Figurativeness, conceptual metaphor, and blending

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Figurative language has interested stylisticians, literary scholars, and linguists for a long time. The last thirty years of scholarship have brought about an interest in figurative language which also includes a study of the conceptualizations underlying figuration. One of the first, and most broadly discussed, figures in this context is conceptual metaphor (see Chapter 1). The conceptual approach now also includes a different mapping, known as conceptual integration (or blending). Both concepts have been used in general studies of linguistic meaning, but have also increasingly appeared in discussions of other aspects of language, and have become popular in cognitive discussions of visual artifacts, discourse genres, and also non-linguistic disciplines. Much of the extant literature does not make clear distinctions between the two conceptual explanations of meaning; also, analysts and students are often not sure how the two concepts are similar and different. An explanation is clearly needed. In what follows, I will outline some major features of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Conceptual Integration/Blending Theory (CBT), often referred to simply as Blending Theory. I will also suggest practical ways in which the central concepts of a conceptual metaphor and a blend can be used in text analysis, and draw comparisons between them, also in the context of other forms of figurative language.

Introduction

Both CMT and CBT build on a well-known fact that words often become polysemous, but also argue that mechanisms of polysemy in such cases are dictated by the nature of thought. The assumption is that figurative meaning is not a special case, where new senses emerge for poetic or rhetorical reasons, but an inherent feature of how words and other linguistic devices are used.

The concept of metaphor outside of CMT has been used in the rhetorical study of figurative language (in poetic or other non-literal contexts), alongside other tropes, such as metonymy, simile, or irony, but metaphor clearly holds a privileged position (starting from Aristotle 1960 all the way through Burke 1969). Since the 1980 seminal book by Lakoff and Johnson (see also Lakoff and Johnson 1999 and Chapter 1), metaphor has
been discussed as a conceptual mapping, connecting two conceptual domains, and allowing speakers to talk about abstract phenomena or emotions in terms of more concrete experiences. Once metaphor was established as a conceptual mapping, other tropes started to be redefined in conceptual terms (for an overview, see Littlemore 2015 on metonymy; Modér 2008, 2010 on simile; or Tobin and Israel 2012 on irony). CBT, for comparison, has never been used to discuss tropes. It was first introduced in the 1990s, primarily describing blending as a broad conceptual process. CBT supports the treatment of meaning in terms of conceptual domains, but does not limit the possible combinations to two such domains (source and target); instead, it postulates that a new concept is formed, called a blend. The CBT approach, just like CMT, has been applied in various areas of conceptualization and expression (see Fauconnier and Turner 1996, 1998, 2002; Grady, Oakley and Coulson 1999; Coulson 2001).

Descriptions of metaphors and blends often highlight their similarities rather than their different general goals. Both concepts rely on the idea of conceptual structure being projected into another conceptual structure; the nature and number of these structures and the scope of the projection can be seen differently (see below), but the very idea of a conceptual structure as a representation of meaning and the possibility of taking meaning from one such structure to project it into another is shared by both concepts. As a result, some scholars present conceptual metaphor as a sufficient term, others assume the same about blending, and still others reserve one or the other term for a specific range of interpretations. Very few attempt to clearly connect or distinguish the concepts (Fauconnier and Turner 2008).

In this chapter, I will go over the major claims of CMT and CBT, showing the similarities but also the differences. The chapter will also include a discussion of some examples, putting CMT and CBT in the context of analyzing how language is used in discourse.

Overview: conceptual metaphor and blending

In this section, I will give basic examples of the kinds of mappings CMT and CBT discuss, and outline the primary mechanisms of meaning emergence.

Definitions of mappings cannot quite be formulated without reliance on other, underlying concepts. One such concept is a domain (typically used in CMT). Chronologically, the concept of the domain was originally proposed in Lakoff and Johnson’s first explanation of conceptual metaphor (1980). It refers to a conceptual package including a range of connected elements, and is potentially referred to by a shared term. For example, a domain such as War includes a number of components such as opponents, weapons, attack and defense, victory and defeat. These components can be used as the basis for a range of metaphoric expressions representing, generally speaking, the domain of an Argument (an exchange of thoughts assuming some initial disagreement, and various procedures and results of those procedures). In talking about an argument in terms of war (attack someone’s position, win the dispute, etc.), the War domain is the source of structure, while Argument is the target. Based on this, a metaphoric mapping can be defined as a relation between two conceptual domains (the source domain and the target domain) which sets up links (mappings) between specific elements of the two domains’ structures.

