

**“I was in that room!”:  
Conceptual integration of content and context  
in a writer’s vs. a prosecutor’s description of a murder**

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**Abstract**

This paper compares a writer’s and a prosecutor’s description of a murder, both involving the integration of the discourse content with the communicative context. I suggest that this content-context blend is essential to the meaning and communicative effect of these discourses. This blend also seems fundamental to intersubjectivity skills such as empathy, ordinary understanding, and the use of the generic ‘you.’ I further define the Current Discourse Space as a blend of the Verbal and the Here-and-Now spaces, and suggest that the Base space always corresponds to the Here-and-Now space. The paper is based on fieldwork and is framed within *Conceptual Integration Theory* (Fauconnier and Turner 1998), using Liddell’s (1995) ‘grounded blends’ and Hutchins’ (2005) ‘material anchors.’

Keywords: Blending, Real space, Here-and-Now space, Sympathy, Generic ‘You.’

**0. Introduction**

Cognitive Linguistics has shown time and again that fictivity and imagination play an important role in human language. In fact, counter to the folk belief, the work of cognitive linguists suggests that fictivity and imagination play as big a role in ordinary as in literary language. The basic claim is that metaphors (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999; Lakoff and Turner 1989) or non-factual scenarios (cf. Fauconnier 1994, 1997) for instance are not

solely devices of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish. They reflect the way our minds work and their use is thus not restricted to literature.

In this paper I assume this view in the comparison of the draft of a non-fiction book on a high-profile murder case with the prosecutor's closing argument at the trial for the same murder. The focus of study is on two particularly dramatic fragments of the novelist's book and the prosecutor's argument. These deal with the killing of the victim. I have chosen the description of this particular event basically because no aspect related to the murder had been irrefutably proven. As I hope will become evident, as a result of the lack of conclusive tangible direct evidence in this case both the description of the writer's and that of the prosecutor's set up conceptual configurations that were halfway between fact and fiction. More specifically, I discuss the description of the assumed criminal facts through a conceptual integration of the situated context of ongoing communication with the discourse content.

This study is framed within Fauconnier's (1994) *Mental Space Theory*, subsequently elaborated into *Conceptual Integration Theory*, also known as 'blending' (Fauconnier and Turner 1998, 2002). The theory of Mental Spaces and Conceptual Blending was first mainly used to explain processes of meaning construction in isolated sentences or short paragraphs. Following the latest developments of the theory (cf. Oakley 1998; Coulson and Oakley 2006; Dancygier 2006; Hougaard and Oakley forth.), I intend to show that it can also account for situated pieces of oral discourses and written texts.

## **1. Mental Spaces and conceptual blending**

Mental spaces (Fauconnier [1985] 1994) constitute abstract mental constructs or conceptual domains that are dynamically prompted as discourse unfolds. Examples of these are: the world defined by a picture, a world of fiction, the world of a person's beliefs and desires, hypotheticals, or time spans. Fauconnier's theory can elegantly solve intricate problems of ambiguous linguistic reference, by pointing at the possible conceptual mappings between an element in one mental space and its counterpart(s) in another space. Fauconnier and Turner (1998, 2002) have further shown that elements in different mental spaces can become fused into one single element with properties from the so-called 'input spaces' and emergent properties of its own. Consider for instance an advertisement run by

an education partnership, discussed in Fauconnier and Turner (2000, 2002). In this ad, three children dressed as surgeons appear in an operating room in front of a lying patient. The headline reads:

(1) Joey, Katie and Todd will be performing your bypass.

Two time spaces are involved in the configuration set up by this ad, a Present and a Future space. In the Present space, Joey, Katie and Todd are about seven years old and have no competence as surgeons. In the Future space, Joey, Katie and Todd are operating on the reader. Of course, the ad does not suggest that at a given time, say three days after reading the ad, the reader will be operated by these children. Rather, what needs to be interpreted is that in the Future space, after having received their education, the children in the Present space will be adult professionals, who will have to perform difficult tasks requiring great competence and skill. This becomes clear once we consider the body of the ad, which reads:

(2) Before you know it, these kids will be doctors, nurses and medical technicians, possibly yours. They'll need an excellent grasp of laser technology, advanced computing and molecular genetics. Unfortunately, very few American children are being prepared to master such sophisticated subjects. If we want children who can handle tomorrow's good jobs, more kids need to take more challenging academic courses. To find out how you can help the effort to raise standards in America's schools, please call 1-800-96-PROMISE. If we make changes now, we can prevent a lot of pain later on.

In "Joey, Katie and Todd will be performing your bypass," a conceptual blending of the Present and the Future spaces occurs, in which the children in the Present space are mapped onto and blended with their own selves in a (potential) Future space. In the ad's picture, they look like the children they are today, but are engaged in the tasks they may be in charge of tomorrow. Note that yet another blend is involved here. By reading the ad, the reader becomes part of the message, as s/he is conceptually integrated with the patient to be operated by the three children. This identity blend is a critical part of the ad's meaning and persuasive function. It is after all by imagining oneself being treated by unskilled

professionals, that one can fully realize the importance of investing in education. Such an integration of an individual in the communicative context and a character in the message content is not uncommon in print advertisements and television commercials (for a blending analysis of another example, see Coulson and Pascual 2006: 157-159). More generally, the content-context blend is particularly common in different sorts of persuasive discourse, as well as in types of discourse in which the author aims at the addressees' emotional involvement in the story.

