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## **Cognitive linguistic theories in phraseology**

Departing from the standpoint of two cognitive linguistic theories, the Metaphor Theory and the Conceptual Integration or Blending Theory, this paper attempts to establish their role in the creation and processing of both conventional and modified phraseological units. It investigates the range of applications and interpretations of the existing cognitive models, furnishing them with attested phraseological material to test their efficiency and universality. It is argued that the two theories can be viewed as complementary: whereas the theory of metaphor is productive in accounting for a wide range of conventional phraseological units, the theory of conceptual integration can be consistently applied to the analysis of modified phraseological units.

**Keywords:** phraseology; conceptual integration theory; metaphor theory; metonymy.

### **1. Introduction**

The aim of the present paper is to examine the degrees to which cognitive linguistic theories can account for certain phenomena and features of phraseological units, both conventional and modified. After a brief theoretical overview of the existing cognitive linguistic theories (Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Integration Theory), we will conduct a set of case studies to test if they can be ap-

plied to selected phraseological material. We will further inspect the results of this cross-fertilization of disciplines and estimate their relevance for both of the disciplines, phraseology and cognitive linguistics.

## **2. Theoretical preliminaries: Theory of Metaphor and Metonymy, Mental Space Theory, Conceptual Integration Theory**

The theory of conceptual metaphor and metonymy (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) is one of the central theories of cognitive linguistics, the one that managed to explain and account for the ubiquity of the two mechanisms in language use. The authors propose that the production and processing of figurative expressions are mediated by metaphorical and metonymic correspondences that are part of the human conceptual system, i.e. that figurative expressions are interpreted as instantiations of deep conceptual metaphors or metonymies.

A more recent development of cognitive linguistics is the Conceptual Integration Theory, or Blending Theory (Fauconnier and Turner, 1998, 2002; Coulson and Oakley, 2000). It is currently one of the most promising theoretical frameworks that provides insight into how we think, create, and understand the world around us, aiming to account for both non-linguistic and linguistic blends. A conceptual integration network is an array of mental spaces, which usually includes two or more input spaces structured by information from different cognitive domains, a generic space and a blended space. The structure of the generic space is common to all input spaces, and the structure of the blended space inherits elements from all inputs, developing a novel, emergent structure (Fig 1.).

The theory offers a model of meaning construction in which processes operate in analogy, metaphor, metonymy, counterfactuals, and other phenomena (Coulson and Oakley 2000, Fauconnier and Turner 1998). Fauconnier and Turner (2002) designed the Blending Theory as a set of principles for combining cognitive models in a network of mental spaces containing partial representations of entities and their relationships in a scenario as perceived, imagined, remembered, or understood by speakers. The mental space theory can provide an explanation of how a participant in an exchange of information might encode it on a referential level by dividing it into concepts relevant to different aspects of the scenario. The central component of both Conceptual Integration Theory and Mental Space Theory is the mechanism of cross-space mappings, which makes it possible to understand how an element in one mental space corresponds to an element in another mental space.

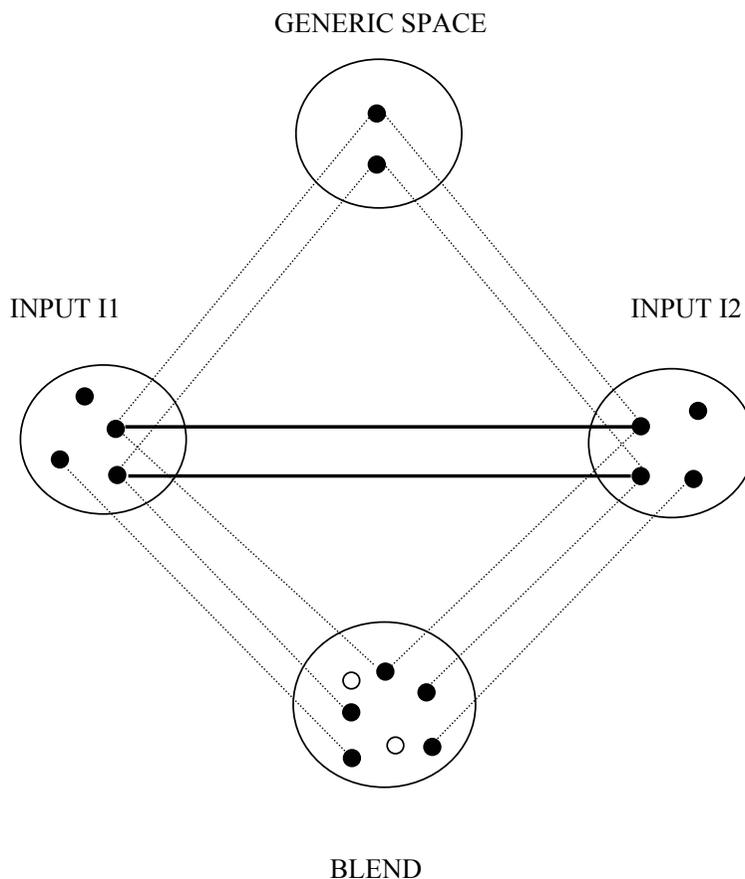


Figure 1. The conceptual integration network (Fauconnier and Turner 2002)

Constitutive principles at work within the conceptual integration network include matching and counterpart connections in cross-space mapping, selective projection from inputs, composition, completion and elaboration, finally integrated in an emergent structure. In order to add more rigour to the model, Fauconnier and Turner (1998, 2002) suggested a set of optimality principles or constraints that further define the relations within the network:

- 1) **integration principle** - representations in the blended space can be manipulated as a single unit;
- 2) **topology principle** - relations in the blend should match the relations of their counterparts in other spaces;

- 3) **web principle** - the representation in the blended space should maintain mappings to the input spaces;
- 4) **unpacking principle** - the blend all by itself should prompt for the reconstruction of the entire network.
- 5) **good reason principle** - pressure to attribute significance to elements in the blend, i.e. maximize and intensify vital relations<sup>1</sup>.
- 6) **metonymic tightening** - when metonymically related elements are projected into the blended space, there is pressure to compress the 'distance' between them.