In CMT, the assumption is that the source domain is rich in conceptual structure, and that that structure is basically concrete in nature, so that the domain evokes real life knowledge or experience. This means that the domain of War is filled with information we can think of to describe specific events and we are able to tell the difference between a war and a
peaceful negotiation between opposing parties. As regards the target domain, it has very little concrete structure, and may in fact be quite abstract. This is the case of the domain of Argument, which we understand as a specific type of verbal exchange, where opposing views are expressed. Using War as the source domain allows us to describe the progress of the argument beyond simply saying ‘and then A said something, and then B disagreed, and then A said something again . . .’, etc. The target domain is enriched with conceptual structure from the source domain, such that the arguing parties will eventually be seen as winners or losers. The above description assumes that the projection of conceptual structure goes one way only—from source to target—and as a result of the projection the target can be talked about in more specific terms. That is, the result is a range of metaphoric expressions made possible by the mapping (as in designing a new line of attack, bringing out the heavy guns, withdrawing from one’s position, etc.) The metaphorical mapping is schematically represented in Figure 2.1.

Blending considers a broader range of possibilities of projection, and it also explains the nature of the projection differently. For example, the media have been referring to the increasing number of retiring seniors and their potential impact on the economy as the silver tsunami. The expression relies on two domains (in blending terms, they are called ‘inputs’), Seniors and Tsunami, but also makes a reference to the Economy. Here is how we might briefly describe the blend:

a. The concept relies on the generic space, based primarily on a cause-and-effect pattern, such as ‘inevitable change through time which brings catastrophic results’.

b. Input 1 is the domain of Seniors (an element in the domain of Age), which includes knowledge about the fact that as people age, their lifestyle changes as well.

c. Input 2 is the domain of Tsunami (an element in the domain of Natural Events), including knowledge about their consequences for people.

d. Both inputs contain a number of elements, but, in agreement with the causal pattern in the generic space, only some elements are chosen for projection. Because of its limited scope, it is called selective projection. In the Seniors domain, the blend represents seniors by their grey, or silver, hair (a metonymic reference to age) and their common lifestyle (no longer employed). In the Tsunami domain, the blend selects features of a catastrophic wave which wipes out everything in its path.

Figure 2.1 Argument is War: the conceptual metaphor.
The selection focuses on the image of an increasing number (of seniors) *cross-mapped* with the increased height, weight, and power of a tsunami wave. Also, the changes in the number of seniors over time are described as increasing along a trajectory—based on the trajectory of the tsunami wave moving forward. When the blend is *run*, the motion and destructive power of the wave is projected into the changes in the Seniors domain, giving them speed and profiling a specific result.

The expression uses the term *tsunami* to signify a catastrophic change, but the results of that change will be felt in the domain of economic stability. To represent this, we need another domain, *Input 3*, that of the Economy, profiled as the domain of destruction caused by the wave.

The selected elements are projected into a new construct, called the *blend*. In the blend, we now have a new configuration of concepts, with seniors and their life changes (from *Input 1*) profiled as the cause, and economic change (from *Input 3*) profiled as the result; finally, the nature of that change would be seen as catastrophic (*Input 2*). This new conceptual structure is called the *emergent structure*.

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The final stage is *backwards projection*, from the blend back to one of the inputs. The causal chain presenting retirement as a potential cause of economic hardship is projected back to the Seniors input, where we now gain the specific view of the effects of the number of seniors growing. This might not change the general concept of aging, but it adds another way of seeing it.

