

A Conceptual Blending Analysis of Yorùbá Riddles

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Abstract

Riddle, as a genre in Yorùbá oral literature, explains many thoughts about the activities of the people, their culture, customs and natural phenomena. Studies have been carried out on Yorùbá riddles using different approaches for their analyses. However, the application of conceptual blending theory with the knowledge of cultural context has not been given adequate attention, hence, the desirability of this study. The objectives of the study were to: (i) explore the cultural context and mental spaces embedded in the selected riddles and (ii) analyse how the cultural contexts are accurately blended to arrive at the correct answer in the process of meaning negotiation in the selected Yorùbá riddles. The study was a descriptive research. The descriptive methods used included: translation, explanation and use of diagrams. The data were purposively obtained from two published texts on Yorùbá riddles. A total number of ten Yorùbá riddles were analysed. The findings of the study were that; (i) the cultural context embedded covers the Yorùbá people's value system, belief system, lifestyles, habits, religion, marriage, food, clothing, traditions, behaviours, factual, and personal experiences and logical-semantic domain and (ii) different items of cultural context are accurately blended with a great range of background conceptual structures which assist to make the search for the optimal relevant context with least effort easier. The study concluded that the knowledge of cultural context, logical semantic and personal experience paved the way for a meaningful interpretation of Yorùbá riddles, thereby making riddle more easily soluble. The study recommended, among other things, the application of conceptual blending theory to other literary genres to assess their potential for achieving results and ability to deliver their social messages since the theory is cognitive-context sensitive.

Keywords: Yoruba riddles, conceptual blending, folklores, mental spaces

Introduction

Riddle, an aspect of Yorùbá oral literature, like the other aesthetic products of imagination, is closely connected with proverb, story, song, poem, drama, incantation, praise poetry, story, legend, folktale and myth. The arts are to the imagination what food is to the body and spirituality to the soul, but they have added character of guiding all human activities. That is why the arts in general, orature in particular, have always been part of the human society. Riddle can be said to be one of the age long elements of poetry. Within the length and breadth of Yorùbá community, riddle is as common as the word 'common' itself. Though riddle is an aspect of Yorùbá oral poetry, yet unlike others in this group that may be associated with a particular community or clan, riddle has no boundary as it cuts across all the Yorùbá tribes. It can be said that riddles and acts of riddling are worldwide things. Riddle among the Yorubas' is called 'Àlò àpamò', 'Gwan' to the Ibos' and 'Tasuniya' to the Hausas' Among the Yorùbá it is called, to the Ibo it is

called while the Hausa calls it 'Tasuniya' and to the English it is called riddle. As revealed by Abimbola (1985), there are different types of riddle. There is the song type, and the question and answer type. The one we are interested in for this study is the question and answer type. This type of riddle is set in question form or formed in an explanatory sentence requiring the riddlee to provide an answer to. There is no denying the fact that riddles are not strange to us and their importance cannot be underestimated. According to Awedoba (2000) and Adeyemi (2013), riddles have significant social roles that may be described as humorous, funny, entertainment, cultural, educative, intellectual and ideological. Entertainment is in-built in riddles to test human knowledge and understanding of the subject matter been discussed in the most transparent manner. In addition to this, a riddler is a poet who shows people their surroundings, its beauty and the odds of it. He or she also teaches the audience how to be thoughtful and be useful members of their society.

In this paper, we attempt to show the context of riddles and how riddles are used to translate human experience such as cultures, human nature, languages, beliefs and physical characteristics of human life among others. Hence, this paper concentrates on how riddles provide the theory of human experiences using conceptual blending theory. Conceptual blending is a theory of cognition developed by Fauconnier and Turner in 1993. They are scholars in the field of cognitive linguistics. It should be added that the importance of the analytical tool adopted is hinged on the fact that generating and interpreting riddles are cognitive-context sensitive. Therefore, it is strongly believed that the adopted theory has given a rich, full and detailed understanding, not into only of the construction strategies but also of the mental processes involved into how meaningful interpretation is done.

Riddles: Overview, Functions and Relation to Linguistics and Cognition

Many research on riddles have focused on their metaphorical, structural characteristics, language use, compilation, classification and interpretation. They include Shultz, (1974), Maranda (1976), Olabimtan (1982), Olatunji (1984), Pepicello & Green (1984), Oyewole (1986), Mokoena (1992), Awedoba (2000), Ajayi (2004), Angga (2011), Zacheus (2017) and Saka (2018). Olabimtan (1982) describes riddle as a game to be solved through deliberation and analytical processes. Saka (2016) defines riddles as text produced with relational clauses in which one thing is said to be something else. That is, a relationship of being is set between the metaphorical elements used in signifying the code and the element itself. Oyewole (1986) adds that the thought and lessons imbibed in riddles are the various reasons behind the existence of numerous riddles all-round.

