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Advertising as a form of communication : a Conceptual Blending analysis

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Advertising has undoubtedly become a form of communication these days[1]. To be exact, it is "[…] verbal/non-verbal, public, one-way communication"[2]. In ads, the communication can be both wordless, conveyed via gestures, poses or pictures, and it can be a dialogue — a conversation between two or more entities. It can be addressed to an anonymous audience or to both known people and anonymous audience; yet no reply is expected to be given.

For communication to occur, at least two participants must be present: one who is speaking (the addresser/transmitter) and the other who is listening (the addressee) and the aim of communication is to transmit the meanings between these two participants, as shown diagrammatically below:
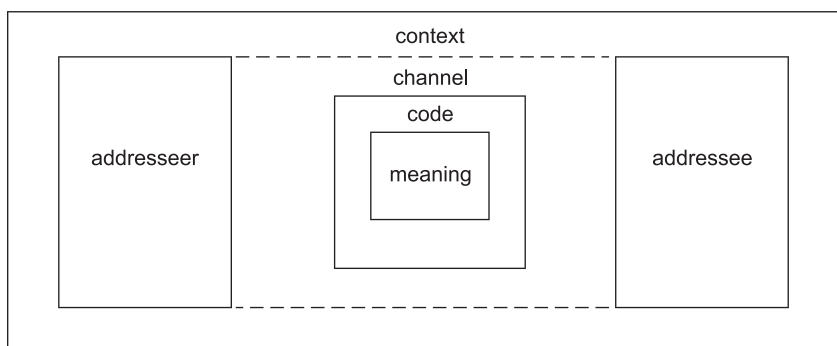

Figure 1. The representation of communication process (after T. Vestergaard and K. Schrøder, *The Language of Advertising,* op. cit., p. 16)

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[1] G.N. Leech, *English in Advertising: A Linguistic Study of Advertising in Great Britain.* London: Longmans 1966; T. Vestergaard, K. Schrøder, *The Language of Advertising,* New York: Basil Blackwell Inc 1985; A. Goddard, *The Language of Advertising,* London-New York: Routledge 1998; G. Cook, *The Discourse of Advertising*, London-New York: Routledge 2001.

[2] T. Vestergaard, K. Schrøder, *The Language of Advertising,* New York: Basil Blackwell Inc 1985, p.15.

What appears in the schema, apart from the addresser and addressee, are the code of the message, i.e. the various signs (e.g. road signs or gestures) through which meaning is conveyed; the channel, i.e. the medium that carries the message (e.g. letters written on paper in writing or sound waves in speech), the situational context in which the act of communication takes place, the immediate environment of the act and, finally, the cultural context and general knowledge of both the addresser and addressee. All these elements of communication will be expected to appear in advertising as well. According to Vestergaard and Schrøder:

> In the case of advertising the relation between this abstract, general communication model and the actual situation is fairly obvious: the addresser is the advertiser, and the addressee is the reader, the meaning transmitted is about the product (more specifically, an attempt to make the reader buy the product), the code (in the case of press advertising) is language and some sort of visual code, the channel consists of printed publications, and the context will include such features as the reader's total situation (does he have the product already? Can he afford it? etc.), the publication in which the advertisement appears, and last but not least the knowledge that the text is an advert [...][3].

The aim of this paper is to account for communication in advertising in terms of Conceptual Blending – one of the theories of meaning construction pursued in the general framework of Cognitive Linguistics. The theory of conceptual blending seeks to explain how people make sense of two or sometimes even more different scenarios and fuse them together to find completely new information present in neither of the scenarios called in other words input spaces or inputs. An attempt will be made here to show how this cognitive mental process unfolds and how its mechanism is exploited in advertisements. In particular, I shall claim that owing to the blending process, one is able to communicate a lot more using minimal linguistic resources.

Basic assumptions of Conceptual Integration Theory

Conceptual Blending, or Conceptual Integration Theory, as it is also called, is an approach that combines two theories: the Mental Spaces Theory and the theory of Conceptual Metaphor. According to the adherents of the Mental Spaces Theory, the act of construing meaning is composed of two processes. First, the act of building of mental spaces takes place and second, the establishing is made of mappings between those mental spaces. Mappings are always based on the discourse so that meaning construction is context-bound. Mental spaces may be defined as "[...] very partial assemblies constructed as we think and talk for purposes of local understanding and action containing elements and [...] structured by frames and cognitive models"[4].

