



The Stylistics of Mental Spaces: A Shift from Aesthetic Reading to Cognitive Interpretation

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Abstract in English

This study explores the intersection between stylistics and mental spaces, reconstructing the reader's analytical engagement with the text from structural-aesthetic analysis to the interpretation of meaning through cognitive processes. Accordingly, the primary aim of this study is to investigate the convergence of theoretical and analytical dimensions between Mental Spaces Theory and stylistics, structuring the analysis to meet the research question: How do linguistic choices, constituting space builders, trigger and configure readers' mental spaces in literary discourse? It is hypothesized that certain stylistic choices are not restricted to functioning as aesthetic markers within the textual structure but as space builders, enabling readers to manage cognitive load, construct conceptual mental spaces, and interpret narrative layers of meaning beyond formal structure. Methodologically, the study adopts a theoretical-analytical approach, drawing on stylistics and Fauconnier's Mental Space Theory, to analyze excerpts from seminal literary works and explore the significant roles of linguistic choices within these interdisciplinary frameworks. Findings reveal that integrating stylistics with Mental Space Theory (an interdisciplinary framework)

Paper Info

Keywords

Mental Space Theory, free indirect thought, epistemic domain, ideological space, hypothetical space

refines the reader's comprehension of how linguistic choices create conceptual mental spaces and communicate meaning by bridging textual analysis with the cognitive interpretation. Related to the findings, narrative verbs configure the narrative stance to create layered mental spaces; connectives frame inferential comprehension; and other choices linguistically construct and encode ideological representations.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.63797/bjh>.

1. Introduction

The interdisciplinary interrelation between linguistic encoding, cognitive processing, and literary interpretation has consistently held theoretical primacy in both linguistic theorization and literary interpretation. Specifically, over four decades of disciplinary progression, the theoretical rise of cognitive linguistic studies, has provided a well-grounded theoretical framework that thoroughly reforms the way researchers investigate literary discourse. The theoretical advancement of cognitive studies has conceptually reconfigured the analytical awareness of literary interpretation from narrowly formalist textual descriptions to the rich and productive interaction between textual structure and mind. One of the most influential analytical cognitive frameworks for theorizing the mechanisms of meaning construction is Gilles Fauconnier's theory of mental spaces.

Mental Space Theory, proposed by Fauconnier (1985), has offered a foundationally significant cognitive analytical structure for analyzing how meaning is constructed. This mental orientation of analysis proposes that meaning is dynamically constructed as discourse progresses, in which the mind activates multiple interconnected conceptual "spaces," to regulate and process knowledge, trace referential connections, and manage complex cognitive analytical procedures "with other mental space (beliefs, time, hypotheticals, counterfactuals, fiction, quantification, etc.)" (Fauconnier and Sweetser, 1996, p.17). These spaces are not rigidly bounded cognitive configurations but flexible and context-dependent mental representations that regulate our comprehension of relational structures. This flexibility enables them theoretically to be well-positioned for grasping the dynamic and multidimensional

nature of literary meaning. In this regard, Fauconnier and Turner (2002, p. 40) characterize mental spaces as “small conceptual packets constructed,” indicating that the “smallness” functions as the structural mechanism of flexibility that can be conceptually modified, cognitively extended, or entirely replaced. Viewed from the opposing perspective, inflexibility or encyclopedic structure of knowledge would impede the rapid reconfiguration that communicative interaction requires.

Considering stylistics as the systematic analysis of style, particularly in contemporary stylistics, where considerable analytical attention was directed toward exploring the functional, multimodal, and ideological properties of styles, the productive interconnection between these two theoretical frameworks (stylistics and mental spaces) permits a more refined comprehension of linguistic choices (space builders). When these two theoretical structures intersect, a significant analytical understanding occurs, where stylistics acquires a cognitive analytical framework to account for why certain linguistic choices produce cognitive effects on readers’ interpretations. Parallel to this cognitive stylistic accumulation, mental spaces acquire a textually grounded framework to conceptually account for how mentally abstracted processes are effectively activated by deliberately grounded linguistic expressions.

Drawing on Fauconnier and Turner’s observation (2002, p. 30), regarding conceptual blending as “its ability to provide compressions to the human scale of diffuse arrays of events,” the significance of this study moves beyond the conventional scope of literary linguistics. Cognitively, providing “compression to human scale” clarifies why certain stylistic choices are so remarkable and effective, enabling the reader to move through “diffuse arrays of events” through coherent, structurally integrated blended spaces. To confirm the significance of this paper, Stockwell (2002) affirms that stylistics moves beyond a mere account of the explicit content of the text, i.e., the “what” of the text, but the “how”, or the conceptual process through which text activates cognitive experience. Cognitive stylistic studies have drawn on the integration between schema theory and conceptual metaphors, and the text world theory, while Mental Space Theory has been developed with remarkable thoroughness to address challenges in the domains of discourse and grammar (Fauconnier and Sweetser, 1996). What is important to raise into primary focus at this point is that the relationship between stylistics and mental spaces remains insufficiently explored in systematic analysis. That is, the relationship between stylistic theoretical perspectives and mental

spaces has not yet received thorough theoretical and empirical examination, integrating a framework that disciplinarily integrates the descriptive power of stylistic analysis with the cognitive explanation of mental spaces.

To go beyond a strictly descriptive account of textual structure, it is necessary to investigate how readers configure and interpret narrative conceptual frames. Accordingly, the research question of this study is: How do linguistic choices, constituting space builders, trigger and configure readers' mental spaces in literary discourse? The hypothesis stated in the abstract is that stylistic choices are not limited to only aesthetic function; rather they function as space builders to construct mental spaces through which narrative layered meaning can be realized.