In this paper I examine fragments of emotionally charged discourse which prompt a conceptual integration of content and context. This type of blends invites the analyst to look further into the role of the context of production and interpretation, i.e. the Here-and-Now space,<sup>1</sup> in the overall configuration of the Current Discourse Space (Langacker 2001), namely the conceptual domain comprising “those elements and relations construed as being shared by the speaker and hearer as a basis for communication” (2001: 144). I believe that the study of the Current Discourse Space should go beyond the configuration set up by the verbal register of a communicative act or what I call the Verbal space (Pascual 2002: 82). As it happens, cognitive linguists in general and conceptual blending scholars in particular have only recently started to include the overall situation of communication as part of their analyses. In his study of American Sign Language, for instance, Scott Liddell (1995, 1998) distinguishes what he calls the ‘Real space.’ This is the mental space of the conceptualizer’s perceived physical surrounding. Liddell shows that our perception of the immediate environment can be an input to a conceptual integration network involving other spaces, producing a so-called ‘grounded blend.’ In this space, a gesturer’s arm and hand, for example, can function as a so-called ‘surrogate,’ as they are understood as standing for Garfield the Cat during the narration of a cartoon for instance. Similarly, Chris Sinha (2005) analyzes the complex blends involved in young children’s symbolic play, which show “the socially collaborative, culturally and materially grounded nature of the human mind” (p. 1537). Along very much the same lines, cognitive anthropologist Ed Hutchins (2005) has introduced the notion of ‘material anchor,’ namely “an input space from which material structure is projected” (Hutchins 2005: 1555). This space is set up by a cognitive artifact or piece of material structure serving to stabilize the representation of conceptual relations. Examples are maps, calendars or one’s own fingers used in counting. In this paper I use the notions of Real space, surrogate, and material anchor in the analysis of the conceptual networks involving the integration of the Verbal

space with the Here-and-Now space. Following Williams (2004), the grounding character of a space is represented in my figures with a square behind the space in question.

## **2. Data**

This paper is based on fieldwork data from a high-profile murder trial that I observed in a Californian county court in 2000 (Pascual 2002). The defendant in this case was a financial manager accused of brutally killing his wife in the couple's bedroom, so he could collect her pension and three life-insurance policies, of which he was the only beneficiary. No clear evidence or alibi was provided to prove the defendant not guilty and he was the only witness for the defense. Despite the transparent incriminatory nature of the evidence – admitted by the chief deputy defense attorney in my interview with him (Int.9-DC: 10-11) –, the prosecution team could find no direct evidence against the defendant. After a two-week trial the defendant was found guilty and later sentenced to life in prison without parole plus seven years.

Analysis is informed by a draft of the non-fiction book based on the case; a thirty-minute videotape of the prosecutor's argument at trial borrowed by a television station; and my feedback interviews with the amateur writer who wrote the manuscript (Int.8-Nov) and the prosecutor whose closing argument is discussed (Int.1-DA). Also, extensive fieldwork was carried out, mainly involving direct observation of the trial and sentencing and in-depth interviews with four trial participants and four attendees, including a juror alternate. For privacy reasons, only initials are used. In the examples to be discussed, direct quotes from the prosecutor's speech come from the official court transcript, enriched with minimal paralinguistic information (e.g. [points to his left]) and clarifications (e.g. [victim]) in square brackets and italics for prosodic emphasis (e.g. '*why?*') from my field notes and from the videotape. In both the example from the prosecutor's speech and the writer's work, relevant words and expressions are underlined.

## **3. Analysis**

This section applies the theory of Mental Spaces and Conceptual Blending to the analysis

of the writer's narration of the crime in the draft of her non-fiction book and the prosecutor's description of the same event to the jury at trial. These were most probably prepared independently from each other, since the novelist wrote the relevant chapter before the trial started and it is highly unlikely that the prosecutor ever read the writer's manuscript.

The two relevant fragments dealing with the victim's death are interesting, since the assumptions they were based on had not been irrefutably proven. The crime occurred in the privacy of the couple's bedroom, with no eyewitnesses who could explain what happened (apart from the defendant, who did not admit guilt, and the victim, who did not survive the attack). Needless to say, there were no audio- or video-recordings of the criminal events either. As a matter of fact, the defendant first stated that the victim had died as a result of a medical accident, and hence that no murder had occurred whatsoever.

The two pieces of discourse to be discussed are also interesting for comparison purposes, since – while belonging to different genres – they both deal with the same objective event in the real world and are roughly based on the same information. (It should be noted that the writer, an amateur novelist familiar with the case, followed the entire trial and media coverage, interviewed the victim's family and even visited the scene of the crime.) Moreover, even though the ultimate communicative goal of books and legal arguments are radically different, in this case both the novelist and the prosecutor had as one of their main objectives the achievement of sympathy for the victim. The novelist wrote her book as a tribute to the woman's memory (Int.8-Nov.: 5) and wanted the reader to feel what she had gone through (Int.8-Nov.: 8). The prosecutor understood the trial as “a battle for sympathy,” which he could only win if the jury empathized with the victim (Pascual 2002: 116). I suggest that in both cases sympathy is achieved through a conceptual integration of the Verbal space and with Here-and-Now space.

### 3.1. *Setting the conceptual scene*

In a four-hour long interview, the amateur writer who wrote the non-fiction book on the case at hand told me that the lack of direct tangible evidence on the circumstances surrounding the victim's death made her wonder about the truth of every aspect surrounding the attack (Int.8-Nov: 9). She also said that this had led her to give her manuscript the title “*It Remains To Be Seen*” (henceforth *IRTBS*). Similarly, the title of the

chapter in which the murder is narrated does not appear in the form of an assertion, but a question: “What Ever Happened To R. C.?” Not too surprisingly then, the entire description of the murder is first introduced through setting up a non-committal Imaginary rather than a plain Past Reality space. The writer starts her chapter on the crime as follows (*IRTBS*, ch. 3: 11):

- (3) Come. Let us use our imaginations, shall we? Soar back in time to the balmy summer’s eve of August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1999. Pretend we are flies on the proverbial wall, or innocents, perhaps, armed with a telescope for a little night gazing...

This piece of text serves as a space-builder. It creates an imaginary scenario in which the events to be narrated are to be conceptualized. Through the KNOWING IS SEEING metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), the rhetorical metamorphosis prompted turns writer and reader into direct ‘observers’ of the crime, as it may have occurred. This construction allows the narration of the events as though they were unfolding in front of the writer and reader. The storytelling is conceptually integrated with the story being told. In other words, the narrating in the Here-and-Now space is presented as occurring in the same mental space as that which is narrated, which inhabits the Verbal space. This image emerges from the conventional blend in which reading is conceptualized as the writer speaking to the reader directly (Herman 1999; Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 210-211). In the narrative, the criminal facts are recounted as though writer and reader were ‘perceiving’ them through their mind’s eye (see Figure 1).