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[3] Ibidem, p.15–16.
[4] G. Fauconnier, *Mental Spaces,* [In:] *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, ed. D. Geeraerts, H. Cuyckens, New York: Oxford University Press 2007, p. 351–376.

We can also find mappings in conceptual metaphors; however, in contrast to those found in mental spaces, mappings in conceptual metaphors are unidirectional. It means that we can only map appropriate structures from a source domain onto a target domain, the former being a 'more concrete' concept than the latter. "Target domains are abstract, diffuse and lack clear delineation; as a result they 'cry out' for metaphorical conceptualization."[5]

The theory of Conceptual Metaphor can be applied to all those cases where meaning construction can be derived from apparent linguistic or conceptual structure. However, when the process of meaning construction is expected to rely on unavailable structure functioning as the input to the meaning construction process, then Conceptual Blending becomes crucial. For instance, although a sentence such as *That surgeon is a butcher* is metaphorical in nature, its meaning cannot be fully explained in terms of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Although we are able to establish mappings from the source domain BUTCHER onto the target domain SURGEON, the conceptual metaphor does not include the implied negative meaning of this sentence, i.e. that the individual called 'surgeon' is a bad surgeon. This is so because "[...] meaning construction cannot rely solely upon 'simple' conceptual projection processes like structuring one conceptual region in terms of another, as in the case of conceptual metaphors, or establishing connectors between counterparts in mental spaces"[6].

In contrast to conceptual metaphor, which involves stable domains of knowledge, where one conceptual region (source domain) is structured in terms of another conceptual region (target domain), in the case of conceptual blending, the integration network consists of mental dynamic spaces created 'as we speak'. Whereas domains of knowledge are seen as rather stable and pre-existing structures of knowledge, mental spaces involved in the meaning construction process are temporary and transient in nature. Hence, the first objective of Blending is to account for local and dynamic character of meaning construction.

Source: BUTCHER	mapping	Target: SURGEON
BUTCHER	⟶	SURGEON
CLEAVER	⟶	SCALPEL
ANIMAL CARCASSES	⟶	HUMAN PATIENTS
DISMEMBERING	⟶	OPERATING

Figure 2. Mappings for SURGEON IS A BUTCHER (after V. Evans, M. Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*, op. cit., p. 402)

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[5] Z. Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction,* Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002, p. 20.

[6] V. Evans, M. Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2006, p. 402.
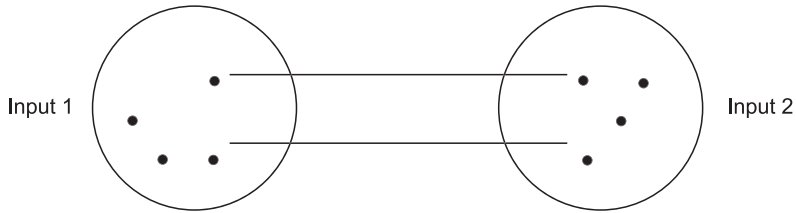
Figure 3. Mapping of elements across inputs (after V. Evans, M. Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*, op. cit., p. 403)

Another defining element of an integration network is the presence of so-called generic space which provides information common to the input spaces (Figure 4). Here, elements from the generic space are mapped onto the corresponding elements in both inputs. This being so, it is possible to establish mappings between the equivalent elements of the input spaces.
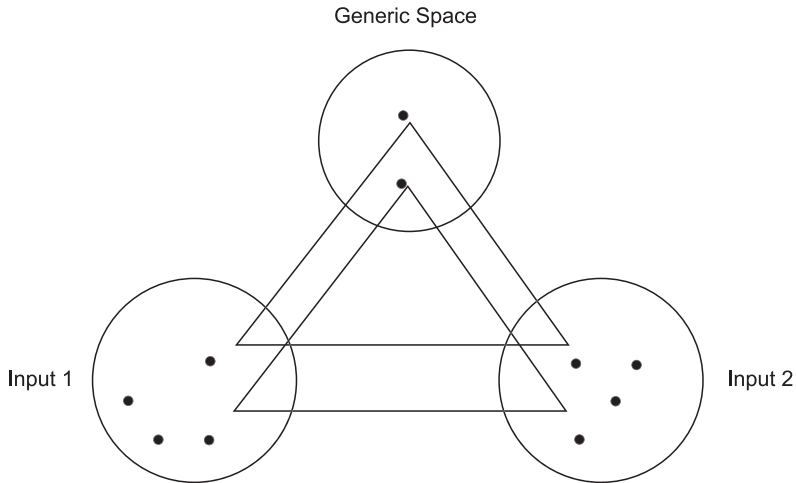

