Poetic Association: Conceptual Blending in *In a Station of the Metro*

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Abstract: Image is one of the most important elements for poetry and general literature. This thesis is trying to analyze Ezra Pond's in a Station of the Metro to take an insight to the mental process of reading the text and gaining the mental image, and it's trying to reveal that how the emotion is conveyed from the poet to the readers in the view of cognitive linguistics.

Keywords: conceptual integration; poetry images; metaphor; mental space

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction about Imagism Poetry

Image is quite essential in both western and eastern poetry. The process that the poet creates poems is the process that the poet observes, feels and expresses, which means that the poet, firstly, gains feelings towards things in the external world and then select those things as the agents of his feelings (Wang Guangming, 1993). With the arrangement and combination of images and feelings, the poem has certain properties that manifest itself and can cause the readers' feelings. If we review the researches about images in the past, we can find that many scholars mainly went on the researches in three ways, that's making the definition for the concept and connotation of image, discussing about the images and the relevant concepts and researches about the artistic effects and characteristics of images. All of these researches are based on theory of literature and art, which has laid rich foundation for us to learn and appreciate the images in poetry. However, there are no solid explains about the mental process that how poet applies these images for his feelings to create a poem, what the mechanisms of the inference of images are and the mental process that how readers get such emotional resonance from a poem. Actually, image is also a kind of special metaphor that calls up people's feelings and helps us to learn the emotion and feelings better. The image certainly involves the mental process of the poet's but also the readers.

1.2 The Conceptual Integration/Blending

On the basis of *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), Fauconnier has proposed the theory of mental space, investigating the cognitive structure and the reflection of human linguistic structure in the cognitive structure. In 1990s, theory of conceptual blending was proposed, in which they think that conceptual integration is a very general process of human cognitive and mental activities, especially when we are undergoing something creative. (Metaphors, 1998) Theory of conceptual integration includes the relationship among different mental spaces and the ways applied in blending for the emergent structure. The basic conceptual integration includes 4 mental spaces, of which two are input spaces(I&II), on above being the generic space and one below being the blend space. The two input spaces mainly contain the information one gets from certain range, which also contain the unconscious knowledge that comes from culture and experience. When there are some elements in the two input spaces that are in common, there will be a generic space to show these. The blend space is quite essential as it receives the both the elements projected from the two input spaces, and compress them together and creates the emergent structure, which neither of the two input spaces have. (Fauconnier, 2002) Nonetheless, emergent structure does not originate from the two input spaces. There are complicate mental, cognitive and psychological process. The essential of the integration process is the selective projection, compression and mind operation. Fauconnier has pointed out that the emergent structure has been produced mainly through the following ways: (1) composition, that is to combine the projection from the two input spaces to form a new structure that does not exist in both input spaces. (2) completion, that is with the help of background knowledge, cognition and cultural mode, the composition structure can be projected from the input spaces to the blend space. And there will be a structure, which can be

viewed as certain kind of logic that makes the composition structure solid. (3) elaboration, that is to conduct the cognitive control to the composed structure according to the logic of its own (Wang Wenbing, 2007:109). The theory of conceptual blending can be used to illustrate lots of phenomenon in daily life and literature works, which are more dynamic.
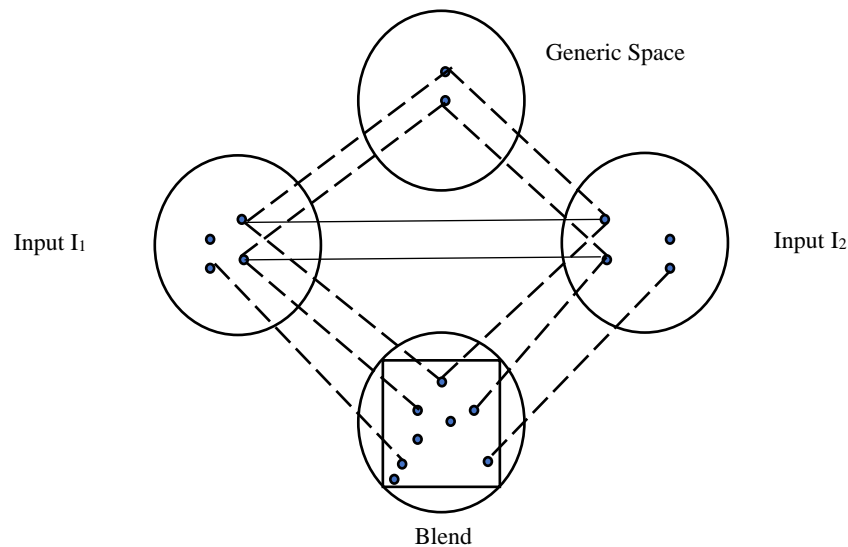