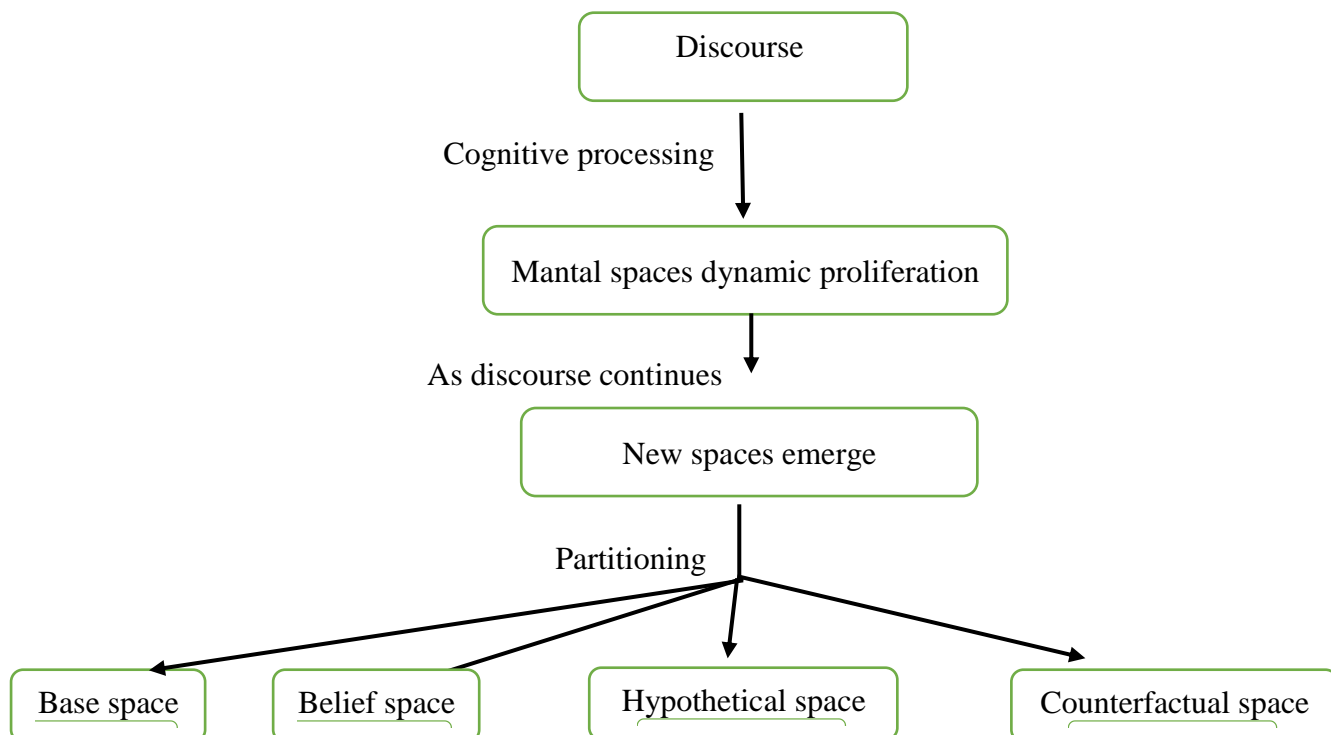
2. Theoretical Overview of Mental Space

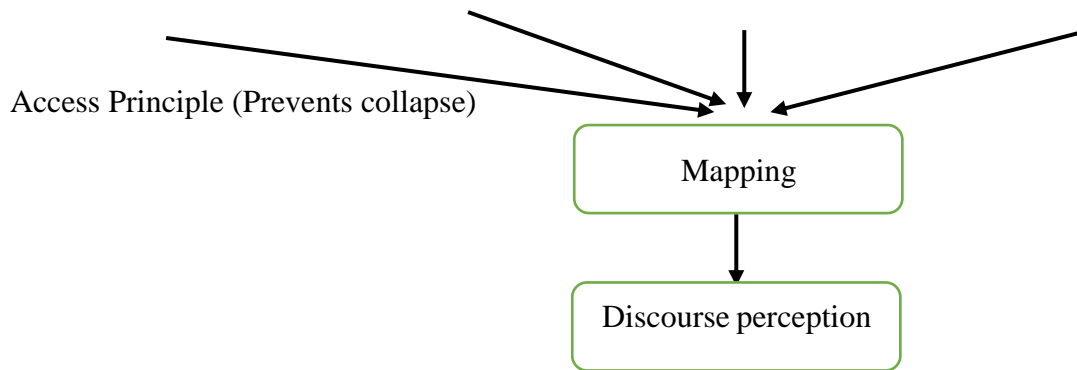
Language is not a transparent representational medium through which we perceive and experience the world, but rather as a constitutive cognitive mechanism that activates schemas, directs attention, and restructures mental representations. This perspective closely parallels Fauconnier's argument that "when we engage in any form of thought, typically mediated by language (for example, conversation, poetry, reading, storytelling), domains are set up, structured, and connected" (Fauconnier, 1994, p. xxxvii). Language transcends being a container for meaning; it functions as an active agent in the formation of meaning through cognitive and analytical processes. Language shapes the world, carries power or lacks influence (semantically thin), structures perception or defamiliarizes it, creates layered meanings or reduces its semantic richness.