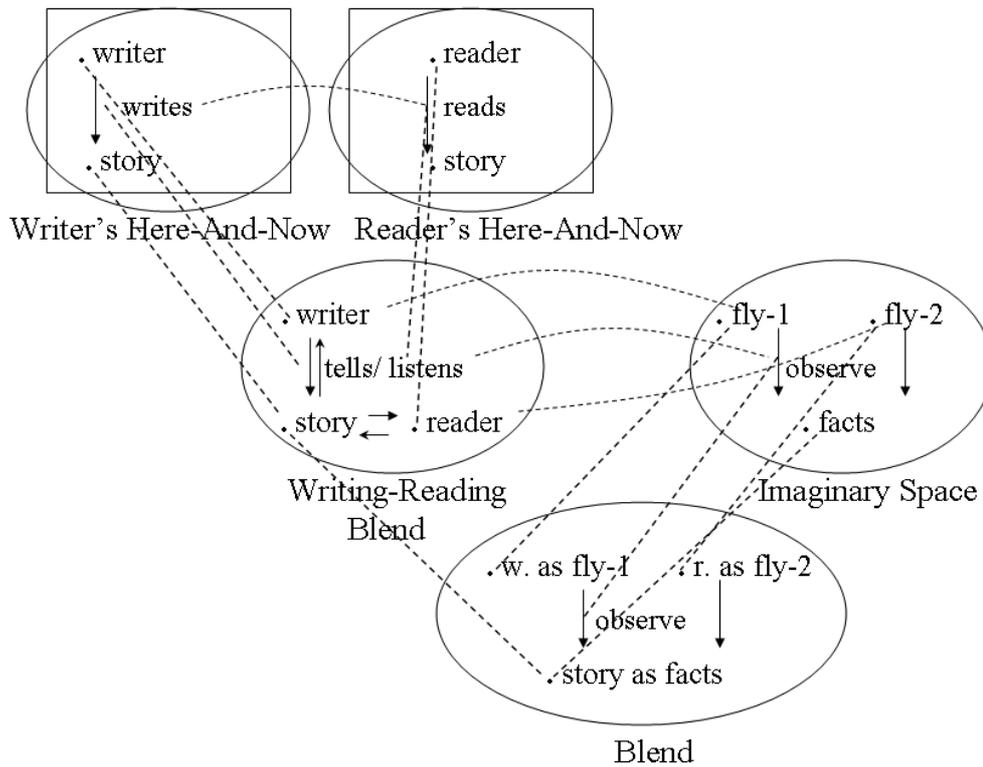


Fig. 1. The writer and reader as imaginary eyewitnesses

This conceptual configuration succeeds in turning hypothetical past events into present-time ones. The story can then be presented vividly with the use of exclamatives, deictic pronouns, and verbs of perception such as ‘see,’ ‘watch,’ ‘listen,’ and ‘feel’ in the imperative mode. Consider for instance (*IRTBS*, ch. 3: 11-14):

- (4) You can see it, no? [...] feel it! There! Now! A sinister fillip rippling tranquility [...] Her bloodied head moves, twitches [...] R. is still alive! Watch her chest rise and fall. And listen! [...] And, yes, we creep forward then, invisible in the searing hatred, for a better view. My god!

Through the use of the present tense, which seems to function as a historical present, the events appear narrated as in a novel. Note too that when working on her manuscript, the writer could only have had a ‘virtual reader’ (Langacker 1999: 95) in mind, as opposed to any individual one. This notwithstanding, in the Imaginary space she set up, the writer finds herself in the crime scene together with the actual reader who happens to be going

through her manuscript in a given space and at a given time. This allows her to address that reader directly with the second person pronoun and imperative forms. By so doing, the reader is not treated as an overhearer, as is often the case in published texts (Tobin 2006). The reader becomes an addressee as well as an onlooker of the events.<sup>2</sup>

Let us consider now how the prosecutor introduced his description of the criminal facts to the jury in the trial for the same murder. Bearing in mind that the prosecutor has the ultimate proof of guilt, his main objective is not only to tell a tragic story, as in the case of the write, but to get the jury to find the defendant guilty of the charges. Thus, he cannot be satisfied by merely presenting the crime within a Hypothetical space – let alone an Imaginary one –, as the writer did. Even if in actuality the prosecutor also operates largely on the hypothetical, he needs to account for each and every one of the elements and events in his Hypothetical space. Not surprisingly then, the prosecutor's conceptual framing of the crime in his discourse to the jury was less imaginative, but certainly not less complex than the writer's. He first warned the jury that (Vol. 6, 1355: 23-28):

- (5) until you can see that killing, until you can see what the defendant did to her and contemplate it and understand it, you cannot judge the defendant's conduct. Can you go back to [...] that night, and see R. C. being struck in the head, struck in the head while she lay in bed?

In this fragment the prosecutor is asking the jury to observe the criminal events (for which there was no direct evidence) through their mind's eye, using the same verb of perception 'to see' as the writer did in (4). The knowledge of the events and how they must have occurred should be such that, through the KNOWING IS SEEING metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), the jury may even be able to watch them happen. He subsequently started his description of the attack as follows (Vol. 6, 1356: 9-10):

- (6) The master bedroom and the master bathroom [i.e. crime scene] are the size of this courtroom [extends arms widely] together.

With this simple utterance, the prosecutor establishes an analogical relation between the courtroom in the Real space, that is the physical space where the ongoing discourse is delivered, and the crime scene, where the narrated events in the Verbal space took place.

