Kémenes Árpád: Conceptual Integration in Sylvia Plath's "Getting There"
Argumentum, 3 (2007), 1-11
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Kémenes Árpád

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Abstract

The present paper focuses on the way metaphors are created and connected to each other in Sylvia Plath's poem 'Getting There'. Analysing the metaphors within Fauconnier and Turner's blending theory, a number of cognitive mechanisms are accounted for, which contribute to the readers' understanding and interpretation of unconventional metaphoric pairings. The paper brings evidence to the fact that a metonymical extension of an element in an input space can function as organising frame for the input of a subsequent metaphor. It is also pointed out that the merge of the same input spaces can yield different emergent structures. If the analysed metaphors do not project identical elements into the emergent structure, the blends are not 'run' in a similar way, and, as a consequence, the listener is involved in mental simulations of different events.

The aim of this paper is to account for a number of cognitive mechanisms which contribute to the readers' interpretation and understanding of unconventional metaphoric pairings – a highly valued manifestation of poetic creativity.

According to the definition provided by the Oxford English Dictionary, a metaphor is "the figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that to which it is properly applicable". However, within the field of cognitive linguistics the metaphor is not regarded as a purely linguistic phenomenon, but rather as a conceptual one.

There are two main theoretical frameworks in cognitive linguistics within which research on metaphors has been carried out: the conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and the theory of mental spaces elaborated by Fauconnier and Turner (1998).

As Grady, Oakley and Coulson (1999) point out, CMT posits stable and systematic relationships between pairs of mental representations called *conceptual domains*. Particular elements from the domains are picked out and lined up with each other. Yet, the projection of the elements is strictly unidirectional, namely from the source to the target domain. The theory focuses mainly on the analysis of conventional patterns of metaphorical conceptualisation.

The theory of *mental spaces* highlights on the existence of *conceptual networks*, within which the relationships between the constituent elements can justify the merge of one concept into another, despite the mismatches striking even on superficial analysis.

Within this theoretical framework language is viewed as a superficial manifestation of hidden, highly abstract, hierarchically organized and interconnected cognitive constructions.

These constructions are referred to as *mental spaces*. Although similar, mental spaces are not equivalent to the domains defined in CMT. Each space is a partial representation of "some *logically coherent situation* or *potential reality*, in which various propositions are treated as true, objects are assumed to exist, and relations between objects are supposed to hold" (Dinsmore, 1991). Mental spaces represent scenarios whose structure is just a small subset of the knowledge recruited in the whole domain. The construction of these interconnected spaces takes place at a cognitive level, and is distinct from the language structure. However, they relate language to the real world, and contribute to "understandings" of a sentence within a context. Mental spaces and connections are built up as discourse unfolds; the configuration of spaces is dynamically updated, based on lexical and grammatical cues provided in the sentence. Thus, language only provides *partial cues* for the space-construction process. Apart from language, *inferencing* and *reasoning* processes are also involved in space-construction.
Mental spaces are *internally* structured by *frames* (also called 'organising frames') and *cognitive models* (both obtained from background information) and are *externally* linked by *connectors,* which relate elements (or even structures) across spaces. As the interior structure of a mental space is defined by the *organizing frame*, the frame has to specify a cognitively representable type of activity, the event structure as well as the participants (or entities). Also, frames include *roles* for the specified participants or entities, which can also be attributed *values*. However, one has to point out the floating nature of the terms "role" and "value", since values can often be analysed as roles of a more finely specified frame.

The form of mental-space network called *blending* or *conceptual integration* is particularly suitable for analyzing the cognitive mechanisms operating within metaphors. Blending involves at least two input spaces that can be associated with the *source* and *target* of the CMT. Yet, unlike in the CMT, when matching them, two other spaces emerge: a generic space and a blend.

The *generic space* reflects what the inputs have in common – for example structure and organization – therefore it maps onto each of the inputs (i.e. onto paired counterparts in the two input spaces), and identifies the cross-space mappings between them.

