RECURRENT BLENDING OF SPACE AND EMOTION FRAMES: EROTIC EMISSIONS IN GREEK POETRY

Conceptual blending (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) has repeatedly proved useful to analyze individual examples of verbal figuration. This explanatory power makes blending a very promising tool both for linguistics and poetics. However, it can also obscure its capacity to generalize over a wide variety of examples, whose relatedness could otherwise go unnoticed. In order to examine the recurrence of integration patterns we need to bring the blending formalism to a more abstract level. This has been done, to mention just two recent works, to study the time-space integration (Fauconnier & Turner, 2008), or to propose generalized integration networks for counterfactuals (Fauconnier, in press). Frames are necessarily crucial in such analyses, since they usually configure the topology of mental spaces.

Frame blending has been described as “a basic mental operation for cognitively modern human beings and a basic topic for linguistics, philosophy, and economics” (Turner, 2008). But frame blending can also be employed to connect seemingly unrelated examples of poetic imagery, thus providing insights relevant to poetics and, in our case, the conceptualization of emotions.

In Greek poetry, from Antiquity to our days, the experience of falling in love, or of sexual attraction, is often integrated with a small spatial story in which someone emits something towards a receiver. Examples include objects thrown with erotic consequences, bodies irradiating light or emanating scents, etc. This recurrent pattern can be modelled in some detail by considering all particular blends as members of a ‘family’ sharing a sort of genetic code, a generic common link: LOVE-CAUSATION-EMISSION. The abstract integration network describing the pattern has a minimum of two inputs: a typical love scene (using the term in the sense described by Fillmore, 1975: 124) and an image-schema of EMISSION. Both structures blend in a systematic way, complying with optimality principles, and opportunistically recruiting an array of subsidiary frames because of their cultural and conceptual proximity.

Cultural and individual factors, as well as rhetoric intentions, are mainly responsible for the variation within the realizations of this blended frame. Frame blending is the operation that makes the networks stick together, linking them to encyclopaedic knowledge and to an embodied schema of EMISSION. This is crucial to understand why this imagery appeals to readers despite cultural differences or formal complexity.

References