This integration is motivated by the immediacy of the prosecutor's discourse, since its communicative situation is one which – counter to the writing and subsequent reading – is shared between addresser and addressees. The establishment of such a relation between communicative context and content prepared the discourse ground for the deictic use of spatial pronouns in the following fragment (Vol. 6, 1356: 16-1358: 4):

- (7) You can tell from what B. K. [blood spatter expert] said that the original attack probably occurred around there [points to his left] because you don't see so much bloodletting at that point. [...] She ends up landing in an area approximately right here [stands in middle of courtroom] in the middle of the master bedroom, and she is still being hit.

The pronouns “there” and “here” refer to locations of the event recounted. However, the speaker's pointing and moving around suggests that these pronouns are not used anaphorically, but deictically. Once a size mapping has been established between the situated context of the discourse production and an element in the story being told, the prosecutor can use the one, i.e. the immediate physical space of the courtroom, to refer to spatial relationships that hold in the other, i.e. the bedroom in which the narrated murder took place. The courtroom in the Real space has therefore become a ‘material anchor’ for a content-context blend. Furthermore, just as was the case in the writer's manuscript, the use of the present tense in (7) helps to construe the events as in a narration. The shift to the past simple indicates a shift to the Here-and-Now space, from which facts in the Past Real space are recounted. The events told in the present progressive are construed in the blend of what Dudis (2004b) calls ‘depicting time.’<sup>3</sup> The prosecutor also acts as what Liddell (1995) calls a ‘surrogate’ of the victim, moving around the courtroom as she must have moved around the crime scene. The time progression of the criminal facts depicted is therefore mapped onto Real time, that is, the time of discourse production in the Here-and-Now space. Consider now the following piece of discourse (Vol. 6, 1357: 2-5):

- (8) And she gets into the corner. [walks to corner of courtroom] She's got to get into this corner at D4 [points at picture exhibit]

Here, the prosecutor is not only conceptually integrating the physical space he and his addressees and overhearers find themselves in (i.e. the courtroom) with the physical space within which his story occurred (i.e. the crime scene). He is also integrating in the overall configuration the Picture space of a crime scene photograph (“D4”), which was taken at a different time, after the occurrence of the narrated facts. This Picture space, which is conceptually linked to the Post-Crime Past space of the investigation, is being accessed by the jury when the prosecutor shows it to them in the Here-and-Now space. Therefore, the exhibit serves as a ‘material anchor,’ perceived by the jury in their Real space. This overall configuration allows the prosecutor to refer to actual locations in the crime scene (now conceptualized as the courtroom) through reference to pictures of these locations taken by the investigators.

Interestingly, once he has himself and the results of the investigation into the picture, the prosecutor also gets the defendant into that conceptual network. Reaching the end of his argument, the prosecutor ads (Vol. 6, 1357: 27-28; 1358: 11-12):

(9) She [victim] pushes over a chair, or the defendant does, and she’s still hit in the same area. [...] That man over there [points at defendant] had incapacitated her at D3,

In this apparently simple piece of discourse the prosecutor is setting up a complex conceptual configuration involving: i) an individual in the Real space of the courtroom (i.e. the defendant); ii) an individual in the Past space of the crime (i.e. the murder victim); and iii) an entity in a Picture space (i.e. the exact location where the murder was finalized). Thus, the prosecutor is implicitly setting up a Trial-Investigation-Facts blend, which presupposed an identity relation between the person accused of the crime and the person responsible for it. The overall cognitive configuration set up by this piece of discourse is represented schematically below:

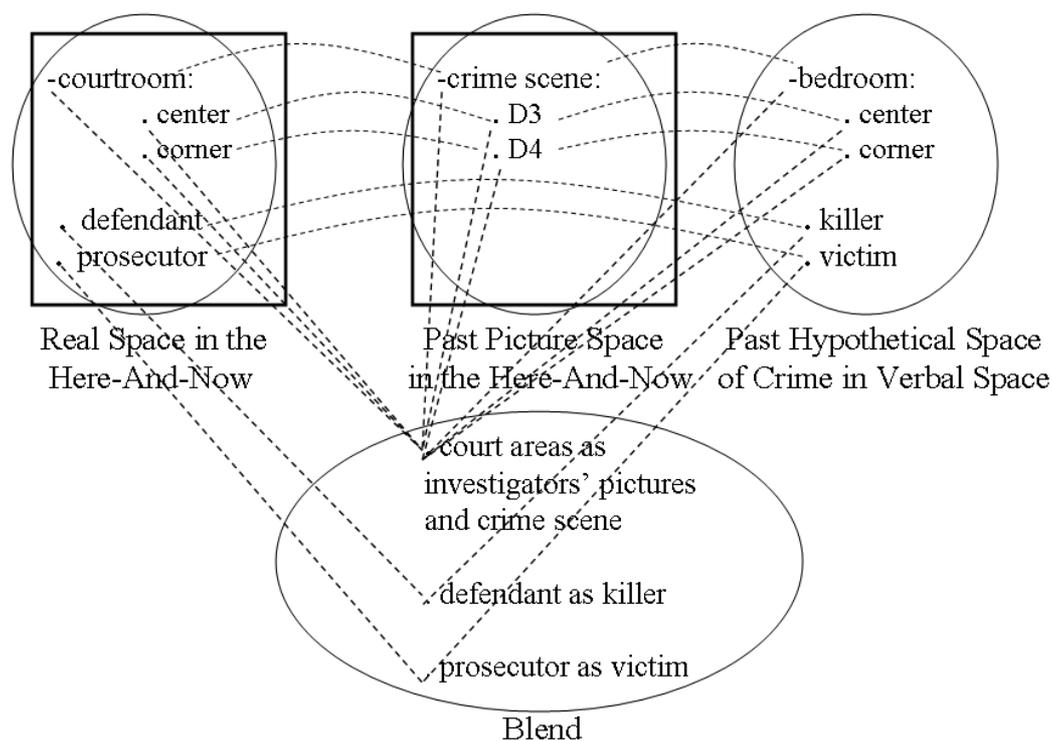


Fig. 2. The courtroom as the scene of the crime

Through setting up this multimodal grounded blend, the prosecutor succeeded in reenacting the crime before his addressees, in an even more complex manner as the writer did in her non-fiction book. Just as the novelist's use of deictic forms, the prosecutor's illustrates the dynamic character of the indexical ground (see also work by Bühler 1934 and Hanks 1990, 1992). The prosecutor's discourse also shows that the discourse building process may not only be facilitated by gestural information, as has often been demonstrated (cf. McNeill 2000, 2005; Enfield 2003; Luchjenbroers 2006), but also by proxemics. When I asked a juror how effective she thought the prosecutor's discourse was, she exclaimed: "he put us there, I was in that room!" (Int.7-Jur: 13).

