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"Piękni i bestie" ("The beauties and the beasts") : local context in conceptual integration networks

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“PIĘKNI I BESTIE” (“THE BEAUTIES AND THE BEASTS”) – LOCAL CONTEXT IN CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Key words: blending, conceptual integration network, grounding box, local context

Conceptual integration theory, or blending theory, as developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner [2002], is a cognitive tool successfully used to analyse novel, creative conceptualizations, which appear in jokes, cartoons and advertisements [Grady, Oakley and Coulson 1999; Coulson 2001; Cichmińska 2004, 2006], but also in literature [Freeman 1997; Libura 2007; Stockwell 2002], music [Zbikowski 2001] and mathematics [Lakoff and Núñez 1997]. For a new structure – a blend – to appear, two (or more) input spaces produce an emergent meaning, meaning which is not available in any of the inputs.

The aim of the present paper is to analyse the headline of an article which appeared in the Polish newspaper “Gazeta Wyborcza” in the weekend issue of 28th–29th May, 2011, *Piękni i bestie* [*The Beauties and the Beasts*]. The article refers to the UEFA Champions League final, in which FC Barcelona, “the Beauties”, was about to fight with Manchester United, “the Beasts”, on Saturday 28th May, 2011. The present paper will focus on the issue of background knowledge, indispensable to understand and unpack the blend, and also on the importance of the local context, in which the blend was originally used. Thus we are asking the question what the headline *The Beauties and the Beasts* might mean to a reader. It is not an instantiation of an entrenched conceptual metaphor (in Lakoff’s sense) as we do not have a metaphor such as FOOTBALLERS ARE BEAUTIFUL GIRLS. The analysis of the meaning of the utterance should thus focus on what it is supposed to mean in a particular situation as it probably does not have any meaning outside of the actual use.

1. Conceptual integration theory

The basic ingredients of the conceptual integration theory or blending theory (BT) are mental spaces as described by Fauconnier [1994], two or more input spaces, the generic space and the blended space. There is partial matching between input spaces; the structure that the inputs share is captured in the generic space, while the blend contains structures from the two input spaces and develops emergent structure that is not present in the inputs. Emergent meaning arises through three processes: composition of projections from the inputs, completion based on recruiting additional structures such as frames, and elaboration, that is modification or “running” of the blend.

In the classical example “This surgeon is a butcher” [Grady, Oakley and Coulson 1999] there are two input spaces, BUTCHER and SURGEON, which are fused in the blend into SURGEON-BUTCHER, that is a surgeon who is evaluated as a butcher because he is incompetent in his job; rather than use the skills of a surgeon, he uses the skills of butchery. This inference of incompetence arises as a result of the mismatch between the goals of surgeons and butchers (healing and severing flesh, respectively), and the means they use (surgery versus butchery). Thus, although the elements in the blend were provided by the input spaces, the meaning of the blend is emergent, it is not copied from the inputs.

Line Brandt and Per A. Brandt criticize this analysis of the surgeon-butcher example and also propose a slightly different integration network, claiming that it is necessary to include a mental space containing a scenario in which the utterance is expressed by an utterer in a specific situation. They propose that the meaning of “This surgeon is a butcher” does not have

a predictable meaning independent of the context of its use [...] The situational context determines what is considered relevant about the target space and this framing, in turn, influences the framing of the source [Brandt and Brandt 2005: 17–18].

If the utterance was made by a woman who had just undergone surgery (successfully – the problem was fixed) and was not very happy with the scar, which turned out to be more dramatic than she had predicted, the surgeon would be criticized for being incompetent, but his incompetence would be of a different nature from performing the surgery unsuccessfully. Similarly, the reference to “a butcher” evokes different interpretations in such utterances as “They destroyed our house without warning. Sharon is a butcher”, or “God is a butcher and we are all going to be slaughtered”, where the Israeli political leader and God respectively are criticized not for being incompetent but for being brutal, cruel and unsympathetic [Brandt and Brandt 2005].

Brandt and Brandt [2005] propose introducing six mental spaces into the network, namely: semiotic, presentation, reference, relevance, virtual and meaning spaces (discussed in detail in Brandt and Brandt [2005]). They suggest that their

model should interpret any utterance in any specific local context, which is not always possible in Fauconnier and Turner's model [2002].

