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*Ralf Schneider,
Marcus Hartner (Eds.)*

BLENDING AND THE STUDY OF NARRATIVE

APPROACHES AND APPLICATIONS

NARRATOLOGIA

Blending and the Study of Narrative

Approaches and Applications

Edited by
Ralf Schneider
Marcus Hartner



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Bielefeld, den 25.08.2012

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Blending and the Study of Narrative: An Introduction

1. Blending/Conceptual Integration

Few people foresaw the immense impact of the joint project on conceptual integration, or blending, that Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier launched in the 1990s, even though both were already of high renown in their respective fields.¹ Still, as Blending theory offered a general and convincing explanation of how the mind creates new mental structures from the input of two or more mental sources, it soon grew into a highly influential concept of multidisciplinary and international significance. Indeed, their joint project has impressively deepened our understanding of the mental processes involved in many cognitive operations such as counterfactual reasoning, metaphoric thinking, and a large number of other linguistic and mental phenomena. Blending appears to be at the root of such a broad range of operations of human meaning construction and creativity that the theory promises to shed light on *The Way We Think*, as the title of Fauconnier and Turner's landmark publication of 2002 has it. Besides scholars working in the wide area of the cognitive sciences, the theory has also attracted many linguists and literary scholars, particularly those inhabiting a domain between the study of language and literature. Blending theory, like other cognitive approaches,² has appealed to those who aim at re-establishing the links between the two sides of the disciplinary coin that once was called, monolithically, 'philology'.

1 For relevant publications see, e. g., Fauconnier's work on mental spaces (1994, 1997) and Turner's work on the 'literary' mind, in which he maintains that the mental processes used in the production and reception of literature are in fact the very processes that are at work in our everyday acts of thought (1991, 1996); see also Turner's previous contribution to the study of poetic metaphor in collaboration with George Lakoff (Lakoff/Turner 1989).

2 See, for instance, fields of study like Cognitive Poetics (Stockwell 2002; Tsur 1992) or Cognitive Stylistics (Semino/Culpeper 2002), the work of Margaret H. Freeman (2002, 2006, 2009), as well as the work on Natural Narratology by Monika Fludernik (1996, 2003).

In this context, the explanatory power of Conceptual Integration networks for the study of metaphor has prompted much blending-oriented discussion of poetry.³ Metaphoric structures in non-poetic texts have also been studied extensively, including metaphors in drama. However, as Monika Fludernik points out, “more complex dramatic issues such as visual blends, past/present blends in dream plays, or spatial blends in fantasy” have not been studied at all, and she goes on to add that “[t]he same goes for film” (2010: 14). Prose narrative, too, has so far received significantly less attention from Blending scholars than poetry and metaphor analysis. Macro-textual structures in particular, such as plot, narrative levels and narrative time and space have not been dealt with under the auspices of Blending theory in any detail. Although there are some notable exceptions,⁴ many aspects of narrative still await their blending-oriented analysis. The present volume aims to illustrate ways in which the study of narrative can profit from the application of the theory of Conceptual Integration or Blending. The chapters in this book explore a variety of aspects of Blending and demonstrate the range of possible applications of the theory to narrative.

In contrast to blending-oriented contributions to narrative, books and articles expounding the basic structure and general mechanisms of blending are legion. The most extensive presentation of the approach is Fauconnier and Turner’s *The Way We Think* (2002); furthermore, there are numerous articles, collections of essays and special issues of journals which both introduce Blending/Conceptual Integration and work with the theory in application to particular texts or linguistic samples.⁵ Still, for the purposes of this volume, it seems appropriate to give a brief summary of the concept. Readers unfamiliar with Blending may find it helpful to have the general theory explained once more before the more multifaceted discussions of the connections between Blending and the study of narrative follow. Those familiar with the theory as such may wish to proceed immediately to the next section, in which I will sketch some areas of the study

3 See, e.g. Fludernik/Freeman/Freeman (1999), Hiraga (1999), Freeman (2002, 2005), Brandt/Brandt (2005a, 2005b), Orton (2007), Crisp (2008, 2005).