### 3.2. *Fatal strikes with the missing weapon*

At the beginning of the previous section a fragment was discussed in which the writer invites the reader to join her in a mental travel back in time to the evening of the murder. It was suggested that this involved the conceptual integration of the writing and reading

events with the story being written or read into a scenario in which writer and reader observe the events in question as they develop before them. In the blend those events are directly perceived, hence becoming concrete and real. Note, however, that since writer and reader are only to “pretend” to be able to observe the crime directly, an act created by the use of their “imagination,” the writer’s account to follow cannot have the same degree of reliability as that of an actual eyewitness in the Past Reality space of the crime. In fact, given that the ‘observation’ of the crime occurs within an Imaginary space, the crime itself, that is, what is observed through the mind’s eye, may be conceptualized within a Hypothetical – and not necessarily a Past Reality – space. The exact correspondences between this Hypothetical space and the Past Reality space of the actual facts need not be specified. This particular conceptual configuration allows the writer to present details surrounding the fatal events even when there was no absolute certainty that these details – and in fact the entire event narrated – actually took place. Consider first (10) below (*IRTBS*, ch. 3: 12, 13):

(10) With a violence shattering this placid connubial scene forever, the weapon whips, [...] the terrible whistle as the murder weapon cleaves the air into jagged shards. [...] The wicked weapon strikes the bed with a crisp whomp [...] Blood spins through the air now, flowing down the length of the weapon [...] Without a beat of hesitation the weapon streaks through the air, its edge striking the woman’s head as she lies on the floor.

In this fragment a murder weapon appears in the scene, interacting with the furniture and the victim’s blood and body. In actuality, no weapon was ever found by investigators which could be related to the crime. However, investigators did infer from the victim’s wounds and the blood spatter on the bed and walls that a weapon must have been used. Thus, in (10), the weapon in the investigators’ (Professional) Belief or Inference space – which was presented in the Past Reality of witness testimony – appears through its counterpart in the Hypothetical space of the facts. More specifically, since the traces left by what must have been the weapon indicated that it must have been a long metal object, investigators testified that they believed the weapon was most probably a fireplace poker. Critically, the couple owned a poker, which went missing right after the crime. Since one would expect the perpetrator of the crime to try and hide the evidence for it, the weapon

was strongly suspected to correspond to that missing poker. Thus, the overall underlying conceptual configuration upon which (10) is based involves a missing-X construction blend (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 241ff.). The weapon inherits thing-hood from the Past Pre-Crime space in which there is a poker by the fireplace. This space was presented in the Real space of ongoing communication through showing the jury an old picture of the fireplace area with the poker hanging on the wall. The missing poker inherits its physical characteristics of being a gap from the 'actual' input, in which there is no poker in the home. This missing poker element in the Blended space is thus a compression of the disanalogy between the Post-Crime Reality space of the trial and the Pre-Crime Reality space (see Figure 3). Once compressed, speakers can refer to the missing poker and map it onto the weapon that must have been used in the Past Crime space. Again, in the writer's narrative, the weapon in the investigator's (Professional) Belief or Inference space is implicitly mapped onto the weapon in the book's Imaginary space. Since that element is not conceptualized within a Reality space it need not be introduced and referred to in the text with a long non-committal description such as "what was probably a poker." Take the following fragment (*IRTBS*, ch. 3: 13):

(11) ...the fiend leaps onto the raised hearth of the fireplace [...], and with calculated malice backhands her across the face with the poker. [...] The poker connects with her head; tissue, hair and blood clot the air, fly up through the open transom at the top of the shower stall. Pound! The poker strikes R.'s face, directly across her eyes and nose, splintering her nasal bones.