Figure 4. Connecting a generic spaces with two inputs (after V. Evans, M. Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*, op. cit., p. 404)

The integration network includes the fourth space, called a blended space or blend. This is the target space – the emergent structure – in which we can expect to find novel information that is not present in any of the spaces of the network. This space includes elements from the inputs and derives structure which has not been given in the inputs (Figure 5). Thus, in the blended space, apart from the already familiar elements, we have also novel information and, consequently, a new meaning.
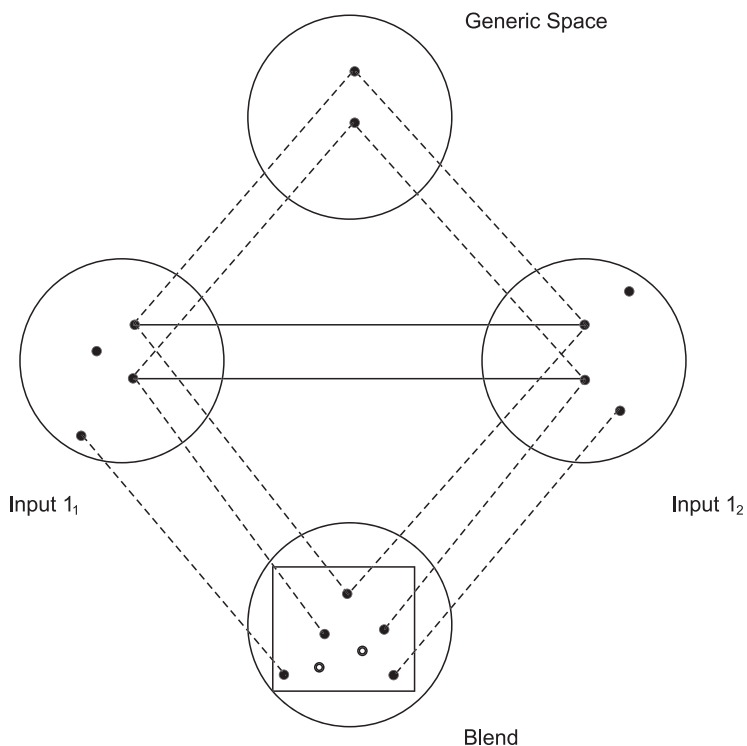
Figure 5. A diagram of an integration network (after G. Fauconnier, M. Turner, *The Way We Think,* New York: Basic Books 2002, p. 46)

We can now analyse the example that was mentioned earlier, namely the sentence *That surgeon is a butcher*:

Input space I contains the following information (i) the surgeon works in an operating room, (ii) his aim is to save people's lives, (iii) he usually uses a scalpel as a tool for operating and (iv) he has to be really precise and careful when conducting an operation not to kill a patient. On the other hand, in input space II, we have the butcher and knowledge of his profession, i.e. that he (i) works in an abattoir, (ii) he deals with dead animals' bodies to get as much meat from them as it is possible, (iii) he uses a cleaver and that he is not usually too careful about what he does as it simply does not matter whether he is precise or not – his only aim is to obtain raw meat from carcasses. The generic space contains more general terms like agent, patient, instrument, etc., thus making it possible to establish the cross-space mappings between them and between the elements from the inputs. Finally, in the blend, we have the structure which is projected from the two inputs and a novel structure which is not present in any of the inputs. The butcher from input II is a perfectly normal professional, however, when a surgeon is assessed as
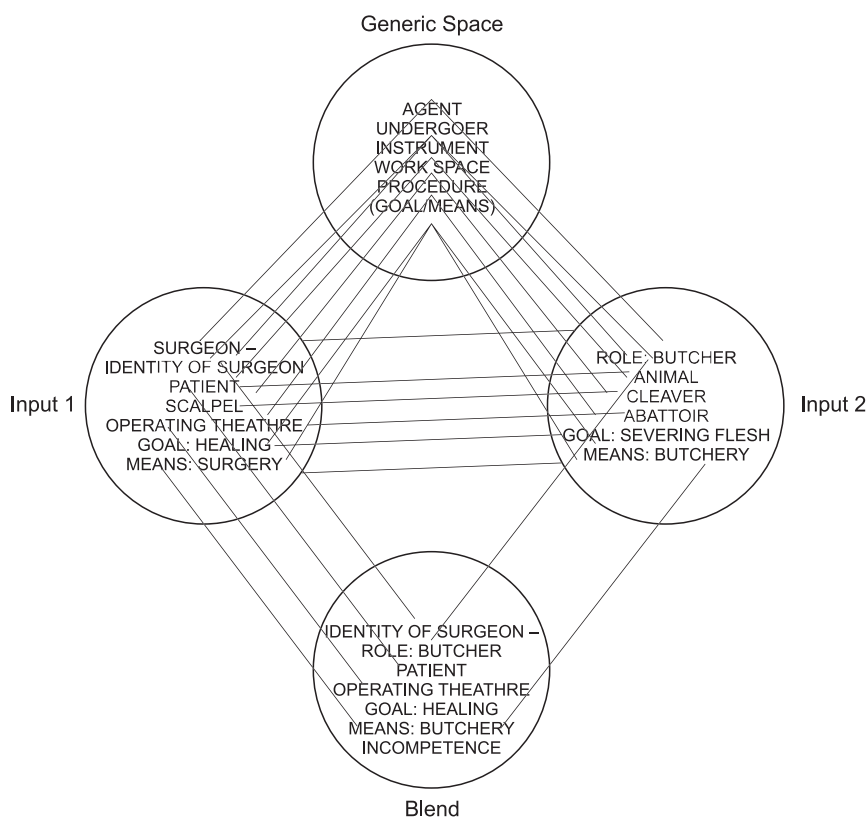
Figure 6. *That surgeon is a butcher* from Conceptual Blending perspective
(after V. Evans, M. Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*, op. cit., p. 406)

a butcher all the contrasts between the jobs of these two agents cause us to perceive the surgeon as having some of the butcher's features, e.g. that he is not precise, that his aim is definitely not to cure anybody or even that his job is more about doing harm rather than helping those in need. Hence, we perceive the surgeon as incompetent, one whom we would not like to conduct any operations on us. This emergent structure of incompetence is not available in any of the inputs but is rather a result of adding the two inputs. What helps us to see this emergent structure even more vividly is the shocking mismatch between the surgeon's aims, that is healing people and the means available, namely butchery.

We can turn to the crucial element of blending, i.e. to the emergent structure. In my attempt to analyse language and sometimes also other elements like pictures used in different ads to communicate various meanings I focus mainly on emergent structure which includes some new, absent in inputs information, and this is usually the information that is to be conveyed in most ads.

Analysis

Fauconnier and Turner enumerate three processes that give rise to emergent structure. The first of them is *composition*. "Blending can compose elements from the input spaces to provide relations that do not exist in the separate inputs"[7]. Looking back at the example *That surgeon is a butcher* we can see that elements from input I and input II are projected to the blend and composed there.

The second process is known as *completion*. This process is about recruiting by a blend background knowledge or frames, what can in other words be described as 'schema induction'. Notice that in the case of *That surgeon is a butcher* example, without the introduction of frames for SURGERY and BUTCHERY, we would not grasp the composition of a surgeon having some butcher's qualities and the negative judgment about the surgeon. *Elaboration* or *running the blend* is the third process involved in the creation of emergent structure. It is possible because of treating blends as simulations, processing them on-line to achieve structure that is unique to the blend. However, the number of elaborations of a given blend is indefinite. "We can run the blend as much and as long and in as many alternative directions as we choose."[8]

With this in mind, we can now move to the analysis of certain ads which come from PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) official website. Consider first the poster:

In the poster, apart from a man hugging a dog we read that buying animals is killing animals. Everything seems to be perfectly clear; however, do people really kill animals when they buy them? Although this phrase seems nonsensical, together with the main statement: *Adopt, don't buy*, it becomes perfectly understandable. What the author wanted to say is just hidden somewhere between the lines; to fully understand this statement, our minds perform blending. In Figure 8 one can find a possible elaboration of the blend. What is worth mentioning here is the fact that it is not one and only correct representation of blending as according to the authors of this theory we can run a blend in as many ways and as long as we can.