The *blend*, which is actually the outcome of conceptual integration, inherits a generic structure from the generic space. Moreover, owing to the partial projection of elements from the inputs (which are not mapped onto the generic space) and the existence of a more specific structure – within the confines of generic structure – the blend develops a structure that is impossible for the inputs, called the *emergent structure.*

Emergent structures rise out of the following operations:
Composition, which is an operation that involves elements from the input spaces, providing relations that do not exist in the separate inputs.
Completion most often refers to pattern completion – when structure in the blend matches information in long-term memory such as knowledge of background frames or cognitive and cultural models. Thus, the structure projected from the inputs is completed with a larger structure in the blend.
Finally, *elaboration* is a process that involves mental simulation of the event in the blend, according to its own emergent logic.

Blending theory does not deny the findings of the CMT. The short-lived, always updated mental spaces inherit their structure from the more general and stable cognitive domains. However, analysis within CMT stops at the level of cross-space mapping, thus capturing only the conventional patterns of metaphorical conceptualisation. The four-space model, in its turn, "focuses on the ability to combine elements from familiar conceptualizations into new and

meaningful ones" (Grady, Oakley, Coulson, 1999). Unlike in CMT, the projection is not unidirectional; the material is projected both from the source and from the target onto the blended space. Thus, elements that have no counterparts in the other input space can also be projected onto the blend. Grady, Oakley and Coulson (1999) point out that "selective projection from the two input spaces yields an image which is inconsistent with our understanding of the source space, […] but that the web of underlying connections allow us to draw inferences from the blend nonetheless". This feature of blended spaces elegantly accounts for the ability of the listener to recruit more meanings from the metaphor than it would be possible by merely pairing elements from the source to those in the target domain. Moreover, binding theory allows also for complex blends, which means that one blend may be the input for another. This way "iterations of the integration processes"(Grady, Oakley, Coulson, 1999) are also possible. Along these lines, simple metaphors can occur as inputs for more elaborate conceptualisations, forming complex blends.

However, not all blendings are interpreted as metaphorical. There are a number of requirements that the connections within the whole network of mental spaces are supposed to fulfil so that the listener should give the blending a metaphorical interpretation. Grady, Oakley and Coulson (1999) mention the following requirements:

Fusion - meaning that prominent counterparts from the input spaces project to a single element in the blended space.

Source and target must be incompatible. Critical knowledge of a given conceptual domain has to be temporarily suppressed.

Asymmetrical projection – some salient aspects of our knowledge of the target are not projected onto the blend, and vice versa, some salient structure in the blended space is prevented from floating back into the inputs.

Sylvia Plath's poems, rich in unconventional metaphors, are particularly suitable to exemplify the phenomena presented above (see also Freeman 2005). Analysing the poem "Getting there" I will focus on the way metaphorical blendings are constructed around the entity "train", the different manifestations of which have an important role in structuring the poem.

The analysis of the train-metaphors, however, does not provide an exhaustive description of the interconnections within the network of mental spaces. The different manifestations of these creative metaphors are embedded in a broader conceptual domain: journey, which, in its turn, serves as the source-input for another (conventional) metaphor paraphrasable with "transformation (in our particular case: purification) is a journey". This composite metaphor has a crucial role when choosing the input spaces that undergo blending in the train-metaphors.

Throughout the poem, the input spaces involved in the train-metaphors are changed according to whether the blend targets at metaphorising the *process of purification* (see the train-monster blend, quotations 1-3) or the *post-purificational state* (the train-cradle and the train-Lethe blends, quotations 4-5).

The analysis of the first three quotations brings evidence to the fact that although the input spaces are the same, the elements projected from the inputs onto the blend are different at each occurrence of the metaphor. As a consequence, the emergent structure, the way of "running" the blend is never the same, thus giving way to various interpretations.

(1) "The gigantic gorilla interior
Of the wheels move, they appall me ---"

Two input spaces are involved in the blend presented in the first quotation: the first one is organized around the frame *"living creature"* and the other one around the frame *"artefact"*. The entity involved in the first frame is *"animal"*, which is attributed the value *"gorilla"*. The speaker/listener, basing on their background knowledge, associates a number of attributes to the concept of "gorilla", such as: hugeness, force, brutality, ability to move, inscrutability, limited will of its own, etc.

The entity involved in the second frame is "means of transport", with the value of "train". Unlike in the first case, the cognitive model associated to the entity is restricted to the "interior of the wheels" by means of 'part-for-whole' metonymy. Nevertheless, background knowledge about (train)wheels trigger other elements such as locomotion, power, weight, etc. What the two inputs have in common, namely the idea of power, weight and locomotion, enter Generic Space (figure 1).