Seana Coulson and Todd Oakley [2005] use and modify both of the above mentioned models and propose a coded meaning model of blending. Their model consists of three spaces: the blended space, in the sense of Fauconnier and Turner [2002], and the presentation and reference spaces, inspired by Brandt and Brandt's proposal [2005]. The presentation space, similar to the notion of source domain in conceptual metaphor theory, elicits a mental scenario which evokes the reference space. The reference space represents a feature or aspect of the situation which is the focus of attention of the discourse participants.

Coulson and Oakley notice the importance of contextual aspects of meaning construction as "all sentences rely importantly on contextual assumptions that vary in their transparency to speakers and hearers" [Coulson and Oakley 2005: 1517]. Thus they refer to Ronald W. Langacker's notion of ground [2002] and Brandt and Brandt's concept of semiotic space [2005].

Coulson and Oakley introduce one more element into their network, that is the grounding box, which contains the list of contextual assumptions considered important by the analyst. When those assumptions are explicitly represented by the speakers, they are represented as models in mental spaces; the grounding box contains implicit assumptions, which influence the way meaning is constructed. Thus the grounding box is not a mental space, and can be used "to specify roles, values and experiences that ground speakers' subsequent representations" [Coulson and Oakley 2005: 1517]. Coulson and Oakley [2005] illustrate their model using the example below:

In France, the Lewinsky affair wouldn't have hurt Clinton.

The full meaning of this utterance involves more than the information represented in the conceptual integration network depending on the circumstances. Let us assume that it appeared in a conservative daily "Washington Post" just after France blocked the vote of the United Nations authorizing war in Iraq. The mention of Clinton affair activates a mental space for US American politics with impeachment and a Senate trial, which functions as a presentation space: it presents the reader with a scenario used as an organizing frame for French politics. The phrase "in France" is the space builder of the reference space, which focuses the attention on the specific feature of French political life: French voters do not care too much about their political leaders' extra-marital affairs. The emergent meaning feeds back from the blend to the grounding box and the full meaning of the utterance shows how corrupted French politics as it would allow such a reviled political figure as Clinton to thrive and as a result might lead the reader to focus on lack of moral clarity in French politics.

On the other hand, if the same sentence was written in “The Nation”, one of the most progressive, leftist publications in the USA, the French would be construed as heroes rather than villains, and President Clinton’s private affairs would not have been exposed as he should not be distracted from fighting with terrorism. Thus, Coulson and Oakley propose that the

space structuring that occurs in meaning construction requires the application and integration of coded meaning, background knowledge, and contextual information. A complete theory of meaning construction must explore the interplay of these factors [Coulson and Oakley 2005: 1535].

2. The Beauties and the Beasts – how much contextual information is required

The article entitled in Polish *Piękni i bestie* (*The Beauties and the Beasts*) appeared in Saturday sport supplement to “Gazeta Wyborcza”. The headline was placed under a rather schematic drawing of Wayne Rooney and Leo Messi facing each other, with an additional headline *Barcelona vs. Manchester United, sobota* [*Saturday*], *Londyn* [*London*].

The headline involves a blend of cognitive models from two inputs, the presentation space of football and the reference space of the fairy tale for children. The presentation space is immediately activated by the picture of the footballers representing the two opposing teams and the caption with the names of the team. The reference space is activated by the direct reference to the traditional fairy tale titled *The Beauty and the Beast*. In the fairy tale, Belle – the Beauty – the youngest, beautiful girl of pure heart, must live with the hideous Beast as a punishment for his father’s unacceptable behaviour. Belle lives a life of luxury in the Beast’s palace and is treated like a princess, but she misses her home and family; when her father gets sick, the Beast allows her to go home and visit him, but she must come back in a week. However, Belle stays at home longer and when she comes back to the Beast, she finds him dying. She starts crying and says she loves him. At that moment the Beast is transformed into a handsome prince that he used to be before a fairy turned him into a hideous creature for being cruel and selfish. Only true love could break the curse. Of course, the Beauty and her handsome prince get married and live happily ever after.