### 3. The applicability of Metaphor Theory in phraseology

Many authors have stressed and recorded the systematic clustering of figurative expressions around conceptual metaphors and metonymies (Lakoff and Turner 1980, Kövecses 1986, Gibbs 1995). This implies that many of these expressions have a common underlying mechanism which is activated constantly and automatically with neither effort nor awareness. In this view conceptual metaphors and metonymies are both available and accessible in any context and serve as a basis for figurative language comprehension. It should not, however, be taken as the only key to the understanding of idioms, but one of the factors, or one of the processing inputs in addition to the meanings of lexemes that compose the idiom, contextual clues, and etymology (Omazić 2004 and forthcoming-b) .

In Figure 2 there is an illustration of how a more concrete domain of FIRE, with several different salient aspects of fire, is mapped onto a more abstract domain of LOVE.

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<sup>1</sup> Input spaces are linked by vital relations: change, identity, time, space, cause - effect, and uniqueness (Fauconnier and Turner 2002).

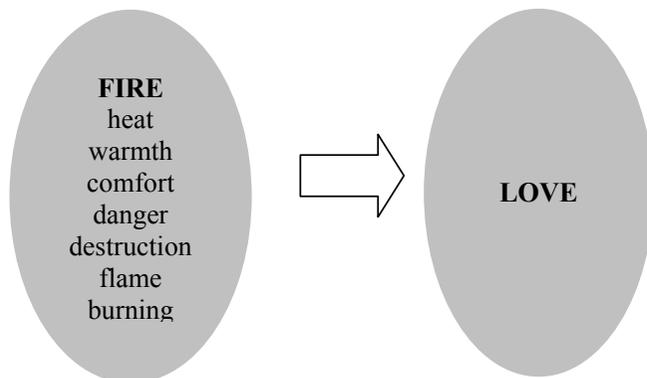


Figure 2. Cross-domain metaphorical mapping from the domain of FIRE to the domain of LOVE.

There is a number of linguistic expressions in which the underlying concept is that of the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS FIRE:

- (1) to carry a torch for someone
- (2) the fire goes out between two people
- (3) to burn with love
- (4) the flames are gone
- (5) to be someone's old flame
- (6) to have the hots for someone
- (7) to be on fire

As a result of the universality of this conceptual metaphor across languages, it would be possible, even for non-native speakers, to make appropriate connections on the conceptual level to interpret some of these expressions, even if encountered for the first time, and even if they do not have the full lexical and structural equivalent in their own language, or have no equivalent in their own language at all.

Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen (2005) challenge the postulates of the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor (CTM) as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) arguing that despite claims that many conceptual metaphors are universal (like ANGER IS THE HEAT OF A FLUID IN A CONTAINER as the cognitive basis for *someone's gall/bill flows over*), many are indeed based on historical knowledge that, although perhaps not valid any longer, still contributes to the interpretation. The

authors do embrace the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor as a valid and useful tool for analyzing conventional figurative language, but argue that the knowledge of underlying conceptual metaphors is insufficient or not linguistically relevant in all particular cases. The main points of criticism of the Conceptual Theory of Metaphor are that the CTM cannot account, or can only partly account, for the wealth and breadth of phraseological data across languages, as well as that it does not incorporate enough relevant cultural inputs that help shape the conceptual systems in different languages and for different cultures.

The criticism does stand, it is just that Lakoff and Johnson did not launch their theory with intent to provide for the bulk of phraseological material, so the full overlap could not have even been expected, nor they and their followers denied the role of culture in shaping the conceptual systems of different languages. It has been more than adequately provided for in Kövecses' book *Metaphor and Culture* (2005) in which he investigates universality and variation in metaphors, and provides answers to how and why metaphors vary within and across cultures, examining the degrees of cultural coherence in the interplay among conceptual metaphors. He proposes a theory of metaphor variation, to an extent complementary to that of Dobrovolskij and Piirainen, but he also outlines different dimensions of intra-cultural variation of metaphors (2005: 88-111), as well as cases of individual variations.