The blend (on the superficial manifestation of which the linguistic sentences of the quotation provide partial clues) inherits structure from the second input space. Yet, apart from the elements of the Generic Space, other elements, which appear only in one of the input spaces, also enter the blend. Thus it acquires a unique emergent structure, which holds within the logic of the blend, but not within that of the input spaces taken separately. Owing to the specific elements projected from input space 1 (inscrutability, will of its own), the blended concept acquires creature-like features, capable of taking decisions as far as the way of reaching the destination is concerned – fact which does not exclude the possibility of its being an artefact.

The next quotation employs the same organizational frames:

(2) "…and I in agony.
I cannot undo myself, and the train is steaming.
Steaming and breathing, its teeth
Ready to roll, like a devil's."

Again, Input 1 is organized around the frame of "living creature", involving the entity "animal", whereas the second input has "the state of being an artefact" as frame, with a "means of transport" entity, which gains the value of "train".

Yet, this time the elements that are subject to cross-space mappings differ from those in the first blend. As a result of this, significant differences can be pointed out as far as the structure of the Generic Space and the elaboration of the blend are concerned (figure 2).

Cross-space mappings are carried out between 'teeth' (Input 1) and wheels (Input 2) – both being capable of destruction, of causing sufferance – as well as between 'breathing' (Input 1) and 'steaming' (Input 2). In the emergent structure, the mismatches between the source and the target of the metaphor become evident. The steaming-breathing counterparts appear as separate elements in the blend, evoking the image of a monster. The actual value of the entity 'animal' is set only at the end of the quotation – devil. As the value attributed to the entity is itself a blend of 'supernatural' and 'animalic', by incorporating it into the structure of both input 1 and of the emergent structure, a complex blend has been created. The 'living creature' – 'artefact' coexistence, which is possible within the logic of the blend, accounts for the treatment at the same level of 'breathing' and 'steaming', thus fusing the preparation of an animal and that of an engine for setting out on a journey/run.

Unlike the 'breathing-steaming' counterparts, the elements 'teeth' (Input 1) and 'wheels' (Input 2) underwent fusion before their projection onto the blending space. In the structure

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outlined by 'train' – projected onto the blending space from the second input – the element 'wheel' is entirely replaced by its counterpart in Input Space 1.

On the other hand, the integration of the element 'devil' into the blend offers a clue for a shift towards a symbolic reinterpretation of the train-metaphor, as metonymic extensions of this element lead us to the concept 'underworld'. The wheel-teeth of the train-devil are now understood not only as parts of a means of transport, but also as causers of sufferance. Basing on the clue mentioned, an updating of the mental space configuration takes place. The outcome of the updating process is the creation of the 'journey-as-purification' metaphor. The train-blend fits the reorganised network of mental spaces, in which it functions as the source domain of the new metaphor. The words

> "…and I *in agony*.
> …its teeth
> *Ready* to roll"

allow the interpretation that both the ego and the train (the devil, the underworld) are on standby for commencing the ritual of purification.

The purificational process is presented by another blend:

(3) "The train is dragging itself, it is screaming ---
An animal
Insane for the destination,
The bloodspot,
The face at the end of the flare."

The animal-train blend yields a novel emergent structure as a result of cross-space mapping between another set of counterparts. 'Drag itself' from input 1 matches with 'move with difficulty' from input 2, both of them implying the existence of a destination. The whistle of the train is matched with 'scream' from the first input (figure 3).

Two things are mentioned in the quotation, which serve as motivating factors for reaching the destination: 'bloodspot' and 'the face at the end of the flare'. These linguistic cues lead to an increase in the complexity of the emergent structure. Contextually we are aware of the existence of the poetic ego, around whom another input space is constructed, the elements of which are imported from the broader 'journey' domain. The newly created space projects the element of 'destination' as well as the idea of 'encountering difficulty' into Generic Space. Bloodspot (inherited from the animal/devil input) and the 'face at the end of the flare' (from the ego-input) are counterparts that present the same motivating factor for reaching the destination from two different points of view. In both cases, the target is Man. The difference lies in the way Man is looked on. Man regarded as bloodspot is the point of view of the animal-devil, who considers Man merely as an impersonal prey. On the other hand, the ego focuses on the face of the loved person, whom she regards as an individual of outstanding importance.

The blend in the next quotation is created to depict the post-purificational state.