Conceptual Blending Theory

'Blending' aspect of conceptual integration is a theory of cognition developed by Gills Fauconnier and Mark Turner in 1993. This theory, according to the founding fathers, is an extension of Conceptual metaphor theory because it offers a more detailed analysis of metaphor interpretation. Conceptual blending theory according to its apostles is a basic mental operation that leads to new meanings, global insights and conceptual compressions useful for memory and manipulation of otherwise diffuse ranges of meaning. Conceptual blending plays a fundamental role in the construction of meaning in everyday life, in the arts, social and behavioural sciences from conceptual perspectives. In this theory, priority is given to mental spaces as resources for making meaning. The mental space is a theoretical construct corresponding to possible world in truth-conditional semantics. The main difference between a mental space and a possible world is that a mental space does not contain a faithful representation of reality but an

idealized cognitive model (Fauconnier, 1985). Mental space is one of the supporting pillars of conceptual blending. It is proposed that:

Mental spaces are small concepts packets constructed by speaker when thinking or talking either intentionally or unintentionally with his cognitive capability for the purpose of local understanding, action and meaning projection from different areas of human experience or endeavour. Spaces are very partial assemblies containing elements, and structured by frames and cognitive models.

Mental spaces have the capacity to connect to one another making meaning negotiation possible or easier (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998).

“A mental space theory locates meaning in speaker's mental representations and construes linguistic structures as cues that prompt speakers to set up elements in referential structure” (Coulson and Oakley, 2000). Based on this assertion, it can be said that mental spaces provide linguistic structures that assist riddlers as well as riddlees to link up different elements that refer to one another so that coherence can be created in riddle discourse. To generate riddles, various mental spaces are continuously connected by various linguistic means, and the discourse is relevant if the riddlee manages to operate in the same mental frame as the riddler to identify the mental spaces constructed (Ibrahim and James, 2015).

Just like other theories, in linguistics and other fields, conceptual blending theory has a network. These networks suggest how the theory works to blend elements from different spaces for meaning negotiation. According to Fauconnier & Turner (1998), conceptual blending integration network in its most basic forms consists of four connected mental spaces: two partially matched input spaces, a generic space and the blended space. The four connected mental spaces can be explained thus: the generic space contains the structure that are common to the input spaces. The two input spaces serve as an avenue where the riddler send messages/ideas to the riddlee, and where the riddlee receives the messages/ideas for the purpose of meaning negotiation. The input space one stands as the source domain where the riddler dwells on and connects different knowledge sources to generate the riddle. The input space two serves as the target domain where the riddlee tries to reason along with the riddler in the same mental frame. While the blended space is the meeting point between the reasoning abilities of both the input space one and input space two.

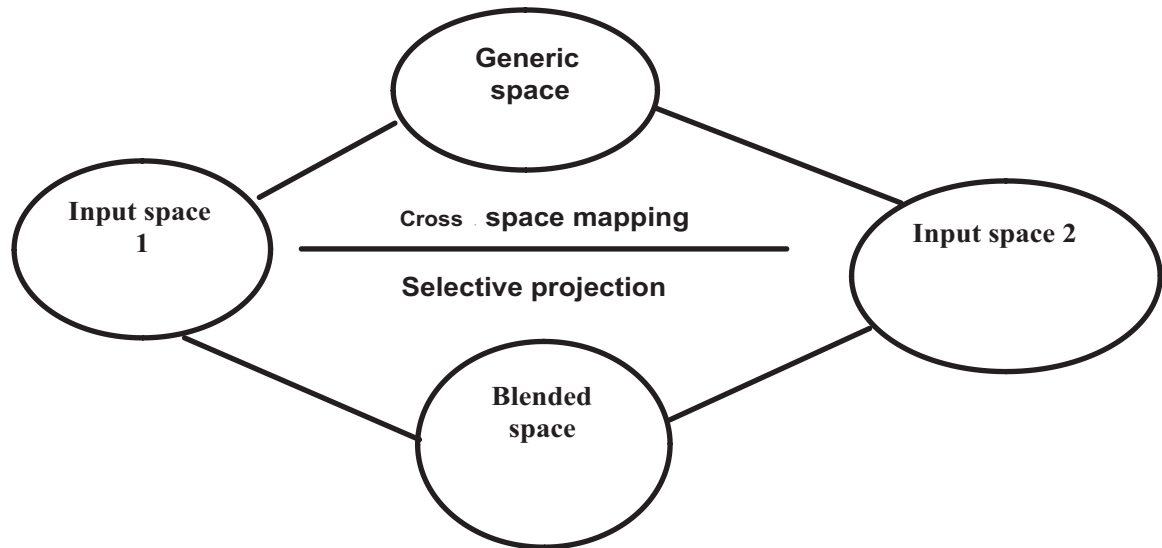
According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002), three basic process must take place before conceptual blending can operate in discourses. These processes are: composition, completion and elaboration. Composition refers to the projection of content from each of the inputs into the blended space. Completion is evoked or manifested when structure projected from the input spaces matches information in long term memory. Elaboration is viewed as the stimulated mental performance of the event in the blend, and which may continue indefinitely. Thus, new juxtapositions, new frames and new features all arise when combining elements from distinct mental spaces. These bits of emergent structure, according to the exponents, are chief diagnostics for the occurrence of blending.

