

Blending Fiction and the Real: Discerning the Most Robust Evolutionary Pattern in Narrative Literature

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The most common understanding of *fiction* is as a piece of literature that describes imaginary events and people, something invented and not true. In this sense, fiction can be explained and understood as standing in opposition to the reality. If we instead look at fiction from the perspective of biopoetics and cognitive theory, it becomes clear that it does not show a sharply defined opposition to reality. It is this fuzziness of boundaries between fiction and the real that we are concerned with in this article; our hypothesis includes the application of Blending Theory (BT) to outline the cognitive processes that sustain the conceptualisation of fictive narrative. Our article attempts to propose a model stemming from cognitive theories of language, that accounts for the underlying cognitive processes that constitute the complex meaning construction when dealing with fictive narrative.

Keywords: cognition; fiction; the real; Blending Theory; distributed cognition

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La integración de la ficción y lo real: la determinación del patrón evolutivo más robusto en la narrativa literaria

Lo más habitual es entender la *ficción* como una obra literaria que describe hechos y personas imaginarios, algo inventado y no verdadero. En este sentido, la ficción puede explicarse y entenderse como opuesta a la realidad. Si, en cambio, observamos la ficción desde la perspectiva de la biopoética y la teoría cognitiva, está claro que ya no muestra una oposición nítidamente definida a la realidad. Este artículo trata sobre los límites borrosos entre la ficción y lo real; nuestra hipótesis incluye la aplicación de la teoría de *blending* (*Blending Theory*, BT) para esbozar los procesos cognitivos que sustentan la conceptualización de la

narrativa ficticia. Nuestra intención con este artículo es proponer un modelo desde las teorías cognitivas del lenguaje que explique los procesos cognitivos subyacentes que constituyen la compleja construcción de significado en la narrativa ficticia.

Palabras clave: cognición; ficción; lo real; teoría de *blending*; cognición distribuida

1. INTRODUCTION

In the realm of cognitive text linguistics, a broad spectrum of research has been carried out since the 1980's (Fillmore 1982; Langacker 1987-1991, 1991, 2008; Talmy 2019, 2020) which is based on the assumption that the text triggers processes of meaning construction in the mind of the reader. In this article we continue to build on that idea and, through the application of already existing models from cognitive theory, our aim is to provide a dynamicist outline of the conceptual and narrative processes that take place in meaning construction prompted by literary fiction.

By drawing on the theoretical frameworks of cognitive linguistics, poetics and narratology, and by applying theories of blending and social cognition, a hypothesis is thus formulated which includes the view of fiction as a cognitive phenomenon of high abstraction that originates in a complex cognitive activity, and which brings about cognitive products of relevance and provides what we read with meaning. The various approaches informing this article have in common that they view fiction as an *emergence*. Hutchins (2000), Bernárdez (2007) and Sharifian (2008), with their respective theories of *distributed cognition*, *synergy* and *interactive cognition*, provide the fundamental concepts for the social cognition approach, while Brandt and Brandt's (2005) cognitive semiotic theory of blending and meaning construction is taken into consideration when theorising on fiction as a meaning space that emerges from situated cognition within a cognitive network, which, in its turn, is a manifestation of distributed cognition.

Though not formally cognitive, Henry James' "Art of Fiction" (1894) also contributes to the theoretical grounding of this article since the focal point of his theorisation in this innovative essay touches to a great extent on many of the concepts that two centuries later were accounted for by cognitivists in cognitive theories in general, and cognitive poetics in particular (Guerra 2009). The quest we are undertaking in this article is, therefore, to develop and diagram a dynamicist cognitive model that explains and accounts for the human cognitive processes involved in the convolution of meaning and of knowledge of the world that results in 'the real' when we as cognisers conceptualise the content of literary fiction.

2. THEORETICAL GROUNDING

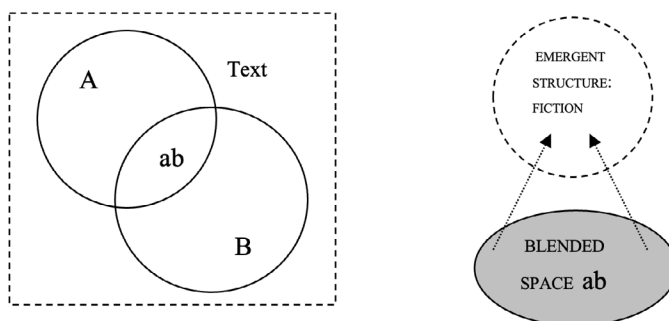
The accounts of the artistic mind, social cognition and biopoetics through the lens of complex system theories presented by Guerra and Ostergaard (2017) provide the

fundamentals of the conception of a literary text as a rich source for understanding human cognition when approached from cognitive linguistics methodologies and models, while the social cognition theories and findings of Bernárdez (2005) contribute to the consideration of the literary text as a cognitive network of distributed cognition prior to identifying it as schematic (Hutchins 2000). Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez's (1997) and Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez and Peña Cervel's (2002; 2005) revision of Fauconnier and Turner's Blending Theory (1998, 2002) facilitates the perception of fiction and 'the real' in literary texts as being closely connected to conceptual integration and the emergence of meaning.