(4) "The carriages rock, they are cradles."

The association train-animal-devil-underworld is replaced by one between train and cradle. Cross-space mapping is carried out between the rocking of cradles and the rocking of trains,

which are projected onto the blend as fused elements. The element 'birth' in the first input has a counterpart in the second input: 'arrival'. Basing on background knowledge, concepts like 'innocence' and 'purity' are also associated with birth and cradle – elements that are projected into the emergent structure, as well (figure 4).

The concluding lines turn back to the train-underworld association:

(5) "…step to you from the black car of Lethe,
Pure as a baby."

The entity within the frame 'underworld' is Lethe, the black river of the underworld, to which one associates elements like forgetting, purification, flowing, getting from one state into another. 'Flowing' in this space matches the element 'moving' in the 'train'- input, while 'getting from one *state* into another' maps onto 'getting from one *place* to another', both pairs having their elements fused when projected into the blend (Figure 5).

The source-target relationship between the input spaces has changed in the last metaphor of the poem. This time the blend is organized along the structure of the 'Lethe'-space, thus reinforcing the symbolic, journey-purification interpretation. Apart from structure, the blending space inherits from the Lethe-input elements such as the idea of forgetting, purification and colour.

Analysing Sylvia Plath's poem within the theoretical frame of mental spaces I focused on the way metaphors are created and connected to each other. The train-metaphors that occur in the poem are regarded as different manifestations of the concept 'journey'. This broader conceptual domain functions as the input space of a complex blend interpreted as another metaphor paraphrasable with 'transformation is journey'. Secondly, the paper brings evidence to the fact that a metonymical extension of an element in an input space can function as organizing frame for the input of a subsequent metaphor (see the shift from 'animal' to 'devil' and 'underworld'). Finally, it is emphasized that the merge of the same input spaces can yield different emergent structures. If the analyzed metaphors don't project identical elements into the emergent structure, the blends are not "run" in a similar way; therefore, the listener is involved in mental simulations of different events.

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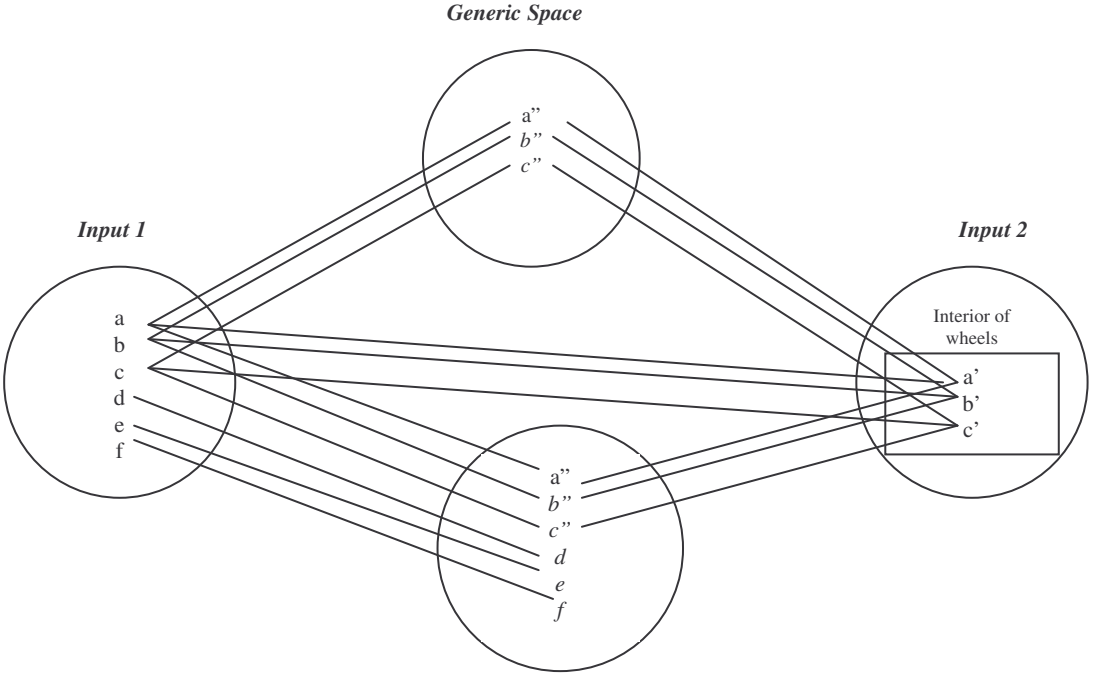