Figure 7

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[7] G. Fauconnier, M. Turner, *The Way We Think,* New York: Basic Books 2002, p. 48.
[8] Ibidem, p. 49.

With the help of the generic space it is possible to establish mappings between corresponding elements of both inputs. However, what is interesting here is that after the blend is created, we find this new information which is absent in the inputs. In this case it is the message that buying animals may lead to death of those which are homeless and left alone without care and love. Thus, by adopting animals we indirectly save their lives because we can only buy an animal from his owner and adopt an animal which does not have one. In integration network we have two input spaces – first of them includes elements like man, buying animals and adopting animals while the other consists of animals, killing animals and saving animals' lives.
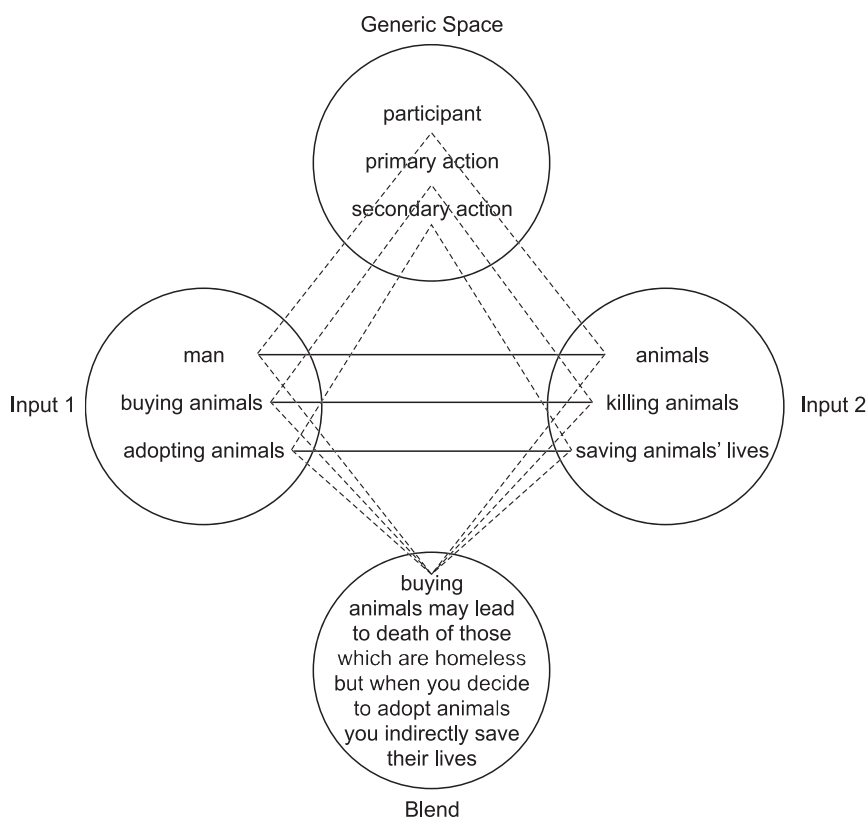

Figure 8. Possible elaboration of blend for *Adopt don't buy*.

The next example to be discussed here is another PETA poster, which says: *Be nice to bunnies*.