Figure 1 Basic Diagram of CBT

2. Conceptual Integration in Poetry

2.1. Images and Concepts

Images are the internal elements used for the whole construction of the poem as a poem will never be the merely arrangement of separate display of images. The poet must arrange a series of images according to his emotion, regularity of aesthetics and certain design that is elaborated. Only in this way can the poem to be the glorious picture composed by various images that contains both the earthly things but also the deep connotation. According to the different ways of composition of images, the images can be generally divided into continuous image, overlay image, contrast image, Jumping image and radiation image. Whichever the image is, its basis is the similarity produced by mental association, which permits us to combine the images in the text and the mental image in our mind. Also, it's this kind of association that permits us to gain feelings from the images applied by the poet. The following discussion will go on in the view of cognitive linguistics and will center around the mental cognition and activities involved in reading a poem and the discussion mainly tries to reveal the mechanisms about them.

2.2 Images of the Title and Its Frame

One of Pond's most famous poem is the *In a Station of the Metro*, in which continuous images are arranged and are presented into reader's eyes and mind quickly, forming a mental picture of multiple layers, and then conveying the emotion the poet wants to express.

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.

As we can see from the poem above, many images are arranged in a certain order with only few words to connect to ensure the whole coherent structure. The images at the very beginning that the title has already indicated the background of the whole poem. The very time we read *"In the Station of the Metro"*, our personal experience about metro station, direct or indirect, are roused. We learn that the whole poem may be related to what happened inside the metro station, which sets the background for the whole poem. Different people may have different experience about the metro station interior but there will always be something in common that we are able to start communication with others on it. We can try to draw some common impression about the metro station at Pond's period, such as dim light, simple facilities, narrow

space and so on. Actually, the moment we read the title, we begin to perceive things written in the poem and to form an imagination about the station in the poem, which is more accurately determined by the following images or description. Actually, when we read the title, the poet is already trying to impose an impression on us, which makes us call up relative experience and then our associative imagination. Nonetheless, the title just gives a range or a background.

If we view the poet's writing and reader's reading as another special type of conversation, the ground between the reader and poet is thus formed with the help of both personal experience towards to the thing written in the poem or in the literary work. Thing written in the text is not what we refer to the real world but the prototype or the ideal cognitive mode that people draw out of their daily life experience. A thing does not exist independently, but exist in the frame net with other things. Here, the metro station interior is not an independent thing but has its own frame, in which there are passageways, lamps, trains, passengers, tracks, tickets and so on. It's the overlapping of the frame that enable us to understand what the others have said. The frame of the speaker is certainly a little bit different from the hearer's but we have certain degree of tolerance tot the difference of speaker's frame and hearer's frame.

2.3 Frames and Blends in the Poem

We have briefly talked about how the things written by the poet in the poem can rise our comprehension by viewing the poem as a special kind of conversation. With the overlapping of the poet's and reader's abstract frames, the reader is, at least, able to understand the basic meaning of the lines written by the poet. The meaning, with the reader's personal experience or the culture the reader lives in, can arouse reader's various emotion. In this way, the imagism effect is achieved.

We can generally conclude things described in the poem. They are *apparition, faces, crowd, petals, wet and black bough*. They all have their frames and by arranging them in a special order, the poet aims to make them connected. This kind of connection can arouse frames in the reader's mind and then form a mental picture with the experience and culture. In this process of turning the things listed orderly in the poem into an image does require the ability of conceptual blending. The first conceptual integration appears in the poem is the "*apparition of these faces*". Apparition means things that you imagine you can see, especially the spirit of a dead person and also means appearing. Faces in the crowd means the faces of people, and with the background, in the metro station.
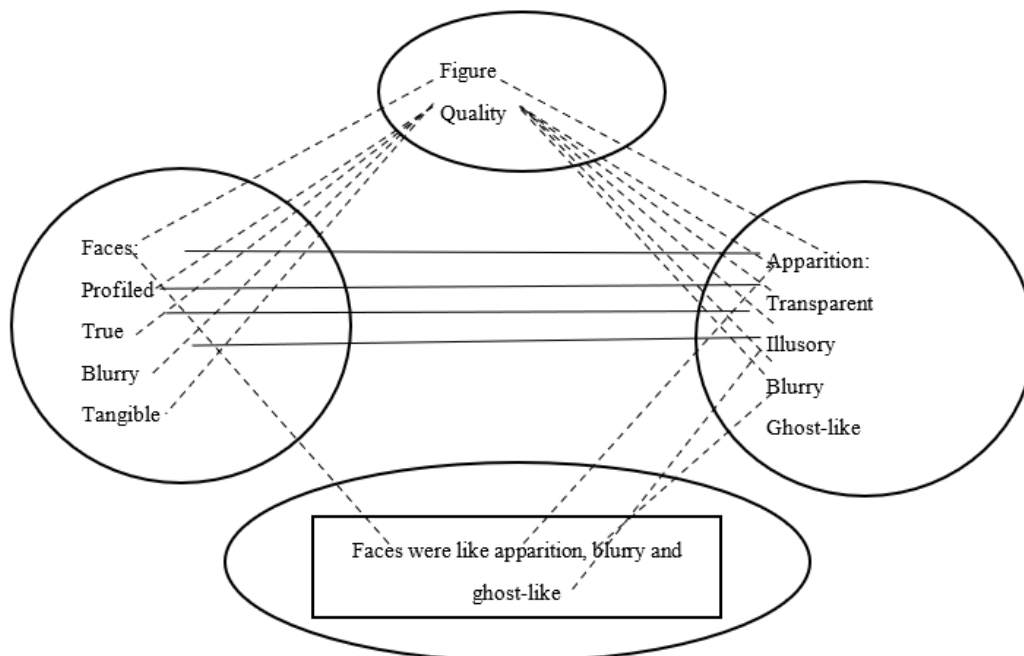