1	*Input space 2*	*Input space*	
FRAME: living creature	FRAME: artefact	a – hugeness	d – brutality
ENTITY: animal	ENTITY: means of transport	a' – weight	e – inscrutability
VALUE: gorilla	VALUE: train + 'part-for-whole' metonymy: "the interior of the wheels"	b – force	f – will of its own
		b' – power	
		c – ability to move	
		c' – locomotion	

Figure 1

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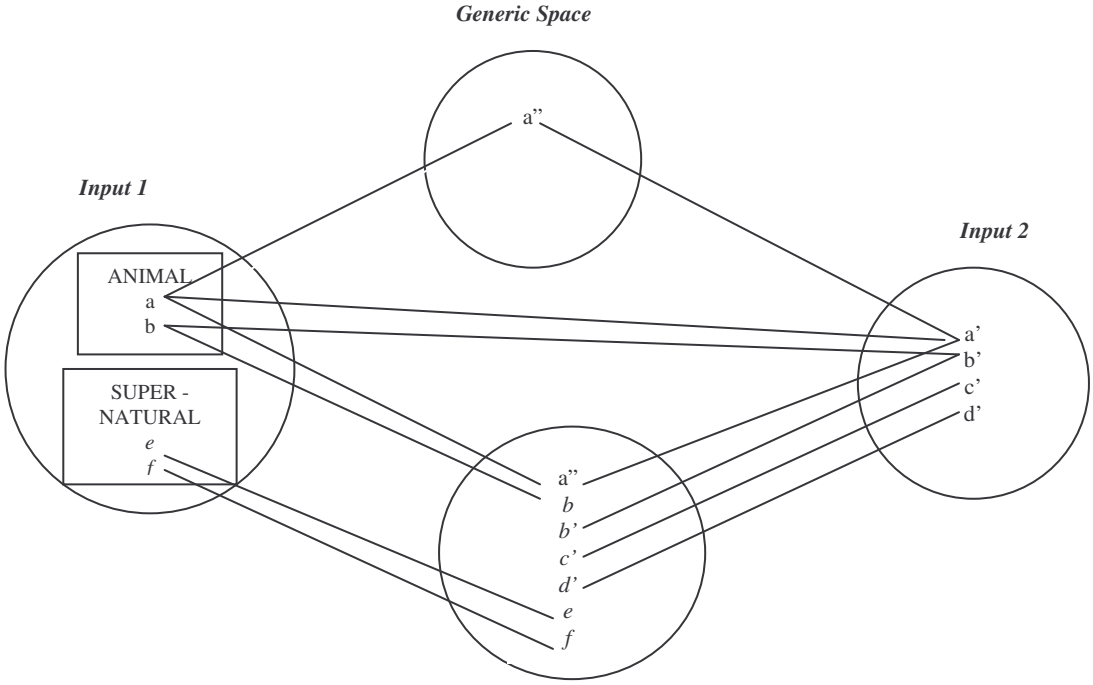

Input space 1	*Input space 2*		
FRAME: living creature	FRAME: artefact	a – teeth	d' – passenger
ENTITY: animal	ENTITY: means of transport	a' – wheels	e – underworld
VALUE: devil	VALUE: train	b – breathing	f – wickedness
		b' – steaming	
		c' – locomotion	

