



The Convergence of Mental Spaces and the Personification of Time, Tenacity and Patience in the Novel by Alexander Zalan “The Last Row”

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Abstract

The fact that society exists, evolves and subsequently modifies the means of interaction, cannot be denied. It is solely possible due to people’s abilities to enact a mutual link on myriad levels, i.e., social, cultural and cognitive. Nevertheless, there are certain innately entrenched constituents that shape our perception, interpretation and assessment. The dominant concept of my PhD thesis (Cognitive Discourse: Cultural Cognitive Models in the Use of Language) is mental spaces and their potential aptitudes, i.e., analogy mapping, identity connection, mental space framing, the convergence of mental spaces and the moulding or alteration of initial perception of various notions. It must also be noted that although language varies in its surface peculiarities in numerous cultures, this variety is underpinned by universal psychological mechanisms that generate further cultural cognition (Chomsky, 1975; Pinker, 1994). The theory considered, it is probable to draw certain parallels within the framework of the novel “The Last Row” (2021) by attributing mental spaces to a pervading realm of a fantasy novel, delineating core qualities of the main characters and depicting their peculiar features by converging the author’s subjectivity, objective implicatures and virtual implications, thus displaying the applicability of mental spaces not only within the framework of cognitive linguistics or psycholinguistics, but also bringing it further to other academic spheres. The core impetus of this article underlies the scope of analysis that can be attributed even to the most inconspicuous elements of any work, fracturing implications and implicatures and delineating the difference between instant assessments and hypothesis, and ultimate results, implying wholly accumulated elements.

Keywords: Mental Spaces, Convergence of Mental Spaces, Identity Connection, Cognition, Mental Space Framing

It goes without saying that exclusively because of holistic and reciprocal blending of socio-cultural and cognitive variables, we exist, interact and evolve as conscious entities. Nevertheless, there are unfathomable arrays of constituent elements that are either inconspicuously integrated or forcefully imposed on us. Such abstract, inanimate and omnipresent notions as time, death, luck, etc., have haunted the minds of millions from the dawn of times. In this regard, the impetuous concept of anthropomorphic depictions has

ignited uncountable literary works, saturating them with flamboyant personifications and drastically deviant portrayals of these ambivalent manifestations. One of the focuses of my PhD thesis (*Cognitive Discourse: Cultural Cognitive Models in the Use of Language*) is mental spaces and their potential aptitudes, i.e., analogy mapping, identity connection, mental space framing, the convergence of mental spaces and the moulding or alteration of initial perception of various notion.

In the long run, the gathered theory on the applicability of mental spaces will demonstrate how it is probable to draw certain parallels within the framework of a novel *The Last Row* (2021) by attributing mental spaces to a pervading realm of a fantasy novel, delineating core qualities of the main characters and depicting their peculiar features by converging the author's subjectivity, objective implicatures and virtual implications, thus displaying the applicability of mental spaces not only within the framework of cognitive linguistics or psycholinguistics, but also bringing it further to other academic spheres. It will also be contemplated on how exactly it is feasible to draw certain conclusions while meticulously fracturing mental space framing by drawing more subjective or socially imposed variables and commonly endorsed images.

The domain of mental spaces may serve as a ground zero for a cognitive outburst and thorough analysis of any literary work, script, play, etc., since it entails myriad arrays of implicit and explicit aspects, which not only encompass one's academic subjective integrity but also imply various historical and socio-cultural variables.

Taking into consideration the fact that I am both the author of the book and the author of the thesis, the following elaboration may broaden horizons or consolidate the theoretical framework and literary integrity of such questions as what exactly the author meant by introducing peculiar features or depicting a certain character, subsequently avoiding ambiguity and ambivalence of the context.

Mental spaces are manifested as partial assemblies that are mentally erected during our cognition processes and speech, thus promoting our local understanding and action (Fauconnier, 1985).¹ These fluctuating spaces are comprised of frames and cognitive models. Fauconnier argues that mental spaces are linked to long-term schematic knowledge, e. g., going up or down the street on the sidewalk, or to long-term specific knowledge, which entails less currently substantial notions, i.e., memories, recollections and reminiscences.

The long-term schematic knowledge entails: people, events that are imprinted in one's memory and myriad details. This mental space can be activated in a variety of ways and for multiple purposes. Any mental space, despite its validity can be hypothetically amended within one's mind. In other words, one may contemplate on what could have taken place if they had not attended a party or had not gone to that concert, consequently

¹ Fauconnier, G.: Mental Spaces, 1985

theorizing counterfactual occasions and feasible outcomes. Therefore, any mental space can be distorted to the innumerable arrays of possibilities.

According to the above-presented information, it can be stated that mental spaces are constructed and modified, depending on a situation. Each mental space might have numerous arrays of alterations. Fauconnier emphasizes the following:

- identity mapping;
- analogy mapping.

The scholar has hypothesized that at the neural level, mental spaces are nothing but sets of activated neural assemblies and the link between the constituent elements conforms to coactivation-bindings. (ibid.) What concerns this particular view, it can be claimed that mental spaces operate in working, short-term memory, but they are partly comprised of entrenched structures that are found in the long-term memory.