If we take the elements of culture or cultural concepts to be an input space in a conceptual integration network, and if we take Grady's<sup>2</sup> (1999) view that Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Integration Theory are complementary, and that metaphorical cross-domain mappings are actually a unique type of blend, we may successfully explain the instances of cultural codedness of conventional as well as figurative expressions within the Conceptual Integration Theory. As a matter of fact, Figure 1 can be expanded to include more than just two domains or spaces, and include the generic space as well as the blended space that inherits the projections from all of the inputs, as shown in Figure 3. We can therefore say that flames, heat, warmth, comfort, burning, destruction, and danger normally associated with fire are projected onto the blended space, where the emotions associated with love are also projected, to arrive at a unique emergent structure not found in any of the input spaces: *to have the hots for someone*. This reasoning is unorthodox in many respects, but appears to be valid in accounting for figurative language expressions of this kind. What is more, with this kind of reasoning we can easily imagine another input space, that of a specific culture,

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<sup>2</sup> Grady et al. (1999) addressed the relationship between metaphor theory and blending theory, including the topic of metaphors as a unique type of blend, and suggested that the two theories are complementary in several respects, as our study will also show.

to be included, and in such a way explain for cross-linguistic variations of figurative expressions via Conceptual Integration Theory.

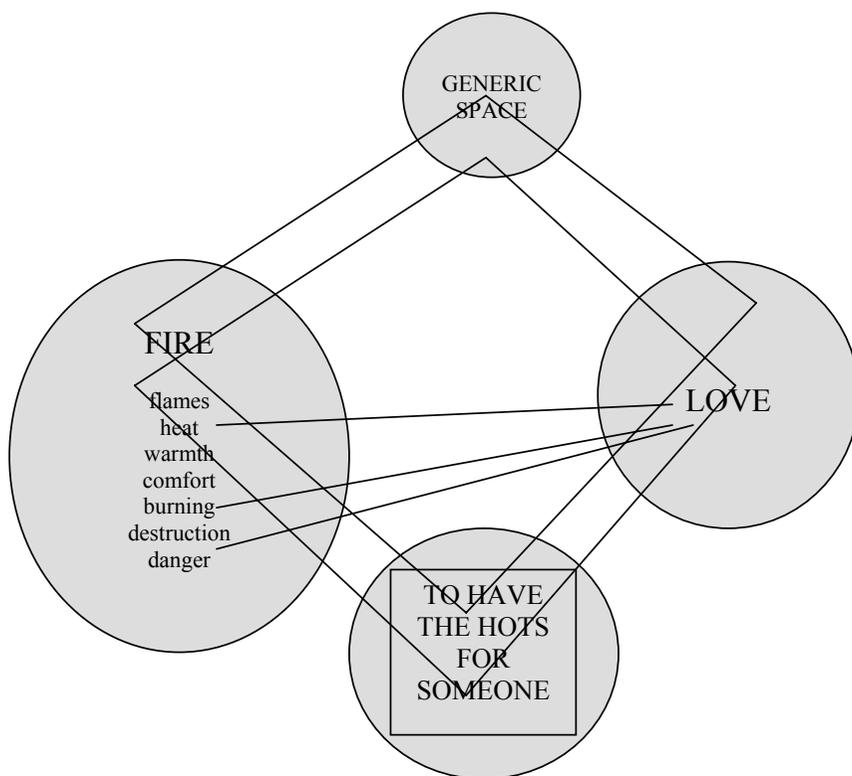


Figure 3. Conceptual integration network with central metaphorical cross-space mapping

#### 4. The story of a *blue dress*

Once upon a time a blue dress was just *a plain blue dress* or *a little blue dress*, until in 1998 the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal gave rise to a new set of collocations: *notorious blue dress*, *infamous blue dress*, *stained blue dress*, or *soiled blue dress*. It is not just a wealth of collocations, but a set of metaphor and metonymy-based uses that surfaced following the affair in headlines and newspapers:

- (8) Lewinsky's Little Blue Dress Has Washington All Atwitter

- (9) But other guests trooping across the Sunday talk show airwaves took a more serious view of the dress's potential to rattle the foundations of the republic.

Strangely enough, in 2004, similar expressions started to mushroom again, and along U.S. highways one could see billboards, as well as buy badges and T-shirts stating *We are all wearing the blue dress now*, as well as many more instances of what I will call *blue dress politics* involving either metaphorical references to the dress, or to Monica Lewinsky herself. Examples from (10) to (13) can all be seen as instances of blending two input spaces set into two different time frames, involving two different presidents, both including a scandal that has or still may cause damage to the people involved. Different selective projections from the inputs run into the blend, it is either Bush himself, or Powel, or Baghdad, or Saddam Hussein from the more recent scandal, and Monica or the dress from the earlier scandal.

- (10) George W. Bush tries on the blue dress?  
(11) The blue dress of Baghdad  
(12) It's hard for many Americans to see that Saddam Hussein has become George Bush's Monica Lewinsky.  
(13) Saddam Is Monica: The Scandal That Scuttled Powell's Case

In this section we will see how different types of blue-dress-based expressions were created as a result of conceptual blending.

#### 4.1. *Blending Theory in Art: Artistic Blends*

Blending as a cognitive operation is a powerful tool of compression and combination within an integration network, at work, as Fauconnier and Turner (2002) suggest, at many different levels of representation: in the creation and understanding of language and different art forms (music, visual arts), perceptual processing, scientific invention, humour, problem solving, rhetorical strategies, etc.