This slogan itself encourages us to treat animal rights, however, there is a bit more hidden in this message when we see it together with its poster (Figure 9). What makes this advert really powerful is in fact blend made of two inputs the former being devoted to human behaviour while the latter to animals' lives. Worth mentioning is also the fact that we have a clear case of polysemy here – bunnies can stand for small, furry creatures as much as for sexually attractive girls known as 'Playboy's bunnies'. However, polysemy does not provide us access to the novel meaning and that is why blending steps in (Figure 10).
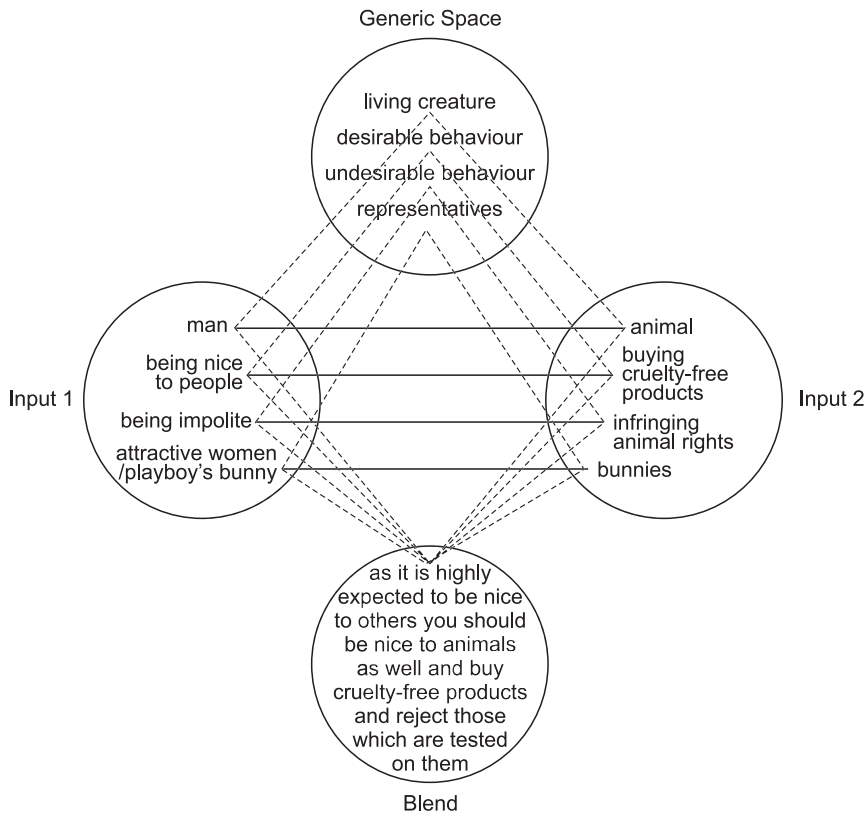

Figure 9

Figure 10. Possible elaboration of blend for *Be nice to bunnies*.

Notice that in this case, too, we also have two inputs which consist of corresponding elements. Generic space contains more general terms that make it possible to link the two inputs – it leads to appearance of blended space which brings us new information. We learn that as we are expected to behave in a certain way, follow certain social rules we should as well present good manners towards animals and in this case buy cruelty-free products which does not harm animals. Additionally, much as our impolite behaviour may discourage other people from getting on well with us, our passive attitude towards protection of the environment harms animals.

The last example to be discussed here is poster encouraging us to boycott the Bull Riding World Cup.
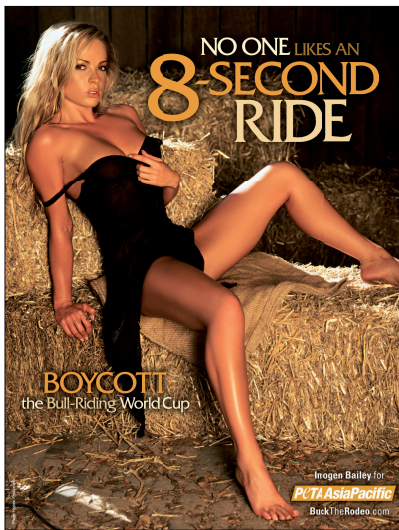

Figure 11

As it is directed mainly to men who are most often both participants and audience in this sport, it appeals to sexuality – something that undoubtedly attracts male attention. In the poster we can see a desirable, young, and half-naked woman sitting on a heap of hay. Above her head we read: *No one likes an 8-second ride*. In accordance with the blending theory, two elements are placed together in the integration network (Figure 12) in the two following frames. First of them is sex frame and the other is bull-riding frame. After the mappings are established between both the inputs and the generic space the blended space appears with derived meaning as well as novel meanings. Hence, the former meaning is the statement from the poster saying that no one likes an 8-second ride while the novel meanings are that having sex for as short period of time as 8 seconds is not satisfying so there is also nothing exciting about so short performances in bull-riding. Additionally, it can be assumed that women find this, so to say, sport as neither involving nor attractive. And finally, if the sexually attractive woman, who we are presented with does not like it and even relinquishes this dubious pleasure it is highly probable that most men will not like to take part in it.