4 See Oakley (1998), Coulson (2001), Popova (2002), Sinding (2005), Dancygier (2005, 2007, 2008), Semino (2006), Copland (2008), Tobin (2009, 2010), and Fludernik (2010).

5 Introductions to Conceptual Integration can also be found in Fauconnier/Turner (1998), Coulson/Oakley (2000), Turner (2003, 2007), Evans/Green (2006: 400–444), and Hartner (2012: 125–148). See also the special issues of various journals, which provide an impression of the scope of Conceptual Integration: *Cognitive Linguistics* 11 (2000), *Journal of Pragmatics* 37 (2005) and *Language and Literature* 15 (2006). Furthermore, see Mark Turner’s “Blending and Conceptual Integration” homepage [<http://markturner.org/blending.html>] (date of access 14 July, 2012) for probably the most comprehensive list of research based on Blending theory.

of narrative that may profit from applications of Conceptual Integration theory. I will then briefly introduce the contributions to this volume.

In order to gain a first impression of what happens during blending processes, it might be helpful to imagine two projectors (e. g. slide, video or LCD projectors) projecting two different images onto a wall. These projectors are arranged in parallel at first, so that one image appears beside the other. If you now shift the two projectors to make them aim at the same spot on the wall, the two images will be blended. Though this comparison is inadequate in several respects, as will be shown below, it illustrates the basic idea of blending/conceptual integration: Human beings can activate two (or more) sets of information, or mental *spaces*, at the same time – much like the images produced by each of the projectors. The information from both these *input spaces* can be projected onto one single ‘spot’ (another mental space), where a *blend* comes into existence.⁶ *Compression* is the term used by Fauconnier and Turner to designate the process of mentally joining things that are factually separate, for instance in time and space:

When we see a Persian rug in a store and imagine how it would look in our house, we are compressing over two different physical spaces. [...] When we imagine what answer we would give now to a criticism directed at us several years ago, we are compressing over times. (Fauconnier/Turner 2002: 113)

Blending involves such compressions all the time – it is the act of literally ‘thinking together’ things that are logically, spatially or temporally apart. At the same time, *decompression* is the process by which the input spaces are kept separate. The input spaces maintain their identity, although they may appear in a different light after they have been projected into a blend. What has been seen in the blend may shine through in the input spaces afterwards.

At this point, however, the projector metaphor ceases being truly helpful, for what we see in the blended images on the wall is in all likelihood chaotic, amorphous and indecipherable (depending of course on the two original images). What emerges in a mental blend resulting from the projection of two or more mental spaces is, in contrast, a new – or *emergent* – mental structure that is meaningful precisely in its very newness. It is both more than the sum of its inputs and different from them. Blending theory assumes that *cross-space mappings* between input spaces are enabled by analogies they share on a general, abstract level. These analogies are captured in yet another space in the network of conceptual integration, the *generic space*.

⁶ I use italics in this section to point to technical terms used in, or introduced by, Blending theory.