Before we proceed to look at instances of blending in language, let us look at a non-linguistic case of blending. *The Blue Dress* painting by a young Croatian/American author Marko Marjanović is a perfect example of how a whole

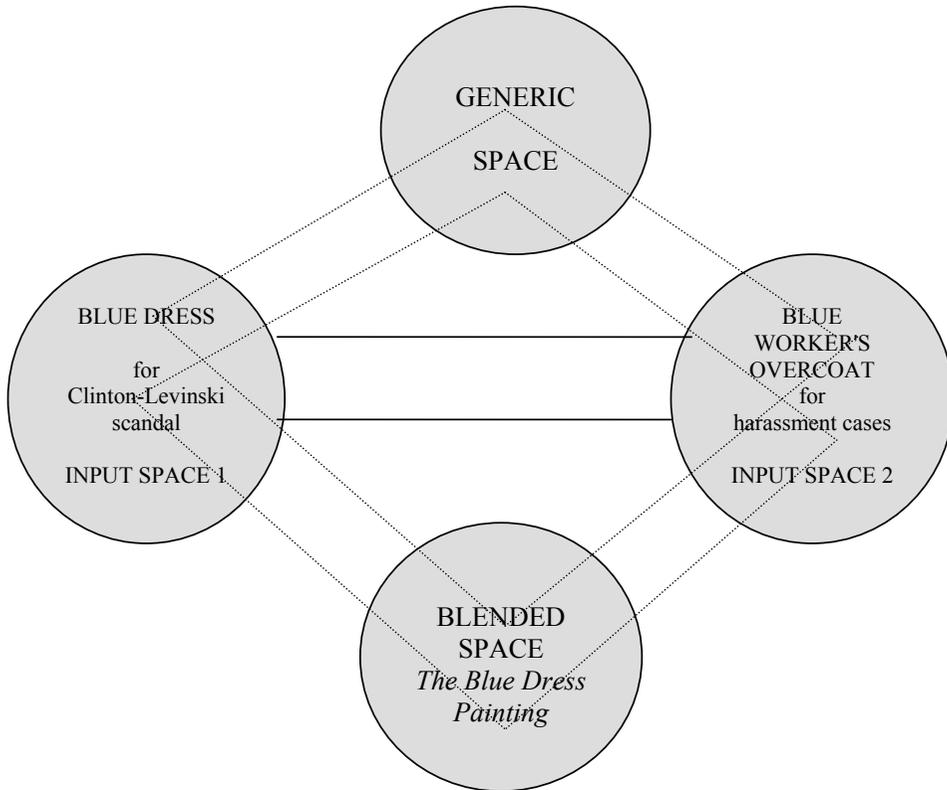


Figure 4. Conceptual integration networking for the painting *The Blue Dress* by Marko Marjanović

scenario can be compressed using only one image that may evoke the entire scenario (Figure 4). The painting shows a blue worker's overcoat pinned to the canvas, torn and smeared with paint of different colour. This artistic blend is interpretable because of the metonymically motivated compression between Monika Lewinsky's blue dress, crucial to the lawsuit in the Clinton sex scandal and the scenario of the scandal itself, and PRESIDENT FOR COUNTRY (former president Clinton for the United States) metonymy, as well as conventional mappings between the colour of people's clothes and their jobs, where blue worn by workers is accommodated in the new context. In the composed blend, president Clinton's denial of the affair and getting away with it may trigger off recurrence of harassment. These implications project back to input space 3, representing future instances of the abuse of power and harassment in the workplace in the United States. By compressing space, time, and causality the artist

managed to subtly and implicitly suggest that president Clinton is a bad role-model and should therefore be considered unfit to govern, a statement of social and political criticism achieved through an act of mental simulation.

## 4.2. *Blending Theory in Language*

In this section we will investigate several cases of blending in language, starting from entirely novel non-phraseological linguistic blends, the examples of which are mostly found as illustrations of blending in cognitive linguistic literature, to blends incorporating phraseological units, and finally to prototypical phraseological blends, i.e. fusions of two or more phraseological units into one.

### 4.1.1. *Non-phraseological linguistic blends*

Inputs to linguistic blends range from grammatical constructions to complex cultural concepts. The input spaces may be beliefs and reality spaces, past and present spaces, different domains of knowledge, elements of experience, history, culture, etc. Consider the following headline:

(14) Baghdad is Bush's blue dress<sup>3</sup>

In this linguistic blend (Fig. 5), the first input space is the scenario of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, encoding the knowledge of the world affairs in the past, the second one is the Bush Iraqi weapons scandal, a more recent political affair. Both of the scenarios rely on compression and are represented metonymically - the blue dress as the crucial piece of evidence in the Clinton case in PART OF A SCENARIO FOR THE WHOLE SCENARIO metonymy, Baghdad as CAPITAL FOR COUNTRY metonymy.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.workingforchange.com/article.cfm?ItemID=15346>