2.1. Fiction and Aspects of the Social Cognition Approach

As a means of framing the literary concept *fiction* within the realm of cognitive linguistics, we adopt the view that fiction stands as a biopoetic and biocultural phenomenon of high abstraction that originates in a complex cognitive activity (Guerra 2001). This complexity is related to the interaction established between writer and reader through the narrative artefact, i.e., the *text* (De Beaugrande 1980; Bernárdez 1982). Essentially, we understand texts as a manifestation of language, and language as an important cognitive instrument that embodies, and manifests, the way we experience and express the world that surrounds us. In fact, calling on this wider anthropological view, we here adopt Sinha's (2017a) view of language as a biocultural niche construction, which is effectively the main tenet of cognitive semantics. In an evolutionary process of increasing knowledge complexity, based on feedback and synergy (Guerra and Ostergaard 2017), language simultaneously triggers the cognitive processes that constantly reconceptualise and reorganises our worldview. This chaotic but deterministic evolution leads, as the assumptions presented in this article will show, to the conception of literary fiction as an emergent structure resulting from a complex cognitive activity that involves conceptual interaction between writer and reader within the context of the text. This hypothesis is illustrated in figure 1 below:

FIGURE 1. Interaction between the conceptual worlds of the writer (A) and the reader (B) within the context of the text, and the resultant emergent structure from the blended space (ab) created



If we acknowledge the theoretical assumption outlined in figure 1 and consider it a steppingstone in the development of our theory, it is necessary to use Blending Theory, or any of the alternative theories on blends, to explain fiction because of the interactive cognition and conceptual integration with resultant emergences that are attributed to it. Brandt and Brandt's (2005) alternative to Blending Theory (Fauconnier and Turner 1998) and Mental Spaces Theory (Fauconnier 1994) serves this purpose given that it considers a cognitive-semiotic approach to expressive blends. In Brandt and Brandt's (2005) theory, the expressive blend is considered a semiotic sign that forms part of a communicative act, and around which meaning is constructed through the setting up of a cognitive system of mental spaces that are integrated in a virtual space, which in its turn gives rise to the emergence of meaning. In this sense, the theory provided by Brandt and Brandt (2005) thus allows for the coexistence of the socio-cognitive aspect and the conceptual integration features which we find indispensable as we attempt to theorise about the construction of 'the real.'

2.2. Interactive Cognition

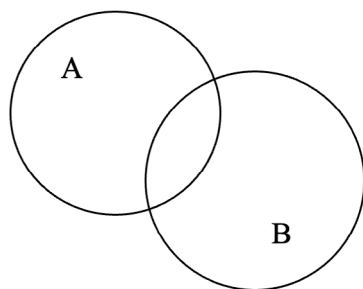
In our attempt to outline the concept of fiction and provide a cognitive approach to its characterisation, we rely on the theorising around distributed cognition (Hutchins 2000) provided by Sharifian (2003, 2017) in relation to social cognition and language. With his theory, Sharifian represents the change brought about in cognitive studies in the first decade of the 2000s. The social approach to human cognition has, since that point, acquired greater importance, and there has been a recognition that human cognitive processes trespass the boundaries of individuality in such a way that cognitive investigation has incorporated terms like *situated cognition*, *situated embodiment*, *collective cognition* and *distributed cognition*. All these terms shift the focus of human cognition theory away from the domain of individuality to a domain that puts human interaction with the environment at the centre of human cognition. The interactive aspect of cognitive theory and Hutchins's (2000) theory of distributed cognition have proved to be particularly useful in this attempt to explain fiction as a cognitive activity carried out at the collective level. Guerra (2022) alludes to this communicative situation as a 4E+4C construction, in which cultural factors are integrated with cognitive processes. Though today's most advanced theories in this field, such as De Jaegher and Di Paolo's (2007) participatory sense-making, have evolved and progressed over time, this paper limits itself to the original cited principles of distributed cognition provided by Hutchins (2000).

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), whenever we express or understand something, it involves cognitive processes which hold together our conceptual worlds, i.e., how we perceive and experience the world that surrounds us. Language plays a fundamental role in these processes since it contributes to the *meaning construction*, or *conceptualisation*, of what we experience. Language, i.e., linguistic units, gives access to our previously acquired knowledge, so-called *encyclopaedic knowledge*, at the same time as it prompts the mental activity responsible for the cognitive processes that provide

meaning for what we experience or express. Language, as a means of expression and as a cognitive instrument, thus manifests how we, as human beings, integrate into our conceptual system what we experience in our interaction with the environment we live in. This is understood as *embodiment* in cognitive linguistics.

Our conceptual worlds filter everything we express, understand and experience by means of the cognitive processes referred to above. Sharifian (2003) claims that whenever interaction between members of a group takes place, for instance in a cultural group, individuals are involved in relative participation in the conceptual worlds of others. This relative participation can be understood as a complex overlapping of conceptual worlds, prompted by different attractors (Guerra 2001), as illustrated in figure 2 below:

FIGURE 2. Overlapping of conceptual worlds (A and B) in the interaction between individuals



The theory developed by Sharifian (2003; 2017) that we are calling on here focuses on the collective, the cultural and the contextual aspect of cognition. This approach, which views cognition as being distributed, collective and synergic (Bernárdez 2007), finds its scope of investigation in communities of speakers, cultural groups and social environments for the simple reason that it is rather rare—impossible even—for a human being to exist in an environment which is not socially mediated. This explains why interactive cognition should be depicted as a phenomenon that is socially distributed rather than individual and isolated. Cognition is socially distributed in the sense that the cognitive activity is carried out collectively. Joint action is a central point of the sociocognitive and cultural linguistic hypothesis, and according to Sharifian (2003; 2017), the more complex the society/network/group, the higher the capacity for joint action amongst the participants in the social context. Sharifian (2003; 2007) refers to these joint actions as *cultural conceptualisations*, i.e., ways of perceiving and conceiving reality that are culturally bound, and in terms of cognition they are described as emergent phenomena that result from the interaction between the members of a group. His approach (2003; 2017) implies that the members of the group constitute a reticular cognitive network of meanings and views on world evolution (Gontier 2015a) that extends beyond time and space.