Figure 2 The blend of faces and the apparition

Here we can see the blend of "*apparition of these faces*" by analyzing the frames of it and the frames of the faces in the crowd. Apparition is something illusory however faces in the crowd will certainly be true and tangible. Apparition usually appears, according to our common experience, in some places that has dime lights as unclear and semitransparent figures will be more invisible under the strong light. Therefore, apparition indicates dim light while the tangible and true faces here are blended with apparition so it's unclear and illusory.

In this way, the faces of people are linked with the ghostly figure of the apparition with our mental effort, but we know that faces will never be the apparition and there must be some reasons that seduced our mind to associate the two and we have the ability to infer ratiocinate. For example, the light might be dim, making it hard to see people's faces clearly, which causes the feeling of blur. Also, it may be that people in the metro station walks too fast to leave a clear figure of their faces. There can be various reasons, but anyhow the link between the apparition and faces are constructed by our mind. As for the relationship of crowd and faces, crowd is usually regarded as background because compared with the faces, it has little focus for the observer to put his eyes on. Faces in the crowd are the focus for the observer. Here we can understand faces and crowd as figure and ground.

In the following part, there are two images, "*petals*" and "*wet, black bough*". These two images actually can exist naturally in the world. Therefore, there is no blend or conceptual integration of the two images, but the two images can show certain emotion to the readers through the persona experience the readers have and the culture readers live in. Like petals in most culture generally represent something good and beautiful, which reminds the reader sense of beauty or hope. It's same for the following "*wet and black bough*" is kind of background that is also able to call up feelings with the help of reader's experience and culture. The relationship of the petals and bough can also be illustrated as figure and ground. Moreover, our mind can produce kind of correlation between the faces-crowd pair and petals-bough pair for both share the same structure of figure-ground. With the similarity created by our mind, we then conduct the conceptual integration in our mind, so the two lines are blended in this larger conceptual integration. The faces in the crowd are blended with petals on the wet, black bough, which has aroused more meaning in the reader's mind and make the reader gain more emotion and thoughts about the poem. And with such integration, this poem has made itself tight that the end corresponds to the former content, enriching the poem's connotation.

We then focus on the integration of the two lines in the poem. We can now consider "*apparition of these faces in the crowd*" in input space I and "*petals on the wet*, black bough" in input space II. With these two, there is the blend.
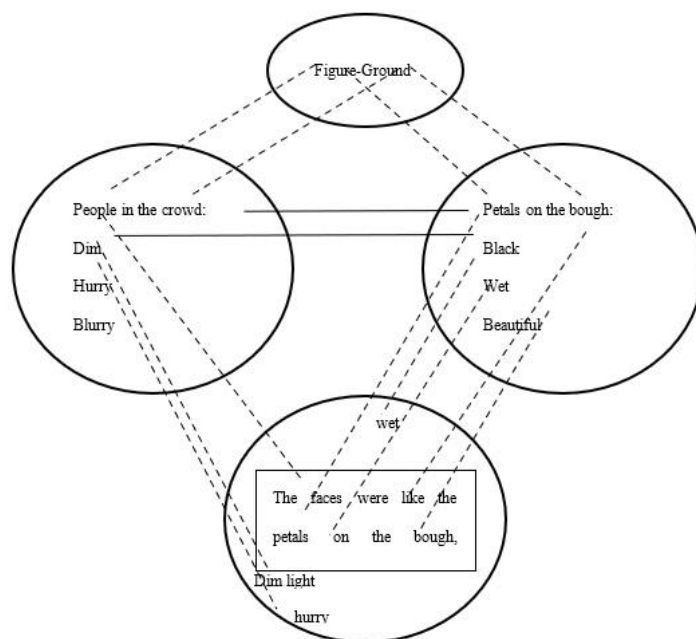