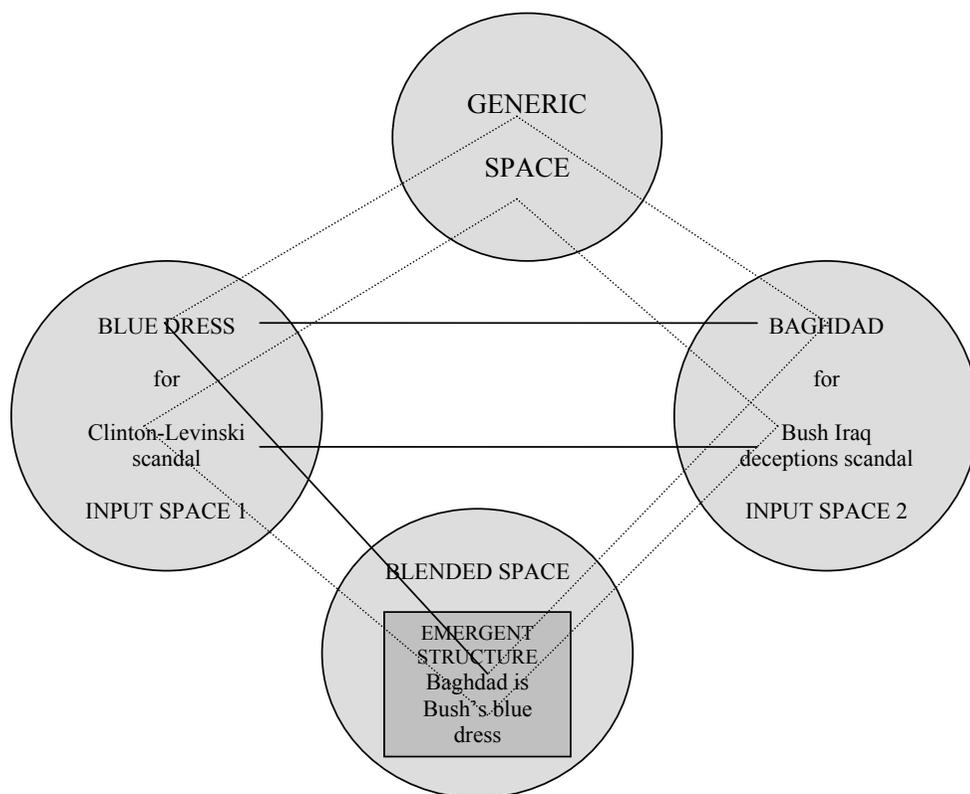


Figure 5. Conceptual integration network for *Baghdad is Bush's blue dress*

A number of matchings in cross-space mapping occur between these two inputs in a causality network. Selective projections from the inputs are mapped onto the common generic space and the blended space, creating a new emergent structure, the composed blend with a unique structure. This headline suggests that Baghdad could/should do to Bush what the blue dress did to Clinton, an exercise in mental simulation. By compressing space, time, identity, and causality the author managed to subtly and implicitly suggest that Bush is complicit in a huge political scandal that should not go unpunished. Moreover, it is a statement of social and political criticism, implying that as Republicans control both houses of Congress, there are no calls for an investigation.