This definition of cognition has been shown to be a suitable point of departure in our search for a model that describes the cognitive processes that underlie fiction. It allows us to hypothesise about the writer and the reader as components of a cognitive network in which the text (De Beaugrande 1980; Bernárdez 1982), i.e., the narrative, provides the (social) context for the later interaction between the writer and the reader and from which emergent phenomena spring. In figures 3 and 4 below we give an illustration of the basic parallels found between Sharifian's theory and the theoretical points that this first part of our hypothesis—which views fiction as a meaning space emerging within a cognitive network and resulting from situated cognition—is based on:

FIGURE 3. Cognitive network 1: Cognitive interaction between members (A and B) in the context of a cultural group, providing a blended space from which cultural conceptualisations emerge as novel structures

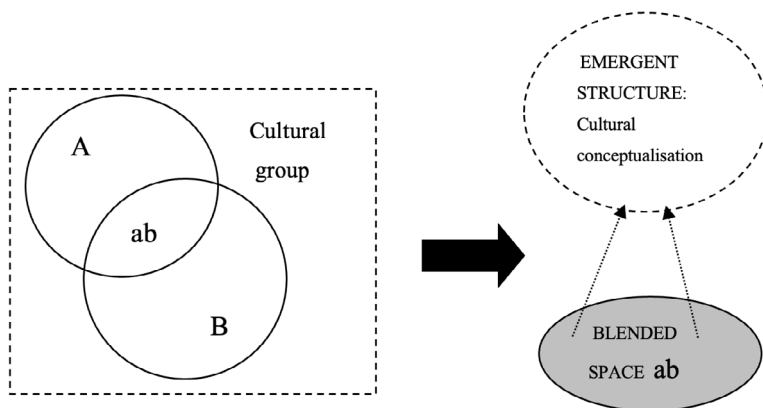
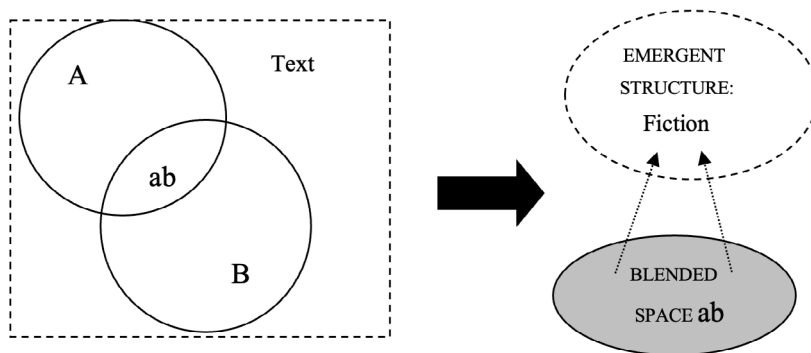


FIGURE 4. Cognitive network 2: Interaction between writer (A) and reader (B) in the context of the text, providing a blended space from which a novel structure, i.e., fiction, emerges



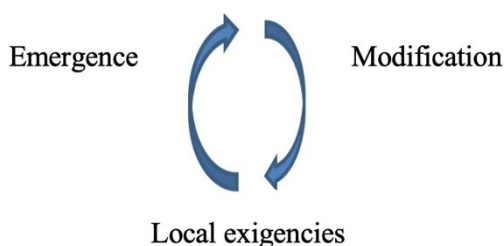
3. MAKING SENSE OF FICTIVE NARRATIVE

3.1. Interaction in the Context of the Text

The text can be assumed to delimit temporarily and spatially the (social) context for the cognitive network consisting of the writer and the reader. In cultural groups, according to Sharifian (2003; 2017), cognition is collective, not merely individual, meaning that the reading, understanding and experiencing of a fictive narrative can be claimed to be a cognitive activity carried out at a collective level. In other words, this thus provides us with the possibility to conceive of writer and reader as constituents of a cognitive network in the context of the text, as illustrated above in figure 4.

The writer's cognitive processes, which are performed 'backstage' before the actual elaboration and writing of the text take place, comprise both individual and collective cognition since the human being is an individual who at the same time is socially mediated. To explain this further we draw on Hutchins's notion of distributed cognition (2000), i.e., the distribution of cognitive processes between the individual and the community. He explains that when cognition is observed beyond individuality, and the environment of the individual taken into consideration, cognitive processes can be understood as distributed among the members of a social group, as coordinated between the internal—the individual—and external—material or environmental—structures, and finally as distributed through time in the sense that the conceptualisations of earlier cognitive processes can modify and transform later conceptualisations. This distributive aspect of cognition, which incorporates constant feedback between the cognisers and the artefact in the process of meaning construction, is demonstrated in the model for technopoiesis provided by Guerra and Ostergaard (2017) and presented in figure 5 below:

FIGURE 5. Technopoiesis



The conceptual world of the writer, i.e., their worldview, is, figuratively speaking, poured into the text by being embodied through language. The text, or the technopoietic artefact (Guerra and Ostergaard 2017), in which this worldview is instantiated, is not only a depiction of human cognition but also provides the context for the creation of a cognitive network from which new cognitive structures will emerge (Sharifian 2008).