It is a general peculiarity of mental space configurations that denotes connections by tying the constituent elements across spaces with no implication that these elements share the same distinguishing features or properties. Although, innate cognitive models and cognitive structures guide us towards meticulously sorted pieces of information within the given environment, elaborating a preliminary portrayal of potentially influential aspects of cognition and subsequent interpretation. As Howard Gardner (1983) has argued, modules fall into lengthy developmental constructions and therefore are open to a potentially robust impact from social and cultural factors

In order to demonstrate differences between such ubiquitous spaces, I have come up with two graphic representations. The latter will shed light on some pervasive and more substantial differences within one mental space, which implies a specific period in time, accumulation of memory, assumptions, specific locations and interrelations within the space, which are subsequently framed.

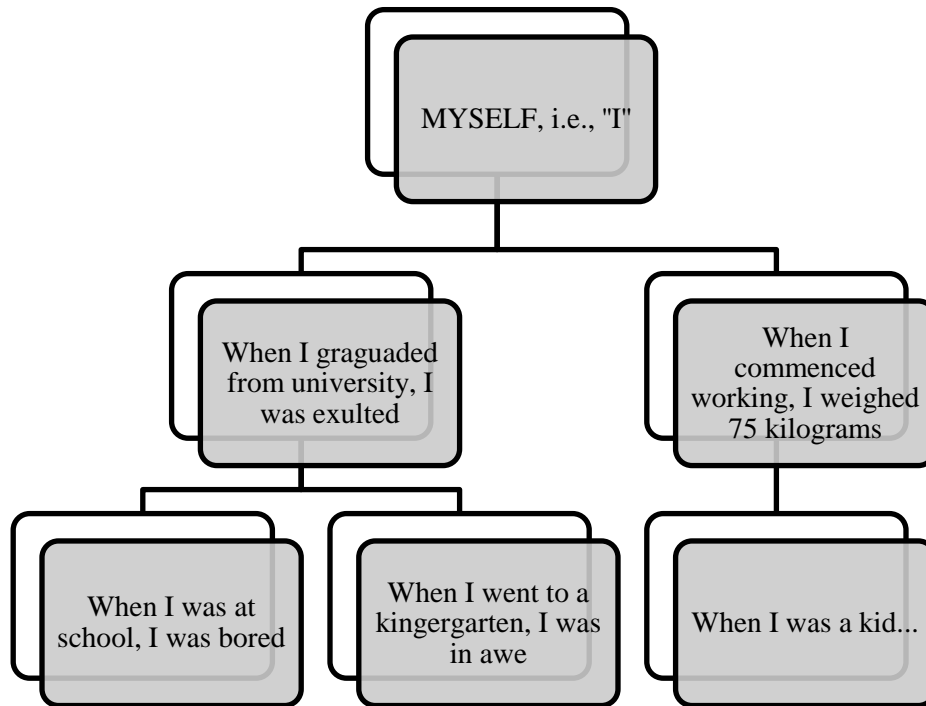


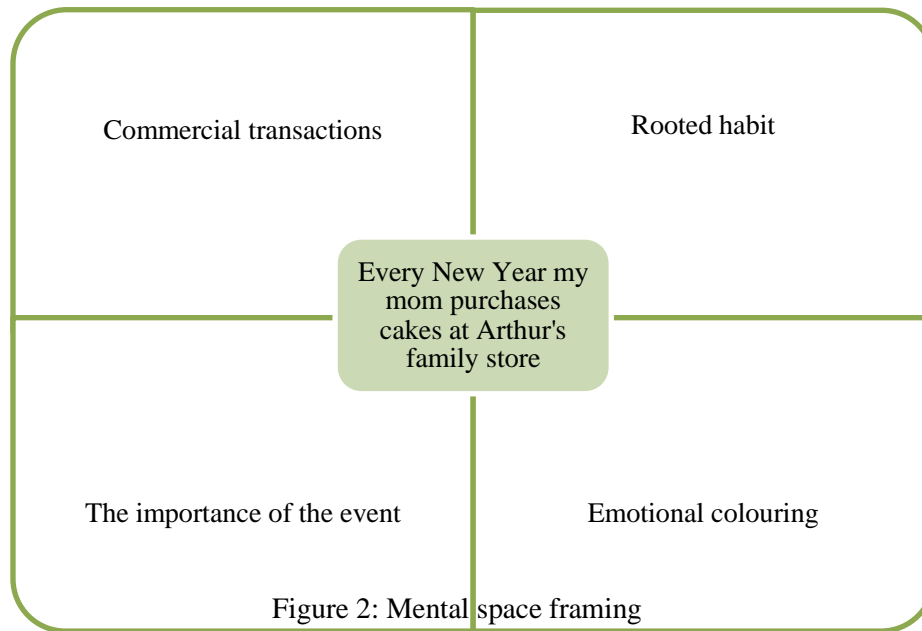
Figure 1: Identity connection

In accordance with the above-displayed figure, it is practicable to assume that, when people build up a cognitive chain of events, emotions, etc., they, undeniably, prompt to establish an identity connector between “themselves” in the past and a contemporary, augmented version of “themselves” at the current time.