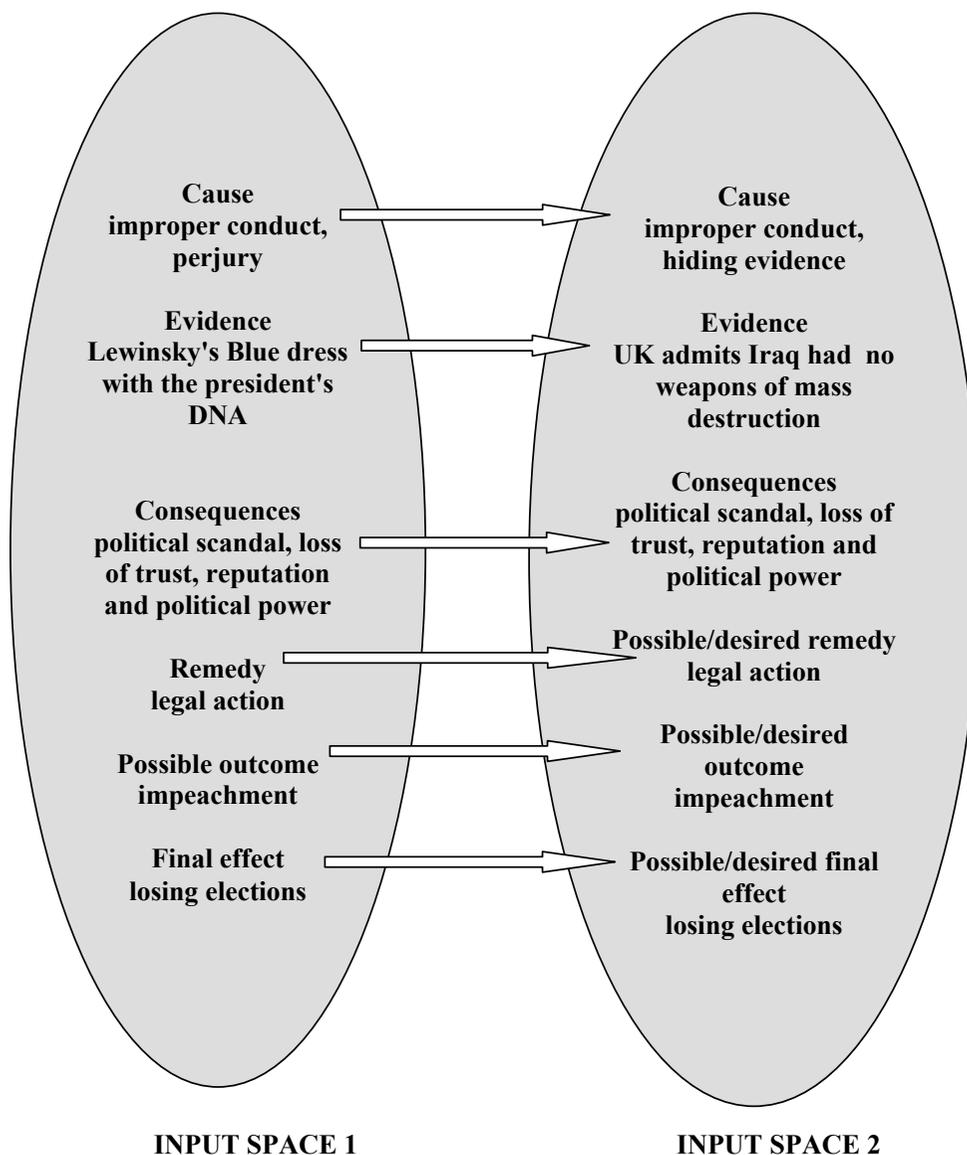


Figure 6. Causality and matching in cross-space mappings

It is interesting to monitor the role of metonymy and the cross-space mapping. In both of the input spaces metonymies are used, but they are of different type PART OF THE SCENARIO FOR THE WHOLE SCENARIO vs. CAPITAL FOR COUNTRY, which results in an inconsistency in counterpart connections, or a violation of the topology principle. Metonymies should therefore not be thought of as products of integration, but as inputs to the integration process<sup>4</sup>. Metonymies them-

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Grady's (2005) discussion of the role of primary metaphors in blending.

selves could rather be considered compressions or reductions, and thought of as products of conceptual disintegration. Compression and decompression are (Fauconnier and Turner 2002) phenomena central to blending theory. Compression in blending theory operates on a set of Vital Relations, including Cause-Effect, Change, Time, Identity, Intentionality, Representation, and Part-Whole, which can apply across mental spaces, and also define the essential topology within mental spaces.

#### 4.1.2. *Blends involving phraseological units*

Conceptual blending can be seen as a powerful on-line meaning construction process. As such, it is perfectly suited to account for on-line linguistic creativity. It may yield conventional blends that may serve as blueprints or templates for new integrations. Let us now see how well the conceptual integration theory ‘blends with’ phraseology. Blending Theory is intended to account for cases of novel inferences, but they need not be entirely novel or built from scratch. We will see now that conventional idiomatic expressions like *skeleton in someone’s closet* can provide the frame to which other input spaces can project other elements of knowledge. Consider, for example the following statement, for which a cross-space mapping is provided in Figure 7:

(15) This article describes the real ‘**Blue Dress**’ in Bush’s closet.