The reader, who, just like the writer, is an individual who is socially mediated, with their own conceptual world where cognitive schemas exist both at the individual and the group level, does not pour his/her worldview into the already existing text to give it meaning, but rather perceptive absorption takes place. This shows the dual purpose of language as a cognitive instrument that was referred to in the introduction and which explained language as a manifestation of conceptual worlds and a prompter of the cognitive processes that constantly conceptualise and reconceptualise our worldview; the manifestations of the writer's conceptualisations in the language used trigger cognitive processes in the reader. This entails that the reader's cognitive schemas—individual and cultural—are being drawn on. This has previously been explained in an illustrative way by Risku (2002, 527): “We do not fill our preconceived schemes with the contents of the specific situation, but we do rely on it as a fundamental source and as the resource we cannot do without when we are looking for meaning.” In other words, by drawing on the structures and schemas that already exist in the conceptual world of the reader, the fictive text acquires meaning and is conceptualised. This coordination and complementation of cognitive processes at a collective level is what gives an interactive aspect to cognition, making it complex. Many authors in most of the cognitive subdisciplines concerning meaning construction have elaborated on these basic dynamics (e.g., Gerrig 1993, 2010; Bundgaard 2006, 2007; Kuzmikova 2012; Tylén et al. 2013). Sharifian (2003; 2017) refers to this complexity of meaning construction as emerging from the cognitive interaction between elements in a network of some sort, an aspect which supports our hypothesis.

From the moment this cognitive network starts to operate, conceptualisations emerge, and the text acquires meaning. Due to the complexity of human cognition, with its many and varied cognitive processes being at play at different levels concurrently, we can describe the meaning construction of the text as an ongoing cognitive process that is distributed between the writer's and the reader's cognitive activity (Hutchins 2000).

3.2. Emergent Structure as a Product of Cognitive Interaction

In Sharifian's view of distributed cultural cognition (2003; 2017), the emergent phenomenon resulting from interaction in the social group, which he defines as a *cultural conceptualisation*, allow us to hypothesise about fiction as an emergent structure. These cultural conceptualisations, products of distributed cultural cognition, function to a relatively high degree to the basic principle of distributed representations explained by Sharifian:

representational interactions among the units can produce emergent group properties that cannot be reduced to the properties of the individual units. Again, similarly, interactions between the members of a cultural group can produce emergent conceptualisations that may not be reduced to conceptualisations of the individual minds (2003, 5).

Our view is that the interaction between members of a cultural group that gives rise to emergent conceptualisations is present also in the group-level cognition intrinsic to the writer-reader cognitive network proposed in this paper. Sharifian's (2003, 5) claim that emergent conceptualisations "may not be reduced to the conceptualisations of the individual minds" is what yields the possibility of considering the highly complex concept of fiction as an emergent structure.

In figure 4, we illustrated the interactive cognition between writer and reader and the emergent structure it produces, which is the result of what Sharifian (2003, 4) refers to as "patterns of interactions between elements of the system over time." In our view, these patterns of interactions are the same as the overlapping of conceptual spaces in a cognitive network. By bringing together the different theoretical points of Sharifian's hypothesis we can explain the emergent structure as the embodiment of experience in the context of a network or system of some sort, which is embedded in interactive practices and impossible to find as a conceptualisation in the individual mind alone.

The framework for the theory presented thus implies that the novel structure that emerges because of the overlapping of the conceptual spaces between writer and reader is a blended space impossible to reduce to a conceptualisation in the individual mind. It is here, in the emergent structure that is produced, that we find and are almost able to grasp fiction.

3.3. Text Analysis: Interactive Cognition and Emergent Structures in Henry James' *The Real Thing*

To illustrate the assumptions presented, we use a passage from James:

I could see the sunny drawing-rooms, sprinkled with periodicals she didn't read, in which Mrs Monarch had continuously sat; I could see the wet shrubberies in which she had walked, equipped to admiration for either exercise. I could see the rich covers the Major had helped to shoot and the wonderful garments in which, late at night, he repaired to the smoking-room to talk about them. I could imagine their leggings and waterproofs, their knowing tweeds and rugs, their rolls of sticks and cases of tackle and neat umbrellas; and I could evoke the exact appearance of their servants and the compact variety of their luggage on the platforms of country stations (1893, 10).

As a most basic analysis of the extract, it could be said that the narrator, who is not the writer, shares a vision with the reader. It would be simple to say that the writer has resorted to his imaginative faculty when writing the extract—although we must bear in mind the numerous and complex cognitive processes underlying the vision that the writer provides the reader with through language. The writer assembles his mental mechanisms and writes this extract from his conceptual world where both his

experience and encyclopaedic knowledge are integrated and organised into conceptual structures and schemas that he draws on in the elaboration of the text.