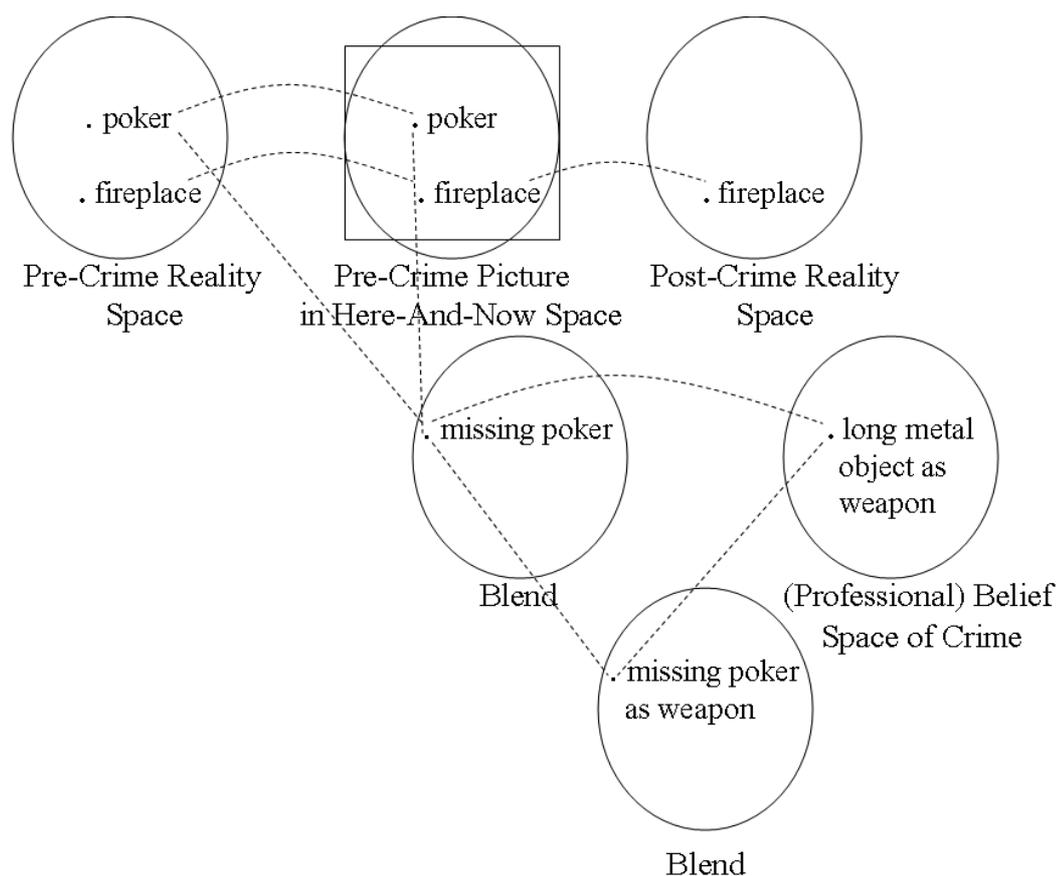


Fig. 3. The missing poker as the murder weapon

Consider now the way in which the weapon is presented by the prosecutor in his discourse to the jury in the case at hand (Vol. 6, 1363: 11-18):

- (12) On People’s 11, 11A, at the edge of this bedspread, that’s the weapon right there. There’s a linear object. It’s approximately three feet in length and it lies across the bedspread. It is covered in blood. But that linear object cannot be explained by any other device at the crime scene except it is consistent with a fireplace poker and the fireplace tools are gone. That explains that mark.

In this extract the prosecutor discusses one of the pictures of the crime scene taken by investigators. Hence, what is characterized as “the weapon” in “People’s 11A” is in fact a picture representation from the Post-Crime Past Reality space of the investigation, perceived by the jury in their Real space. Significantly, this is not a picture of an “actual linear object.” Rather, it is the photograph of a long mark of blood on the couple’s bed. Thus, when the prosecutor says “that’s the weapon right there,” the connection between

the actual weapon used at the time of facts, possibly a fireplace poker, and the picture taken during the investigation is not merely an analogical mapping between representation and thing represented. Since the weapon was never found, a picture of it could not be taken by investigators. Rather, there is a connection chain from the real blood mark to its representation in the picture, and then from this representation to the actual object that left that mark. An EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy (Panther and Thornburg 2000) is therefore involved, since the blood mark stands for the long object stained with the victim's blood, which for this very reason could only be the murder weapon. At the same time, since the mark is consistent with the mark that a fireplace poker could have left, and since the couple's fireplace tools went missing after the crime, an identity relation is set up between the weapon in the prosecutor's – and the investigator's – (Professional) Belief space of the crime, and the fireplace poker in the Past Reality space preceding the crime (see Figure 4).

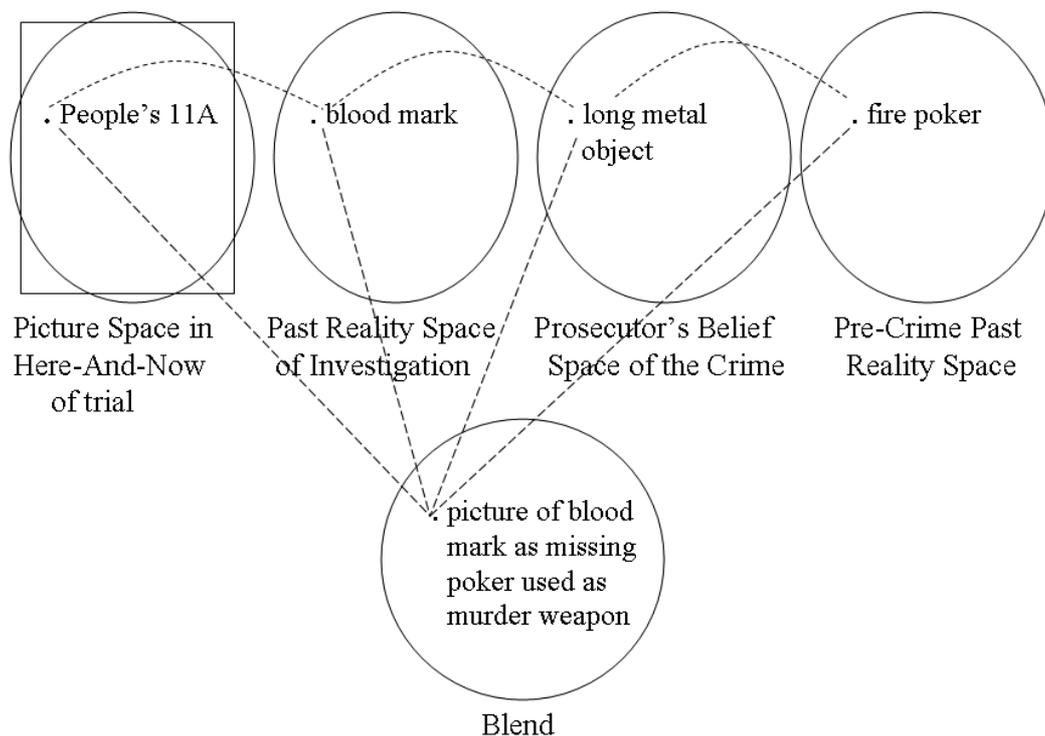


Fig. 4. The picture of a blood mark as the murder weapon

Once the weapon has been set in the scene through this sequence of conceptual operations, it can be presented as operating in the prosecutor's (Professional) Belief space of the crime. See for instance the extract below (Vol. 6, 1373: 27-1374: 5):

- (13) he takes a weapon like the fireplace poker, the weapon that made the red mark on the bedspread, and he takes that and hits her right across the head. Now, stop and break this down for a minute. What else could your intent be when somebody takes a fireplace poker and hits somebody across the head?