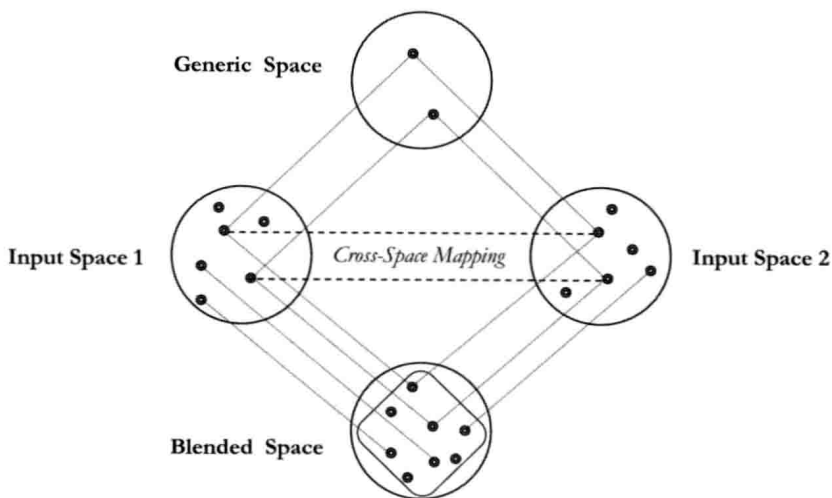


Figure 1: A basic blending network⁷

As the standard illustration of the structure of a basic Conceptual Integration network (fig. 1) shows, there are at least four mental spaces involved in blending: two input spaces, one generic space and the blended space itself. The generic space, however, is another deviation from the slide projector metaphor. Imagine a sorting mechanism installed behind the projectors, which selects for projection only images that share relevant elements. The generic space guarantees the comparability of the two input spaces, and its structure is present in both of them and in the blend. Note that integration networks can consist of more than two input spaces, and they can produce more than one blended space.

As an example for a blend of the kind shown above, imagine two colleagues preparing the agenda for the next team meeting. One of them says, “I think I’d rather avoid that point. The topic is such a minefield.” Of course, this looks like a simple, and not very ingenious, metaphor that is likely to be understood without much conscious cogitation. Seen from the vantage point of Blending theory, the mental operations that enable the speaker to make, and the hearer to understand, the metaphor can be analysed in the following way which points to the underlying conceptual

⁷ Adapted from Fauconnier/Turner 2002: 46.

complexity of that seemingly simply sentence: To be able to bring the two input spaces ('topic in a discussion' and 'minefield') together, the speaker must imaginatively construct some commonalities between the two. At first sight, the two inputs are of course quite different from each other, belonging to entirely different frames. A minefield is a physically concrete space which has been perfidiously prepared with hidden explosives in order to keep people away from an area or to injure or kill unsuspecting trespassers, usually in a situation of transnational or civil war. It is characteristic only of the minefield, and not of a discussion, that moving there is dangerous, because you may inadvertently tread upon a mine that will explode under your feet. It is characteristic of a discussion, however, that you cannot foresee how your conversation partners will react to a given topic. You interact with human beings who bring their full emotionality to the discussion, and aspects of a topic may touch their sensibilities, so that they might then react rather violently; they may feel offended or angry and, for instance, start shouting, or leave the room.

Different as the input spaces are, there are still various affinities between some of their elements (generic space) and the relations between them (cross-space mapping). The first and most obvious candidates for such mappings in the *THE TOPIC IS A MINEFIELD* example are the elements of 'uncertainty' and 'violent reaction', as pointed out above. In addition, these elements become particularly meaningful in connection with other basic metaphors: First, a discussion can be seen as a movement through space:⁸ the argument/your route will take you to uncertain places. Not knowing what will happen is common to both the discussion and the minefield. Second, we tend to think of emotions, especially negative ones, as being pent-up, compressed in a container, accumulating pressure that brings the container to explosion at the slightest touch. Here the emergent structure based on the shared structure of the two inputs becomes visible: Although no physical danger emanates from topics in discussions, in the blended space the danger becomes a reality, and it needs to be avoided. The danger consists in the likelihood that other participants react as if 'exploding like mines'. If some people in the room have long treasured a certain opinion on a topic that may be opposed to yours, for example, or if they feel their point of view has not been taken seriously in previous discussions, you may expect them to be touchy, waiting for an opportunity to

8 For an exploration of basic metaphors like this, which structure human thought in many respects, see Lakoff/Johnson (1980) and Lakoff/Turner (1989). Cf. some other renderings of the underlying metaphor, which involve a number of further blends: you can make headway or leeway in a discussion; conversations can grind to a halt; you can cover much ground, if you touch upon – yet another blend! – many aspects of a topic; you can get lost in the intricacies of an argument, etc.

vent their pent-up anger and frustration. To think of the participants' potential reactions as explosive amounts to what is called a *backward projection*: once the input spaces have been blended, you can mentally go back to each of the inputs with the new 'knowledge' from the blend and think afresh of the inputs. Note that the blend can also be interpreted differently: If the speaker knows that the colleagues are just waiting for an opportunity to make him or her look silly, she may be thinking of a different kind of danger when she says that the topic is a minefield.