Crucially, the effect is that in the blend thus set up, we are now seeing the growing number of seniors as a negative phenomenon. Outside of the blend, retirement can still be seen as a desirable situation, where people who have worked hard all their lives are now given a chance to relax. In the blend, this is presented as undesirable, because of potential effects on other people. This is the crucial aspect of blending—the point of view constructed by the blend is only valid in that blend, not as a general change in meaning. It is not surprising that the whole concept of the *silver tsunami* is causing a lot of controversy—not everyone wants to see retirement as harmful.

The blend in this case relies on a number of implicit conceptualizations specific to the inputs. For example, using a (rather formulaic) description of old age by referring to hair color is a case of metonymy. Also, the concept of a wave relies on simpler images of the power of a wave being proportional to its size (the higher the wave, the more destructive it can be), of the wave moving forward (and thus removing obstacles in its way), of the motion of the wave being impossible to stop, etc. All these elements contribute to the impact of the blended image.

The process described above is rather complex, since the blend analyzed belongs to the most powerful (and most complex) category of blends, called double-scope blends. The primary explanation of how three very different domains can be fused into a new concept is the idea of *compression*. The differences across various elements of the three inputs are compressed into a tight and easily manageable structure in the blend. The primary axes along which compression happens in this blend (in CBT, such axes are referred to as *vital relations*) are Causation and Analogy. Outside the blend, old age may be a Change, but in the blend it is a Cause; also, the complex nature of a rising wave (based on the amount of water) provides an analogy to the increase in retirements (where the number of seniors is what causes the problems). Further discussion of vital relations is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is good to keep in mind that they guide the kinds of changes that elements of inputs undergo as a result of being projected into the blend.
Can conceptual metaphors be interpreted as blends?

There are several kinds of blends described in CBT. They all postulate the independent structure called the blend, and one sub-type, called a single-scope blend, represents conceptual metaphors. Returning now to the *Argument is War* metaphor outlined above, in a blending interpretation the nature of conceptual relations between the domains of War and Argument is described in somewhat different terms; the steps are discussed here and the resulting blend is represented in Figure 2.2.

a. As in the example above, the domains are referred to as input spaces; thus the domain of War would constitute Input 1, and the domain of Argument would constitute Input 2.

b. They are matched in terms of a more general domain, called generic space. This would contain the idea of opposing options, participants representing those options, actions these participants would undertake (such as trying to affect the opponent’s stance), etc. These concepts are applicable both to wars and to arguments, and thus the integration of War and Argument would rely on an abstract frame of oppositional behavior.

The way in which such knowledge is represented is an important issue in comparing metaphorical analyses with blending analyses. In blending, the generic space needs to be formulated independently of the inputs, for the purposes of the emerging meaning. In metaphorical mappings, there is no dedicated construct justifying the connection between the source and the target; rather, it is assumed that the oppositional behavior characteristic of war is projected into the frame of the argument, thus representing it as an example of oppositional behavior.

c. Metaphor analysis would focus on the effect of the projection—how the target is changed as a result (Kövecses 2002 discusses the effect of *highlighting* the relevant aspects of the target; see also Chapter 1). That is, a metaphor analysis maintains its interest in the relationship between the source domain and the target domain. Blending, for comparison, proposes that the projection does not flow directly from (the source) input to (the target) input, but that both inputs project into another structure, called the blend.

d. There are several steps leading to the full fusion in the blend. First, elements in the inputs are connected through cross-mapping. Crucially, the participants in a debate are cross-mapped with the warring parties. An argument, like war, is a series of events, where both participants alternate performing similar actions (physical actions such as attack and defense versus verbal events, such as formulating a new thought intended to prove the opponent wrong or serve as a rebuttal).

e. The final stages are like the ones outlined for the silver tsunami example above: conceptual content is selectively projected into the blend, where the new emergent structure is set up, allowing for further inferences or new expressions. The effects of all these processes are represented in Figure 2.2.

If we compare the two blends described above (‘Argument is War’ and the silver tsunami), the steps in the emergence of the blend are the same. But differences arise on the basis of the number and type of inputs and the scope and complexity of projections into the blend.