Note that the weapon is first tentatively presented as “a weapon like a fireplace poker,” which is then once more explicitly mapped onto the element that left the blood mark in the Picture space. Since in (13) it had been established that the weapon most probably corresponded to the fireplace poker in the Past Reality space prior to the crime, that is, the Past Reality space prior to the poker's mysterious disappearance, the prosecutor can subsequently speak of the weapon directly as “a fireplace poker.” Apparently, the prosecutor was so convinced of the identity connection between the missing fireplace tools and the murder weapon that he had asked to bring a similar type of poker to the courtroom for demonstrative purposes. The defense had objected to this, arguing that it was not “100% sure” that the “heavy blunt instrument” used was a fireplace poker, as “there was no instrument that was admitted into evidence” (Int.9-DC: 34). Interestingly, in order to illustrate the manner of killing all the same the prosecutor used a wooden pointer as alternative. Consider the fragment below (Vol. 6, 1455: 10-22) and the corresponding images borrowed from KSNB television of the prosecutor delivering this piece of discourse:

- (14) As he batters her with the weapon, [slow battering movements with pointer, while looking at jury, pic. 1] if he's even hitting just up here [touches back of pointer] or somewhere along the length of the weapon, [smooth movements along pointer, pic. 2] centrifugal force is going to keep directing the blood all the way to the end [touches end of pointer]. That's why he [blood spatter expert] said you'd expect to see some blood even on the back of the shirt [turns around] of the person who is swinging the fireplace tool [points to own back, pic. 3], because the blood is going

to come off the end [touches end of pointer] [...] So as he casts down after it's wet,  
blood flies to the end [touches end of pointer]



pic. 1

pic. 2

pic. 3

Here, the wooden pointer stands for the missing weapon. Thus, the pointer serves as a material anchor to help interpret the prosecutor's regular movements in the Here-and-Now space as corresponding to movements in the Past Reality space of the crime, conceptualized within the (Professional) Belief space of the prosecution team. The prosecutor's intentional hand movements along the pointer stand for the blood's path due to gravity. At the same time, the prosecutor uses his own body in the Real space of the courtroom as a surrogate, as it stands for the attacker's body in the crime scene. Clearly, the prosecutor's mimicking gestures are not merely an embellishment of speech, but integral parts of his discourse production, which is consistent with recent studies on gestures accompanying language (McNeill 2000, 2005; Enfield 2003). Note too that the prosecutor's movements are slow and that he accompanies them with an explanation and eye-contact with the jury. This resembles more a teacher's demonstration than a realistic reconstruction of a fatal attack. This indicates yet another content-context blend, in which the pragmatic and the metapragmatic level become integrated with each other. The prosecutor is dramatizing his description, that is, illustrating the events dealt with, as well as providing a commentary on these events for the sake of the audience in the Here-and-Now space.<sup>4</sup>

#### **4. Empathy and the generic 'you'**

Besides the content-context blends that the writer and the prosecutor explicitly set up in their discourses, I suggest that they both also succeeded in implicitly prompting an identity

blend between the addressees (readers and jury members) and the discourse characters (victim and defendant). I believe that this conceptual operation reflects the universal cognitive capacity to put oneself in someone else's shoes, which is fundamental to the experience of sympathy. In my feedback interviews with trial participants and attendees in the case at hand, for instance, interviewees often expressed their feelings about the case through drawing analogies with their own lives, as well as with how they believed they would feel – or *I*, their interlocutor, would feel – under the same circumstances as the individuals talked about. For example, the writer who wrote the manuscript and the juror interviewed – both females – tried to explain for themselves why the victim neither divorced the defendant nor suspected any malicious intent on his part by blending themselves and their (ex-)husbands with the couple. The writer even (rhetorically) put both herself and me – her interlocutor – in the shoes of an average victim and assaulter, thereby blending the roles of the discourse characters in the Verbal space with the interlocutors in the Here-and-Now space of the interview (Int.8-Nov: 19):

- (15) They also found a very high correlation between injuries in the face and a very **personal** relationship of hatred towards the victim. For instance, if you and I want to just kill each other, or just kill somebody, we wouldn't necessarily, hit them 20 times in the head!

Here, the writer explains the results of a study showing a correlation between the number of injuries in the face of a victim and the attacker's amount of hatred towards that victim. This was relevant to the case at hand, in which the victim's face had been severely battered. The illustration of this point with an imaginary crime committed in which we, the two communicative participants, are victims or attackers should be regarded as quite extraordinary if one bears in mind that we were absolute strangers engaged in an interview which was being tape-recorded for subsequent analysis. Still, it seems that structuring the content of the Verbal space in terms of the Here-and-Now space was more important than truth, relevance or conversational etiquette. More generally, I believe that this constitutes a vivid exploitation of a common – and perhaps even universal – blending type. Critically, I propose that this blending type does not only become manifest in discourse, or in the grammar of American Sign Language (Liddell 1995, 1998), but also in the semantics of

the generic 'you.' Consider in this regard the extract below, also from my interview with the writer (Int.8-Nov: 14, 15):

- (16) If you are a witness and you lie about something people assume that you are lying about everything else [...] That's the way the trial system works. [...] the idea being that if you and I are in the jury and we see him lie about one thing, then we assume they are lying about everything else [...] they try to trap you into a statement, and then impeach you with your own testimony [...] So you'll say, 'no I wasn't at the store at eight o'clock,' and I take out the testimony and I said 'aha! you testify here that you were at the store at eight o'clock!'

In this extract, the writer explains the working of the trial procedure, using the second pronoun 'you' to refer to a witness first and a jury member then, while the pronoun 'I' serves to refer to a jury member first and a lawyer then. The two pronouns are used in order to illustrate a general scenario, and thus do not refer to the addresser (the writer) or the addressee (myself) in the research interview. Rather, they are to be interpreted as referring to a generic witness, jury member, and attorney. Thus, roles in the Verbal space are dynamically filled with values in the Here-and-Now space, even though they still need to be understood as roles. Note that in the cases in which the second person pronoun is used, it would be hard to find a clear-cut distinction between this use and that of the generic 'you.' Indeed, it would be difficult to argue that the generic 'you,' used repeatedly by my informants, sets up a basic conceptual configuration that differs significantly from an identity blend between individuals in the Here-and-Now and individuals in the Verbal space. It seems more accurate to state that there exists a continuum between the explicit blending of addressees with discourse characters, as in the Bypass blend or in (15), and the implicit blending through the use of a generic 'you.'