Figure 2

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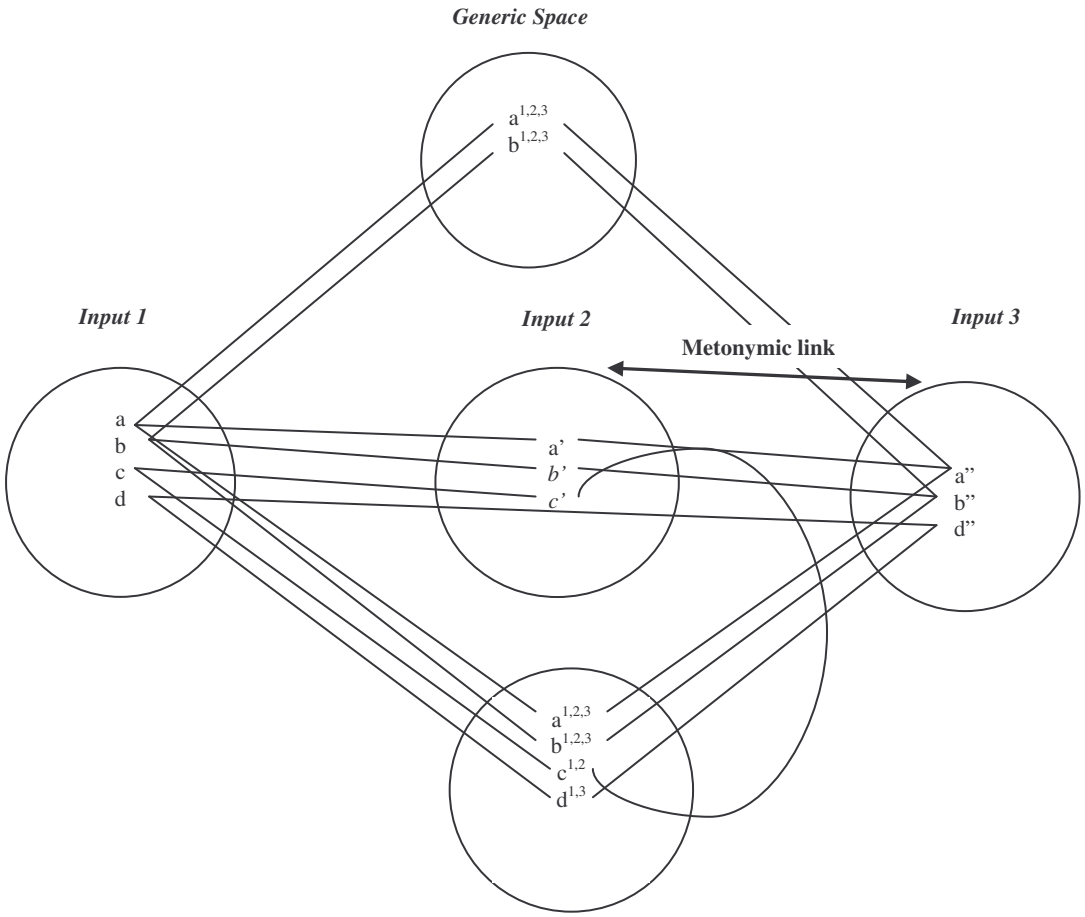

Input space 1
FRAME: living creature
ENTITY: animal
VALUE: devil

a – dragging itself
b – moving towards a destination
c – scream
d – motivating factor (bloodspot = man)

Input space 2
FRAME: artefact
ENTITY: means of transport
VALUE: train

a' – moving with difficulty
b' – destination
c' - wistle

Input space 3
FRAME: journey
ENTITY: passenger
VALUE: poetic ego

a" – encountering difficulty
b" – destination

d" – motivating factor ("face at the end of the flare = man)

Figure 3

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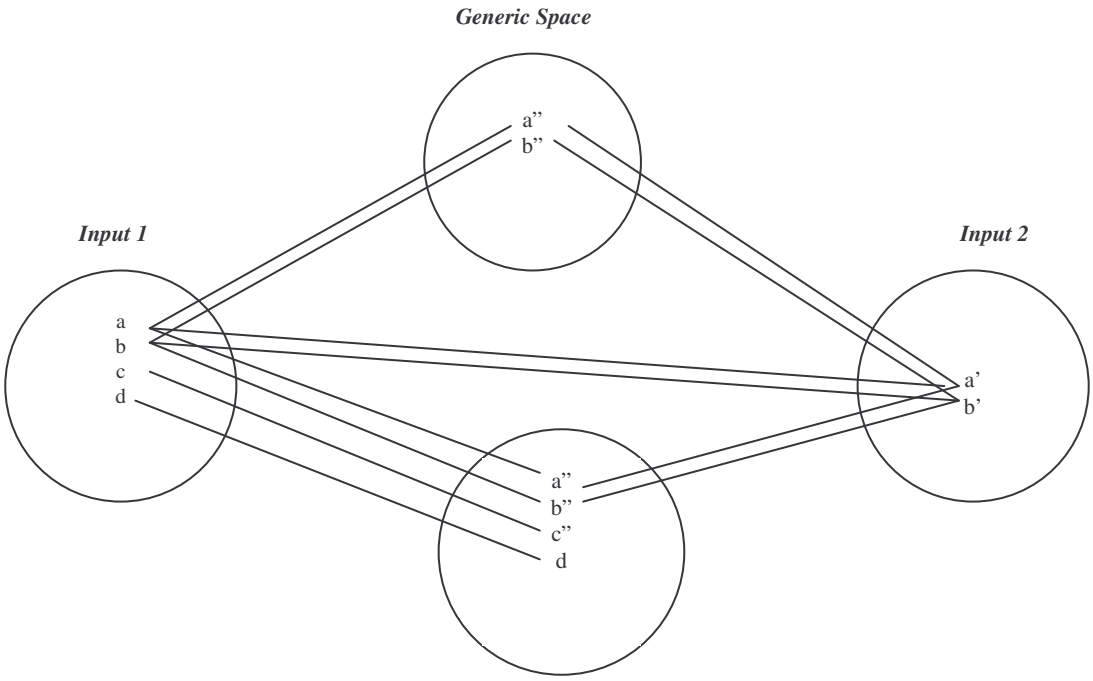