These stages of the blending process do not represent the actual sequence of events developing in time, of course. They show the way in which we can represent in some detail what it is for one concept to start structuring another. There are guiding principles that make the connections possible (the generic space), there is contribution from all inputs, but there is
also a new concept, one which does not exist in any of the inputs alone, but instead is an independent conceptual structure with its own dynamic.

As the discussion above shows, much of the CMT work would focus on the productive emergence of more and more expressions based on one metaphorical mapping (so that much of the discourse on Argument can rely on War). CBT is less interested in the effect of one mapping, and centers its attention on the online spontaneous communicative effects of giving a tight and unique form to a complex set of various issues and attitudes (so that one aspect of the complex issue of the number of seniors is given a compact and easily manageable label). Fauconnier and Turner (2002) talk about the result of blending as achieving 'global insight' and 'human scale'—indeed, the image of a dangerous tsunami is simple and triggers immediate responses of fear, creating attitudes to seniors which may not make sense outside the blend.

As was noted above, conceptual metaphors can be represented as single-scope blends. Thus, whether we describe the construal of arguments as wars in terms of conceptual metaphor or blending, basically the same facts are accounted for.

Both CMT and CBT use similar operations to describe new meanings. They both postulate that meanings need to be represented as complex structures (whether they are called domains or inputs), and they both propose that projecting aspects of meaning from one such structure to another is the core of the process. But there are important differences as well. Metaphor is more specific about the nature of the changes in the target domain, while blending describes these kinds of changes as resulting from a more general process.

Because of the different goals of the two approaches, one or the other might be chosen with respect to the kind of data under analysis. Blending analysts intend to represent emergence
of meaning beyond conceptual metaphor, and so focus on the variety of possibilities serving different discourse goals. The result is that in considering applications of blending, we need to look at a variety of unrelated examples. They may come from any area of language use and structure. There are examples in the formation of new words, as in a webinar—a seminar held online, or the verb to guestimate—estimate by guessing. There are also important examples of complex blending even in the simplest adjectival modification. If someone wishes you Happy travels! as you are boarding a train, they are attributing the future state of happiness to you as a traveller, and not to the actual motion from one location to the next which travel may represent. In this blend, the expression connects the emotional state to the participant in the travel event, not to the event as a whole, creating a complex image of a person pleased with the experience of travel. The meaning does not arise by a simple sum total of the adjective happy and the noun travel: it is a blend using the full complexity of the travel input and the idea that wishing someone something typically relates to a type of experience an event may evoke.

Examples of how various language forms prompt blending structures are numerous, and so CBT covers a broad range of phenomena where new meanings emerge, but not for purposes typically assigned to conceptual metaphor. In comparing CMT and CBT, we need to keep in mind that there is a limited range of examples where both theories can be equally explanatory.

**Critical issues**

The most important question that arises out of the comparison of the two theories is the analytical benefits of choosing one or the other. Indeed, the practices of various scholars are quite different.

The first strategy is to use the concept of metaphor quite broadly, with some reference to its conceptual nature, but without distinguishing it from blending as a related, but different, conceptual mapping. This is a common practice in many contexts where the specific details of meaning construction of a particular expression are less important to the general points being made. For instance, we will find metaphor being discussed as a broad analytical tool in discussions of discourse (Semino 2008; Chilton 2004; Charteris-Black and Hart 2010; Musolff and Zinken 2009; Deignan, Littlemore and Semino 2013). What these analysts typically aim at is a broad understanding of how a figurative thought pattern affects ways to discuss an issue, construe a problem, draw inferences, etc., especially in a specific discourse genre. It is often the case then that the metaphors postulated have rich domains as sources—the discussion typically focuses on the domains of Journey, War, or similarly salient and productive concepts.

These analyses often uncover important discourse phenomena. For example, in analyses of the discourse of cancer, much discussion is devoted to the Battle (or War) metaphor. The cancer sufferer is portrayed as fighting the illness. Importantly, the motivational nature of such discourse has recently come under much criticism from the medical profession, as too much responsibility for the results of the treatment is placed on the patient’s shoulders, and dying of cancer is then implied to be some sort of failure on the part of the sufferer. The discourse can thus be actually harmful to the patient’s morale (cf. Chapter 26). In such discussions, the metaphor is viewed as a mindset embedded in the choice of discourse. In many cases, then, the term ‘metaphor’ is used quite broadly, as a most general pattern of figurative language and thought.