The reader, when reading the extract, gives meaning to what is read by conceptualising it; that is, a socially mediated individual with conceptual systems that are coordinated between internal and external structures—partially shared with other individuals in the reader's environment and partially individual—constructs a reality out of what they read by means of the cognitive activity that is triggered by the language selected and used by the writer. Simultaneously, meaning is given to the text and a context for interaction between writer and reader is provided. The simultaneity with which a cognitive network is created accounts for the fact that an overlapping of the writer's and reader's respective conceptual worlds takes place and they—to a certain extent—participate in each other's conceptual worlds. Thus, a blended space is created from which a novel structure emerges; in this case, it is the emergence of narrative framing. In this sense, then, the emergent structure is a common conceptualisation produced from the cognitive interaction between the writer and the reader, and where fiction is 'situated'. In figures 6, 7 and 8 this process is illustrated:

FIGURE 6. Writer's and reader's conceptual worlds

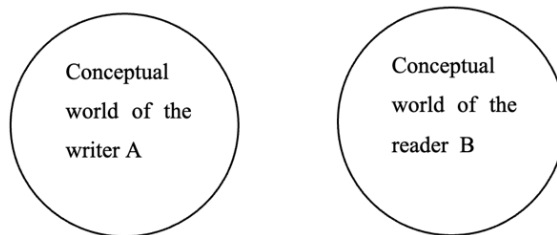


FIGURE 7. Overlapping of writer's and reader's conceptual worlds

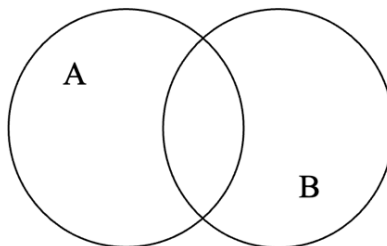
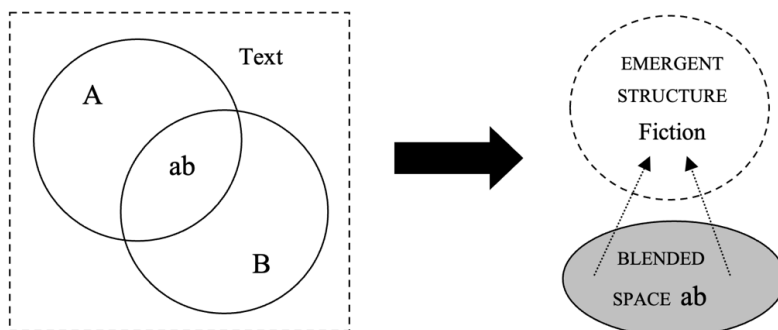


FIGURE 8. Creation of a blended space from which a novel structure will emerge



Cognition is a highly dynamic and complex mental mechanism and accordingly, the novel structures produced from the blended space that the interaction provides are constantly emerging conceptualisations which the reader integrates into their conceptual world in a narrative space of highly creative indeterminacy (Guerra 2011) throughout the activity of reading.

4. FICTIVE NARRATIVE AND COGNITIVE MODELS

4.1. Fiction and Situated Embodiment

The novel structure, fiction, that emerges because of the overlapping of conceptual spaces between writer and reader is an open blended space that is impossible to reduce to a conceptualisation in the individual mind. In order to make the highly abstract phenomenon we are attempting to describe here more comprehensive, we have found Risku (2002) to be of great value. In her paper, Risku gives an account of the work of translators and how they internalise and embody the conventions and rules of the translation practice. She also provides a description of what can be apprehended as the blended space in which professional and experienced translators are situated conceptually when translating and outlines how access to this space is provided. The most notable relation with our theory is her assertion about the interactions that take place in the cognitive network translators are part of—in the context of the text—and the result of these interactions—which we understand as the blended space we have referred to previously:

As novice translators gain experience and become more involved in the process of translation, they no longer follow the decontextualised rules they started off with. In the end, the process of translation starts to follow its own implicit patterns (Jääskeläinen, 1993, p. 116f). The

scaffolding is taken away and replaced by the flexibility and freedom gained in the process of shaping a *Merkwelt* (Risku 2002, 531).

What Risku is referring to here can be interpreted as the result of “patterns of interactions between elements of the system over time” (Sharifian 2003, 189). We could think about it as situated embodiment, i.e., the embodiment of experience in the context of a network or system of some sort and embedded in interactive practices. Accordingly, we can comprehend the translator and the writer of the source text to be constituents of a cognitive network, in the same way as we earlier formulated the interaction between writer and reader in the context of the text. Further support for this idea is found in Hutchins’ (2000) article on distributed cognition where he reflects on Vygotsky’s view of the social origins of individual psychological actions that he later makes use of in his distributed cognition theory to explain the propagation of functional skills through a community:

The new functional system inside the child is brought into existence in the interaction of the child with others. As a consequence of the experience of interactions with others, the child eventually may become able to create the functional system in the absence of others [...]. The patterns of activity that are repeatedly created in cultural practices may lead to the consolidation of functional assemblages (2000, 5).

After describing the development of the professional skills of translators through what we—in line with the theory formulated in this article—view as an example of situated embodiment, Risku states:

Translators demonstrate their professionalism in one activity after the other, but each of these is a unique activity. Indeed, they find it difficult to describe these activities in interviews. According to Bühler (1996), translators report a subjective feeling of stepping into a mystical space detached from lexical and syntactic patterns, a linguistic vacuum or an indescribable language-free space governed by pure meaning and perception (2002, 531).

Risku’s description of this “mystical space” which is beyond language and instead rooted in “pure meaning and perception” is a perfectly suitable alternative to an understanding of fiction as being ruled by a high-level cognitive function and situated in a collective environment where the writer and the reader constitute the interactive components, and the text the context.