People use the word idea to attribute and encompass absolutely any content of the mind, involving conceptions of how things are or should be. These networks of fluctuating ideas are frequently referred to as folk theories or mental models (Gentner & Stevens, 1983). Such models comprise individual’s explanations of how things operate and take place, eventually resulting in judgements and decisions that impact an individual’s demeanour.

What concerns the framing of mental spaces, all constituent elements are to be organized as a package of already known data. When everything in the chain is meticulously aligned and all the elements are inert, it is characterized as a frame (ibid.).

The figure below demonstrates more location-specific framing, which cannot be altered or distorted due to certain constituent elements. In this scenario, it is possible to consider a long-entrenched habit and its established bounds.



Mental spaces, i.e., mental domains are constructed out of the array of more vivid and less implicit aspects, i.e., habits, preferences, etc., which are highly dependent on the environment of the event that is subsequently framed, as shown in the figure above. In order to thoroughly analyse the process of framing, let us consider “my mother purchases”. In this particular frame there is a set of conceptual domains, i.e., the concept of eating, drinking, buying and selling at public places. A separate mental space can be built up out of knowledge of several individual domains. The very concept of someone’s mother making a purchase annually can be complemented by adding other frames, thus expanding the scope of the domain. For instance, it is possible to add other people or public entertainment, taking into consideration a specific time of the year, or adherence to an annual routine. However, there is another approach to enacting mental spaces, e.g., immediate experience or response. In other words, if someone sees my mom purchasing cake at Arthur’s, their mental space is generated this very instant, i.e., someone’s mom is purchasing cakes. This particular example of an immediate experience is an involuntary invitation to blend one’s mental space with other domains. Certain mental spaces require more insight due to their resilient structure. The previously presented example, framing the morning or afternoon, is one’s specific place and time in mutual mental spaces at Arthur’s, which cannot be simply integrated into someone’s mental space due to the lack of knowledge of the context.

While unfolding a full discourse, an array of mental spaces is typically set up with reciprocal connections and abrupt shifts of standpoints of concentration from one space to

another. As it has been mentioned before, mental spaces are built up, with the probability of future alterations, in working memory. Nevertheless, a mental space can also become embedded in the long-term memory. For example, it is possible to activate a rarely used mental space in one's memory. The latter might occur because of insufficient usage of a particular mental frame that evokes a certain space. There are some inviolable mental spaces that may be generated instantly, e. g., the solar system or the Eiffel Tower. Such mental spaces intersect and overlap, evoking a range of possible variations, references or manifestations when being activated. Fauconnier states that every mental space may have its own scales, image-schemas, crucial relations or force-dynamic patterns. (ibid.)

Moreover, Fauconnier emphasizes such vital aspect as the *access principle*. It is regarded as an indispensable constituent element of a language, aligning with cognitive constructions and conceptual ties. This particular principle implies that an expression that names or depicts an element within one mental space can be used as a keyhole to get the access to another counterpart of that element that dwells in another mental space.

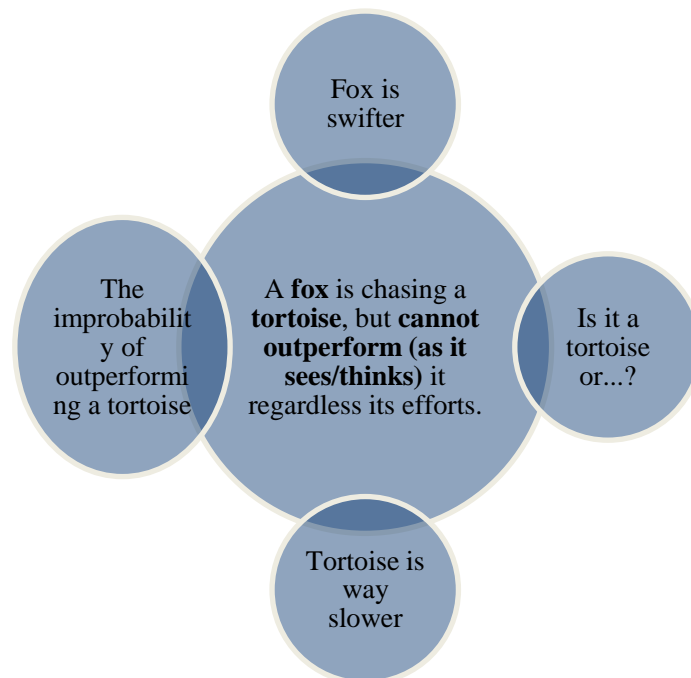


Figure 3: Convergent mental spaces

Let us consider the above-displayed sentence as an example of overlapping mental spaces. A preliminary vivid background involves a vicious predator and an animal. These two are

the core constituent elements of the first mental space, therefore depicting a cognitive construction compatible with the following discourse:

- A fox is chasing a tortoise.