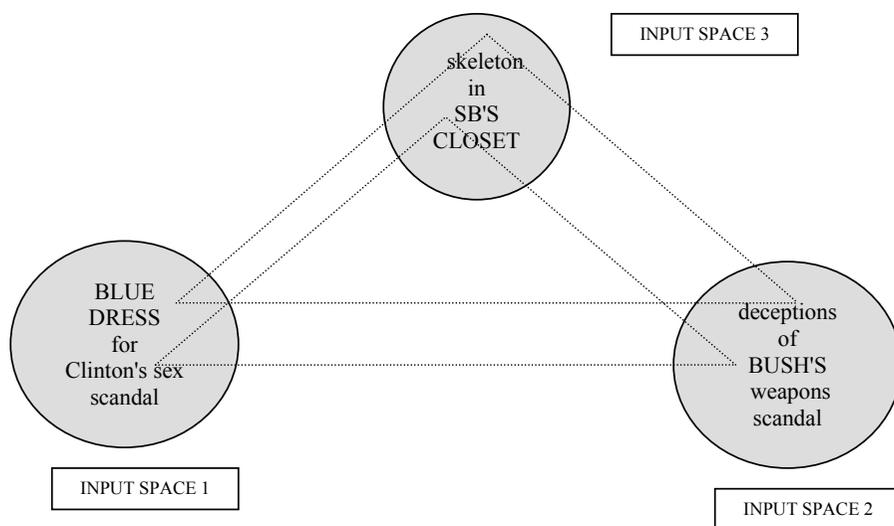


Figure 7. Cross-space mappings for the real ‘Blue Dress’ in Bush’s closet

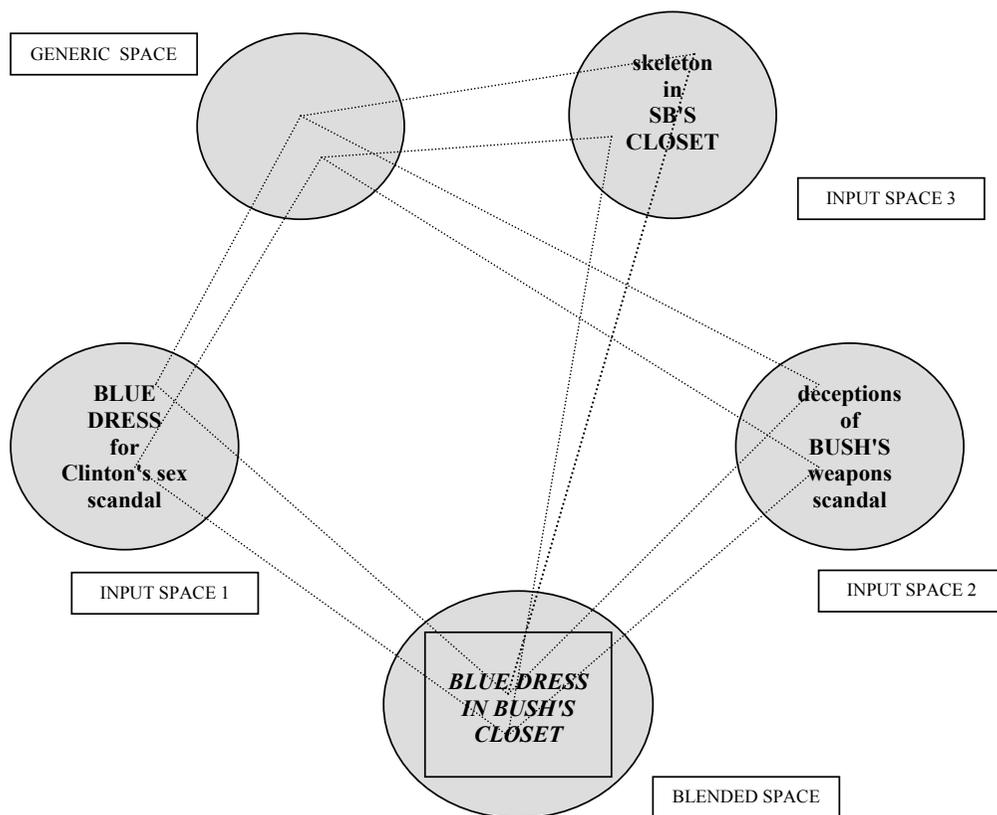


Figure 8. The conceptual integration network for *Baghdad is Bush's blue dress*.

The emergent structure in the blended space inherits the idiom structure from input three, and lexical projections from input spaces one and two: blue dress is projected from input space one, Bush from input space two. The blend inherits the structure and meaning from input three, and different meaning elements (knowledge of world affairs and culture) from inputs one and two.

A similar analysis was performed for a number of idiom modifications analyzed in detail as part of a large study of modifications of phraseological units (Omazić, in print), as well as a case study of a modified Croatian idiom (Buljan 2004), and it appears that the Theory of Conceptual Integration is the answer to mechanisms at work in modifications of phraseological units. The examples like (15) above, where the idiom frame is recycled and furnished with new elements, are among the most complex of all, with other single modification mechanisms

(substitution, deletion, insertion) having less complex networks. It is very often the case that a proverb or an idiom is modified in such a way that only one word is substituted by another, as in *to be born with a wooden spoon*, also a clear instance of blending in which the idiom *to be born with a silver spoon* provides the frame, and there are two more input spaces, that of our knowledge of silver and its value on the one hand contrasted to the input space taken by our knowledge of wood and its value. The inconsistency of mapping between these two inputs provides the desired effect in the blend, the one of the opposite meaning of the emergent structure compared to the meaning of the frame-providing one. Furthermore, in search of answers about constraints that regulate modifications, many questions remain open. If we, however, test the optimality principles that regulate the operations within the blend against our *to be born with a wooden spoon* example, we can see that they are indeed well-tailored for modification purposes. The modified expression is integrated and can be manipulated as a single unit, thus satisfying the integration principle. The topology principle is also represented in the set of relations between the counterparts in input spaces of silver and wood, and the representation in the blended space maintains clear mappings to the input space. As far as the unpacking principle is concerned, the blend, i.e. the modified idiom itself, may prompt for the reconstruction of the entire network. Furthermore, there is pressure to attribute significance to elements in the blend, which is the case with *wooden*, as it maximizes and intensifies vital relations. In other words, it satisfies the ‘good reason principle,’ as it is not any lexeme that can replace *silver* in the original idiom, but the one that is there for reasons of its salience or potential to create new effects in the blend. This is, in short, an answer to questions of limits of lexical substitutes allowed in idiom modifications. Finally, the principle of metonymic tightening is also adhered to, as there is pressure to compress the distance between metonymically related elements in the blend, which is the case with the *silver spoon* in the original and the *wooden spoon* in the modification.

#### 4.1.3. *Formal idiom blends*

In his presentation on variation in phraseology from a cognitive linguistic perspective Langlotz (2001) spoke of three cognitive principles operating at the mental level of idiom representation:

- Metaphorical modeling following Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980);

- Formal blending (contaminations): Idioms can inherit lexemes from idioms with the same or a very similar meaning even if the imported element does not fit into the literal meaning of the expression;
- Conceptual blending: Idioms are varied by interactively transferring elements from the level of the idiomatic meaning to the level of the literal meaning.

I find Langlotz's set of principles to be a rather mixed bag: metaphorical modeling and conceptual blending are indeed cognitive operations; formal blends can only be products of those operations. His description of conceptual blending is far off what the fathers of the theory intended it to be. The mechanism behind Langlotz's definition is the one of phraseological level switching: from idiomatic to literal and it may be a product of conceptual blending. A concept that is missing from his account is metonymic modeling, also found to be at work in idiom modifications.

Phraseological blends<sup>5</sup> (Langlotz's *formal blending*) are structural fusions of two phraseological units into one modification, in which the units share a lexeme or more lexemes that serve as a link. Langlotz claims that idioms can inherit lexemes from idioms with the same or a very similar meaning even if the imported element does not fit into the literal meaning of the expression, which is only partly true. It may be the case for some blends, but there are idiom blends like *I fell lock, stock and barrel, hook line and sinker, head over heels for you babe*<sup>6</sup> or the blend in example (16) which show that there does not have to be similarity in meaning between input expressions for the blend to be possible. *Fall in love, and fall for something hook line and sinker* have different meanings individually, but as they share the lexeme *fall*, which signals reckless abandon and loss of control, *hook line and sinker* has an intensifying function in the blend (Figure 9).

