# Conceptual Blending Theory and the History of Emotions

**Cristóbal Pagán Cánovas (cpcanovas@um.es)**
Department of Classics, University of Murcia, Campus de la Merced
30001 Murcia, Spain

**Abstract**

The history of emotions is increasingly being grounded on cognition and expression, but its new paradigm may seem in conflict with cognitive theories of basic and complex emotions. To contribute to the convergence of these theories with emergence models, I propose the concept of *integrated emotions*, with conceptual integration operating at all levels in the construction of affective meaning. Blending Theory can offer the appropriate model for a history of emotions, including emotion concepts, language, and artistic representation. A diachronic and generic version of the blending model is needed to study recurrent conceptual patterns of emotion and their interaction with socio-cultural factors and communicative functions.

## Fields Made for Each Other: Conceptual Integration and The History of Emotions.

Despite their relevance for cognitive and social science, as well as for the connection between them, conceptual integration and the history of emotions have consolidated as scientific fields only recently. The research project on conceptual blending was launched by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner in the mid nineties (Fauconnier & Turner, 1994) and the reference book for the theory was not published until after the turn of the century (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002; shorter versions in Turner, 1996, Fauconnier, 1997, and Fauconnier & Turner, 1998).

The history and sociology of emotions have been around for centuries, and some of their basic tenets are grounded – consciously or not – as early as in classical Greek philosophy. However, even the pioneering work of authors like Johan Huizinga (1924) and Norbert Elias (2000) was not predominantly focused on emotions as a motor and indicator of historical change, but rather on increasing emotion control through history. The main methodologies that view the history of emotions as inseparably linked to that of thought and expression are, in fact, fairly recent (e.g. Reddy, 2001, Rosenwein, 2002; see also Oatley, 2004).

### Conceptual Blending Theory and the Social Sciences

Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) provides a model of how meaning is constructed by selectively projecting – according to optimality and governing principles – materials from *mental spaces* (Fauconnier, 1985, 1997), small conceptual packets built as thought and discourse unfold. These materials – cultural frames, embodied schemata, relations, contextual knowledge – are integrated into new wholes or *blends*, which retain the links to their inputs, thus forming a network of mappings and projections. According to this theory, conceptual integration is a defining human capacity underlying all major products of meaning construction: metaphor, language, religion, art, etc.

On these grounds, CBT has been claimed to be of the highest interest for the methodology of the social sciences. It is crucial, for example, to our understanding of how counterfactual reasoning or analogy work (Turner, 2001: 62-84, 119-136) and to the construction of a theory of the evolution – perhaps also the *history* – of meanings as complex adaptive systems (Turner, 2001: 137-151).

Turner's reflection on the nature and descent of meaning opens the path towards what he calls *cognitive social science*. However, it seems that much more specific work remains to be done after the theoretical breakthrough. CBT has been profusely applied to the study of language and literature, in varied levels of specificity (language: Fauconnier & Turner, 2008b; Coulson, 2001; Sweetser & Dancygier, 2005, etc.; literature: Turner, 1996, 2002; Dancygier, 2006, etc.). History, sociology or anthropology do not seem to have attracted the same effort. The history of emotions, which includes their sociological and anthropological aspects, is one of the most highly interdisciplinary fields in the social sciences, and it seems to be turning a great deal of its attention towards cognition. Crucially, affective meaning both motivates the procedures of blending and emerges from them (Turner, 2001: 44; Fauconnier, 2009), although the relation between conceptual integration and emotion remains largely to be explored. Here seems to be a good opportunity to ground an increasingly relevant field of the social sciences in cognitive science.

### The History of Emotions and Cognitive Science

The turn towards the cognitive aspects of the affective experience in the history of emotions seems to be irreversible by now. Barbara Rosenwein even talks about a new paradigm (Rosenwein, 2002), with her *emotional communities* and William Reddy's *emotives* (Reddy 2001) as prominent examples of the new theoretical constructs. For Rosenwein (2002), emotions arise in the *emotional communities* all people inhabit (families, neighborhoods, institutions, social groups), by means of an ongoing process of evaluation and expression, inextricably linked to the relations between their members and their own appraisals of these relations.

Very congenial to emotional communities, *emotives* are speech acts, communicative functions, or conceptual patterns that "are themselves instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying emotions" (Reddy, 2001: 105). Reddy states that neuroscientific and cognitive research is increasingly making the distinction between emotion and cognition irrelevant (Reddy 2009). He defines emotion mainly on cognitive and communicative terms: "a range of loosely connected thought material, formulated in varying codes, that has goal-relevant valence and intensity, that may constitute a "schema" (or a set of loosely connected schemas or fragments of schemas); this range of thoughts tends to be activated together (…) but, when activated, exceeds attention's capacity to translate it into action, or into talk in a short time horizon" (2001: 94). Anybody familiar with embodied cognition and conceptual integration will find this definition congenial to the frames, scripts, image schemata, and blends that the cognitive approach holds as major tools of analysis.