Theoretical Underpinnings and Structure of Conceptual Blending Theory

Among the theoretical underpinnings of conceptual blending include (i) the unique features of human beings having the capacity to create new meanings from existing ones; (ii) the way to implement this

capacity is to perform double-scope blending, that is, to build an integrated mental space on the base of number of inputs spaces; (iii) conceptual blending is underlined with the notion that conceptualisation involves networks of mental spaces with mappings between them. Glebkin, Coulson and Canovas (2013). The third fundamental aspect is important to this paper.

The schematic representation of conceptual blending is shown in the diagram in fig. 1 below:



(Source: Fauconnier & Turner, 2004, p. 59)

Context in the scheme of Conceptual Blending Theory

According to Ayodabo (2002, p. 332), context is the circumstances that form the background picture of an event and idea which enable readers to fully understand the narrative or literary piece. Context, in simple term, is the hearer's cognitive environment and thus it plays crucial roles in interpretation. Among the subdivisions of context are physical context, socio-cultural context, historical context, ideological context, cognitive context and others within which the riddlee can reason along the utterances of the riddler in order to successfully interpret a riddle discourse.

Methodology

The study was a descriptive and analytical research. It adopted a qualitative approach to analyse the data collected. The data comprised of seven (7) purposively sampled Yorùbá riddles from two published texts on Yorùbá riddles. Data were subjected to critical and descriptive analysis.

Conceptual Blending Theory Analysis in Selected Yorùbá Riddles

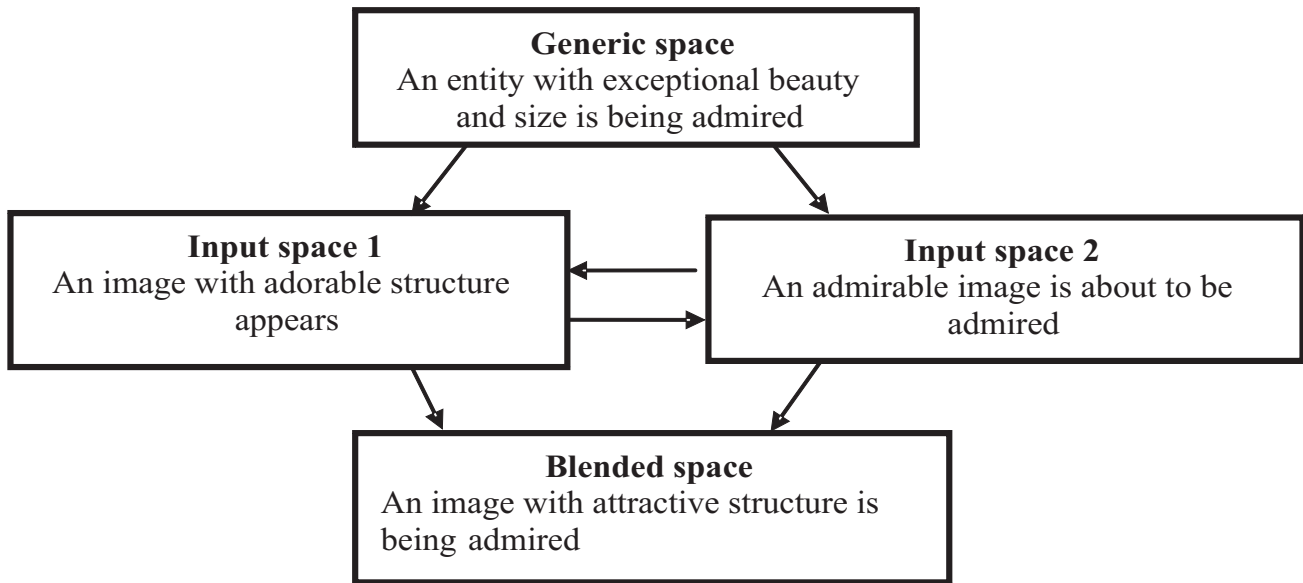
Using Fauconnier and Turner's (2004) model, the analysis considers the cultural context of the Yorùbá people (such as values, beliefs, marriage, religion, food, clothing, customs, factual and personal experiences) and all the four spaces identified by the riddlers. The spaces are generic space, input spaces and blended space. The blended is used to group the analysis. The riddle which gives the blended space is

written in bold after the blended space.