Blending, for comparison, is often chosen to discuss meaning emergence in selected complex expressions. To remain within the discourse of cancer, interesting examples can
be found in some of the writing on the subject of cancer by Christopher Hitchens. When first diagnosed with cancer, Hitchens describes his experience as a gentle deportation—he refers in this way to being abruptly removed from his daily professional routines and taken to a new and unfamiliar place where only sick people reside. This is clearly a metaphorical usage. But when later in the article Hitchens talks about the medical discourse of cancer as Tumorville tongue (which he then describes in terms that make it sound like a foreign language), CBT seems to be a better choice in explaining the name of Tumorville. It is a non-existent name of a non-existent town, using the ending -ville, a component of many real city names (such as Louisville, Charlotteville), but also made-up names of film and sit-com locations (Pleasantville, Psychoville, or Smallville, all with predictable local character). So the -ville part is suggesting an invented location, and the Tumor part evokes the actual disease, thus creating an imaginary location of cancer sufferers, though with a charming tone to it. CBT seems a much more effective way of describing the combination of the City Names input with the Tumor input, to create the concept of not just a location for cancer patients, but a whole city-like environment, with its own local flavour, tongue, and rules. Tumorville is not a basis of a reasoning pattern or broader discourse; on the contrary, it is a jocular one-off implementation of the word formation process and a broader idea of pockets of life that healthy people do not know about. Roughly speaking, then, we might say that CMT is a more common tool when one broad concept is talked about in terms of a pattern borrowed from another, while CBT is a natural choice when a creative term is used to encapsulate a rich and complex combination of meanings for the purposes of current expression. Crucially, though, it would be hard to argue that only one of the approaches is appropriate.

This becomes a bit more complex when visual artifacts are involved. Just like the Tumorville expression, visual advertisements often rely on some visual combination of two independent concepts (Forceville 1996; Forceville and Urios-Aparisi 2009). For example, one of many anti-smoking ads shows a hospital bed, neatly made up and empty, with the colors of the bedding resembling a cigarette—three quarters white and one quarter yellow-brown, like a cigarette filter. The bed input clearly suggests illness, serious enough to warrant hospitalization, while the empty and desolate look of the bed suggests that it has just been emptied by a terminally ill smoker-patient, or that it has been reserved for a smoker who will become a patient soon. The cause of the serious illness is only suggested by the colors of the bedding—we understand that the patient was/will be a smoker based only on that. The crucial aspect of such an image is that the warning against the health dangers of smoking is implied through a clever combination of two images, each evoking one of the aspects of the situation. CMT would not help here, because we cannot claim that the knowledge of hospital beds is projected into the concept of a cigarette, or vice versa. Rather, the image depends on metonymy, such that the bed evokes serious illness, warranting hospital treatment and potentially ending badly, while the colors evoke cigarette smoking. The threatening meaning of the image does not arise as a result of projection from one domain to the other, but rather from evocation of two concepts and connecting them into a causal chain: smoking is the cause, illness is the result. Imposing causality is what creates the emergent structure, held together by the so-called vital relation of cause and effect (similarly to the silver tsunami example above). Importantly, then, the causal structure and the resulting warning do not exist in any of the inputs alone—they exist only in the blend the viewer creates by extending and elaborating the two domains into a cohesive structure.

Blending theorists incorporate metaphors into blending and postulate a very broadly applicable mechanism (which is useful in explaining not only language forms or visual artifacts, but also forms in other arts, mathematics, film, theater, etc.). Conceptual metaphor
theorists focus on one type of projection while building out other types of figurative meaning from that basis. As this suggests, relying on one framework or the other is largely a matter of a selective approach to what will get covered as a central case. For metaphor theorists, consistent lexical usage and its discourse consequences are central, while for blending theorists, spontaneous emergence of various communicative forms is the primary interest.