These historians' cognitive-semiotic view of the emotions as historical and cultural processes (see also Stearns, 2000 on standards, the individual, and expression) seems very close to Mark Turner's proposal of cognitive social science. Let us look briefly at a specific example. Turner (2001: 3-59) has analyzed Geertz's classic study of Balinese cockfight (1972) in terms of blending, also referring to other relevant constructs of cognitive anthropology, like *distributed cognition* (Hutchins, 1995). *Embodiment* (Barsalou, 2008; Clark, 2008; Gibbs, 2006; Anderson, 2003) and *enaction* (Bruner, 1966, 1968; Maturana & Varela, 1987) could easily be incorporated, since many embodied cognition structures are integrated in the Balinese cockfight blend, and its full meaning is achieved through interactive performance. Such a cognitive analysis would even have the necessary diachronic perspective, for Turner sketches how a history of such a symbolic system could be made, taking its public actions and other components as the starting point (2001: 47-48). The only thing remaining would be to focus on the affective aspects of the cockfight, which is a clear example of an emotional institution. Its great emotional implications become even more outstanding within the Balinese culture, where public displays of emotion are usually repressed. The blend is describing a system of *emotives* within an *emotional community*, in Reddy's and Rosenwein's terms. A cognitive history of emotions is practically at hand.

## Cognition, Communication, and Change: Towards a Theory of Integrated Emotion.

Emotion, not much unlike language (outside linguistics), is a topic that interests many different disciplines, although none of them will claim it as its own or give it a central role. This interdisciplinary panorama is somewhat deceiving: in most cases, the scientific areas involved (psychology, philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, literary studies, history, cognitive science, neuroscience, etc.) simply adopt a self-contained approach. Many bridges are still needed between them.

In general terms, the theory and history of emotion are building a cognitive paradigm for their studies. They seem to need an adequate model describing how the imagination assembles previously scattered elements (like animal fighting in nature, gambling, group membership, or social status) to create new conceptual systems of far-reaching emotional and social implications (like the Balinese cockfight), with emergent affective meanings that were absent from the components preceding the new *emotive*. CBT can provide the model to account for the complex integration networks and mental simulations that give rise to these meanings and their expressions. There is also little doubt that the development of CBT would benefit from the engagement with emotion. On the way towards an integrative view of emotions both as cognitive and historical processes, I propose two levels of implication for the network model: the theory linking cognition, communication, and emotion, and the cultural and historical variation operating within it.

### Emotion, Cognition, and Communication

The Humanities have a long tradition of social study of emotion, mainly stemming from Aristotle (e.g. *Rhetoric* 1384a, 22-36, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1107a, 9-17) and the stoics (recently discussed by Oatley, 2010), and later on connecting with phenomenology (Gross & Kemmann, 2005). This tradition is closely tied to the expression and conceptualization of affect, with rhetoric as a central discipline (Gross, 2006). This rhetorical tradition has provided some of the theoretical background for the influential Communicative Theory of Emotions (CTE), which is the work of two leading cognitive scientists (Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987, 1996; Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 1989, 2000), and has a strong interest in language and artistic expression (Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 2008). This is an important point of agreement with Reddy's *emotives*, an approach that has made intellectual history a central source for the history of emotions. Along with CTE comes Keith Oatley's theory of literary works as mental simulations (Oatley, 1999; Mar & Oatley, 2008), which could probably make extensive use of CBT for modeling the architectures of fiction (e.g. Dancygier, 2004, 2005, 2008).

Like Ekman (1992), Damasio (1994: 146-163), and many others, the CTE proposes a reduced set of basic emotions, although there seems to be little agreement among scholars regarding the members of this list (Ortony & Turner, 1990). Complex emotions would be *blends* (in the non-technical sense) of the basic emotions (anger, happiness, etc.) and object-oriented emotions. Of course, one would say that complex emotions have emergent properties of their own; there is, for example, more to *remorse* than merely sadness about an action: we also have judgment within an idealized mental model of the self and its ethical code (Johnson-Laird

& Oatley, 2000: 462), and a sense of causality and responsibility as the result of that evaluation. Reddy (2001: 13-15; 2009) opposes the division between basic and complex emotions, arguing that cognition and emotion are inseparable (with O'Rorke and Ortony, 1994: 283), and that even the most basic emotions involve cognition of some kind.