Input space 1
FRAME: artefact
ENTITY: device used for nursing babies
VALUE: cradle

Input space 2
FRAME: artefact
ENTITY: means of transport
VALUE: train

a – rocking
a' – rocking
b – birth
b' – arrival
c – innocence
d – purity

Figure 4

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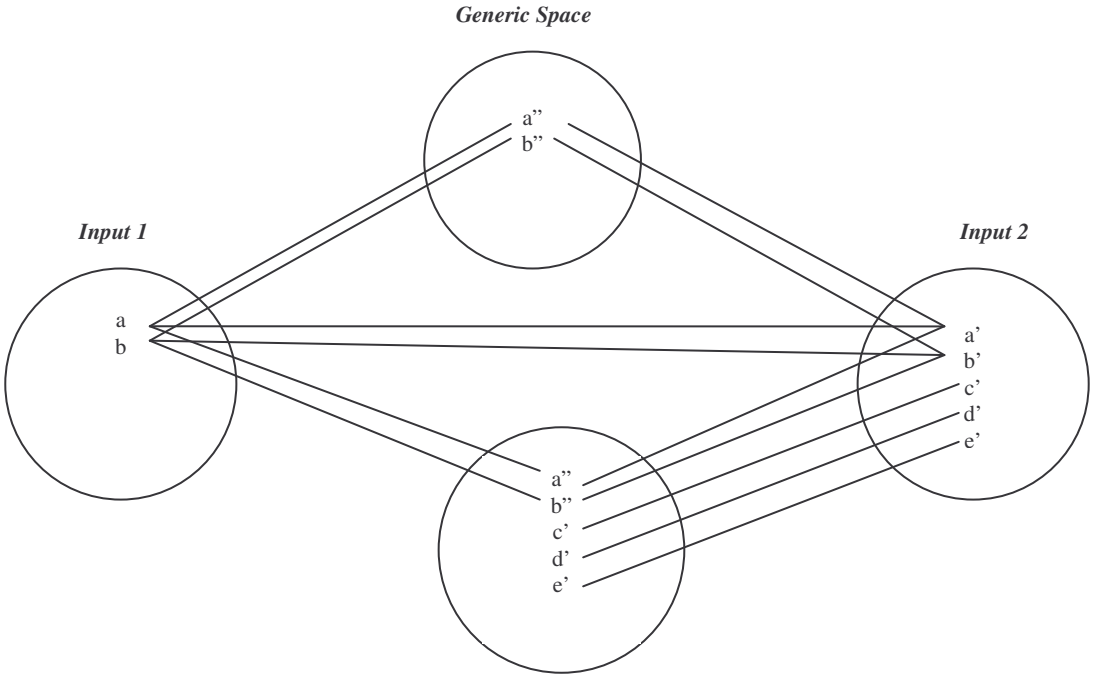

Input space 1	*Input space 2*	a – moving
FRAME: artefact	FRAME: religion	a' – flowing
ENTITY: means of transport	ENTITY: underworld	b – getting from one *place* into another
VALUE: train	VALUE: Lethe	b' – getting from one *state* into another
		c' – purification
		d' – forgetting
		e' – black colour

Figure 5