At this instant it is attainable to delineate two elements in action. This is the manifestation of the first frame, which is yet unaltered. Nevertheless, this single frame must be blended with another one in order to proceed to further expansion of domains. Background information tells us that these two elements are related to the animal kingdom. Another part of the sentence sheds light on their natural relationships, i.e., a predator and its victim. The next part of the sentence introduces a visible incongruity in cognition, i.e., the fox, despite its natural physical advantages cannot outperform and catch the tortoise, no matter how hard it tries.

The space builder, which in this scenario is the fox, establishes a new space, where the improbability of outperforming the animal, which is undoubtedly slower, thrives. The time reference indicates the tense, thus blurring the outcome. It is the most appropriate time to introduce other counterpart elements that may be accessed thanks to the initially established mental spaces. Let us delve into such subtleties as a space builder's cognition and its volatility.

By adding a hypothetical conjunction of counterfactual conditions, it is probable to blend two mental spaces. If one assumes that the very fact of fox's inability to catch the tortoise underlies a subtle instability of fox's physical abilities, then the further reasoning morphs into a distorted concept. E.g., if the fox is incapable of catching the tortoise, it can be deduced that the tortoise is not the actual loitering prey. Furthermore, it can expand into another concept, i.e., the tortoise is actually a lynx or a cheetah. In this particular mental space, the fox is the one to save itself in order to stay alive. This abrupt change is putting the counterfactual space into the spotlight within the initially established, reflective mental space.

The above-presented figure is an example of how opaque and transparent mental spaces can be simultaneously. Initially, the opaque section implies the chase, which is not altered in any way, regardless the number of scenarios we add to it, while another, more fragile segment is a transparent part of the mental space, which endorses resilient, hypothetical conjunctions to take place in between these mental spaces.

Consequently, it leads to the conclusion that any mental space, be it arbitrary or inert, can be accessed via universal concept of a language or by expansion of one's mental space. Taking all the above-presented information into consideration, it is feasible to apply it to the analysis of "The Last Row", delineating merely afore-mentioned characters, i.e., Time, Tenacity and Patience. Nevertheless, the following structurization of characters and their gradual introduction require certain insights into the story itself.

"The Last Row" is a book that takes its readers on a journey in between two worlds. The first world is a rough copy of our planet, though there are no peculiar features or places

or countries mentioned. It can be grasped that its depiction resembles our Earth, but one will never find any similarities. The second world is a parallel realm, which bears certain resemblance to ours, but nevertheless deviates in terms of values, mythical characters, magic, etc. Eventually, due to certain inexplicable events, these realms intersect and exist reciprocally and simultaneously, i.e., these two realms and their peculiar features are present everywhere, all at once.

The main characters are Jacob, Yve and Sebastian, while their magical counterparts are Time, Tenacity and Patience. In addition, there is a boy and a girl, who are named A and A. These two characters have their own storyline, which is a mediator between the worlds and the impetus for characters to morph.

“The Last Row” is a whimsical journey to embark on in the real world. It is a blend of philosophy and fantasy, which contemplates the nature of ordinary evasive things. I have compiled the list of quotes that either touch upon an intricate, equivocal and abstract depiction of this or that character or quote characters directly in order to establish the specific realms within which mental spaces will be formed. It must be born in mind that the scope of information will certainly vary according to an individual, his or her preferences and the state of mind, creating either synchronic or diachronic aspects of their mental spaces.

Time:

- *My relationships with Time were always tense. I always lacked it, so I can state that Time was an irresponsible partner.*
- *Time is like an immortal beast that you cannot tame.*
- *Tenacity. Patience. Time. You guys didn't change at all.*
- *Even such sovereign matter as death is nothing without Time.*

Tenacity:

- *...Tenacity has always made the right remark at the right place in order to dissolve dizziness.*
- *Their friendly relationships were experiencing the most dreadful stall – the routine. Tenacity lost his patience. Patience demanded more time.*
- *But you have always been full of tenacity to keep up with the rushing times.*

Patience:

- *Patience's voice was so calm that one could fall asleep.*
- *I always associated Patience with hope.*

- *Patience is a dreamer.*²

Additionally, in order to shed light on the convergence of inanimate notions and alive characters, it is required to compile the list of the main characters of one of the chapters i.e., Sebastian, Yve and Jacob. In order to delineate their peculiar traits that are gradually imposed on them or one may say that these traits have been inconspicuously infiltrated into their consciousness.

To put it in a more cohesive and coherent statement, Time, Tenacity and Patience appear in the very beginning of the story, though Yve, Jacob and Sebastian have not been introduced yet. All whimsical and pervasive transmutations within the story are infiltrated in the chapters that vary in their narrative and simultaneously transpiring events. It turns out that despite the many intersecting occurrences, the characters of the story morph into these abstract notions, i.e., Time, Tenacity, Patience within a specific period of time, though their reciprocal existence in real world remains ambiguous and rather grotesque. Further on, I would like to display an intricate blend of identity connectors, mental space framing and the convergence of mental spaces:

- Retrospective literary analysis – a more meticulous look at certain fragments of the story and its constituent elements (setting, characters, events, etc.) in order to grasp the core concept;
- Synchronic literary analysis – chronological analysis of the story that implies such notions as assumptions, implications and implicatures.
- Initial draft – it may be interpreted as ‘rough notes’ and can be attributed to a preliminary moulding of the storyline and all applicable deviations, i.e., the first impression from the cover, etc.

