

Mr. Ramsay's Idiosyncratic Mind Style: Cognitive Explication through Blending Theory

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Abstract

*This paper presents a detailed analysis of the various idiosyncratic metaphors used by Mr. Ramsay, a character in Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*. Blending theory is used to explain the construction of the metaphors which Mr. Ramsay uses during his contemplations and utterances. This study establishes the relevance of these metaphors with the challenging academic situation of Mr. Ramsay. Semino's conceptual networking presented in her paper *A Cognitive Stylistic Approach to Mind Style in Narrative Fiction*³ (2002) is used as framework for the study. The study concludes that metaphors are not mere linguistic variety but are programmed on a deeper level of cognition. This cognitive mapping of metaphors justifies Mr. Ramsay's idiosyncratic behavior through unfaltering rationalistic attitude and delimits his character from a narcissistic sympathy seeker to a competent academician who bravely survives the academic challenges.*

Keywords: Mr. Ramsay, Idiosyncratic metaphor, Blending Theory, Mind Style

1.1 Mr. Ramsay and *To the Lighthouse*

*Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* displays an array of cognitively complicated characters. Among these characters, Mr. Ramsay stands unique regarding his style of thinking and language execution. He is a professor and researcher by profession who worries and thinks persistently in a self-centered frame work about his social and professional persona. He hassles himself with the jadedness of his knowledge for which he seeks recognition in the form of sympathy from others. The other characters detest him for his attention seeking behavior.*

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³ With slight modification in diagrammatic design to provide ease in the detail

This novel is known for its intriguing narration in the modern technique of stream of consciousness; this analysis, however, focuses on how mind style affects a character's comprehension of reality and perspective development. In other words, how the schema of a character develops and manifests itself through linguistic choices. This work will research into the cognitive factors underpinning Mr. Ramsay's sympathy pursuing behavior through his linguistics and stylistic choices.

1.2 Blending theory, Idiosyncratic metaphors, and Mr. Ramsay's Mind style

Blending theory also known as Conceptual Integration Theory propounded by Fauconnier and Turner (1998) has been developed to understand the process of construction of meaning. Unlike Conceptual Metaphor Theory which works on schemata, Blending theory works on mental spaces. These spaces are: Input space –1, Input Space- 2, Generic Space and Blended Space. The Input Space-1 presents the vehicle, the object to which the comparison is made; Input Space-2 on the other hand is tenor i.e. the object about which the discussion is done. Generic Space presents the generic attributes shared by the two spaces. The blended space combines the blending of the shared attributes to generate meaning of the metaphor. This section provides an elaborative discussion on the metaphors used by Mr. Ramsay. For the in-depth analysis, various figures ¹ will be used to present the conceptual networking for these metaphors. This will elucidate the cognitive patterning of metaphors to create a unique mind style. Although Mr. Ramsay uses various metaphors, this research focuses only on the idiosyncratic metaphors which Mr. Ramsay uses to project his perspective about himself and his profession. Semino and Swindlehurst (1996: 147) associate idiosyncratic metaphors with individual mind style; "... the systematic use of a particular metaphor (or metaphors) reflects an idiosyncratic cognitive habit, a personal way of making sense of and talking about the world: in other words, a particular mind style."

In case of Mr. Ramsay, the idiosyncrasy of metaphors is presented by its unconventionality of generally not being used by a person who is struggling for recognition amidst social and psychological challenges.

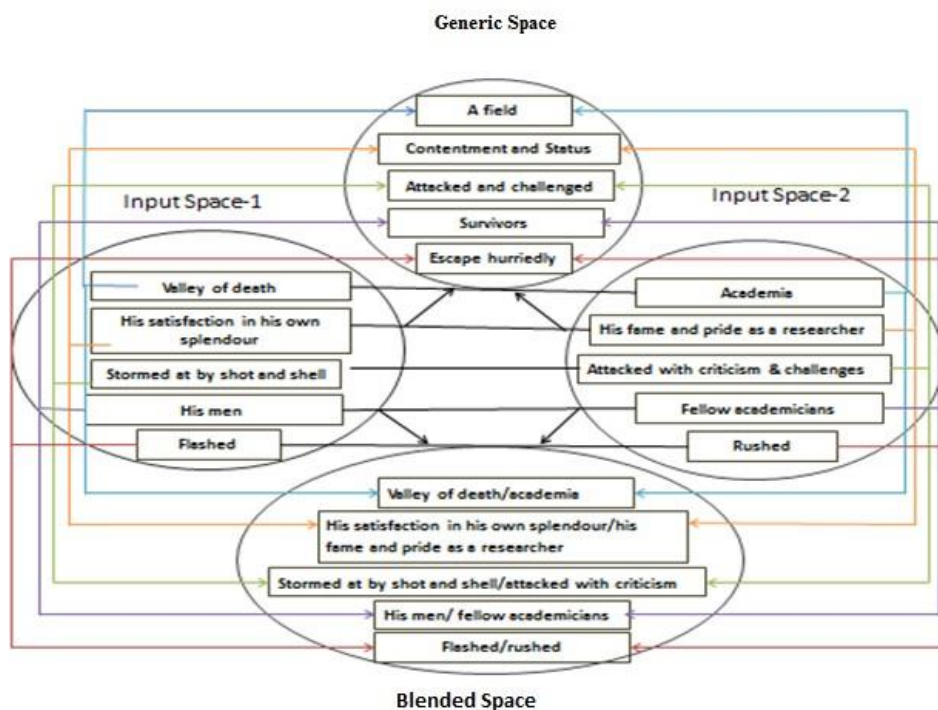
¹These figures are adapted from Semino's discussion on the conceptual networking of metaphors as presented in her essay (2002). Please check the reference list for the details.