Emergent structure "is generated in three ways: through *composition* of projections from the inputs, through *completion* based on independently recruited frames and scenarios and through *elaboration* (*'running the blend'*)" (Fauconnier/Turner 2002: 48; italics in the original). Composition establishes links between the comparable elements from the separate inputs; the input spaces in the above example are the unforeseeable or dangerous elements that may interfere with a journey from point A to point B, which exist in both inputs. Completion is the process by which background knowledge 'seeps' into the blend, i. e., the automatic inferences that yield a complete picture without requiring much conscious thinking (ibid.): we may have a variety of scenarios in our minds in which a minefield features, and we know that mines are buried only a couple of centimetres under the ground, etc. None of this needs to be mentioned explicitly in the phrase, but will still provide information structure available for the formation of the blend. While most processes in blending occur automatically and unconsciously, elaboration allows you to actually 'do things' with the new structure, or 'run the blend', as Fauconnier & Turner express it (ibid.). We can pursue the implications of a particular blend by, for instance, connecting it with further frameworks of background knowledge and running mental simulations of the new structure to see how it 'behaves'. Elaborating, or 'running' the blend in our example, the colleague might for instance suggest previous consultations with the potentially difficult colleagues and say, "Ok, let's see where the mines are and whether we can remove them before the meeting."

To sum up: The most important aspect is that the *blended* space contains information which has been partially selected from each of the input spaces in a way that a new structure emerges, resulting from a new arrangement of pieces of information present in the inputs. The structure that emerges in the blend is thus not restricted to what was present in either of the input spaces, nor does it simply add the information from the inputs, which are themselves affected by the blend. A conceptual integration network is therefore a complex, dynamic, mental event, as the essays collected in this volume will also demonstrate. It is important to note that conceptual integration networks may occur in various degrees of complex-

ity, depending on the number of input spaces involved and the role of frames of knowledge they contain (Fauconnier/Turner 2002: 113–135). Frames are the structures organizing the information projected into the blend. In *simplex networks*, one input provides the organizing structure onto which information from the other input (which has no organizing frame of its own) is projected. When two input spaces share an organizing frame on a general level, we speak of *mirror networks*. Mirror networks allow the easy establishment of correspondences between the inputs, which result from “compressions over the vital relations of Time, Space, Identity, Role, Cause-Effect, Change, Intentionality, and Representation” (125). Obviously, there may be blends in which the organizing frames of the inputs differ. These integration networks, called *single-scope networks*, result from the projection of only one of the organizing frames of the inputs – they are, according to Fauconnier and Turner “the prototype of highly conventional source-target metaphors” (127). In such blends, the application of the organizing frame of one input sheds light on the properties of the other input. Our THE TOPIC IS A MINEFIELD metaphor above is a network of the single-scope type. Finally, in *double-scope networks*, we find “inputs with different (and often clashing) organizing frames as well as an organizing frame for the blend that includes parts of each of those frames and has emergent structure of its own” (131). Double-scope blending, located at the high end of the complexity scale, is regarded as the kind of extraordinarily creative meaning construction to be found in much literary and artistic expression, as well as in scientific thinking. Far from producing irresolvable ruptures in meaning, double-scope blends bring forth fresh views of things.