Figure 4 below depicts the applicability of one of the approaches or a blend of all analytical methods presented above. It also demonstrates preliminary implications that could have been inferred while reading the book or having read the above-mentioned quotes, subsequently moulding one’s opinion solely from them.

Nevertheless, it must also be noted that taking into consideration that I am the author of the book, I will endeavour to objectify all assumptions in order to avoid certain misinterpretation of the plot or the characters, thus making the converging of mental spaces as visceral and primordial as possible, i.e., being the reader myself.

It must be noted that the most convenient approach to be chosen is the initial draft. By all means, it is the rifest approach to any analysis at the preliminary stage. Later, it can be complemented by a synchronic analysis, though it requires a specific set of already acquired information. Nevertheless, the above-depicted approaches are to be used in a

² Zalan A.: *The Last Row*, 2021

particular sequence, since when applied arbitrary, the analysis might turn into a mere pulp of thoughts that must be bound.

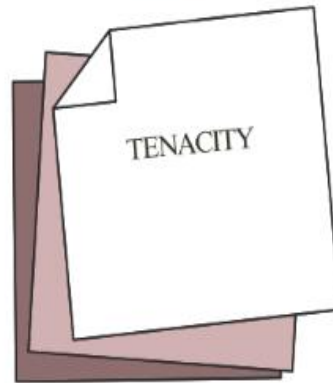
The alignment of the characters and their counterparts:

1. Yve → Time;
2. Tenacity → Jacob;
3. Patience → Sebastian.

Perpetuated notion that is considered as something unvanquishable. Time cannot be subjugated nor surpassed. We also lack time, thus are in a constant rush or hesitation. Time is something that taunts and daunts us on a daily basis. It is something that makes us experience fear of something irrevocable, dreadful and imminent.