In alignment with this, Gilles Fauconnier formulated the Mental Space Theory, a theory from cognitive linguistics, to explain how meaning is constructed. Mental spaces are small cognitive "packets" that trigger the activation of cognitive schemas. As stated by Fauconnier (1997, p. 5), "Meaning is divided into discrete, temporary conceptual 'packets' that are built 'on-line' for the local understanding and action of narratives, metaphors, speech acts as well as "general reasoning." Cognitively, multiple linguistic frameworks have been formulated to offer a theoretical account of how humans cognitively structure and linguistically share knowledge. In this context, meaningful communication is grounded in our ability to encode and organize complex information within the cognitive constraints of working memory. As Fauconnier

proposes, our cognition depends on these “partial structures that proliferate when we think and talk, allowing a fine-grained partitioning of our discourse and knowledge structures” (p. 11). Mental spaces are inherently “partial structures,” temporary cognitive packets, rather than a comprehensive representation of the world. These spaces “proliferate” rapidly during discourse processing, meaning that is not processed through a single mental space; that is, discourse comprehension draws on the rapid “proliferation” of newly configured mental representations. During cognitive processing, mental spaces offer a mechanism in which there is “a fine-grained partitioning,” i.e., keeping different types of mental spaces, such as temporal, ideological, narrative, modal, and epistemic, separate (cognitive compartmentalization). Fauconnier’s argument serves as the theoretical grounding in relation to which the intersection between stylistics and mental spaces may occur. The correlation between stylistics and mental spaces focuses on how mental spaces account for the notion that narrative gaps arise when mental space formation is partial, how syntactic fragmentation activates conceptual spaces, how cognitive load rises when spaces proliferate without clear mappings, and so on. *Figure 1* illustrates Mental Space Theory.

Figure 1:
Mental Space Theory: Key Principles





Fauconnier categorizes diverse variants of mental spaces. His argument “a fine-grained partitioning” indicates that “partitioning” is the process of dividing textual production and knowledge configurations into structurally partitioned cognitive units. Being “fine-grained” means that the separate knowledge structures, particularly in stylistic terms, are fine-grained and textually motivated, triggered by formal textual cues, such as negations, question, tense, viewpoint markers, modality, hypothetical framing, desires, etc. All these stylistic choices function as triggers to create marked, partially structured mental spaces. The “partitioning,” or the small “conceptual packets,” is a cognitive process, in which the theoretical implications are categorized by type.

Within the domain of cognitive processing, there are various types of mental spaces like base space, reality space, hypothetical space, focus space, counterfactual space, belief space, future space, and so on. Each one of these mental spaces is constructed by a space builder. The space builder “is a grammatical expression that either opens a new space or shifts focus to an existing space. Space builders take on a variety of grammatical forms” (Fauconnier, 1997, p. 40). Linguistic realizations, such as modality, prepositional phrases, conditionals, reported speech, subject + verb constructions, temporal or spatial expressions, etc., which function as space builders, are not constrained to a fixed set of expressions. To some extent, the relationship between mental spaces and space-builders is similar to that between ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’, taking into account that the signifier-signified relationship is static, while in mental spaces and space builders, the relationship is dynamic due to their interpretive variability with which readers construct and reconfigure cognitive representations.

To extend this argument further, *construal* is another critical term in understanding mental representation. It shapes the boundaries of mental spaces.

Construal, in Langacker’s words (2019, p. 140), is “our ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways.” Here, the most salient element in Langacker’s viewpoint is “alternate,” considering that each alternative construal represents one way of understanding a certain situation but not the unique conceptualization of that situation. That is, one situation can be conceptualized in diverse mental representations. A mental space is a bounded conceptual scene (*packet* in Fauconnier’s terms) we construct mentally through the process of thinking or communicating. Construal is the act of how we choose to structure and shape that scene in our consciousness, focusing on what we bring into focus, what we reduce in cognitive activation, and which communicative angle we choose.

What is still to be considered is the process of *blending*. To accomplish a cognitive process, the blending, according to Croft and Cruse (2004, p. 39), refers to “how information from two spaces, construed broadly to include domains, is combined to produce novel conceptual structures.” It is a process of combining information from two mental spaces to construct new cognitive formations (ideas from mental space 1 and mental space 2), in which the two are mapped into a third mental space to create new meanings. This sequence of combined cognitive actions demonstrates how linguistic constructions mediate partial integration of mental spaces to expand the horizon of meaning.

3. Stylistics as Self-Renewing Discipline

Stylistics marks its own theoretical boundaries by its dynamic adaptability to developing language-theoretical, cognitively grounded, and literary critical orientations. Its origin can be traced back, as Burke (2014, p. 12) points out, to “The great classical period of rhetoric and poetics began roughly in the fifth century BC with the beginnings of democracy in Athens.” In the 20th century, there was a shift of analytical priority from the aesthetic analysis of literary texts to the affective and communicative essence of language, where linguistic choices, as stylistic features, are foregrounded (Ammon, 1989; Taylor, 1992). Linguistic schools, such as Structuralism, Formalism, and New Criticism, all contributed to the theoretical development of stylistics, focusing on the sensitivity of the context and the role of the competent reader (Giovanelli and Harrison, 2022). Furthermore, stylistics reconsiders that meaning is not confined to the static written signs on a page, but it is realized in the reader’s experience, psychological condition, and sociocultural context (Spitzer, 1948). In

parallel with this, there are sub-disciplines of stylistics, such as feminist stylistics (Mills, 1995), functional stylistics (Canning, 2014), multimodal stylistics (Montoro, 2006; Nørgaard, 2010), critical stylistics (Jeffries, 2010), and corpus stylistics (Mahlberg, 2013; Fischer-Starcke, 2010), and ecostylistics (Goatly, 2017, 2022; Viridis, 2022). More specifically, with marked focus on the expansion of the stylistic, conceptual, and analytical domains by integrating its theoretical insights with the interdisciplinary study of mind and language, most notably with the rise of cognitive stylistics (Semino and Culpeper, 2002; Stockwell, 2002).

In spite of this broad disciplinary scope, what has yet to be studied is a framework to harmonize a stylistic analytical toolkit with Mental Space Theory in particular.