- (16) She had no one but herself to blame if she'd *fallen hook, line and sinker in love*.

<sup>5</sup> More about phraseological blends in Omazić (forthcoming-a).

<sup>6</sup> A line from Kory Livingstone's song *Lock Stock and Barrel*.

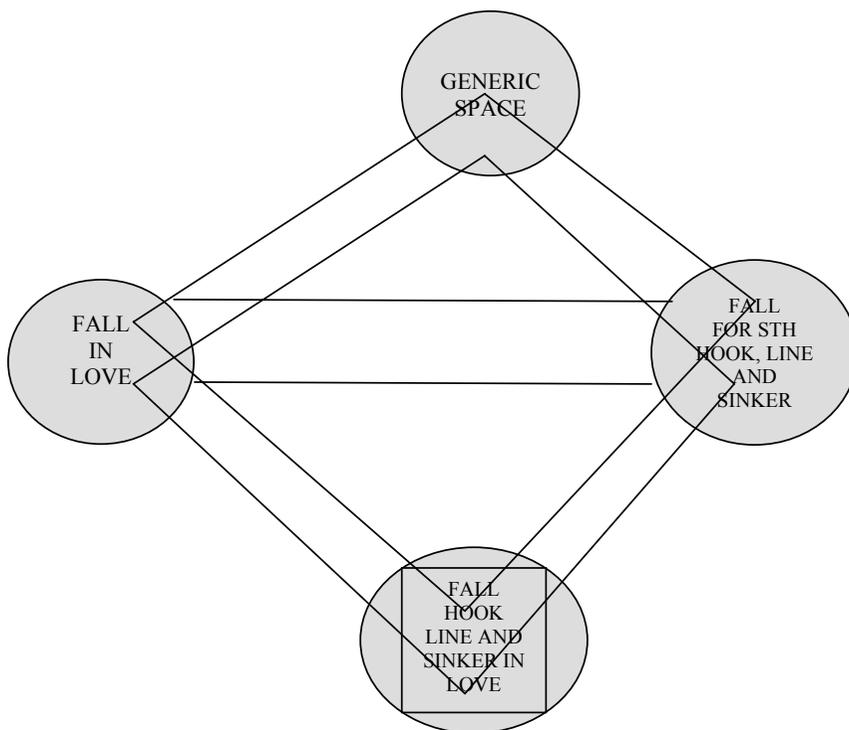


Figure 9. Conceptual integration network for *to fall hook line and sinker in love*

## 5. Conclusion

We hope to have shown that both cognitive linguistic theories, Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Integration Theory, can be used to analyze phraseological material, conventional and modified, in order to provide insights into how it is created, organized, and creatively adapted. The theories not only provide insight into the way we think, but give clues about the ways in which we process figurative expressions. Metaphor theory gives insight into the mechanisms of conventional figurative language creation and processing. Conceptual integration theory provides insight into the creation and processing of modified figurative expressions.

In many works dealing with idiom modifications a question of constraints regulating the modification mechanisms remains unanswered, where as a matter of fact the answer can be found within cognitive linguistics. As all instances of

phraseological modifications may be taken as results of blending, the optimality principles designed to regulate the relations in the blend also efficiently regulate modification.

Blending is at the heart of creative processes for both novel linguistic and artistic creations in the case studies we provided, and as such it may be considered to be the essence of creativity, i.e. the combination of old and new to achieve new effects. Furthermore, as all instances of modifications of phraseological units may be explained away as instances of blending, this may be an answer to the claim made by Dobrovolskij and Piirainen (2005) that we need a theory that will provide for modified figurative language expressions. We may conclude that it already does exist within cognitive linguistics in form of the Conceptual Integration Theory.

Moreover, Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Integration Theory could also be viewed as complementing and not competing cognitive theories, which may be useful for several reasons. Metaphor (and metonymy) theory can be placed at the heart of the blending theory, as they may provide inputs to it. We may easily furnish the network with a cultural input, and thus explain the presence of cultural element in some conventional figurative expressions in different languages. Therefore the two theories that may be observed as competing are actually the Conventional Figurative Language Theory proposed by Dobrovolskij and Piirainen (2005) and the Conceptual Integration Theory proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (1998 and 2002).

Finally, Conceptual Integration Theory may be used to account for instances of conventional and modified as well as novel figurative language, but not for instances of conventional non-figurative language, which is also the object of phraseology. This means that the application of Conceptual Integration Theory in phraseology is limited, covering only figurative phraseological units, however numerous, but not the units that are not figurative.

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## **ULOGA KOGNITIVNIH LINGVISTIČKIH TEORIJA U FRAZEOLOGIJI**

U središtu su pozornosti ovoga rada dvije kognitivne lingvističke teorije, teorija metafore i teorija konceptualne integracije, te njihova uloga u nastanku i razumijevanju konvencionalnih i modificiranih frazeoloških jedinica. Ispituje se primjena i tumačenje postojećih kognitivnih modela te se na njih primjenjuje frazeološka građa kako bi se ispitala njihova djelotvornost i univerzalnost. Teorije se promatraju kao komplementarne; teorija metafore produktivna je za analizu velikog broja konvencionalnih frazeoloških jedinica, dok se teorija konceptualne integracije može uspješno primijeniti kod analize modificiranih frazeoloških jedinica.

**Ključne riječi:** frazeologija; teorija konceptualne integracije; teorija metafore; metonimija.