This paper considers the metaphors of war field, piano, mother-child, and boots under idiosyncratic metaphors to discuss Mr. Ramsay’s mind style.

1.2.1 Conceptual Network for the Metaphor of War Field

Figure- A presents the correspondence of war field metaphor which Mr. Ramsay establishes with his profession of research. In his conceptual domain, it is not only his profession which is shown in metaphorical terms but also his position in relation to that metaphor. He sees himself as a soldier along with his fellow academicians who are fighting the same dilemma of being forgotten. The following figure presents the blended space and generic space development to comprehend this perspective of Mr. Ramsay.

Conceptual Network for the Metaphor of War Field (Figure –A)



In Figure-A the source input space (input space 2); Ramsay associates himself with the soldier of the poem. He uses metaphorical scenario associated to source domain of war in order to build a perspective on his professional persona. He envisages himself accompanied by other soldiers to be bombarded with shells and cannons in the war field. This

space establishes itself on the larger war domain which is conceptualized by Mr. Ramsay. The target input space-1 domain is the situation where he is battling with his actual professional challenges which refer to his academic life domain. The correspondences are established between the two input spaces; the valley of death corresponds to academia, satisfaction in his own splendor to fame and pride as an academician, shattered and destroyed to suffering, stormed by shooting and shelling to being attacked with criticism and challenges, volleyed and thundered to be criticized and confronted, his men to fellow academicians, and flashed to the hurried escape from failure. In the generic space, qualities that are similar in a war hero (source input domain) and Ramsay as a hardworking academician (target input domain) are illustrated. The generic and blended spaces coincide due to which Ramsay justifies his mindset as a warrior who has to be very calculated and rationalistic in developing strategy for the battlefield. In this instance, when Ramsay contemplates over his accomplishments, he considers himself a survivor in the war field of constant academic pressure and criticism. This results in his urge for admiration and recognition which he demands from his wife and friends. He does not consider sympathy seeking as entreating; he rather thinks it as a due reward from the society. His family and friends, on the other hand, consider it an annoyance and needless attention seeking.

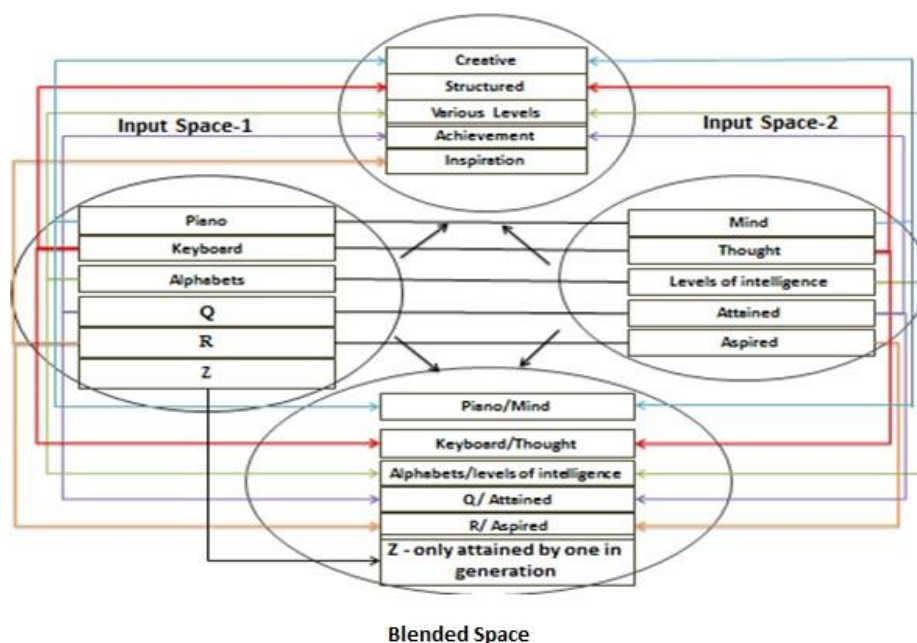
The coloured lines in Figure A (and other figures to follow) indicate the correspondence between the source, target, generic and the fourth domain which is the blended space. Blending theory states that it is in the blended space where meanings are generated. The blend receives the structure of the source input space i.e. Mr. Ramsay the warrior is Mr. Ramsay the academician, valley of death is the academe and so forth. The complete correspondence makes Mr. Ramsay believe that he *is* a soldier fighting against opponents' attack which in this case is his rivals' criticism. This illustration shows the working of war field metaphor in influencing Mr. Ramsay's opinion and perspective about himself.