4. Methodology

In this study, a theoretically analytical methodological framework was adopted from Gilles Fauconnier's Mental Space Theory (1985; 1994; 1996; 1997; 2000), to stylistically and cognitively analyze how linguistic structures (space builders), specifically in narratives, enable readers to trigger, construct, and blend dynamic mental spaces. The data constituting the basis of this study were purposively extracted from more than one seminal novel. These excerpts were selected for their stylistic richness and cognitively layered narrative constructions which stylistically and conceptually offer ground for mental space analysis. The data of analysis consists of four carefully selected excerpts, ranging between two and ten sentences, extracted from representative canonical texts such as "Dubliners" by James Joyce, "The Brothers Karamazov" by Fyodor Dostoevsky, "The Old Man and the Sea" by Ernest Hemingway, and "1984" by George Orwell.

4.1 Verbs as Space Builders

In narrative, verbs, as space builders, extend beyond the straightforward description of actions. They act as dynamic triggers for conceptually regulating viewpoint, the point toward which attention is directed, and spatial or temporal mapping across mental spaces. According to their category, they build a perceptual space (perception verbs), construct a mental belief or thought (cognitive verbs), and constitute a reported discourse space (speech verbs), etc.

To redirect the theoretical viewpoints presented into the domain of narrative analysis, the intersection between stylistics and mental spaces can be seen in a chosen

excerpt from James Joyce’s novel, in which his verbal choices give shape to mental spaces:

“He stood still in the gloom of the hall, trying to catch the air that the voice was singing and gazing up at his wife. There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels of her skirt would show off the light ones. Distant Music he would call the picture if he were a painter” (Joyce, 1976, pp. 209-210).

In this text, mental spaces, as small conceptual packets, are triggered by certain linguistic structures (space builders). The text begins with the ‘base space’. The focalized representation of the real-world base space, being one type of mental space, can be realized through the use of certain narrative verbs. Some of the verbs used in the text, some of them, generate physical and perceptual spaces, as seen in ‘stood’, which grounds the protagonist within a specific and identifiable physical space (actual space), ‘the hall’. A further category is the use of ‘was singing’ to create a simultaneous acoustic cognitive mental space (event space); a distinct form, such as ‘gazing up’, is used to redirect attentional focus upward, schematically constructing a mental viewpoint toward his wife (viewpoint space). This may indicate that there is no emotional connection between Gabriel and his wife. Such a viewpoint space evokes the impression that there is a psychological estrangement between them. While the use of ‘catch’ marks the mental act of perceiving something non-physical, such a non-physical object creates a constrained mental space of perceptual engagement. To extend beyond the physical space, the second verb class constitutes intentional and reflective mental spaces, such as ‘trying’; acting as an internal mental space allows the reader to experience how the protagonist perceives the voice. ‘Trying’ indicates incomplete actions, where music and understanding his wife are not fully grasped yet; and ‘asked’ in ‘He [Gabriel] asked himself’ signals a shift from the external, physically accessible world into the character’s inner mental world, generating, for readers, self-referential mental space for understanding how Gabriel perceives his wife. The third group of verbs includes hypothetical and imaginative spaces, like ‘would call’ and ‘would paint’. These verbs build mental spaces of imaginative conceptualization and possible realities,

while the hypothetical verb ‘were’ in ‘If he were a painter’ or in ‘as if she were a symbol,’ is a ‘subjunctive mood’. The phrase ‘as if’ acts as a trigger with a powerful effect, and the verb ‘were’ metaphorically confirms it. The subjunctive verb creates hypothetical spaces through which the reader constructs hypothetical or counterfactual possible worlds, i.e., what is narrated is not true in reality. Narratively, the use of ‘were’ constructs a mental space in which the man no longer holds the position of his wife; she is conceived no longer as an artistic object. From a more interpretive analytical stance, Gabriel is incapable of forming a meaningful connection with his wife in the domain of actual existence; he is only capable of perceiving her as an imaginatively constructed artistic representation.

From a stylistic perspective, the stylistic choice of verbs, as space builders, triggers layers of mental spaces through which the extent to which stylistics intersects with the processes of cognitive space-building can be encoded. Stylistically, the use of verbs functions in shifting perspectives, in which the reader moves between perceptual apprehension, cognitive reflection, and creative imagination. Also, the stylistic characteristics of these verbs foreground the narrator’s focalizing stance (narrative voice), as the triggered mental spaces show how the protagonist interprets and cognitively reconfigures the visual and auditory stimuli that he becomes aware of. The visual stylistic description gives rise to mental spaces of viewpoint. Gabriel stands quietly in the hall; his sensory awareness is fully active, constructing a framed image of her ‘if he were a painter’, gazing at her, observing how light reflects on her hair, imagining the ‘dark panel of her skirt’. All these descriptions lead to an aesthetic world that merges the boundary between observation and interpretation. The shift in stylistic construction allows him to reshape his wife from a human figure in the scene into an aesthetic construct within the cognitive-narrative space. Furthermore, the prominent stylistic markers of such verbs create complexity (interpretive opacity), whereby the propositional contents conveyed hypothetically or counterfactually construct a non-existent world that is being cognitively constructed. Not only is the verb that configures complexity one of the stylistic features, but also the shift in tenses from past ‘he asked’ to present ‘what is a woman’ further reinforces this. Although the process of narration is in the past, the stylistic shift of tenses moves the readers directly into Gabriel’s consciousness in cases where his thoughts are portrayed as live and immediate (free indirect discourse). Essentially, the stylistic choice of ‘asked’ does not merely modify

the rhythmic structure; it breaks down the demarcating line between the character and the narrator. This conceptual analysis of the intersection between stylistics and mental spaces is mentally constructed when a stylistically grounded selection of verbs reconfigures the reader's schematic understanding of the narrative. To conclude, the use of verbs is not merely used as an aesthetic element; rather, they constitute cognitive cues for constructing mental spaces. The power of the narrative makes the reader experience Joyce's style in its present cognitive or narrative state as nested layers of narrative spaces, all coherently integrated by the deliberate stylistic choice of tenses.

