internal logic of the blend to its inferential consequences, sometimes discovering meanings that were not anticipated at the outset of the blending operation.

The explanatory reach of conceptual blending theory is exceptionally broad. It has been applied to the analysis of linguistic metaphor, extending and in some respects challenging the earlier conceptual metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson. Where CMT posits systematic unidirectional mappings from a concrete source domain to an abstract target domain, blending theory emphasizes that integration is typically bidirectional and that the most important cognitive action occurs not in the source or target but in the blended space, where new structure emerges [1: 89]. A well-known example is the analysis of the expression 'This surgeon is a butcher,' which is not simply a mapping from butchery onto surgery but involves a blended space in which a surgeon performing an operation with the careless methods of a butcher produces emergent meaning—incompetence, crudeness, danger—that is present in neither input alone.

Blending theory has also been applied to grammatical constructions, where it illuminates the semantic motivation of forms that traditional grammar treats as arbitrary. The caused-motion construction in English—'She sneezed the napkin off the table'—involves a blend of the sneeze event and a prototypical caused-motion event, producing an emergent meaning in which the sneeze is construed as a causing force. This analysis demonstrates that grammatical productivity is not purely formal but is grounded in conceptual integration processes.

The notion of 'vital relations' is central to the theory's account of cognitive efficiency. Fauconnier and Turner identify a set of fundamental cognitive relations—including identity, change, time, space, cause-effect, part-whole, and analogy—that are compressed and transformed in the blended space [1: 101]. These compressions allow cognitively unwieldy multi-domain structures to be apprehended as single, vivid, human-scale scenarios. The theory argues that this drive toward human-scale compression is a fundamental principle of the human cognitive system, operative across domains from language to art, mathematics, and religion.

Frame semantics, as developed by Charles Fillmore, intersects significantly with blending theory. Frames provide the background cognitive structures that participate in the completion stage of blending: when a blended space is established, it is completed and elaborated by

recruiting relevant frames that supply the inferential scaffolding for the emergent meaning. In this sense, frame semantics and blending theory are not competing but complementary frameworks, each illuminating a different aspect of the complex cognitive processes underlying meaning construction.

CONCLUSION.

Conceptual blending theory represents one of the most significant theoretical contributions of cognitive linguistics. By revealing the dynamic, multi-space architecture of meaning construction, it has transformed the study of metaphor, grammar, discourse, and cognition. Its core mechanisms—input spaces, generic space, blended space, vital relations, and the processes of composition, completion, and elaboration—provide a unified and powerful account of how humans construct novel meanings in real time. While the theory continues to be refined and debated, its contribution to our understanding of language and mind is beyond question. Future research should continue to develop empirical methods for testing the theory's predictions and to explore its applications across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

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