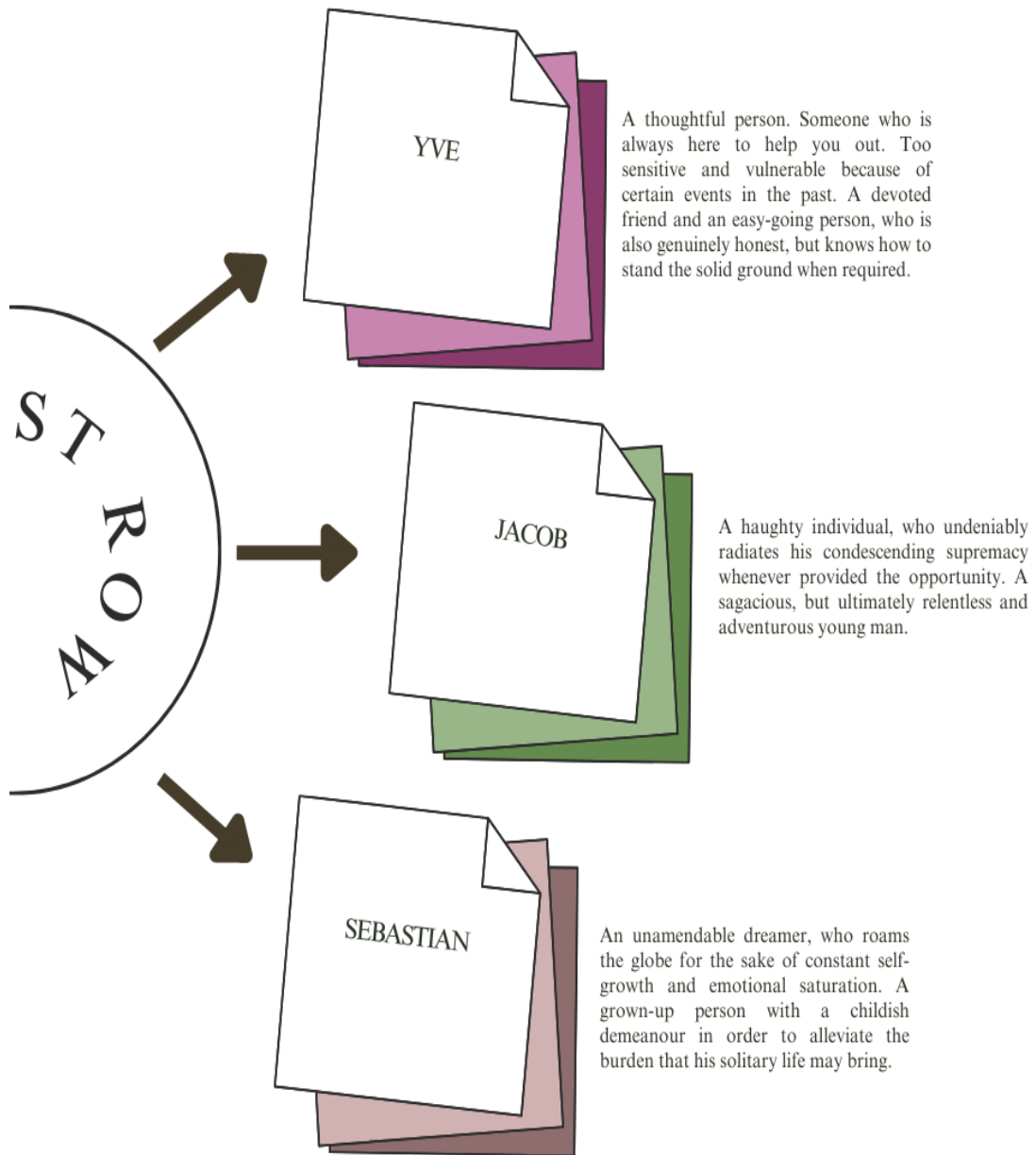


As a self-explanatory notion, tenacity is always tied to restlessness, obnoxiousity and fidgeting. However, it is an ambivalent notion, which may be depicted as a positive trait or as something frenzied, which might be labelled as obsession.



This notion is a virtue. Patience is always linked to something solitary, tranquil and serene. Prevailing majority of characters are attributed patience as their zealous trait, which serves as the most vigilant sentinel and the most destructive weapon, both figuratively and virtually.





As the book and the unveiled story are a holistic entity, it is required to proceed to the second stage, which implies mental space framing. Nevertheless, compared to identity connection, the mental space framing requires more thorough insights into the story, its plot and other equivocal, implicit and explicit elements.

Therefore, it means that a person cannot frame mental spaces without prior acquaintance with all the vital elements that are binding the frame, e.g., places, people, thoughts, events, specific time, season, etc.

It must be noted that, taking into consideration that I as the author have more discreet zest for the plot, I will therefore frame some intertwined occurrences in the book that echo on the subconscious level within the characters and gradually encompass them as they evolve.

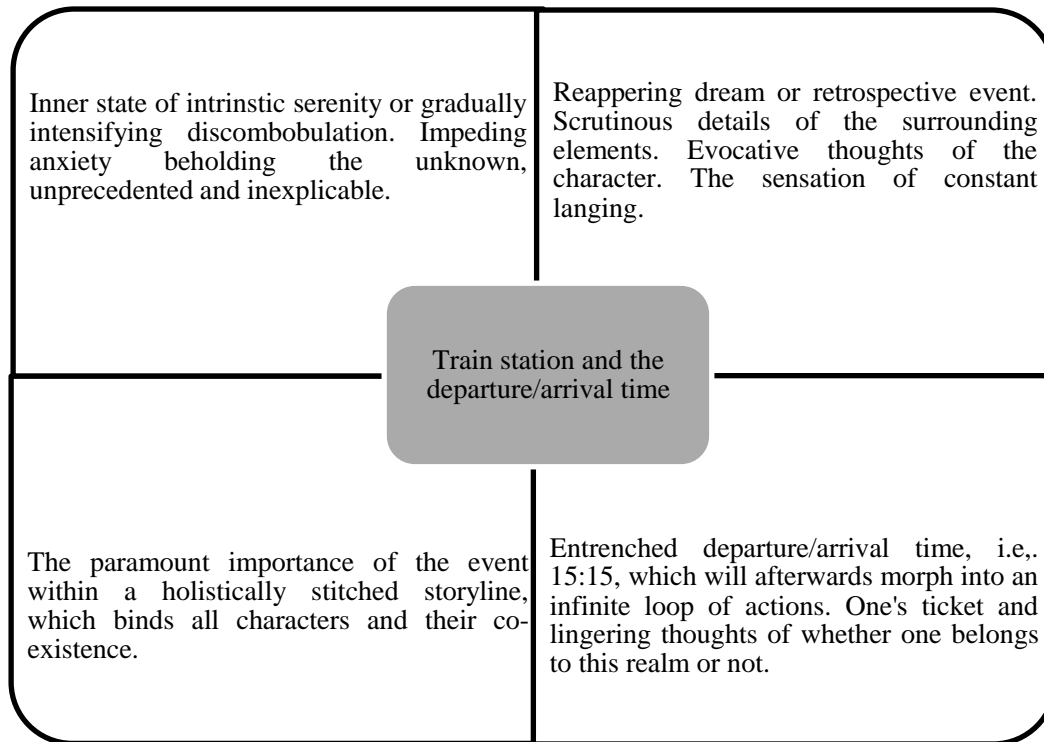


Figure 5: Mental space framing

Further on, I will provide two more mental frames that encompass other events and appearances in the book. Since all the characters are bound to co-exist, meet up and morph into less inanimate beings, these events can be reciprocally and chronologically swapped in order to assess possible deviations of the plot and the characters' actions. However, it must not be confused with total restructuring of the constituent elements as everything that takes places has a solid ground and cannot be physically replaced, which

will otherwise alter the integrity of the events, utterances, intersecting realms, etc.