In Figure 1 a graphical representation of the integration network for the analysed blend is shown. The emergent structure in the blend arises out of the three processes of blending. In the process of composition, the information from different spaces is juxtaposed. In the blend, an element from the football domain is composed with an element from the fairy tale domain (Barcelona players are the Beauties, Manchester United players are the Beasts). In the process of completion, two frames are activated: the football frame and the fairy tale frame.

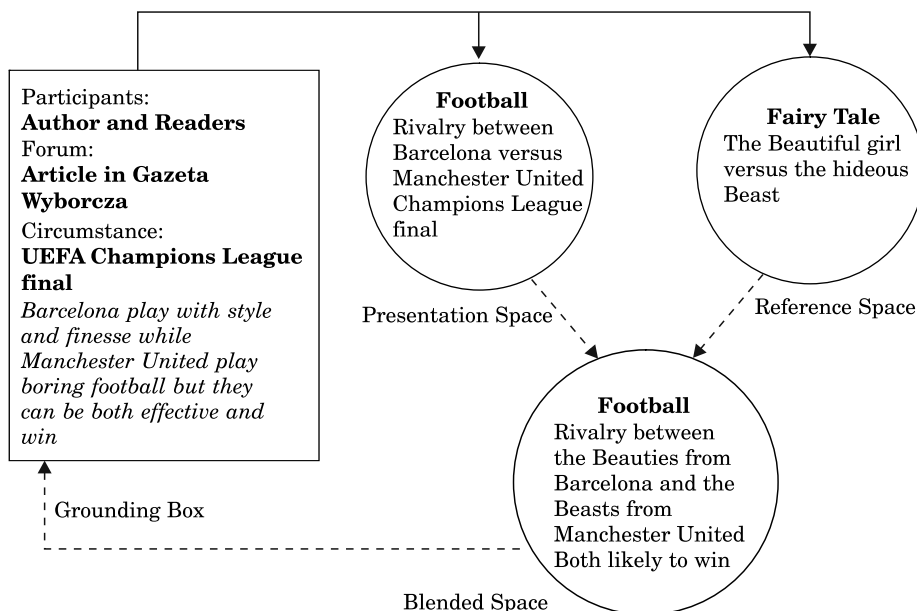


Fig. 1. Conceptual integration network for “Piękni i bestie” (“The Beauties and the Beasts”)

Finally, in the process of elaboration, which results from mental simulation, we deal with the team of the Beauties – Barcelona, who represent the beautiful side of contemporary football: not only do they play with passion and great finesse, but they are also effective and win trophy after trophy. The author of the article, Rafał Stec, refers to the game as “półbogowie kontra modlitwa o przetrwanie” [“half-gods versus praying for survival”]. Although Manchester United, the Beasts, can be effective and win matches, they show neither beauty of finesse: their performance is considered boring, and thus not very entertaining for the spectators and viewers all over the world.

However, as the author claims, even though most sports commentators agree that Barcelona will defeat Manchester United, both the teams are effective in scoring goals and are able to win; otherwise they would not fight against each other in the final. After all, the Beast from the fairy tale is a dangerous, powerful creature; Manchester United’s football may not be spectacular, but has deadly Rooney and fabulous Edwin van der Sar in the goal. Thus, no matter how spectacular and attractive to the spectators their football may be, what counts is the final result and the trophy – the Champions League Cup. Thus, even the ugliest game may lead to a victorious result.

The two inputs are asymmetric: parts of the domains they activate are projected while others are suppressed. The frame of the Fairy Tale projects only the existence of two protagonists: the Beauty and the Beast, while the frame of Football projects a lot of background knowledge of Barcelona, Manchester United, Champions League and football in general. The blend is thus structured,

as Brandt and Brandt suggest, according to what is “situationally relevant” [Brandt and Brandt 2005: 31]. Situational relevance influences the framing of the blend, which is contextually motivated. The question arises whether, as the quoted above authors propose,

the meaning of the blend does not have a predictable meaning independent of the context of its current use. The situational context determines what is relevant about the target space [Brandt and Brandt 2005: 17–18].