This seems to lead to a practical division (though no theorist would likely accept it as his or her own). The conceptual theory of metaphor has made strong claims about metaphors being conceptual in nature and relying on correlations which yield a broad range of conceptually related uses. This makes metaphor theory ideal for discourse work, where the full potential of underlying mappings is clearly seen. Blending focuses on mechanisms of creativity and emergence of new forms expressing new meanings, and it is quite naturally more graceful in explaining the packaging of complex meanings into visual or linguistic chunks, thus allowing for efficient reference and discourse manipulation.

These goals in either case are quite broad, and it is often the case that analysts choose to discuss data in terms of conceptual metaphor or in terms of blending for reasons not clearly connected to the nature of the data under discussion. Some analysts talk exclusively about blends, and others talk exclusively about conceptual metaphor, without trying to distinguish the two. The readers may not be given any justification for the choice of term the analyst makes, and thus may assume that only one way of describing mappings is the correct way. As I show above, there are differences. But also, as I will show below, what is in fact needed is a more flexible and multi-faceted approach to discourse. What should matter more is the accuracy of interpretation, not the preferences in the choice of terminology.

An example of current research

As even our cursory presentation above shows, both metaphors and blends build on simpler structures and various underlying processes. The nature of that hidden structure seems to be more important than a (partly arbitrary) choice of a label. This issue was recently discussed in detail in Dancygier and Sweetser (2014) under the rubric of ‘levels of schematicity’. The approach assumes that more complex conceptual structures, such as domains or inputs, build on lower-level structures.

The view of how these structures are connected relies on broadly conceived theories of embodiment, which argue (based on language evidence but also a range of experimental data) that concepts, even many abstract ones, are built on the basis of embodied experience. There are numerous versions of the theories, some very radical and some more partial, but they all see basic embodied experience as the groundwork on which conceptualization is built. For example, all humans mature in the environment in which they desire to move, see objects, or reach for them, but are often blocked by barriers and obstacles. Thus, early on we develop very schematic concepts, called image schemas, such as ‘path’, ‘move’, ‘occlusion’, etc. (Johnson 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1999). These very essential spatial concepts provide a foundation for the development of further concepts. Image schemas are not mappings; rather, they are basic spatial or force-dynamic structures used in understanding other, more complex experiences. Furthermore, recent studies suggest that we should distinguish more than one level of conceptualization to account for what has been discussed as image schemas so far (Mandler and Cánovas 2014), which gives more importance to their role in the emergence of complex meanings.

The next stage of conceptual development, where we can talk about mappings as connections between concepts, is the stage of primary metaphors (Grady 1997; Lakoff and
Johnson 1999). For example, the schema of occlusion, and the resulting understanding that one has to have visual access to objects to know what they are, yields one of the very basic metaphors built on actual experience: *knowing is seeing*. (Think of the fun a small child has playing ‘peekaboo’). Primary metaphors are directly rooted in basic experience and provide a background to more complex, socially motivated and culturally specific metaphors.

There is much research to be reported on the subject. Here, I will assume only what seems necessary—namely, that image schematic structure is used in the emergence of more complex concepts, that primary metaphors underlie the use of complex metaphors, and that broad, lower-level mappings linking embodied activity to abstract activity are often at the core of more complex expressions. All these concepts are illustrated in the examples below.

To consider other conceptual mappings, we can approach the issue of simile in an analogous way. Most high school and college textbooks present simile as similar to metaphor except for the additional use of words such as ‘like’ or ‘as’ (She was singing like a canary; She was as pretty as a rose). However, recent work shows that simile is a more complex case. First, the presence of ‘like’ or ‘as’ is not a sufficient description of simile—the main point is that simile is explicitly comparing two things (e.g., a person’s voice and bird song) and choosing a specific focus for the comparison. Setting up a simile relation is not as productive as setting up a conceptual metaphor, because simile typically ends with just one dimension of comparison (pretty as a rose does not imply also smelling like a rose, or having rosy cheeks). Simile is thus to be seen alongside metaphor and blending, but as different from them.