Conclusion

Communication is very often narrowly understood as a simple dialogue between two or more people. Yet this is not so, as the analysis of advertisements has shown. Indeed, the human ability to communicate involves not only "verbal language"
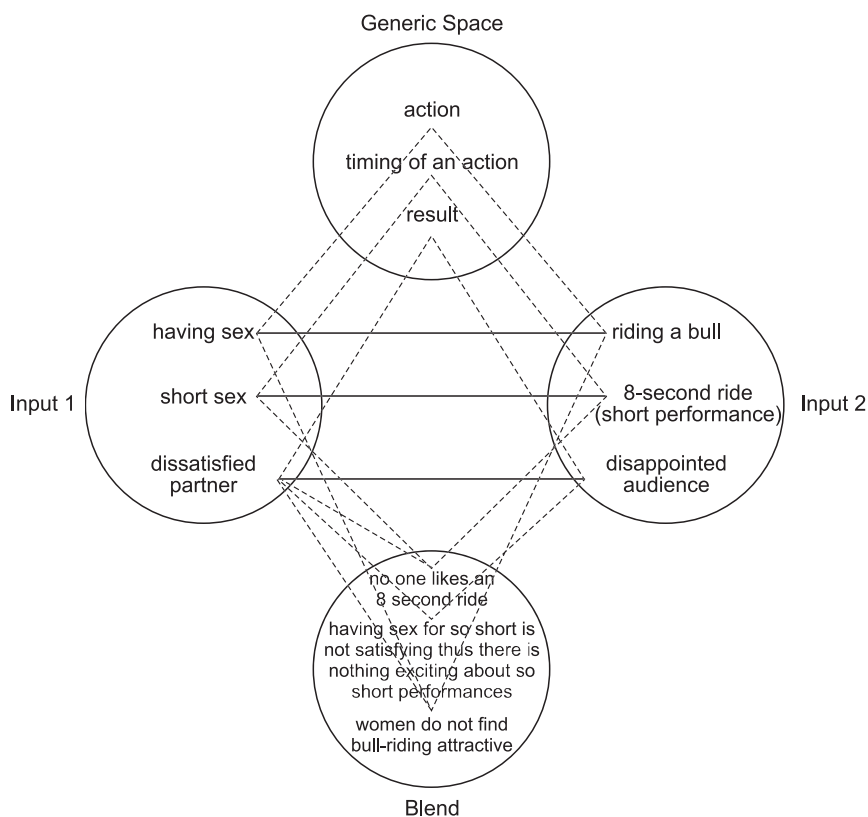
Figure 12. Possible elaboration of blend for *8 second ride.*

but "visual language" as well. Advertising companies are perfectly aware of this: to convey the message effectively, they resort to cognitive strategies involving blending mechanisms, the mechanism that we hold is best accounted for by the Conceptual Integration Theory.

Streszczenie

Reklama jako forma komunikacji – analiza na podstawie teorii amalgamatów konceptualnych

Artykuł poświęcony jest reklamie rozpatrywanej z językoznawczego punktu widzenia. Na początku dokonano prezentacji reklamy jako jednej z wielu form komunikacji, jednak to, na czym skupił się autor wiąże się z językoznawstwem kognitywnym, a dokładnie teorią amalgamatów konceptualnych (*Conceptual Blending Theory*), przy pomocy której został

zanalizowany zgromadzony materiał. Autor starał się pokazać, jak szerokim pojęciem jest komunikacja, skupiając się na modelu komunikacji jednostronnej (*one-way communication*). Co więcej, starał się również wytłumaczyć mechanizm, dzięki któremu ludzie są w stanie odnaleźć znaczenie ukryte pomiędzy słowem a obrazem.

Summary

Advertising as a Form of Communication: a Conceptual Blending Analysis

The article is dedicated to the issue of advertisement which was considered from a linguistic point of view. The advertisement was presented as one of many forms of communication. However, the author focused first of all on the cognitive aspect of the phenomenon, and precisely on the Conceptual Blending Theory which was used in the analysis of the collected material. The author tried to show that communication is a broad term, and concentrated on the so called one-way communication model. Moreover, he also tried to explain the mechanism which allows people to find the meaning hidden between a word and a picture.