Cognitive science provides an alternative. The emergence model of emotions proposes that gestalts (Thagard & Nerb, 2002) and integrated simulations (Thagard & Aubie, 2008) are necessary constituents of emotions, which arise from complex patterns of neural activity constituting dynamic systems. Cognitive evaluations, even if mostly unconscious, are indispensable in the construction of affective meaning (Clore & Ortony, 2008). Expression is the other key to how emotions are conceptualized and constructed, and it further confirms the necessity of higher cognition in emotional experience (Stein, Hernández & Trabasso, 2008; Moors 2009).

Perhaps there is, after all, no real conflict here, and a convergence of the primary-secondary emotions and the emergence model could be both possible and desirable. I venture that, in terms of CBT, one could argue for what I call *integrated emotions*. Conceptual integration works all the way from bottom to top, mostly unconsciously, in backstage cognition. Even basic emotions cannot be reduced to automatic physiological responses to stimuli: they are integrated experiences blending the self, cognitive models, and mental imagery related to memories, cultural frames, etc. Antonio Damasio, who claims that, in neural terms, the stimulus and the image of body state are not blended but correlated, will nonetheless admit that a representation of the self is also necessary (1994: 145-148).

It is difficult to see how these three elements (stimulus, body state, self) can be coherently experienced together without running a mental simulation that integrates them. In order to start making sense of an emotional experience, we need both conceptual blending and some of its products – one of them, at least: a minimally situated self, which cannot lack social cognition and must be integrated in a cognitive narrative (Turner, 2008). Even the most primary and spontaneous feeling of disgust or happiness will be felt by *someone* perceiving *something* or *someone else*, and it will be inserted in a narrative of causation, with some expression accompanying it, even if repressed. There are, of course, non-cognitive and non-cultural components in emotion, but there are no non-cognitive or non-cultural emotions. We need *integrated emotions* if we are to make any sense from affective experience.

Crucially, the fact that all emotions are integrated does not rule out different degrees of complexity, but places them in a continuum, with basic and complex emotions at the extremes. Perhaps there is no agreement about where to draw a line between them because it is a matter of degree rather than of a sharp division, since all emotional experience involves blending of some kind, and affective meaning is emergent from conceptual integration networks. CBT has a parallel solution for the literal-figurative dichotomy (Turner, 1998, 2005b) and for the different kinds of structure clashes in conceptual integration networks, from simplex to double-scope (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002: 119-137). Recognizing increasing levels of sophistication in the blending process is in fact one of the most appealing tenets of the theory, as it accounts for the products of conceptual integration being more varied and context-specific as we go along the complexity scale.

## The above plus Cultural Variation and Change

Cultural variation and change, both at the social and the individual level, are often neglected in neuroscientific and cognitive studies of emotion, and this is where the diachronic cultural analysis offered by history becomes crucial, for there is no affective meaning that is not situated. If we accept, with Reddy (2001: 17-34), that both emotions and culture are, at least from some perspective, a set of overlearned cognitive habits, and that they are constantly reshaped as emotives in emotional communities, we need a cognitive theory to model this process of change. Thagard's *emotional contagion* (2005), a mimetic procedure arguably grounded on embodiment and blending, might be a valid term for the transmission of some affective meanings, but it is probably not meant to fully account for the evolution of emotion concepts and their expressions along history or the life span.

CBT has a good potential for dealing with cultural diachrony: the products of conceptual integration (expressions, artifacts, institutions, skills, etc.) are, when successful, transmitted through contagion, learning, imposition, or whatever other way. This happens with, say, mathematical concepts (Fauconnier, 2005; Turner, 2005a) as well as with emotions. Blending scholars repeatedly report how certain blends strive to arise from previous conceptualizations, and how easily they are used once they enter the cultural background. However, these studies do not usually go beyond particular examples. We need systematic historical descriptions of blending processes, and accounts of how new conceptualizations emerge from existing patterns. These historical analyses have to be grounded both on the theoretical background of conceptual integration and on the methodology of the Social Sciences and the Humanities, which involves a detailed cultural analysis and a careful, fully contextualized study of documents, events, and behaviors.

The history of emotions, largely a cognitive enterprise by now, would greatly benefit from the diachronic study of conceptual integration. The cultural psychology of emotions is also demanding an articulate narrative of the scripts and models that give rise to emotional meanings, and CBT, which deals regularly with the projection of story and schemata (Turner, 1996), should be able to help there too. But benefits would also go in the other direction: CBT would be generously exposed to situated data, careful socio-

cultural analysis, systematic comparison, and diachronic perspectives. Moreover, conceptual integration would thus join the discussion about affective meaning, one of its major products and motivations.