In his inaugural 2013 speeches, Pope Francis explained his concept of the role of the church, relying very heavily on many figurative language forms. Some of the expressions he used are as follows:

(1) “We have to find a new balance; otherwise even the moral edifice of the church is likely to fall like a house of cards [. . .].”

(2) “This Church with which we should be thinking is the home of all, not a small chapel that can hold only a small group of selected people.”

In these fragments, the pope talks about the institution of the church in terms of buildings, but he also evokes simpler underlying concepts (through expressions like balance, fall, and hold). He uses several image schemas—balance, up/down, and containment. Humans generally have a very basic concept of balance; they know instinctively that balancing your body or other erect structures (here the up/down schema plays a role too) gives them stability and shape and allows various forms of interaction. In the earliest experience, a well-balanced structure made of wooden blocks will have the desired shape and make play possible. If it loses its balance, it falls down and disintegrates, and using it in pretend play as a castle or a mountain will not be possible. Because remaining in an upright position affords more possibilities for action, it is generally considered a positive situation. Containment is another such schema, imposing boundaries and deciding not only on size but also access. Being inside or outside the playpen affords different possibilities for action and, again, could affect us in a positive way (protection) or negative way (restriction of movement).

The schemas described underlie a range of primary metaphors: good is up, persisting is remaining erect, abstract structure is physical structure, and important is big (cf. Grady 1997; Lakoff and Johnson 1999). Even before the reader can appreciate the concept of the church that is being proposed, it is already clear that the speaker’s intention is to ring a note of alarm against lack of stability, limited importance, exclusivity, and potential cracks in
the structure. It can then be easily appreciated that the speaker wants to remove all of these symptoms of weakness and dangers of potential collapse.

Quite a lot of the impact of the discourse depends on those lowest levels of schematic structure. From there, much additional complexity is added, but not at all through consistent use of any of the forms of figurative language. Rather, the combination of a variety of means is what gives the fragment its full impact:

a. Complex metaphor: COMPLEX ORGANIZATIONS ARE BUILDINGS

Expressions such as edifice, chapel, and house of cards refer to types of buildings (see Grady 1997 for an in-depth discussion of the metaphors connected to the Building domain) to describe various possible views of the social importance of the church—from an imposing edifice to a modest chapel to a shaky house of cards, destined to fall down at the slightest provocation.

b. Simile: like a house of cards

This expression evokes the least stable kind of structure, to present the dangers facing the church unless changes are made. Let us note too that this common simile, almost a cliché, relies on the same image schemas and primary metaphors as the complex metaphor in a., using Buildings as the source domain.

c. Metonymy: BUILDING FOR INSTITUTION

A church is literally a building, but it metonymically represents the religious institution, as most believers interact with the religious organization through the activities and events located in or around the church building. A small chapel further instantiates the metaphor important is big, as it represents the image of the religious institution which has only limited impact on people. But it also belongs to the same part of the frame the Church Building belongs to, as it represents the way in which church-goers interact with the institution. Importantly, though essentially metonymic, the expressions also participate in the Building domain, and so represent the primary and complex metaphors referring to stability, persistence, etc.

d. Blending: moral edifice of the church

This blend is realized through a combination of lexical and syntactic choices.

There is a common type of a blend which uses adjectives derived from nouns to modify other nouns. For example, the expression an economic tsunami (a simpler version of the silver tsunami above) uses the term tsunami to apply it to a situation in the domain of the Economy. Various patterns of adjectival modification have been described as blends (cf. Sweetser 1999), in which an adjective as a modifier does not simply add new information, but may in fact change the meaning of the noun—which is what the adjective moral does here. The prepositional phrase of the church also represents a figurative construction, explicitly identifying the institution and the building as related (rather than metonymically having one stand for the other).

The adjective moral as a modifier thus prompts a blend where aspects of the meaning of edifice (its imposing, serious nature) are related to the domain of morality. Overall, the blend suggests a moral construct of specific importance and power. However, the addition of the prepositional phrase of the church further supports the construal under which the selective projection does not include the Building part of the domain of Edifice, and applies the solidity and significance of the building to the institution of the church.