## **5. Summary and conclusions**

This paper presented an analysis of a writer's description of a crime compared with a prosecutor's description of that same crime in his closing argument to the jury.

I hope to have shown that the pieces of discourse dealt with involved a conceptual link between (at least) the supposed Past Reality space of the crime and the ongoing communication in the Here-and-Now space. This link facilitated the creation of narratives that were halfway between fact and fiction. Sequential stories were constructed out of the presentation of fragmented events occurring in different temporal and spatial realms, some of which might have no counterparts in actuality. Spectacular and unusual as this rhetorical device may seem, its basic underlying conceptual operations are extremely common in litigation and criminal narrative. (At least) in judicial argumentation, this technique is often used because it allows one to simultaneously attend to all the relevant concerns in the same conceptual domain (cf. Pascual 2002; Coulson and Pascual 2006). In fact, it does not even seem possible to understand, reason, or talk about past events with which one has had no direct experience without evoking underlying conceptual operations of this kind. In particular, the data analyzed seems to show that the overall conceptual configuration underlying a piece of narrative such as a non-fiction book may be significantly less complex than its counterpart in an actual prosecutor's discourse in a high-profile criminal trial. This indicates that fictivity and imagination do not only play an important role in literature, but also in legal language, possibly precisely when the stakes are particularly high (cf. Coulson and Pascual 2006). This is non-trivial, since it is generally accepted that evidential law is "conceptualized as organized around facilitating the presentation and contestation of what happened, of 'facts' and 'the truth'" (Philips 1992: 250).

At the same time, in the two pieces of discourse discussed the narrator conceptually turned addressees into direct 'observers' of the story, in such a way that communicative context and discourse content became one. Even though this occurred only implicitly and for the sake of argument, it successfully managed to achieve sympathy. Indeed, the conceptual integration of communicative context and discourse content is critical in the gaining of sympathy and cognitive involvement from the audience. It may be postulated that one cannot empathize with someone else without mentally engaging in an identity blend with that individual. In fact, it seems reasonable to me to postulate that an identity blend between the interlocutors in the situation of communication (with their own past experiences and expectations of future ones) and the characters and events in the Verbal space may also be critical to ordinary comprehension and reasoning. This idea is consistent with work on simulation semantics (cf. Glenberg and Kaschak 2002; Matlock

2004; Bergen and Chang 2005; Feldman 2006), which shows that language understanding critically involves mental simulation of linguistic content. In other words, it is postulated that in order to produce or understand meaningful language, language users mentally imagine themselves perceiving or enacting the content of an utterance or piece of discourse. Along the same vein, I have suggested that the generic 'you' sets up a basic conceptual configuration based on an identity blend between the interlocutor(s) in the Here-and-Now space and the role(s) and/or the character(s) in the Verbal space.

In short, in the examples discussed in this paper the recognition of the context of communication is essential to constructing the intended meaning. I believe this constitutes the norm rather than the exception in ordinary language use. Bearing this in mind, I propose that the Current Discourse Space constitutes a blended space of the Verbal and the Here-and-Now spaces. To put it differently, I suggest that the conceptual domain shared by those engaged in communication needs to be understood as resulting from the blending of the configuration set up by the linguistic input with the input coming from the situated context of communication. This entails that the Base space, i.e. the "starting point for the construction to which it is always possible to return" (Fauconnier 1994: xxii), always corresponds to the Here-and-Now space. This idea is consistent with the conceptual blending model developed by the Aarhus school, in which the situation of cognizing constitutes the ground upon which space building occurs (Brandt and Brandt 2005).<sup>5</sup>

This paper is thus a call for an approach to blending and cognitive linguistics in general which takes into account both the content and the context of language production and interpretation. Indeed, my work is in tune with a view of language as essentially context-bound and interactively organized (cf. Cicourel 1973; Duranti and Goodwin 1992). My work is hence also in line with cognitive linguistic approaches that regard intersubjectivity as a fundamental dimension of linguistic meaning as well as grammar (cf. Sinha 1999; Verhagen 2005; Janssen in press). Lastly, I believe the paper also shows that understanding discourse and communicative phenomena can help us better understand linguistic phenomena. It seems therefore useful to study linguistic constructions within a broad, situated discourse context.

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<sup>1</sup>The Here and Now Space corresponds to what Brandt and Brandt (2005) call the 'Semiotic Space.' I have decided not to use this term for finding them little accurate to characterize the situation of ongoing communication.

<sup>2</sup> As a fictive onlooker, the reader of the non-fiction novel does not become part of the story being read, which would be rather peculiar, since the narrated events are based on real life. Therefore, even though the content-context blend involved has an important emotional function is essential for understanding the main plot. Some advertisements, such as the Bypass, as well as cartoons, short stories and novels are fundamentally based on a content-context blend. An example is Julio Cortázar's short story "Continuity of Parks," in which the protagonist, a reader immersed in a thriller, is first "witness" to a narrated encounter in a mountain cabin and subsequently becomes the victim of the murder mystery he is reading.

<sup>3</sup> Dudis (2004a, b) has shown that Real space blends demonstrating actions are indispensable to American Sign Language discourse. Just as the prosecutor did in his closing argument, signers integrate conceptualized event time and discourse time for purposes of iconically depicting events as if they were occurring in the Here-and-Now.

<sup>4</sup> Not surprisingly, the integration of description and demonstration, involving the partitioning off of body parts allowing the presentation of the scene narrated from different viewpoints, also occurs in sign language (cf. Dudis 2004a; Liddell 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Kashmiri Stec for a particularly fruitful brainstorming session on this issue.