1.2.2 Conceptual Network for the Metaphor of Piano

This metaphor is used by Mr. Ramsay in one of his deliberations about the quality of his intellectual caliber. Figure-B shows how a musical instrument is used as a structured symbol to examine the nature of intelligence. It also suggests the mind style which dissects an innate ability and tries to validate its improvement through practice. He rationalizes the gap between his achieved scholarly understanding and the aspired acumen.

It is like investigating his ambition under the microscope and figuring out the problem in his struggle. The conceptual network does not only show this difference but also highlights the impending issue of aiming to achieve genius. This also reveals Mr. Ramsay’s combat on two planes; one to accomplish the next level of knowledge and the other to yearn for the perfection and ease with which only genius are endowed.

Conceptual Network for the Metaphor of piano (Figure- B)
Generic Space



This illustration shows the idiosyncratic aspect of Ramsay’s mind style where he compares levels of intelligence with the notes of a piano keyboard. In the input space-1, it can be observed that piano is described as a musical instrument with alphabetically categorized notes. This corresponds to the input space- 2, in which various levels of intelligence are outlined. Thus, alphabet Q on the piano’s keyboard can be related metaphorically to the level of intelligence where a person can be inquisitive about the reason of something. This is the intellectual degree which Mr. Ramsay has accomplished and strives hard to go to the next level. This stage defines a person’s inquiring interest and investigative quality of research and knowledge. Level R depicts the

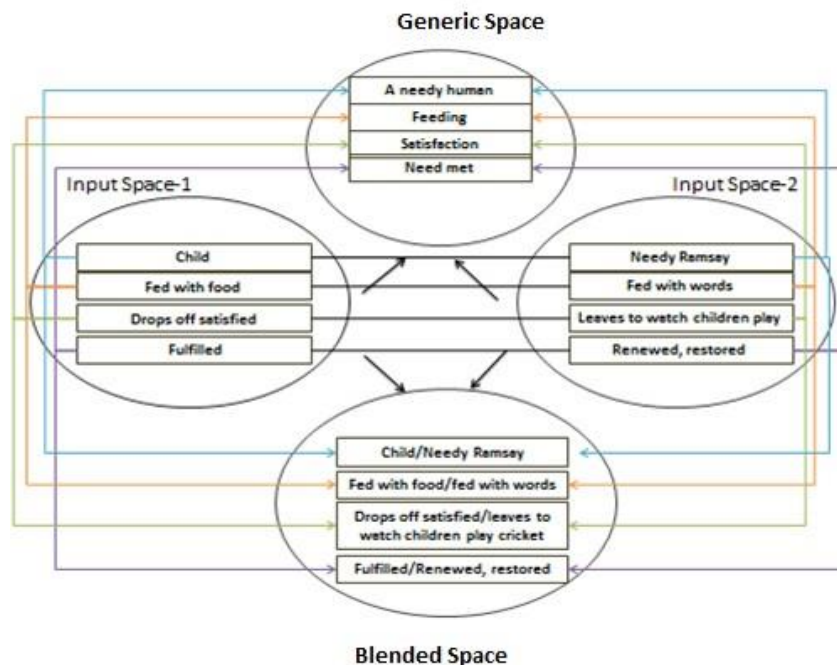
ability of finding possible solutions to the problems that arose at level Q: the inquest stage. Mr. Ramsay struggles to improve himself from the level of inquiry to the level R at any cost, thus defining room for self-improvement. Level Z stands for the Zenith of one's intelligence which Ramsay's mind style equates with genius. It is this level which Ramsay cannot achieve yet he spends his whole life to attain this perfection.