To sum up, the figurative expressions used in this short fragment are primarily driven by image schemas, and primary metaphors such as: GOOD IS UP, PERSISTING IS REMAINING ERECT,
ABSTRACT STRUCTURE IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE, and IMPORTANT IS BIG. However, they are also used in combination with complex metaphors, metonymy, simile, and blending, each of which supports some aspect of the main idea—that the church is in danger as an institution and as a moral authority, and so changes are needed to avert the threats. Discourse like this makes it clear that approaches insisting on just one way of dealing with figurative expressions are bound to miss important aspects of the interpretation. It is equally ineffective to insist on a traditional approach relying on narrow definitions of tropes as decorative stylistic choices, or on conceptual metaphor as the only tool, or on blending as the best solution. Each of the conceptual forms mentioned above (schemas, primary metaphors, complex metaphors, metonymy, simile, and blending) participates in the message offered by Pope Francis in its own way. Each of these ‘tropes’ functions at a different level of conceptual schematicity and grammatical form, and thus contributes to the overall message. They represent a range of types of figurative conceptualizations.

Future directions

In the above analysis, I outlined the contribution of various figurative forms to the overall message of a short fragment. What is certainly worth studying further, though, is how the complex clusters of conceptual mappings work together. In the example described above, primary metaphors provide connecting tissue on which the complex message is built—hence, probably, the immediate appeal and clarity of the discourse. The Building domain connection is effective precisely because of its embeddedness in basic schemas of upright-ness and strength and its simultaneous realization of various conceptual mappings. In the end, each conceptual figure contributes to a different aspect of meaning.

What an attempt to compare conceptual metaphor and blending also shows is that it is crucial not to be led entirely by terminological differences. You can call a structure a ‘domain’ or an ‘input’, but it is possibly best to keep in mind that we cannot effectively describe any of the central figures without making it clear first what the nature of these basic conceptual structures is. In the end, it is the nature of figurative language that allows us to talk about metaphor and blending as same or different, and it should remain the core of the question we are investigating.

Given that both CMT and CBT are now increasingly applied in various discourse contexts, including multimodal contexts such as advertising or comics (Forceville 1996; Forceville and Urios-Aparisi 2009) or new achievements in technology (Harrel 2013), one can expect more work on clarifying the nature of the two concepts and their most natural contexts of application. But at the same time, we can expect more interest in redefining figurative language overall (Dancygier and Sweetser 2014; Gibbs and Colston 2012) in terms of conceptual patterns and interpretive strategies. This is exciting work, which might eventually shake the artificial divide between literal and figurative language. Figuration might soon be considered a norm rather than an exception.

Notes

1 Dancygier and Sweetser (2014), for example, propose a conceptual interpretation of figurative meaning overall, including metaphor, metonymy, simile, and other tropes.
2 In the discussion below, I will use the term ‘metaphor’ to refer to a conceptual mapping, and the term ‘blending’ or ‘blend’ to discuss the processes and structures postulated in CBT.
3 Throughout the chapter, words with their first letter capitalized stand for domains or inputs.
In literature on conceptual metaphor, one may also find domains defined in terms of ‘frames.’ See Sullivan (2013).

5 The term ‘input’ is specific to CBT, but in most cases it is equivalent to CMT’s definition of a domain. I use ‘domain’ here as a generic term, applicable in both theoretical frameworks.

6 In Fauconnier and Turner (2002) blends are claimed to be of four kinds, with respect to the type of relation between the inputs. Full discussion of all these types is beyond the scope of this chapter, and I focus only on two types—double-scope and single-scope. A single-scope blend is heavily dependent on the conceptual structure in one of the inputs, and thus CBT argues that most metaphorical expressions can be described as single-scope blends. A double-scope blend, for comparison, draws from both inputs in complex and often unpredictable ways; it is thus better suited to the description of new, one-off expressions.

7 Dancygier and Sweetser (2014) describe simile as a construction setting up a limited-scope blend (following the observations about the scope of simile made in Moder 2008, 2010). For the purposes of this discussion, though, I will treat simile as an independent trope.

Further reading


References