A theoretical concept that claims such universal applicability is bound to provoke objections of many kinds. Blending has, indeed, come under some criticism, and it is only fair to take note of it here. As the reader of this volume will find, the blends described in the chapters are sometimes regarded to be ‘in’ the text, and sometimes to be ‘in’ the reader; in some cases they are understood to have been put there, consciously or unconsciously, by the author; in other cases they are understood as being realized by the reader, whether by authorial intention or without the author’s planning. Whose blend, then, are we talking about when we speak of a blend in a narrative (cf. Cienki 2008), and how can we be sure that the blends someone has analysed are really *there*?⁹

One of the problems is that many of the processes involved in conceptual integration – just like other complex mental operations of the hu-

9 Besides Cienki, see Gibbs (2000, 2001), Harder (2003), Ritchie (2004), Hougaard (2008), and Ungerer/Schmid (2006: 294f.) for critical evaluations of Conceptual Integration.

man mind – are automatic, i. e. they are not fully accessible either to conscious introspection or external observation (cf. Turner/Fauconnier 2002: ch. 2). What is more, blends are not predictable “solely from the structure of their inputs” (Fauconnier/Turner 1998: 136). The input spaces are not even explicitly mentioned in most blends but need to be singled out by the observer. To analyse blending in a scholarly article, say, therefore involves an interpretation of a package of meaning that is regarded as having been induced by operations of conceptual integration. Seanna Coulson and Todd Oakley sketch the standard procedure of describing blends as follows:

[B]lending analyses typically begin with the introduction of an example *hypothesized to involve blending*, and proceed with a description of conceptual structure in each of these spaces in the integration network. These descriptions usually begin with the structure in the input and generic spaces, and include a list of the mappings between elements and relations in each of the spaces. [...] Next the analysis describes the structure in the blended space, focusing on which aspects of its structure come from each of the inputs. [...] In such descriptions it is important to characterize the differences between the structure evoked in the blended space and each of the inputs. [...] The characterization of differences between the structure in the blended space and structure in the input spaces is how the analyst justifies the claim that conceptual blending gives rise to the emergent structure that frequently sustains reasoning. (Coulson/Oakley 2000: 180f.; emphasis added)

Starting with a hypothesis and then justifying your findings by adducing your own differentiations suggests circular reasoning, or, as Monika Fludernik puts it, “one starts out from the blend and works one’s way up to the generic frame, venturing on the thin ice of speculation” (2010: 20; cf. also Hougaard 2008: 198). One could say that if you look for a potential blend, you will always find it, and if you have your own idea about which input spaces are part of the network you suppose is triggered by a text, then there is no way of arguing you out of that. Just as it is very difficult to verify Blending theory with the help of empirical testing (cf. Harder 2003, Hougaard 2008), it is impossible to falsify a blending analysis, as Gibbs (2000), among others, has criticised. There is no way of demonstrating that a particular utterance someone has identified as involving a blend can be understood *without* recourse to conceptual integration, though some commentators have maintained that other explanations than Conceptual Integration may provide sufficient interpretation of some of Fauconnier & Turner’s examples (see cases discussed in Harder 2003 and Ritchie 2004); neither can you prove that other input spaces or generic frames than those somebody has ‘identified’ as pertaining to the blend in question are involved. Common sense will help in some cases, as in many simplex or mirror networks, which rely on highly conventional language

use.¹⁰ While such cases seem straightforward, this is not necessarily true for literary examples or other cultural artefacts, in which polyvalence and semantic ambiguity are frequently the core issues. As Fludernik has pointed out, it is very difficult to find a generic frame for double-scope networks (2010: 20).