## Applying Conceptual Blending Theory to the History of Emotions

All this can be fine in theory, but what would the applications of CBT to the history of emotions look like? First of all, we would need a generic and diachronic version of CBT in order to do the comparative study, which means that there is still theoretical work ahead. Gilles Fauconnier has recently applied the concept of *generalized integration networks* to a detailed analysis of some figurative language expressing emotions (Fauconnier, 2009), without engaging in a historical study. I have attempted some diachronic work with what I call *generic integration networks* (not exactly the same concept), applied to a documented cultural analysis. However, this paper does not aim – neither has the space – to offer theoretical developments of CBT. I will just make some methodological suggestions that I hope will be useful. Along with them, for illustration purposes, I'll try to sketch some of the multiple lines of research that could emerge from the study of the diachronic conceptual integration of emotions. The reader will surely imagine many more.

### Emotion Language and Emotion Concepts

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1993) has devoted great attention to the figurative language of emotions (e.g. Kövecses, 1986, 2000; Lakoff, 1987: 380-415). However, CMT cannot easily become a relevant approach for the history of emotions. To begin with, CMT and its studies of emotion metaphors lack diachronic perspective, which inevitably causes some flaws in the analyses. For instance, the semantics of anger in English seem to rely heavily on the folk theory of humors rather than on non-cultural mappings (Geeraerts & Grondelaerts, 1995, Geeraerts & Gevaert, 2008; Rosenwein (2002) calls humors "the hydraulic model"). CMT does not seem able to address history and cultural variation, much less so in the theory's latest form (Lakoff, 2008), which turns to the neural underpinnings of language rather than to its social and historical aspects.

Analogy has proved to be a creative tool for generating emotion, rather than just a means for the expression of emotion concepts (Thagard & Shelley, 2001). CMT fails to explain why source domains seem to be structured in terms of target domains in order to from an analogy, or why affect needs to rely on sensorimotor representations of other domains, when it has its own, or why it should be structured in terms of some source domains that seem less firmly grounded than emotional cognition itself (Crawford, 2009). Emotion language is probably more constrained than we tend to think (Stein, Hernández & Trabasso, 2008), but its underlying conceptual mappings seem too complex to be modeled with unidirectional projections and without diachrony. Finding convergent categories of analysis has also proved quite problematic (Russell & Lemay, 2000). The same happens when it comes to account for universality and variation (Werzbicka, 1999, 2009).

A recent study in CBT regards metaphorical mappings as emergent from much more complex integration networks (Fauconnier & Turner, 2008a). Like Fauconnier's analysis of anger metaphors (2009), the network for TIME-SPACE in that study has generic features, and can be used for comparative study beyond individual examples. CBT should provide more complex generalizations of conceptual patterns that generate emotion, in order to account for all the inferences that do not result from source-target projection. A closer look at affective connotations is also necessary. For example, in the classic example *this surgeon is a butcher* (Grady, Oakley & Coulson, 1999), we do not only have INCOMPETENCE as an emergent meaning: there are also connotations of fear, resentment, contempt… (heavily dependent on viewpoint and context: Brandt & Brandt, 2002) that do not arise in the inputs, but only in the blended space, where someone pursuits an objective with inadequate means or a careless attitude. CMT cannot deal with these meanings, since the domains of surgery, butchery, or even professions in general are not loaded *a priori* with such connotations, and thus these inferences cannot be *transferred* to their targets. None of them is a domain of emotion. These complex mappings and whatever systematicity there is in their interaction with context and diachrony can only be generalized by means of a network model such as that of CBT.

### The Diachronic Study of Embodied Conceptual Patterns: Erotic Emissions

One way to avoid too simple mappings such as ANGER IS HEAT or LOVE IS A JOURNEY is to pay attention to more complex blending templates. Families of blends involving embodied schemata and emotional situations can be good candidates (Pagán Cánovas, forthcoming a), since they tend to form simple narratives of emotion causation from which successful analogies emerge (for success in analogy see Turner, 2001: 126). These skeletal stories are suitable for many different instantiations, which vary greatly across cultures and periods. At the same time, they retain their embodied features and integration procedures, which are good candidates for universality. They can be observed in diachrony as complex adaptive systems (Turner, 2001: 143-4), mainly through their manifestations in language, literature, and art.