4.2 Connectives as Triggers for Mental Spaces

The narratological function of connectives, regardless of their syntactic function as temporal, adversative, conditional, attributive, or causal, contributes significantly to mental spaces by guiding construction through connecting one space to another (e.g. 'because') to create epistemic spaces for the speaker's reasoning processes, building new spaces (e.g. 'if') to establish hypothetical spaces, contrasting space (e.g. 'but') to restrict integration of inferences across mental spaces, organizing hierarchy (e.g. 'if... when') to structure embedded spaces.

4.2.1 'Even if'... 'Then' Connectives

The analysis now considers the role of connectives and their function as triggers for mental spaces, as well as their role in the intersection between stylistics and mental spaces. An excerpt from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*:

“Even if he admits it, he admits it as a fact of nature till then unrecognized by him. Faith does not, in the realist, spring from the miracle but the miracle from faith. If the realist once believes, then he is bound by his very realism to admit the miraculous also” (Dostoevsky, 2005, p. 20).

Within the framework of mental space analysis, the use of 'even if' and 'then' is not limited to connecting ideas logically; they act as deictic markers that guide cognitive stance through the process of construing meaning. The connective 'even if', as a powerful space builder, is realized as a hypothetical space builder that stimulates the reader to constitute an alternative configuration. Such a powerful space builder constructing a concessive mental space, hypothetically, is a non-assertive configuration (concessive conditional space) that has not yet come into existence. In this quote, one of the triggered mental spaces is the 'base space' in which, how things actually are. The universe is governed by fixed and unbreakable laws; and only the material world exists; therefore, miracles, as a concept that embedded in this base space, do not exist. Facts

are natural, and unrecognized miracles remain beyond perception. A ‘realist’, a person who acknowledges only empirical reality, has a viewpoint within which the possibility of miracles is excluded. Dostoevsky’s use of ‘even if’ forces the reader (the realist) to open a new perspective in which miraculous events take place. For the realist’s worldview, what is construed as normal ranks at the highest point of the scale; things with the possibility to happen are in the mid-range of the scale, while miracles are at the lowest level. This categorization of miracles is grounded in Dostoevsky’s use of ‘even’, which marks the point of maximum cognitive difficulty his mind can manage. The ‘even’ space, in the reader’s consideration, departs from his reality. Stylistically, connectives construct meaning beyond simple grammatical structure; they shape the development of thought and strengthen the interpretive persuasiveness of the discourse.

Taking the analysis further, the use of ‘then’ in ‘till then unrecognized by him’, as a deictic expression, particularly a temporal deictic (space builder), refers back to a particular point in time within that hypothetical world and indicates the exact moment before he admitted the miracle. The space builder (then) is a transition that denotes a shift between two mental spaces: one is the ‘base space’ in which miracles fall outside the realist’s belief, and another is a ‘belief space’ in which the realist begins to accept the miracle. Stylistically, the linguistic choice of ‘then’ as a connective connects two mental spaces where it mediates the acknowledgement of the miracle ‘he admits...’ to the contrast with the earlier condition ‘till then unrecognized...’ (before and after then).

Moving beyond this point, the second use of ‘if’ in ‘If the realist once believes’, as a connector, introduces a condition in which a situation must occur before subsequent events. Dostoevsky does not confirm that the realist affirms within their interpretive schema that the miracles are natural facts, but he opens a hypothetical perspective in which he believes that miracles could be considered observable truths. This hypothetical mental belief space arises if the realist integrates faith into his worldview; a necessary consequence must be realized. In line with this, the second part of the conditional statement is the use of ‘then’ as a consequence connective in which the realist has to accept the miracles. If the realist shifts from skepticism to belief, his commitment to realism drives him to accept the miraculous as real, exceeding its characterization as ‘unrecognized nature’. The expression ‘if...then ...’ denotes the act of believing (the condition) which leads to the acceptance of miracles (the result). The

miracles that have been internalized as acceptable are an unavoidable result of the first part, which follows the ‘if-condition’. Stylistically, the connectives function as more than simple clause connectors; they direct the progression of thought across mental spaces and enhance the persuasive power of the argument. To conclude, Dostoevsky depends on a precisely logical sequence of discourse connectives to map a rational path from rejection to acceptance (skepticism → belief). In other words, faith is not derived from miraculous phenomena; it constitutes the foundational ground from which miracles arise.

4.2.2 ‘Because’ Domains

In her book entitled, *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Rhetorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure*, Eve Sweetser (1990) argues that the range of semantic interpretations of linguistic forms can be systematically interpreted through different cognitive models. She points out that certain linguistic structures can be understood in more than one domain such as ‘content’ domain, ‘epistemic’ domain, or ‘speech act’ domain. According to this categorization, it is possible for researchers to construe that ‘domains’ function as mental spaces on the grounds that domains constitute discrete mental partitions.

The formulation of causal worlds often relies on the causal connectives, among others. According to Fauconnier’s perspective, ‘because’, like other linguistic choices, is a space builder that can generate various mental spaces. The three applicable domains proposed by Sweetser can be conceptualized as mental spaces for ‘because’. To illustrate the multidimensional domains of ‘because’, as a space builder, illustrative narrative examples will be extracted from Ernest Hemingway (1952), *The Old Man and the Sea*.