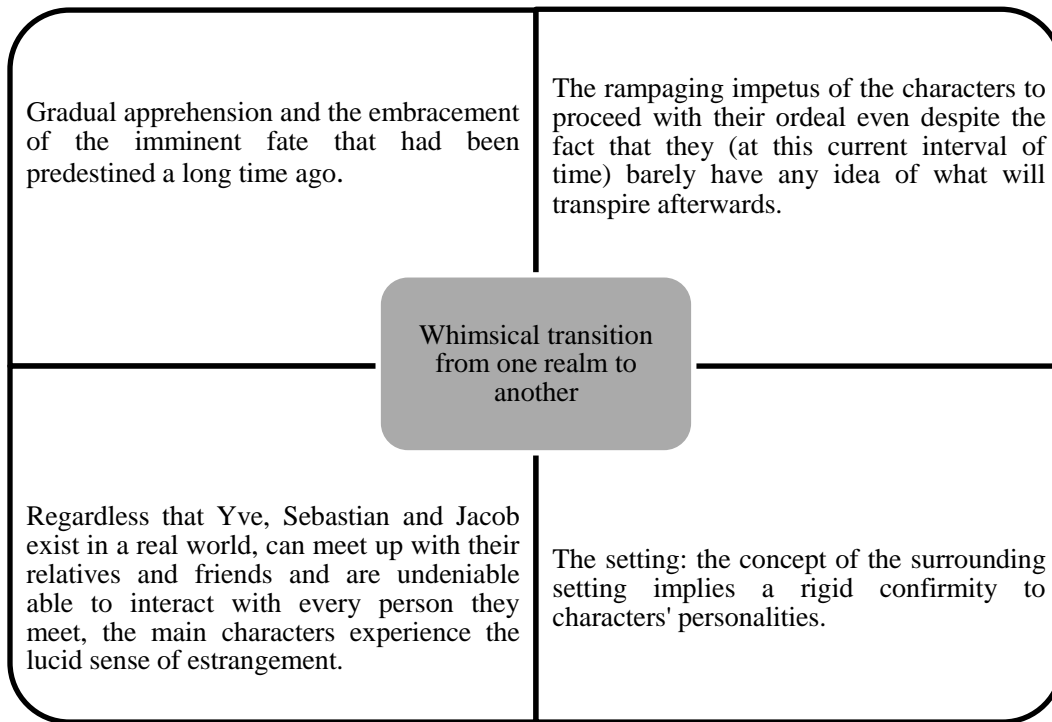


Figure 6: Mental space framing: realms

The last element that must be framed is the very brink of transition from one realm to another and the subsequent metamorphosis of the main characters and their simultaneously existing, already incarnated counterparts.

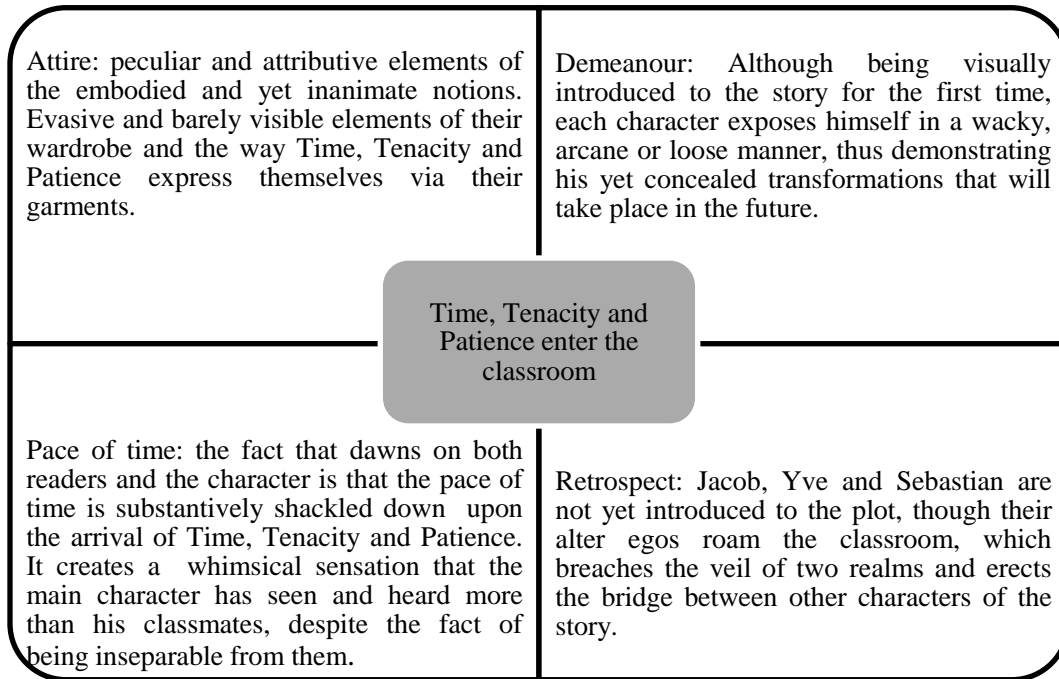


Figure 7: Mental space framing: character

The last figure is a multi-layered representation, which is thoroughly comprised of universal truth, i.e., actual constituent elements of the story; implying solid characters that do not experience any hypothetical alterations, settings, events, expressed thoughts, implications and concepts. Although, taking into consideration that the converging mental spaces imply ambivalent notions, the presented figure will also have unequivocal implications and implicatures. The convergence of mental spaces is predominantly guided by facts rather than by vague presuppositions. Nevertheless, the sole fact that blends everything together is the notion of a constantly lingering uncertainty and “what ifs” that pervade the conscience of a reader, which is prescribed to the characters towards which readers feel empathy or bear certain resemblance.