In the blended space, it can be observed that the piano schema does not correspond with Ramsay's idea of structured intelligence. This can be elaborated by the argument that piano being an instrument can be learned playing whereas genius is not a matter of practice. Ramsay believes that genius is innate and gifted, e.g., in one of his contemplations he considers genius as *the inspired who, miraculously, lump all the letters together in one flash...* (Woolf, p. 25), thus nullifying the argument that genius can be possibly learned. It also strengthens the difference between the two input spaces of the conceptual structure for piano i.e. Ramsay overburdens himself with the pressure of achieving something natural by learning, which is impossible. He, however, realizes this fact during his reminiscences and admits that *Z is only reached once by one man in a generation.* (Woolf, p. 25). His stubbornness to gain intellectual perfection is cognitively draining him, and in order to console himself he seeks emotional support from others.

1.2.3 Conceptual Network for the Mother-Child Metaphor

Figure-C is the exposition of the nature of dependent relation of Mr. Ramsay with his wife. This can be seen through the metaphor of a child and mother relation where it is natural for the child to seek help from mother to fulfill his/her nutritional or emotional needs. Although this is an idiosyncratic metaphor, the conceptual networking makes it logical and less sentimental. It works on the pragmatics of abundance and lack. In this scenario Mrs. Ramsay is abundant with emotional support whereas Mr. Ramsay lacks the emotive energy. Therefore, he seeks it from his wife with the trust that she will selflessly devote to the need of his ego gratification.

Conceptual Network for the Mother-Child Metaphor (Figure- C)



This illustration is furthering the result of Mrs. Ramsay's offering attention and admiration to Mr. Ramsay. Through her appreciation, he replenishes his lost hope and faith in his abilities and accomplishments. The first input space elaborates the metaphor of a child being fed *who drops off satisfied* (Woolf: 28) after the gratification of his hunger. Correspondingly, Mr. Ramsay in the second input space finds his emotional strength in the appreciative words of his wife. Their communication is mostly nonverbal and is devoid of public display of mutual affection. They nevertheless, have a strong connection which facilitates Mr. Ramsay to find his recognition. For example, when Ramsay demands sympathy from his wife, Mrs. Ramsay *Flashing her needles, confident, upright, she created drawing-room and kitchen, set them all aglow; bade him take his ease there, go in and out, enjoy himself.* (Woolf, p. 27). Her mere presence and glances exchanged with Mr. Ramsay prove to be useful in giving him the courage to get back from his hopeless state of not being a gifted genius.

The dependence of child on mother in the source domain parallels with the reliance of Mr. Ramsay on Mrs. Ramsay in the target domain. Feeding

with food corresponds with provision of consolation, child's satisfaction in the input space- 1 relates with Mr. Ramsay's fulfillment with renewed hope in the input space-2. Her words (verbal and non-verbal) change his disappointing opinion about himself. With his confidence restored, he leaves the room to watch children play cricket outside, thus ready to be a part of happenings other than his academia. The generic space in this metaphor represents the similar aspects between the source and target spaces and the blended space gives a perfect blend of uncompromising dependence of Mr. Ramsay on his wife.

In the conceptual networking for this case, both the input spaces correspond completely, generically making it sound to draw parallels between Ramsay's situation and a hungry child. This comparison vindicates his search for sympathy as a healthy need initiated by the appetite of achieving intellectual excellence. Mr. Ramsay, therefore, does not see it as attention seeking behavior as alleged by others, but as a natural phenomenon based on cause and effect.