4.2.2.1 The Content Domain

In the content domain, specifically from the perspective proposed by Sweetser (1990), ‘because’ demonstrates a cause-and-effect relationship (physical causality).

This perspective can be applied in narrative analysis. In Hemingway’s narrative:

“...there was a sudden deep of seven hundred fathoms where all sorts of fish congregated because of the swirl the current made against the steep walls of the floor of the ocean” (1952, p. 28).

The cause ‘swirl the current’ leads to ‘fish congregated.’ The narrator does not encode logical reasoning, nor a speech act; he communicates a real-world force within the story world (natural observation). The wording of ‘because’, as a deliberate stylistic

technique, portrays the physical phenomena of the ocean. Here, the connective is used neither to indicate a conclusion (epistemic domain), nor to make a statement, give a command, or ask a question (speech act domain). Mental spaces begin with a geographical entity, ‘deep of seven hundred fathoms’, triggering a base space of a physical location. Another space is embedded, where ‘deep’ indicates space depth. This space of depth does not imply vagueness; rather, it is more concrete, measured, and specified (700 fathoms). The interpretive schema frames the depth as dangerously steep, like a cliff, stimulating in mental representation that the surrounding water is not shallow. Because the number attached to it is not chosen randomly, not impressionistic, not approximate, but fixed, the mental space that is constructed is more authentic and reliable. Such verified knowledge represents an epistemic solidity rather than a vague sense. In sum, space 1 is the bottom of the ocean, the depth measurement, and the spatial grouping of fish, while space 2, introduced by a causal connective, gives the reason behind space 1, constructing nested cause-and-effect mental spaces that make it possible for readers to reconstruct the event and its causal process.

The second part of the base space is the expression ‘all sorts of fish’ which foregrounds the image toward an agentive and living understanding. The fish act as agentive and active participants within narrative discourse, where they are not bound to a specific place and react to environmental stimuli. The reader’s mind is cognitively rich in the space in which the narrator begins with a single species (fish) within one area; then he moves to tell the reader that there are all kinds of fish there, leaving the reader to imagine all the kinds (open-ended mental spaces). Avoiding naming any species activates the reader’s mind to imagine. Through the process of narration, particularly in effective narration, the writer should not tell the reader everything; the reader must cognitively infer, extend concepts, and imagine what is missing to become more cognitively capable of holding and manipulating multiple potential possibilities (spaces to be filled).

The third part of the base space is that the narrative expression ‘congregated’ is the central relational event. The centrality of the event lies in structuring the narrative around a specific action in a context where the fish neither swim, nor eat. They do nothing more than congregate, since congregating carries the complete semantic load of the action in the sentence. Removing ‘congregated’, would result in no event

realized. It is the focal point of the mental space; without it, mental space does not have its intrinsic structure and configuration.

Stylistically, the diction of the adjective ‘sudden’, in addition to its conveying a sense of unexpectedness, encodes temporal perception within a spatial dimension. A ‘deep’ is a physical reality of place that does not have an implication of time. The use of ‘sudden’, as a temporal linguistic choice, carries a powerful mental shift by making the reader construct a cognitive representation of the geographical element as if experiencing it in the present moment (fictive motion). A further stylistic lens, with particular reference to the observer’s experiential viewpoint (implicit observer), the choice of ‘sudden’ encodes internal focalization (point of view), where the ocean is humanized by processing it through human perception. Parallel with the narrative stylistic perspectives, the open and inclusive phrase, which is encoded by the complex quantifier ‘all sorts of’, is used as a scalar hedging device in which ‘all’ conveys a sense of comprehensiveness. The scalar hedging ranges from one fish to all sorts of fish. It signals a cognitive sense of unlimited availability. Also, in relation to stylistic narrative construction, the cognitive interpretation of the past tense ‘congregated’ indicates that the narrator is neither talking about progressiveness, nor talking about present truth. The narrator, through the use of the past tense, knows knowledge and presents it as fact. That is, the process of congregating is presented as a verified and completed fact within a fictional domain.

4.2.2.2 The Epistemic Domain

In the epistemic domain, specifically as conceptualized in Sweetser (1990), ‘because’ is not used for a cause-and-effect relationship (physical causality). i.e., it does not connect one event to another in the mental space. It is used to link a piece of evidence with a mental inference.

In the narrative discourse of Hemingway:

“...he was happy to see so much plankton because it meant fish” (p. 35).

The linguistic choice of ‘because’ does not describe a sequence of physical causes (cause-and-effect relationship), since ‘plankton’ does not encode a literal causal relation for the existence of fish. The use of ‘because’, as an epistemic domain, frames the reader’s cognitive processing for inferential interpretation; that is, it provides the inferential warrant for the speaker’s conclusion. Hemingway guides the reader’s understanding by using the existence of plankton as an evidential source on the basis

of which fish are cognitively inferred, i.e., maps the thinking that led the character to the state he is in (being 'happy'). That is, interpreted logically: there are fish because there is plankton, considering plankton as a trigger for cognitive conclusions regarding fish.

In Fauconnier's theory, 'because', as a space builder, acts as a linguistic choice that builds two distinct mental spaces. First, it formulates the premise space within the reader's inferential schema (plankton are observed). Second, it configures the conclusion space (fish are no longer allowed to remain hidden). It cannot be re-expressed without semantic alteration that the existence of fish is causally dependent on plankton. The fish are construed as not causally dependent. The narrative representation of premise space and the conclusion space obliges the reader to construct an inferential bridge between them by using the connector.