Another fundamental point of criticism concerns the terms 'spaces' around which the theory is constructed. As Ritchie (2004) has argued, these terms are metaphorical themselves. There is not really a 'space' that 'contains' information in the mind. Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 40) assume that the mental operations underlying blending are most likely to be rooted in connectionist neural networks, but they do not explore this potential grounding of Conceptual Integration in the cognitive 'wet science' of neurobiology. This may be a wise move, for the gap between the findings of neurobiology on the one hand and the models of complex cognitive operations on the other is still considerably wide. The use of metaphors such as the mental space metaphor, and of models that simplify aspects of the cognitive architecture that brings forth the processes modelled is going to be a standard tool for theorizing the human mind for some time to come. This, however, must not be seen as a weakness of the theory at all. Linguistic and literary theories need to be measured by the plausibility of the insights they produce, not by whether they receive support from other disciplines. That neither X-bar-syntax nor deconstruction, to choose two random examples, could boast of being supported by any kind of infallible neurobiological evidence has not reduced their impact in the development of models of language and the mind.

While the objections referred to above are of course not unfounded, what are the consequences for scholars interested in Blending? Is one supposed to cease all application of Blending theory in literary and linguistic analysis? Or should one try to emend the theory before attempting to apply it to the study of narrative? As I have pointed out, some of the potential problems of Conceptual Integration are, for better or worse, grounded in the fact that the theory tries to come to grips with highly complex, invisible processes of the mind, and only time will show whether the design of Blending theory needs to be adapted to further scientific insights into the human mind. Alternatively, and this is the route an impressive number of scholars (including the contributors to this collection) have chosen, Conceptual Integration could be understood as a provisional, but valuable tool for conceptualizing the intricacies of human meaning production. At pres-

10 Fauconnier and Turner (2002) devote a full chapter (16) to the rules and principles that govern and limit blending operations, convincingly countering the charge that with Blending theory, 'anything' goes.

ent, no theory from the cognitive sciences is capable of providing a conclusive and empirically corroborated model of complex information processing. The real strength of Fauconnier and Turner's approach, thus, lies in the heuristic quality of their theory. "Even if we never obtain any solid evidence of whether [B]lending occurs in predictable ways in our 'wetware' (another [B]lend)," as Dancygier (2006: 12) points out, "we will still profit from the clarity with which meaning construction [...] can now be described."¹¹

That the theory is a powerful heuristics has been, I believe, amply demonstrated by the wide range of linguistic, literary and cultural phenomena to which it has been applied. As with all theory-oriented readings in the study of narrative, every application must aim at proceeding in comprehensible ways and at yielding plausible results. Since the value of Blending, in my opinion, lies in its potential for application, we ought now to turn to the field of study that is the focus of this volume.

2. Aspects of Blending in the Study of Narrative

The explanatory potential of Blending theory for the study of narrative can best be appreciated if situated in the context of the more general turn of narratology towards cognitive approaches. While in Cognitive Poetics (Stockwell 2002) and Cognitive Stylistics (Semino/Culpeper 2002) the initiative mostly came from linguists interested in literary language, the cognitive sciences have for some time now also fed into the development of new questions and answers formulated by literary scholars.¹² This invites investigations of blending also on a larger scale than individual metaphors or other small-scale conceptual integration networks. One reason for the fact that Blending theory has not yet been applied systematically by narratologists is the ubiquity of both, narrative and processes of conceptual integration:¹³ narrative can be regarded as an instrument of cognition,¹⁴ and we have already seen the range of mental activities in which blending plays a role. It is therefore hard to say where one had best start looking for blending in narrative. One could begin on a very general level by saying

11 See Hartner (2012: 143-149) for a more detailed discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of Blending theory.

12 See, for example, Turner (1991, 1996), Jahn (1997, 2003), Crane/Richardson (1999), Herman (2002, 2003a, 2009), Margolin (2003), Hogan (2003), Palmer (2004), Richardson (2004, 2006), Zunshine (2006), Huber/Winko (2009).

13 We could compare this with the ubiquity of conceptual metaphors, such as those described by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). If it is the case that these are basic cognitive mechanisms, it is difficult to imagine a situation in which they would *not* play a role.

14 See e. g. Herman's (2003b) concept of stories as a "tool for thinking".