Figure 3 The blend of people in the crowd and petals on the bough

In the blend, faces are made to have the same quality as the petals, colorful, vigorous, standing for hope and so on. Here, the apparition that entered into the earlier blend can also cause effects in the next larger blend. Faces in the crowd is something that is blurry and easily disappear just like the petals in the input space one. At least faces are like petals as being something that is conspicuous, while the crowd are made to combine with the wet black bough. Therefore, the crowd shares the quality and impression of the wet, black bough, say, the crowd will not be that warm-hearted. The crowd tends to be cool and indifferent or the crowd is moist due to the moisture that comes from the wet bough and they tend to be the crowd of grey tone because of the influence of black bough. Therefore, in this larger integration, we blend the apparition of these faces in the crowd with the wet and black bough, manifesting ourselves a much richer meaning than the mere display of images one by one. And the whole topology of integration during reading the poem can be briefly concluded as this.

3. Psychological Interpretation

When we are reading the poem, the conceptual integration must extract materials from the content of the poem and raise our feeling through all of these word meanings, conceptual integration and impression. However, when we are reading a poem, we are always trying to know what the poet wants to say besides our own comprehension and thoughts about the poem. Our own understanding can never accurately be what the poet wants to express, while we are doing it all the time when we are reading a poem or other literature works. This requires an ability of psychological comprehension which human beings have gained at a very early age. This psychological comprehension enables us to infer what other might know and to think what others might think. Around six years old, people can get the ability of second-order false belief understanding, which enables him to think what the other one might know and think. The adult can actually grasp fifth-order false belief understanding that's I believe you that you speculate me that I imagine you that you want me to believe that… (Wimmer & Perner, 1983)Turner has mentioned the other minds, an ability that is proved by many scientists to explain that one can put his mind in the other's mind and then continue to imagine or understand a series of things, while the imagination is also selective.

In this way, we, the readers, are trying to place ourselves on Pond's position and are trying to experience what he has experienced. This gives support to the biography approach of literature criticism. The more we know about the poet's experience, the closer we can approach him psychologically and then attempt to feel what he wants to express by imagining we are him. Certainly, this kind of imagination still cannot make the reader be the poet as personal experience always differs. Nonetheless, with this way, we can grasp the emotion or thoughts the poet wants to convey trough the poem better.

Talking about personal experience and culture, Lakoff and Johnson has written that we gain experience with the interaction with the physical world, which can also be called as the interactive property. At the same time, we gain indirect experience from culture and others' experience (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Experience varies from one to another but there can be something common as we conduct the cognitive process of extracting the experience into ideal cognitive mode and prototypes. Therefore, different people may have different feeling and reflection after having reading the poem due to the different personal experience and culture in their lives but there must still be something that is common. As we have discussed before, the frames may various from people to people but there must be enough overlapping for the participants in a conversation to communicate with others and to understand others. Poem can be viewed as a special kind of conversation; in which the reader is actually trying to grasp what the poet wants to express and gain the resonance.

4. Conclusion

In reading *In a Station of the Metro,* the first integration happens in the "*apparition of these faces*", which is also applied in the second larger integration. With these two integrations, we can infer the effects brough by the images and the arrangement and combination of images, that is with our mental operation, one thing from the input space could gain the quality of the other from another input space in the blend. Certainly, not all of these materials of input spaces are selected to be projected into the blend, and the process of integrating these selected elements are also called compression. (Fauconnier, 2002)

With such blend, the meaning and connotation of the poem is thus enriched and our cognition to the poem will be more complex. Direct experience and indirect experience are used during the comprehension of the poem. Although experience varies, there are still many common places, which

make poem generally admitted and popular. With these experiences, readers can gain their personal feeling about this poem, which is of various kind. However, as we have the ability of psychological comprehension, we could put our mind into Pond's to feel as much as he feels with the background information of him and his time. In this way, we can get closer to Pond and get deeper understanding of the poem.

In the end, by doing this research we can take a deeper analysis of the reader's mental activity and cognitive activities to help us to learn more about the integration during the reading, which can offer certain help for those who create poems to arrange images they tend to apply and offer help to the readers to appreciate the literature work better.

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