The importance of local contextual information can be seen by imagining the appearance of the same headline accompanied by the same drawing of Rooney facing Messi appeared in other newspapers, like “La Vanguardia”, Catalonia’s leading daily newspaper, and “The Daily Mail”, a British daily. The fully derived meaning of the article would have to be different in this case. The author of the Polish article tried to present a very balanced opinion of the two teams; even though he agreed that Barcelona plays more spectacular and attractive football, he admitted that even if a team plays “ugly” football, they may win as well. Regardless of what most of the sports commentators think, both the teams have equal chances of winning the cup, no matter how they play. The Catalan newspaper article would most probably focus on praising the skills and mastery of Barcelona players, and the Beauties would probably be presented as the only team deserving to win. The British newspaper might use the term “the Beauties” in a somewhat derogatory way, say, commenting on handsome, but not very tough faces or general appearances of Leo Messi and David Villa, and imply that the “real” footballers, the Beasts, like Wayne Rooney, do not have to be handsome. In fact, his rough manners and appearance might make him look more like a man. Thus, “the Beast” might become a compliment, when we talk about a footballer’s behaviour on the pitch, while “the Beauty” might refer to someone who is not very masculine and does not display macho behaviour – either on the pitch or in life outside football. Additionally, the author of the British article might refer to the ending of the fairy tale, where the Beast becomes a handsome prince he used to be, and thus imply that it is not the appearances that matter – it is what is hidden inside that matters and inside the macho appearances of Manchester footballers and their unattractive style there is the winning streak, the ability to win tournaments – the real beauty.

If the same headline and the drawing appeared in a women’s magazine, accompanying an article about the most handsome and attractive sportsmen, neither the headline nor the drawing would refer to football but rather the appearances and possibly lifestyles: quiet and modest Messi versus hooligan Rooney.

When a blend integrates information projected from totally different input spaces, this integration can produce novel results. However, these novel results need to accommodate the viewpoint of the speaker, in the analysed case – the author’s viewpoint. This perspective alone might change the derived meaning of the blend.

3. Discussion

Blending processes are used to conceptualise actual things, such as computer interface, fictional things such as talking animals, and impossible things, such as me being you, as in the counterfactual expression "If I were you". Although cognitive models in blended spaces may sometimes be totally different or even outright bizarre, the integration of information from the inputs can produce extremely novel results, and lead to changes in the conceptualiser's knowledge according to the principle of backward projection, where elements of the blend may feed back into the inputs. Backward projection might thus lead the readers to believe that contemporary footballers are mythical figures, like characters from fairy tales, with magical skills and talents, and their income and celebrity status. Alternatively, depending on the context, the readers might be led to believe that (as might be the case with a potential British article under this headline) "beauty is skin deep" and it does not really matter in the macho world of football: what counts is toughness and the final victory. After all, in 20 years, who is going to remember the style in which the final was won?

It seems that understanding the blend in the headline poses no difficulty to the reader. However, the real comprehension of the blend as intended by the writer is possible only when the reader shares the same background knowledge, in this case the detailed knowledge not only of football in general, but also the particular Champions League final and the style the two opposing teams represent. To a layperson, who is not really interested in football, it might refer to the actual appearances of the footballers (as undoubtedly the most popular of them do enjoy celebrity status), as it was mentioned before. The layperson would have to read the whole article to find out that their initial interpretation was wrong.

The blend in question may also be misunderstood depending on the local context, i.e. the kind of magazine, the country and language in which it would appear. Thus, it seems that the proposal put forward by Coulson and Oakley [2005] is an interesting development of the blending theory as proposed by Fauconnier and Turner [2002]. It definitely has its limitations as it is easy to imagine blends which are understood without any particular local context, but in many cases the grounding box might help the analyst grasp the full derived meaning of the blend [cf. Cichmińska 2011].

It seems controversial, though, that Coulson and Oakley [2005] should have given up the concept of the generic space. As Agnieszka Libura writes [2007], finding more abstract structure, which the input spaces have in common, and which is placed in the generic space, licenses the existence of the integration network at all. It might seem plausible to add the grounding box – at least in those cases where it is necessary – to the "classical" integration network without giving up the generic space.

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Summary

“Piękni i bestie” (“The Beauties and the Beasts”) – Local Context in Conceptual Integration Networks

The aim of the article is to discuss the importance of local context in conceptual integration networks as proposed by Coulson and Oakley [2007]. Their concept of grounding box is discussed with reference to the headline *Piękni i bestie* [*The Beauties and the Beasts*] from “Gazeta Wyborcza” (28th–29th May, 2011).