4.2. Fiction and Blending Theory

Following on from this appropriation of Risku’s (2002) description of the space that we claim to be the emergent fictive space, our intention is to establish a detailed roadmap

to this destination—read fictive space—in Blending Theory, which by virtue of its principle of conceptual integration and its resulting emergent structures seems to be an integral part of distributed cognition theory.

Elaboration (Hart 2007)—one of the three component processes that, according to Blending Theory, provide a novel structure in a blended space—is of particular interest as we try to explain how to reach the cognitive space where fiction is ‘situated’. To clarify its special relevance, we provide a definition of this cognitive mechanism refined by Evans (2007, 65): “elaboration is the process whereby structure which emerges due to composition and completion can be further developed by virtue of a simulation in order to develop further new structure.” The process of elaboration, then, constitutes the device that answers for the true online aspect of the cognitive activity that takes place. The new, emergent structure—the fictive space—does not have clear-cut boundaries but rather shows a high degree of fuzziness because of the high-level cognitive processes that underlie its emergence. The elevated degree of abstraction urges us to think about fiction as something atmospheric, rather than spatial (Manteiga 2009).

4.3. Fiction and the Mirror Neuron System

Simulation is briefly treated as a cognitive mechanism in Gallese et al. (2004). We have chosen to adapt the definition the article provides since it indirectly supports the idea of achieving emergent fictive space via the social cognition theory, and hence enables the unification of different parts of our hypothesis:

What makes social interactions so different from our perception of the inanimate world is that we witness the actions and emotions of others, but we also carry out similar actions and we experience similar emotions. There is something shared between our first- and third-person experience of these phenomena: the observer and the observed are both individuals endowed with a similar brain-body system. A crucial element of social cognition is the brain’s capacity to directly link the first- and third-person experiences of these phenomena (i.e link ‘I do and I feel’ with ‘he does and he feels’). We will define this mechanism simulation (2004, 296).

In brief, Gallese et al. (2004) see the mechanism of simulation as responsible for the bridging of third-person and first-person experiences, it being based on a mirror neuron system. This implies that the activation of one and the same neuronal area takes place, whether the action or emotion observed is a third-person experience or a first-person experience. The article goes on to explain that this simulation mechanism results in mapping of the information onto neuronal structures. A dichotomy is thus established between the “direct, motor-mediated type of action understanding and a cognitive type based on the interpretation of visual interpretation, [which] is most likely also true for emotion understanding” (Gallese et al. 2004, 401). The article furthermore maintains

that the mapping that takes place “can occur when the emotions of others can only be imagined” (Gallese et al. 2004, 401). Hence, the cognitive processes underlying fiction can partially be understood by means of the mirror neuron system theory, just as is the case of the simulation mechanism. Gallese and Wojciewowski (2011) further expands on this idea, referring to it as embodied simulation, and he makes clear the prominent role of the body in language and social cognition. Embodied simulation—of which the mirror neuron mechanism is a part—is cued by our social practices and habits (Gallese and Wojciewowski, 2011) and should therefore be understood as an inherent part of social—or distributed—cognition.

Just as it is important to point at the pluralism with which the interrelation between the different cognitive processes described above can be established—always within the framework of social cognition—, it is also pertinent to refer to the simulation mechanism as being an important part in meaning construction through its relevance as a component in the processes of conceptual integration. Gallese et al. provide the framework, despite its slight vagueness, for this statement: “we are inclined to believe that simulation probably underlies intention understanding too” (2004, 397).

Moreover, the description of the mystical space that translators have a spatial experience of (Risku 2002), which we equated with a plausible description of the fictive space we have continuously addressed here, coincides to some degree with Merleau-Ponty’s description of action-understanding that Gallese et al. (2004) lean on when accounting for action-understanding based on the mirror neuron mechanism: “The sense of gesture is not given, but understood, that is recaptured by an act of the spectator’s part” (2004, 397). The authors, then, see this as a clear manifestation of how the mirror mechanism provides a “direct experimental understanding of the observed actions” (2004, 397).

5. CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION

5.1. Fiction and Space Building

As stated in section 4.2, the claimed relation between fiction as a cognitive phenomenon and the cognitive network as it was presented in Sharifian (2003) has attributed fiction with features that clearly hint at its phenomenological affinity to the theories of blending. Conceptual integration and emergent structures are fundamental principles of blending and as such they provide an opportunity to consider the cognitive-semiotic approach to metaphorical blends provided by Brandt and Brandt (2005) as another opening in the research on fiction within the realm of the Blending Theory. Brandt and Brandt (2005, 216) present “a general framework for analysing metaphorical blends and other kinds of semiotically distinguishable conceptual concepts (mental spaces) in expressive blends.” As the

title of the article—“Making Sense of a Blend”—reveals, the hypothesis developed deals with meaning construction.

The distinct approach of Brandt and Brandt to meaning construction through blending presented in their revision of Blending Theory owes its originality to the concept of semiosis that constitutes the framework of their hypothesis. The focal points in the study of the conceptualisation of metaphor from a semiotic point of view that are of particular interest for the development of our own theory—and which distinguish Brandt and Brandt’s theory of blending from others—are the virtual scenario and their own specific interpretation of space building in the blend.