Riddle 1: 'Ọmọge ọlómú m̀r̀ìndínlógún gbogbo ayé ló ǹ fé e' (Ìb̀épe)

A lady with sixteen (16) breasts, everyone loves her (Ans: Pawpaw)

This riddle is accounted for by means of conceptual blending using this diagram as follows:



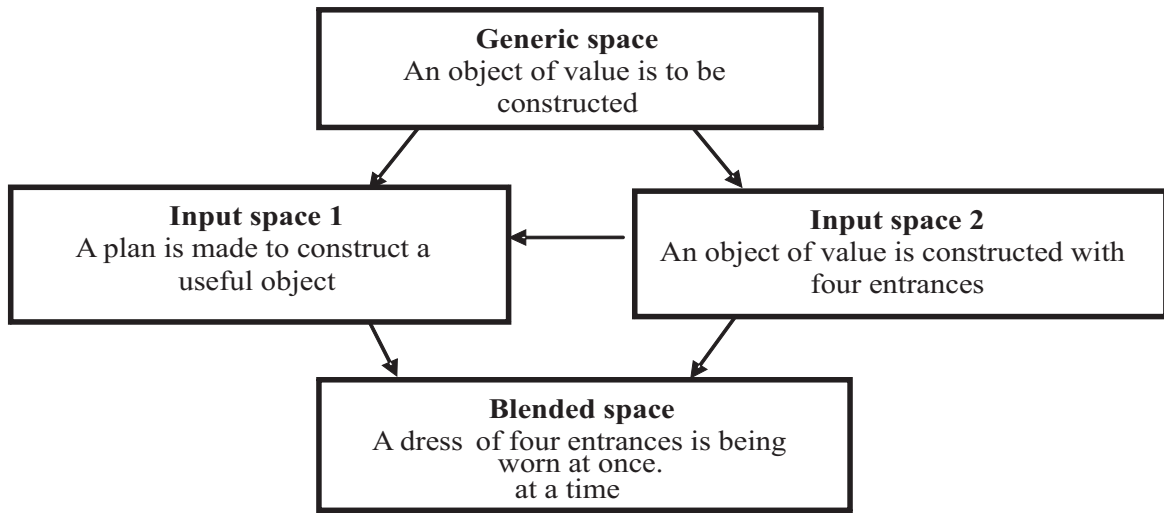
Discussion: In riddle 1, the riddlee will be required to have the knowledge of marriage as a cultural context in order to interpret this riddle. Here, it can be said that, the generic space specifies “An entity with exceptional beauty and size is being admired”. Therefore, the implication in the generic space implies that there is an admirable fruit tree and there is a lady that can be likened to it. This means that the entity is admired just like the lady is. The generic space leads to input space one which affirms that its adorable structures appear. Input space one also leads to input space two which specifies that, “An adorable image is about to be admired”. The two input spaces lead to the blended space. Thus, the blended space of “An image with attractive structure is being admired” is arrived at.

In the analysis of this riddle, the production of this riddle relates to the logical-semantic and operation of metaphor. Hence, some lexical items undergo semantic shift, thereby generating hidden meanings. The meanings of these lexemes do not depend on the semantic context but instead, they test the riddlee's ability to establish a relationship between a word and its referent. The riddle is an example of metaphor between 'breast' and 'pawpaw'. In the metaphor, there is semantic extension to the lexemes “ọmọge” (lady), “ọmú” (breast) and the number “m̀r̀ìndínlógún” (16) to extend to the nature of the fruit, the black contents in the pawpaw and the multiple numbers of the content when cut into two. This riddle, no doubt, elucidates the primacy of ideational meaning over the referential in the study of meaning. A riddlee can unravel the riddle and arrive at its answer only if he or she is operating in the same mental frame as the riddler in seeing the metaphoric relationships between a big juicy ripe pawpaw and an adorable lady who has oversized breasts which will equally attract the attention of people passing bye. Hence, a riddlee's experience in the area of agriculture/food is needed to arrive at the answer which is given as PAWPAW.