Considering the stylistic features, Hemingway's linguistic expression, '...he was happy ... fish', is encoded in free indirect thought (FIT). In the free indirect thought, as a powerful stylistic mode, the boundary between the style of narration (the narrator's voice) and a character's internal thoughts (character's consciousness) entirely loses its structural integrity. In mental spaces, the use of FIT functions as a linguistic move that brings into view a character's consciousness (inner perspective). Taking this into account, FIT enables the reader to enter the character's cognitive frame to perceive the character's mental spaces regarding what he knows, what he has experienced, and what he has concluded without the text overtly marking it as belonging to him. Extending this, the diction of 'meant' carries stylistic salience. It reinforces the connective element between the initial space (premise) and the space where thought comes to ground (conclusion). Furthermore, foregrounding, as a stylistic technique of constructing certain linguistic choices to be salient, is embedded in the use of 'because'. Its middle position, is before the process of observation and after it, is the process of conclusion, connecting the physical world (plankton) with the invisible conclusion (fish whose existence is inferred rather than directly seen). Bringing all of this to a point, the writer's stylistic choices are not just textual aesthetic stances; rather, they condense mental spaces, implicitly open new viewpoint domains, and determine what the mind finds significant.

4.2.2.3 The Speech Act Domain

As Sweetser (1990) frames it, the speech act domain is the use of connectives that represent the act of speaking with respect to its being identified as the highest degree of sociality among the other two domains. Connectives, such as ‘because’, neither encode a connection between two factual elements (natural causation) nor relate two reasoning threads to each other (direct evidence with inferred meaning). It is the act of telling, the grounds or the purposes behind what you are saying, i.e., he/she is telling something because”.

To put the term in Hemingway’s fictional world:

“Then get your hand in order because there still is more to come.” (p. 110)

The narrative event occurs during World War I, in which Passini was injured in the hand. His friend, Frederic, is asking him to care for his hand because the war is not over. The use of ‘because’, as a connective, does not generate factual mental space nor give rise to mental inferences. What follows ‘because’ is the justification for the act of speaking (narrating). The speech act domain begins with the command ‘get your hand in order’. This command is an answer to an unstated question the reader might mentally construct, for example, asking: what is the purpose of telling me (as a reader) this? The second part that is syntactically subsequent to ‘because’, ‘there still is more to come’, acts as the justification for stating the speech act of commanding; in other words, through the connective force of ‘because’, the process of narrative interpretation is: giving an order (communicative act) and then justification for the narrator’s command (pragmatic motivation).

Through the frame of mental space, ‘because’ is a space builder that takes the constituents occurring before it and embeds them inside a motivational domain (command space), and then builds a second space that clarifies the underlying purpose for what happened in the first (the justification space). The connective acts as a bridge that connects the intentional communicative act of commanding with the pragmatic driving force (the purpose behind the action).

Stylistically, the short-narrated sentence ‘Then get your hand . . . more to come’ imposes more cognitive load (cognitive effect of density) on the reader’s cognitive engagement, where he must construct three mental spaces concerning suffering that has already occurred, the command at the time of narration, and an anticipated cognitively imagined challenge for the character. What is more, the linguistic choice of ‘still’ adds a temporal frame of reference to the domain of justification, taking into account that

there is a connection that extends from the past, which has already been a challenge. It activates prior mental spaces and implicitly grounds the time marker in the narrative, which constructs the narrative as a layered and interconnected structure. Extending narrative stylistic choices, ‘more’ functions as a marker that indicates the mental space of challenge does not yet constitute the only base space (past space); however, further spaces of difficulty will be outside its domain, i.e., ‘more to come’ (future space). To place the final stylistic thought, even the use of the deictic expression ‘your’ encodes mental spaces of ownership and personal responsibility. Such spaces draw attention to physical presence through which the reader perceives that narrative is not only limited to abstract things but also framed in terms of bodily actions.

4.3 Space Builder as Ideological Configuration

Space builders, not reducible to merely cognitive processes, determine which dimensions of reality are made prominent and which are made opaque. They, by foregrounding certain assumptions, i.e., in particular interpretive contexts, not merely divide narrative discourse into neutral cognitive spaces; rather, they act as mediums for communicating divergent ideological stances.

To trace the ideological function of the space builders, an illustrative excerpt from Orwell’s narrative is selected:

“War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength” (Orwell, 2012, p. 4).

The copula ‘is’, in one of its linguistic functions, is equative use, which frames the argument that the descriptive elements belong to the same entity or the same category (Higgins, 2015). In Orwell’s excerpt, the copula in each semantic unit serves as a space builder; it is not a predicative; rather, it is equative in the sense that it constructs a space of equivalence. The mental space of ‘war’ is conceptually blended with that of ‘peace’; ‘freedom’ with ‘slavery’; and ‘ignorance’ with ‘strength’. The first narrative claim, ‘war is peace’, marks the opening cognitive frame of two mental spaces that are logically incompatible at the analytical level. The incompatibility can be realized in ‘war’, which implies struggle, loss of life, destruction, and the collapse of social bonds, while ‘peace’ indicates a place where nothing threatens. Here, the role of the copula merges the two unharmonious mental spaces into a single ideological space in which they are treated as equivalent. Extending the analysis further, particularly from an ideological perspective, the embedded ideology is not to tell the truth, but rather to control people by shaping their beliefs (ideological thinking). It structures mental

representation to privilege a specific ideological stance, which is not a matter of individual judgment; instead, it is framed cognitively as beyond dispute. This is specifically the process by which they direct how beliefs are formed. Those who intend to convince people of ‘war’ do not directly use violence, but they just lay new tracks for thinking.

The second ideological space can be viewed as a construction of political ideology. By using the equative ‘is’ as a space builder, this ideological claim is conceptually merged with the mental space of slavery. This space-building mechanism constitutes two ideological dimensions. The first dimension devalues the accepted norm of ‘freedom’ by situating it in relation to its perceptible counterpart. The second ideological scope encodes ‘slavery’ as ideologically acceptable. In this context, the space builder, according to Antonio Gramsci (1971), functions as a discursive device of hegemonically enforced norms.