One example is what I call the generic integration network of erotic emission (Pagán Cánovas, 2009, forthcoming a), which can be widely observed, at least in Western literature, from Antiquity to the present. At the most abstract level, this network blends an image schema of

EMISSION (A emits *x* towards B, with consequences) with a situation in which someone has an erotic response towards a stimulus. These two spaces are integrated into a story of emotion causation in which the loved person – or an external agent, like Eros, in the three-input version of the network – emits something (light, wind, an arrow, etc.) towards a receiver, who feels passion as a result of the emission.

Observing such a specific pattern with comparative social perspective can produce interesting insights. For example, when a third main input is included in the network it always seems to be an external emitter, typically a superior force. The arrows of Eros in Antiquity are the most famous example, and I will discuss them below. However, we also have instances of light or other emissions coming from God in Christian times, or from less specified sources, in very recent poetry. In *Spring Symphony* (1938), by the Greek poet Giannis Ritsos, we sometimes find that both lovers are pictured as receiving the emission together, with an emergent meaning of reciprocity in the relationship, which would have been unsuitable for the typically asymmetric love poetry of other periods.

If we follow a specific instantiation of the pattern across history, we can also discover interesting ways in which cultural background influences the cognitive-emotional blend. Take, for instance, just two examples of the irradiation of light as an erotic emission. Pindar (Snell & Maehler, 123), in a homoerotic context in the 5th century B.C.E., pictures the ephebe Theoxenus as irradiating light from his eyes. If you see those rays, you just cannot help feeling the waves of desire. Almost two thousand years later, a medieval Greek folksong tells the story of a lady at the beach (Politis, 97). The wind lifts her hemline a bit and her ankle is exposed. Light irradiates from her ankle all through the coast and attracts a captain in his war ship. In each case, the luminous faculty of the beloved is attached to a part of the body that is erotically relevant in the cultural context: glance is a more powerful means of seduction in a society where youngsters are commonly seen in the nude, while in a society where women usually cover most of their bodies it is the uncovering of some of their parts that provokes arousal.

## Poetic Imagery, Cognitive Narratives, and The History of Emotion Concepts

The previous section has offered examples of a wider line of research: the diachronic study of blends including schematic spatial stories and emotion situations. Figurative language is, of course, the richest material to be mined for such blends. Within it, poetic imagery is particularly appealing. The literary material is invaluable both for cognitive study (e.g. Turner, 1996; Fauconnier, 1997: 125; Brandt & Brandt, 2005) and for emotion research (Reddy, 2001, 2009; Oatley, 2004: 152; 2009; Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 2008; Tan, 2000, etc.). The embodied approach to emotion language can be key to our understanding of universality and variation (Werzbicka, 1999: 306).

However, such a study needs not be limited strictly to verbal figuration: it can include non-verbal expressions and aim at emotion concepts in general. CBT is especially well suited to assist the methodology of the history of emotion symbols, and of symbols and concepts in general (for this field, see Koselleck, 1989, and Skinner, 1999). For example, the origin of the arrows of love, arguably the most famous of all emotion symbols, can be traced back to the early archaic Greek period, and described as a cultural process that integrated an abstract cause personification network, the deadly arrows of Apollo, with the erotic emission blend. This hypothesis seems to explain the extant data better than the single authorship in a later period, which has been proposed by several specialists (Pagán Cánovas, forthcoming b).

## Preliminary Conclusions: Towards a Cognitive History of Integrated Emotions

If cognitive or neuroscientific studies of emotions lack the necessary social and historical perspective, as has been criticized in the cases of Damasio (1994), Sorabji (2000), or Nussbaum (2001), the phenomenon they are studying is bound to vanish (Gross, 2006: 10-35, 72-78). On the other hand, as Reddy and Rosenwein show, the history of emotions cannot be attempted separately from their cognition and expression. Aristotle already saw that emotions are intrinsically cognitive and social experiences. Not reducing them to their biological or mental substrate does not mean obliterating it. Emotions are integrated. Conceptual integration operates at different levels to articulate affective meanings by blending schemata, narratives, cultural frames, gestalts, and mental simulations. The history of emotions is the history of these blending templates and their interaction with social and historical factors.

In order to engage in the history of emotions productively, CBT needs to foster its potential for diachrony and comparison. Some of its objectives might include the following:

- finding recurring conceptual patterns that can be compared across cultures and periods, mainly relying on embodied schemata and generic integration networks.
- finding regularities in the interaction between the conceptual templates and socio-cultural factors, surfacing in a wide variety of blending products in different emotional communities.
- studying universality and variation in modes of emotional expression (*emotives*), relating them to semiotic procedures (styles), communicative *functions* (speech acts), and other pragmatic and semantic factors related to context and enunciation.

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