Riddle 2: Mo kọ ilé ojúlé m̀erín, è̀èkan nàà ni mò ǹ wọ ibè (Èwù)

I built a house with four apartments, I enter all at the same time (Ans: Dress)

The conceptual blending in this riddle is accounted for by means of this diagram:



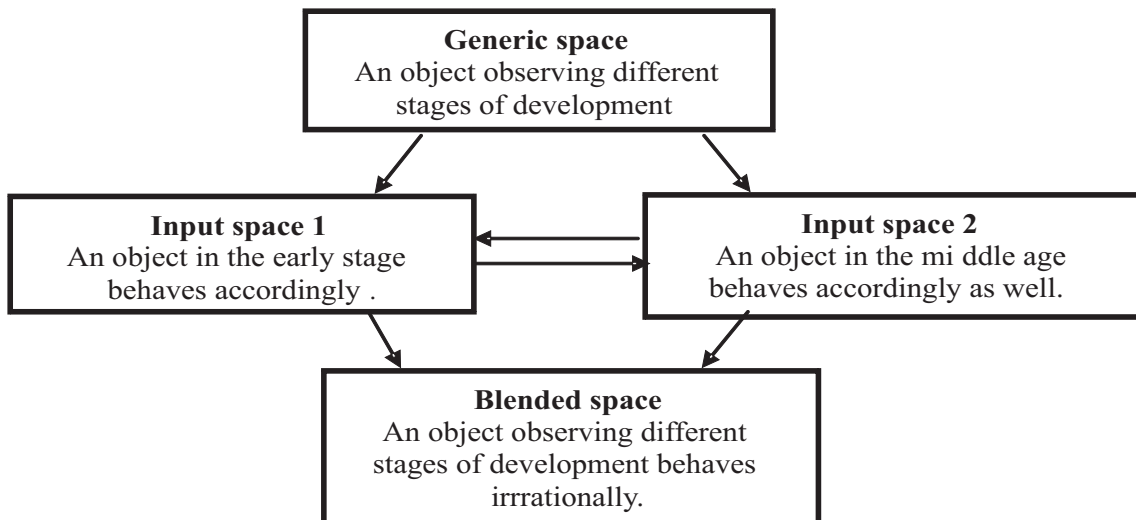
Discussion: In riddle 2, the contextual knowledge of building in Yorubá setting will be required in an attempt to interpret this riddle. Therefore, the generic space specifies that “an object of value is to be constructed”. The implication of what is obtained in the generic space is that an object of value is to be constructed. The generic space leads to input space one which affirms that, “A plan is made to construct a useful object”. Input space one also leads to input space two which specifies that, “An object of value is constructed with four entrances”. The two input spaces lead to the blended space. Thus, there is the blended space of “An object of value with four entrance is being constructed”.

From the discourse of the riddle and its contextual situation in the text, it is evident that the riddle results from the blending of factual and personal experiences of the riddler. The riddle, as well as the blending, generates the model of comparison between clothe and the frame building. Therefore, in generating the meaning of this riddle, a riddlee needs to draw from his cultural experience in the area of clothing to realise that the answer to riddle 2 is DRESS.

Riddle 3. Àkùkò babàa mi kan laéláé, Ó ní eṣè méréin láàárò, Ó ní méjì lósánán, Ó ní mēta lalé (Èniyan).

My father's age long cock, it has four legs in the morning, it has two legs in the noon, it has three legs in the evening (Ans: Human being).

This riddle is accounted for by means of conceptual blending using the following diagram:



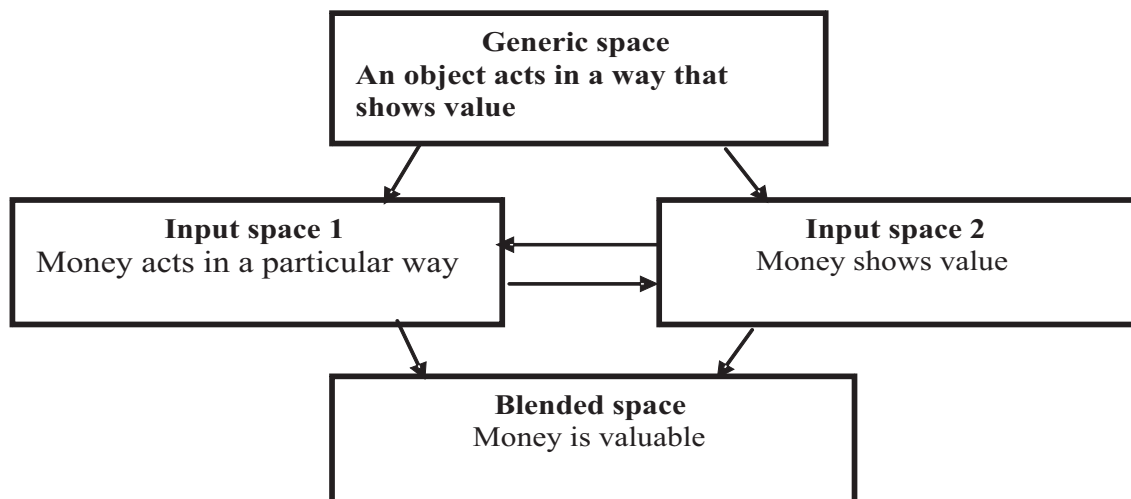
Discussion: In riddle 3, the cultural context of personal experience will be required to unravel the solution to this riddle. Therefore, the riddle gives the information on “An object observing different stages of development”. The implication of what is contained in the generic space is stages of life are being observed. The idea in the generic space leads to input spaces one and two. Both input spaces eventually lead to the blending of the domains of cognitive contexts employed. Thus, the generic space leads to input space one which affirms that, “An object in the early stage behaves accordingly”. Input space one also leads to input space two which specifies that, “An object in the middle age behaves accordingly as well”. The two input spaces lead to the blended space of “An object observing different stages of development behaves rationally”.

From the discourse of the riddle and its contextual situation in the text, it is evident that this riddle is generated from a lexico-semantic operation of metaphor. The different stages of life are being compared to the development of a cock. Though a cock does not have four legs, this modification helps to balance the riddle and makes it appealing. The physical referents of four legs, two legs and three legs are a metaphor for a person's three main stages of life's journey, i.e. childhood, adulthood and old age with each stage's peculiar characteristics.

Riddle 4: Àdàbà kénké kò sí ojà tí kò ná rí (Owó)

A small dove, there is no market it has not transacted in (Ans: Money).

This riddle illustrates conceptual blending using this diagram:



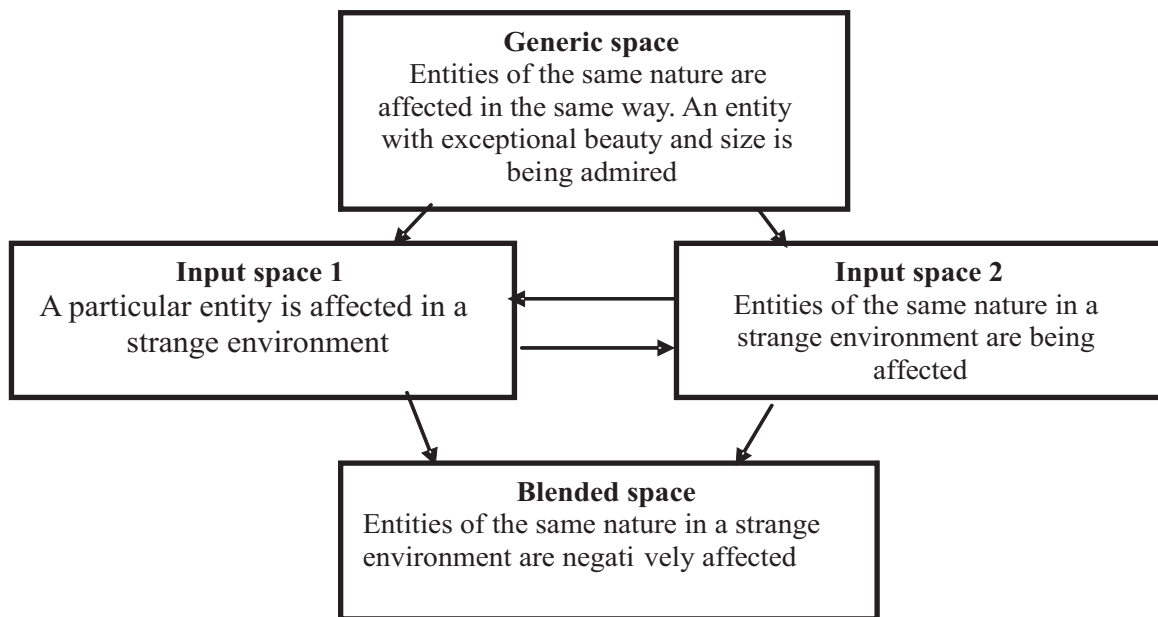
Discussion: In riddle 4, the cultural context of value will be needed by the riddlee to tackle this riddle. The generic space gives the information that, “An object acts in a way that shows value”. The implication of what is contained in the generic space is that an entity has value. This develops to input space one that affirms that, “Money acts in a particular way”. Input space one also leads to input space two which specifies that “Money has value”. Input spaces one and two lead to the blended space. The two input spaces eventually yield into the blend of “Money is valuable”. From the contextual meaning of the riddle, it can be deduced that money is an item of value used for exchange of goods and services in every market. The Yorùbá people say money is business. This is to say that money is used to run businesses.