In section 2.2—where fiction is dealt with as a cognitive network constituted by the writer and the reader in the context of the text—we claim there to be an interaction between the reader and the writer through the text. We situate this cognitive network beyond time and space and hence claim that a communicative act between subjects is taking place where the text serves as medium. Moreover, in our theorising on fiction as the result of conceptual integration—and within the framework of Sharifian’s distributed cognition theory—we state that blending is taking place and results in the emergence of a new space where fiction becomes close to perceivable. These aspects of our theory serve as important access points for the application of the theory provided by Brandt and Brandt (2005):

expressive blends, such as metaphor, need to be accounted for in semiotic terms, since they occur in—intersubjective as well as private—communication, which is essentially semiotic in nature; expressive blends occur as *signs* and are therefore a natural subject of cognitive semiotics, the study of cognition in semiosis (2005, 216; italics in the original).

The use of Brandt and Brandt’s (2005) theory in our search for a means to map the cognitive processes that underlie fiction as a cognitive phenomenon implies a vision in which the emergent meaning of the metaphor corresponds to our idea of fiction, understood here as an expressive blend.

In their revision of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Blending Theory, Brandt and Brandt (2005, 222) claim that the meaning of the metaphor “is what it is intended to mean in a particular situation where it is uttered by someone.” The metaphor has no intrinsic meaning but rather its meaning is contextually bound to its actual use; it is the sum of the speaker’s intention to carry out a semiotic exchange in which mental content is shared with the addressee and its status as a communicative act. This very simplified account of their hypothesis about the meaning construction of a metaphor supports our claim that projecting this hypothesis onto fiction—when perceived as a cognitive phenomenon—would be appropriate. This implies that the overlapping of conceptual worlds accounted for in section 2.2 corresponds to the shared mental content from which meaning—and thus fiction—arises.

Furthermore, Brandt and Brandt (2005) develop and enrich the idea of mental spaces in their theory of expressive blends. According to them, the input spaces in a blend are set up in a semiotic space “in which utterances are uttered and come to mean whatever it is they are supposed to mean. It is a space of expressive signification as such and is the base of all further space building” (2005, 233). This semiotic space, or discourse base space, represents the speaker’s intention to share mental content (Brandt and Brandt 2005, 234). This base space, then, is equivalent to the ‘text’ in the model of conceptualisation presented in section 2.2, and as Brandt and Brandt (2005) explain, is the situation or context in which the exchange of utterances and signs takes place.

5.2. Semiotic Base Space and Virtuality

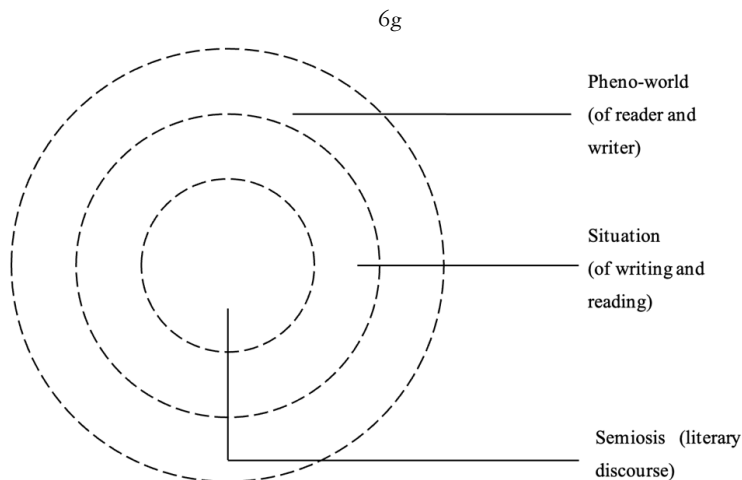
The concept of the semiotic base space (Brandt and Brandt 2005; Brandt 2010) is of special interest due to it being a multidimensional entity. We strongly believe that a model which allows for various dimensions and determinants of cognition is required to explain the processes of human cognition that underlie the construction of meaning and of the world in literary texts. In their article, Brandt and Brandt (2005, 235) argue that the semiotic base space consists of a minimum of three determinations which they refer to as spheres:

an inner sphere of circumstances pertaining to the expressive act as such; this sphere is contained in a larger sphere comprising circumstances that characterize a specific situation as framed by the participants; and finally an outer space comprising such conditions that are universally given in the human phenomenological life-world (or pheno-world) (Brandt and Brandt 2005, 235).

They continue by explaining that any act of thought, or communication, is carried out within this phenomenological life-world at the same time as it is determined by it. This process of signification (Vygotsky 1966) is always contextually bound; there is always a situation that serves as background. In applying the concept of semiotic base space to our vision of the writer and reader as interactive cognisers in the context of the text (see figure 2, Interactive cognition), ‘text’ is understood as multi-dimensional. The ‘text’ is now the representation of the writer’s intention to engage in a communicative act and, simultaneously, it represents the specific situation in which the participants engage in the communicative act. In this sense, the ‘text’ entails the phenomenal world which Brandt and Brandt (2005, 236) explain as “the realm of subjective and intersubjective experience.” ‘Text’ should hence be perceived as an entity which embraces and mirrors cognition independently of time and space.