Turning to the third proposed ideology, it can be cognitively framed through the use of the equative ‘is’, as it triggers the mental space of deficiency of knowledge (ignorance) and merges it with the mental space of dominance (strength). The purpose behind convincing people that not seeking knowledge (ignorance) is conceptually similar to ‘strength’ to keep people under control. The proposed ideology tells society that it is not necessary to have knowledge, i.e., it makes them perceive knowledge gaps as a semiotic marker of social or cultural identity.

Stylistically, the most stylistically salient feature is a paradox. Through the copula ‘is’, each utterance merges two meanings that stand in semantic contrast. The paradox can be realized in two parallel mental spaces. The first is the mental space, specifically the base space, constructed from the reader’s cognitive schema grounded in real-world experience, in which war cannot be equated with peace; freedom is the very denial of slavery; and ignorance is fundamentally incompatible with strength. The second mental space is the party's ideological world, where these contradictory meanings are encoded as unquestionable claims (the ‘doublethink’ technique in Orwell’s words). Extending the stylistic features further, the use of ‘is’, as a copula, legislates the reader’s cognition; i.e., it functions as a stylistic choice that acts as a law that closes the boundaries (deontic space builders). There are no qualifiers, hedging or modal markers (e.g., ‘seem’, ‘it could be argued that’, ‘perhaps’, ‘this may suggest that’, etc.). Here, the copula restricts the reader’s awareness that he must accept A is

equal to *B*. In other words, there is no space for the mind to think, no space to disagree, no space for deliberate argumentative debate, and so on (declarative force). Another stylistic feature that contributes to creating mental spaces is the syntactic repetition (parallelism). The three utterances have the same syntactic structure (Noun + Copula + Noun). Such types of rhythmical patterns construct a unified ideological space. What is more, there are no conjunctions (Asyndeton), just juxtaposed utterances without connecting markers to build unquestioned ideological authority and to leave no room for thinking.

5. conclusion

This study has confirmed that the intersection between stylistics and Fauconnier's Mental Space Theory offers a comprehensive framework that fosters theoretical insights and systematic cognitive analysis for investigating narrative meaning. By exploring how stylistic choices function as triggers for the inferential processing of space builders across multiple narrative contexts in works ranging from Joyce to Orwell, the stylistic analysis has demonstrated that language use is not reducible to aesthetic construction. Stylistics extends beyond its familiar or conventional role of making sense of literary configurations to take shape as a field methodologically adequate to account for how such linguistic structures, such as particular verbs, connectives, and copular constructions, trigger different mental spaces. These stylistic features not only activate mental spaces, but they also guide dynamic cognitive construction of meaning, frame and control viewpoint, and shape the meaning through interpretation. Regarding viewpoint, the analysis of verbs, as space builders, confirmed that narrative verb classes, such as perceptual, cognitive, and hypothetical, are not confined to descriptive representations of actions; they regulate viewpoint, generate nested mental spaces, and direct attentional focus. The analysis of connectives, whether they are in content, epistemic, or speech act domains, affirmed that they are not merely logical connectives but referential deictic markers that influence and guide inferential interpretation within the reader's interpretive faculties. Moreover, the extended analysis demonstrated that the examination of certain space builders reveals different ideological interpretations, confirming that linguistic choices are not always neutral but encode ideological implications. To bring these points together, the study confirmed that meaning in narrative is neither reducible to the text alone nor entirely the product

of the reader's interpretive activity; it is a product of the intersection between textual analysis and cognitive processing.

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المستخلص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة العلاقة بين الأسلوبية والفضاءات الذهنية، مما تُعيد بناء تفاعل القارئ التحليلي مع النص، بدءًا من التحليل الجمالي البنوي وصولًا إلى تفسير المعنى من خلال العمليات المعرفية. وعليه، فإن الهدف الرئيسي لهذه الدراسة هو بحث التقارب بين الأبعاد النظرية والتحليلية لنظرية الفضاءات الذهنية والأسلوبية، مع هيكلية التحليل للإجابة على سؤال البحث التالي: كيف تعمل الخيارات اللغوية التي تُشكل مُنشآت الفضاء، على تحفيز الفضاءات الذهنية للقراء في الخطاب الأدبي؟ تفترض الدراسة أن بعض الخيارات الأسلوبية لا تقتصر على كونها علامات جمالية ضمن البنية النصية، بل تتعداها إلى كونها مُنشآت للفضاء، مما يُمكن القراء من إدارة العبء المعرفي، وبناء فضاءات ذهنية مفاهيمية، وتفسير طبقات المعنى السردية بما يتجاوز البنية الشكلية. منهجياً، تتبنى الدراسة نهجاً نظرياً تحليلياً، مستندةً إلى علم الأسلوب ونظرية الفضاء الذهني لفوكونيه. عملياً، تختار الدراسة تحليل شواهد نصية من أعمال أدبية رائدة لغرض استكشاف الأدوار المهمة للخيارات اللغوية ضمن هذه سياقات التخصصات المتداخلة. تكشف النتائج أن دمج الأسلوبية مع نظرية الفضاء الذهني (إطار متعدد التخصصات) يُحسن فهم القارئ لكيفية خلق الاختيارات اللغوية للفضاءات الذهنية المفاهيمية وتوصيل المعنى من خلال الربط بين التحليل النصي والتفسير المعرفي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية الفضاء الذهني، التفكير غير المباشر الحر، المجال المعرفي، الفضاء الإيديولوجي، الفضاء الافتراضي