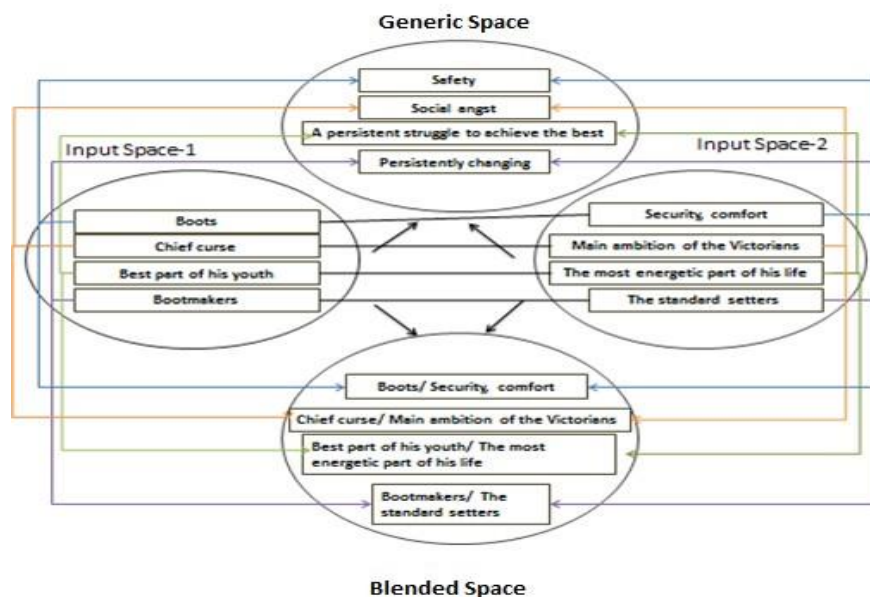
This metaphor is idiosyncratic in the sense that child's dependence on parent is projected onto husband's dependence on partner. The child is not physically or psychologically strong enough to prepare food for him whereas such is not the case with Mr. Ramsay. He needs help in seeking emotional support as his overtly rationalistic attitude does not entertain any room for emotional tendencies. He therefore, seeks it from his wife who does not challenge his need for solace due to his persistent engagements in the academic conflicts.

1.2.4 Conceptual Network for the Metaphor of Boots

This conceptual network as shown in Figure-D presents a clever shift from footwear to its metaphorical significance of comfort and support. It locates the resemblances between the source domain of the footwear and the target domain showing its figurative value. This figure presents the rationalization for Mr. Ramsay's extensive discourse on boots which Lily interprets on its surface value. Mr. Ramsay, however, is not merely engaging in a conversation about shoes; on the conceptual plane he is also sharing his efforts in achieving personal and social comforts. For him shoes cease to be mere footwear and extend to the domain of his achievements due to which he gets enthusiastic in talking about them. Lily on the other hand, takes it as Mr. Ramsay's social awkwardness to engage

in needless conversation about boots and therefore wants to end the conversation as soon as possible.

Conceptual Network for the Metaphor of Boots (Figure- D)



Ramsay skillfully develops a metaphor of boots from the actual footwear during his conversation with Lily. When he declares finding the suitable footwear as one of *the chief curses of mankind* (Woolf, p. 115), his mind style parallels shoes with its metaphorical significance. He explains that he has spent the best part of his life in searching a suitable pair for himself; he symbolically refers to the comfort and recognition which he has personally and socially achieved. By mentioning the bootmakers, he is referring to the stakeholders of various walks of life who set particular standards of excellence, which takes a life time to achieve. It also suggests that as various brands in the footwear business claim various levels of comfort and durability, customers pay as much as they are asked for because they want to seek comfort and keep up with the vogue of society. This of course comes with a price, as comfort, durability and fashion are not available at an easy cost. This can also be seen in case of establishing oneself in financial, social and emotional milieus. As the standards of quality persistently change, it takes a lot of commitment in terms of time, toil and financial investment. To get quality shoes the customer must pay a good price, similarly, to attain stability and accomplishments, one need to pay off in terms of hard work, diligence and energetic days of youth. This

correspondence can also be seen in the two input spaces where gain comes with loss.

According to Mr. Ramsay, social and financial stability do not stop as an achievement, it rather becomes an endless chase of hoping to achieve better and smarter. This chase is driven by the ambition to meet the changing standards of excellence. As shoes never go out of fashion as a necessity, likewise, social and academic stability is a need to survive professionally. Mr. Ramsay's perpetual insistence on proving his professional worth is justified as he sees it as a necessity to continue his academic life.

1.3 Conclusion

This study has furthered on the mind style of Mr. Ramsay through the application of blending theory. These theories analyze the conceptual mapping of the selected metaphors used by Mr. Ramsay. It is successfully established that metaphors are not only linguistic expressions; they are also associated with the cognitive representations of related concepts. Mr. Ramsay's over relating with the discussed metaphors has a deep cognitive reason to link his story with the choice of his language. Therefore, he expresses his utmost passion and enthusiasm for the poems which he thinks narrates his untold story. The choice of metaphors is permeated with the themes of struggle and perseverance against the challenges. As a result, Mr. Ramsay is in conflict with his professional and emotional insecurities. His demand of adoration is not an unnecessary attention- call as perceived by others; it is a reasonable plea for deserved recognition. He becomes outrageous if this condition is not met either in the form of submission to his reason or appreciating his understanding. Logic of his discipline is not the only reason to enforce his uncompromising rationalistic behavior; his mind style is also a main contributing factor to shape his attitude. Cognitive metaphor theory and Blending theory use the logic of correspondence, to explicate his rational behavior through language and cognition i.e. his mind style.

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