In figure 9 below, the semiotic base space from Brandt and Brandt (2005) is presented in its adapted version:

FIGURE 9. 'Text' as equivalent to semiotic base space



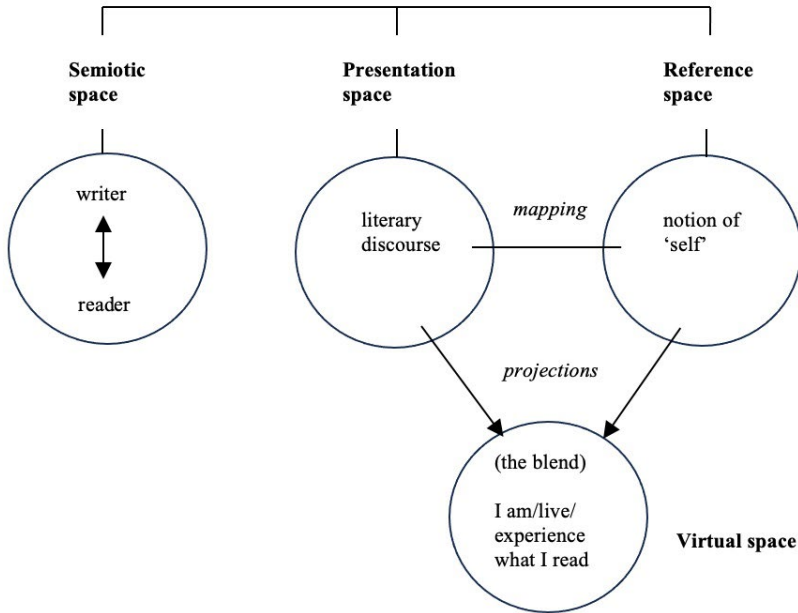
After introducing the semiotic space of their theory on meaning construction, Brandt and Brandt (2005) specify the different spaces emanating from it. They name the space where the utterance is produced a reference space and specify that it relates to actuality. The reference space in the adapted model is set up by a notion of 'self'. The referent, just as in the original model by Brandt and Brandt (2005), is contextually bound and situational.

The presentation space (Brandt and Brandt 2005) is where we find the figurative predicate to the subject in the reference space; the metaphor in their model, and the literary discourse in the adapted version. A blended space is added to the spaces set up from the semiotic space, which presents the referent as if it were identical with the content in the Presentation space, and according to Brandt and Brandt (2005), this identity link is virtual. Virtuality (Langacker 1999; Sinha 2005), they argue, "is what makes a blend a blend" (Brandt and Brandt 2005, 23). This hints at the idea that the presentation space and the concept of virtuality can together reveal important information about fiction from a cognitive point of view:

By virtuality we mean the very as-if-ness that characterizes a mental space blend. The blend (of the Reference space and the Presentation space) is treated as if it was real, and it yields real inferences, even though it is not vested with belief. Virtual spaces are momentary fictions that yield lasting inferences (2005, 238).

In figure 10, the application of Brandt and Brandt's model to our hypothesis is presented and shows the first steps in dealing with fiction in terms of expressive blends. We understand that the virtual space which constitutes the blend of the 'self' and what is read plays a key role in meaning construction in fictional literary texts:

FIGURE 10. Meaning construction in fiction



We assume that virtual spaces are important mechanisms in the construction of meaning in fiction since they not only momentarily blur the boundaries between fiction and the real, but also produce inferences that are conceptually integrated and essential in the construction of meaning.

This provides a link to the content in section 4.3, where we accounted for one of the Blending Theory's elaboration device's central components—simulation—in terms of the theory developed by Gallese et al. (2004), which is based on a mirror neuron system. Through the theoretical link to the virtual space in Brandt and Brandt's (2005) semiotic account of meaning construction in the metaphor which the simulation mechanism provides, we find further reason to consider the mirror neuron system relevant in research on fiction. It could be interpreted that Brandt and Brandt, by introducing the Virtual space in the elaborative process of the blend, acknowledge it as a constituent of the simulation mechanism of the elaboration device, something which supports our intuition that mirror neurons play an important role in the construction of 'the real'.

6. CONCLUSION

The fact that meaning constructed from fictional input can create lasting inferences that modify our cognitive processes blurs the boundaries between fiction and 'the

real'. Through the application of Sharifian's theory of cognitive networks where conceptualisations emerge through interaction between the participants, we have found that fiction is an emergence that results from the cognitive network set up by writer and reader within the context of the text. Through the overlapping of their conceptual worlds, a cognitive structure emerges and provides the setting for meaning construction. At the same time, online adaptation to the non-lexical environment can change these dynamics every time the text is read by the same reader; this makes it a highly creative, complex process.

If we consider fiction as an emergent structure that results from the interaction between participants in a cognitive network, we must acknowledge it as a phenomenon of distributed cognition. However, the context in which the cognitive network is created, the text assigns the resultant emergent structure with the feature of being situated; the participants in the network distribute cognition amongst themselves and simultaneously exert situated cognition given the time, space and cultural specifics of the context.

The virtuality provided in the virtual space as presented in the theory developed by Brandt and Brandt (2005) involves the integration of the conceptual contents brought about by the literary text and the elaboration of these to acquire new, emergent meaning. Given the virtual aspect of this mental space and the elaboration that takes place, the simulation mechanism (Gallese et al. 2004; Gallese 2018) is assumed to be called into use in the process in this part of meaning construction, something which hints at connections to the mirror neuron theory.

When putting theoretical models into practice by applying them to literary texts, a revision of the theories of (literary) discourse analysis and the importance of genre is carried out simultaneously. This hopefully provides the possibility to enrich the relation that is acknowledged to exist between literary texts and human cognition, when this latter is conceived of as being situated, distributed, synergic and, in general, social. Furthermore, this also brings about a new meaning of Poetics—as envisioned in Guerra (2013) and Guerra and Ostergaard (2017)—that acknowledges dynamisation and complexity as fundamental attributes of the fictive process as a living literary event; “living reading.”

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