In this riddle, money is presented as a feathered vertebrate having the capability of flying about. This is a semantic extension because money, a medium of exchange, becomes a vertebrate by being given the quality of a bird that moves freely in the environment. The interpretation of this riddle will require the

Riddle 5: Àgbààgbà méta kú sóri àpáta a kò rí egungun wọn (Ekòlò)

Three elders died on a rock, their skeletons could not be found (Earthworm)

The conceptual blending in this riddle is illustrated using the following diagram:



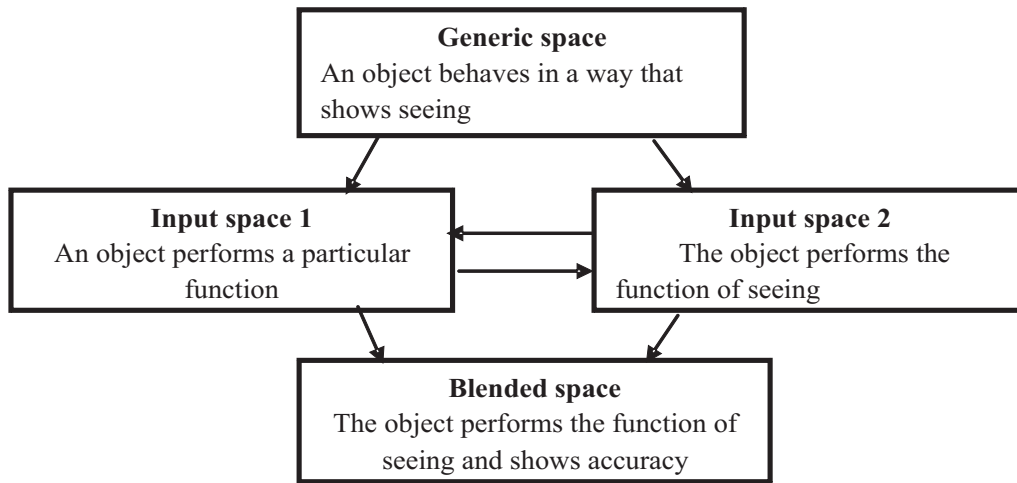
Discussion: To interpret riddle 5, the cultural context of agricultural practice and ecological system in the Yorùbá community will be required. Therefore, the generic space gives the information that, “Entities of the same nature are affected in the same way”. The implication of what is contained in the generic space is that what affects one entity affects all. This is buttressed by the Yorùbá saying that what affects the Oya priest affects the co-worshippers. From the generic space, input space one is derived. Input space one affirms that, “A particular entity is affected in a strange environment”. Input space one also leads to input space two which specifies that, “Entities of the same nature in a strange environment are being affected”. The two input spaces lead to the blended space which affirms that, “Entities of the same nature in a strange environment are negatively affected”. According to this blend, these entities get affected when they find themselves in a strange environment.

From the discourse of the riddle and its contextual situation in the text, it is evident that to interpret the answer to this riddle, which is given as EARTHWORM, the riddlee will draw from his experience in the domains of agriculture and ecology to arrive at the right answer. This answer can be said to be borne out of the general ecological knowledge that earthworm is cherished by a lot by farmers because its decomposition assists in making the land fertile for farming. The familiarity of the riddlee with this animal can make him identify it as a boneless animal. Even at this, the experience of the riddlee in the area of agriculture may be short of giving the correct answer, and to this end, a cognitive blending of ideas from fields like agriculture, ecology and knowledge about lower animal kingdoms mutually shared by the riddler and the riddlee will help.

Riddle 6: Òkò bínnítín fogba igi (Ojú)

A tiny stone crosses two hundred trees (Ans: Eye)

Riddle 6 illustrates conceptual blending using this diagram:

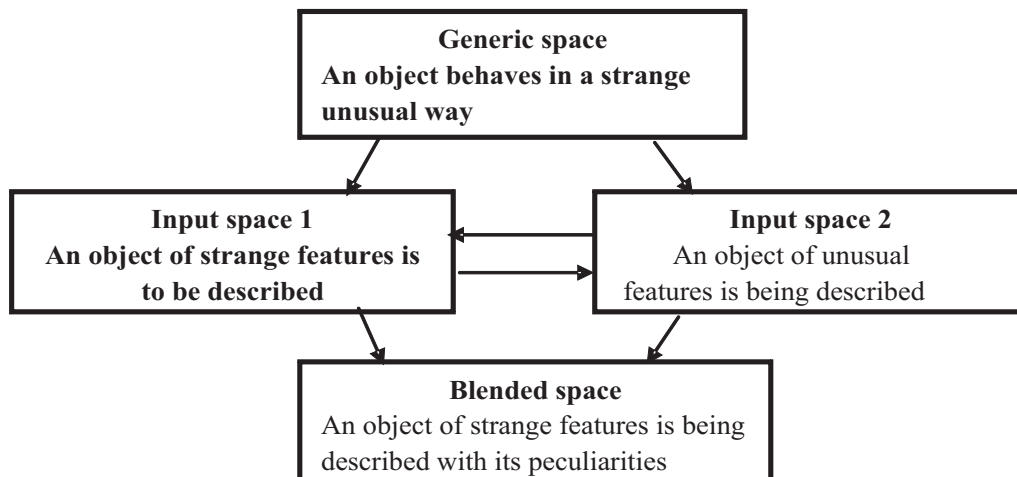


Discussion: In riddle 6, the cultural context of the knowledge of human body parts will be needed to interpret this riddle. The generic space gives the information that, “An object behaves in a way that shows vision”. The implication of what is contained in the generic space is that an object shows the act of seeing. This leads to input space one that affirms that, “An object performs a particular function”. Input space one leads to input space two which specifies that, “The object performs the function of vision”. These two input spaces lead to the blended space which affirms that, “The object performs the function of vision and shows accuracy”. The blended input space asserts that an object has the ability to see something clearly. From the discourse of the riddle and its contextual situation in the text, it is evident that the eye, with a sizeable structure, can perform its function accurately even over a long distance. The riddle contains a source space related to stone which is mapped onto the target, which in turn is based on vision. In order to interpret this riddle, a riddlee will have to focus on the correspondence related to (vision), since eyes are normally used with that aim. Besides, there is also a word play upon which “a tiny stone crosses two hundred trees” is also connected to the idea of “seeing long distance”. To unravel the solution to this riddle, the knowledge of human body parts is essential and, logically, the part of the body that functions as described are the EYES.

Riddle 7: Ó sáré ní pápá telengételengé; Ó rìn laalà yẹ̀lẹ̀nkù yẹ̀lẹ̀nkù; Olóri asínrín dodongba dodongba (Áparò)

It runs in the desert elegantly; it walks in between ridges zig-zag; the head of poisonous mouse (Partridge).

Riddle 7 illustrates conceptual blending using the following diagram:



Discussion: In riddle 7, the riddlee will require a knowledge of the animal kingdom as a cultural context in Yorùbá environment to interpret this riddle. Therefore, from the figure above, the generic space specifies that, “An object behaves in a strange way”. The generic space implies that the particular bird performs differently in different places. The notion in the generic space leads to input space one which affirms that, “An object of strange features is to be described”. Input space two is also derived from input space one. This input space two asserts thus, an object of unusual features is being described. All these lead to the blended space, and the blend is, “An object of strange features is being described with its peculiarities”.

To unravel the solution to this riddle at the surface level of compositionality, the riddlee would have to resort to his or her experiential knowledge of the fauna family to arrive at an acceptable answer to the riddle which is given as PARTRIDGE. With this answer, the riddle appeals to the riddlee's reasoning that in a free environment, this particular bird, identified as the head of poisonous mouse, is smarter and runs faster in the desert than when its route is obstructed. Hence, a riddlee can arrive at the correct answer to this riddle with a good knowledge of the animal kingdom.

Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

Obviously, to interpret the message that underlies a riddle, there is the need for conceptual blending of different knowledge sources so as to operate in the same mental frame with the riddler. Findings of the study reveals that: (i) the cultural context embedded covers the Yorùbá people's value system, belief system, lifestyles, habits, religion, marriage, food, clothing, traditions, behaviours, factual, and personal experiences and logical-semantic domain; (ii) different cultural contexts are accurately blended with a great range of background conceptual structures which assist to search for the optimal relevant with least effort; and (iii) cognitive context is affected differently due to various factors, that is, linguistic knowledge, socio-cultural experiences and cognitive ability. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that the knowledge of cultural context, logical semantic and personal experience paved the way for meaningful interpretations of Yorùbá riddles, thereby making riddles easily resolved. It thus follows that among other things, the application of conceptual blending theory to other literary genres to assess their potential for achieving results and ability to deliver their social messages since the theory is cognitive-context sensitive.

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