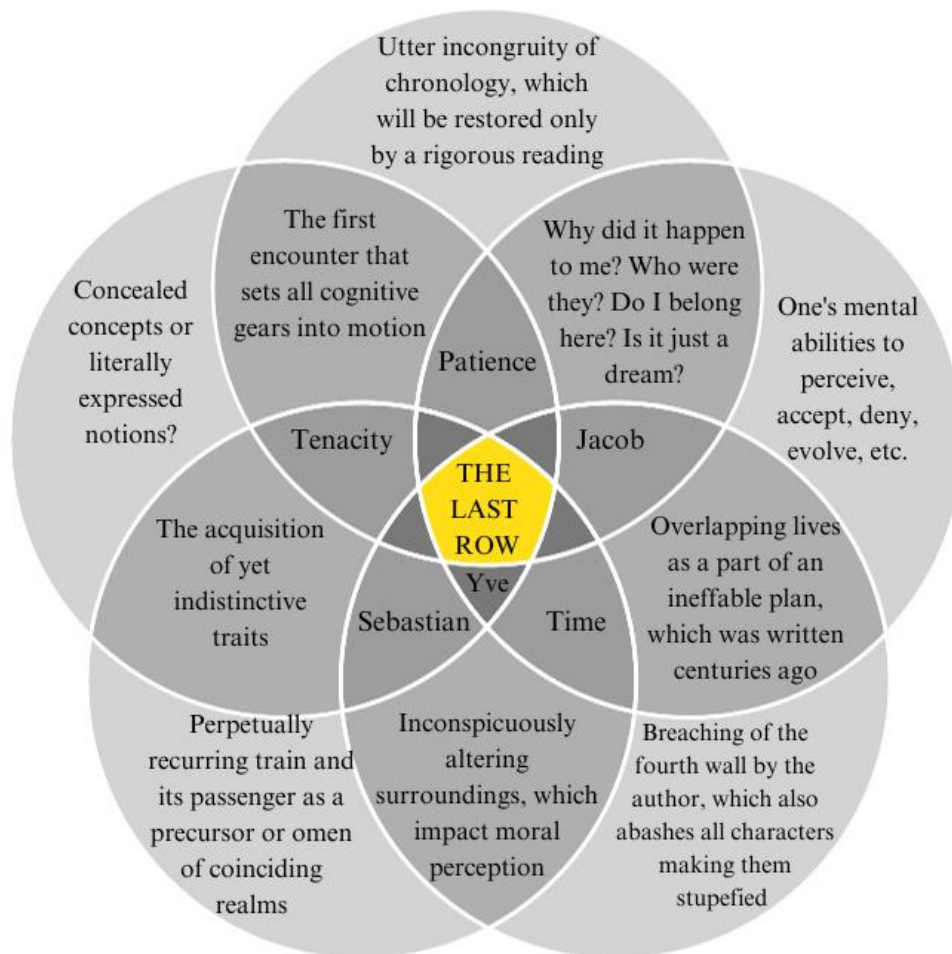


Figure 6: The Last Row: Convergent mental spaces

Overall, taking all the above-presented information, it is feasible to deduce the following: mental spaces as the umbrella term, though being introduced less than four decades ago, has not holistically unveiled its potential within such fields as linguistics, cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics, psychology and psychoanalysis, literary studies, etc.

Three crucial pillars of mental spaces are as follows:

1. Identity connection;
2. Mental space framing;
3. Convergence of mental spaces.

According to the above-shown figures and their proceeding elaboration, it is possible to deduct that the application of mental spaces within such a flexible domain as literature, which encompasses an inexplicable scope of approaches, deviations, trends, etc., can lead to a meticulous analysis of a literary work.

Nonetheless, since the scope of mental spaces is not virtually bound by anything, as it implies both opaque and direct matters and therefore is balancing between stringent regulations, mental compass and creative multifacetedness and an individual's subjective capacities, which in their turn involve myriad implicit and explicit factors. Therefore, the range of the initial mental space must be allocated by the literary work, since otherwise it may entail never-ending arrays of hypothetical assumptions.

It is noteworthy that the use of mental spaces in the literary analysis broadens one's mental perspective, since the processes of accumulation, compilation and structurization of three elements, i.e., IC (Identity connection), MSF (Mental space framing) and CMS (Convergence of mental spaces) entails various branches from the field of humanities.

The proceeding application and holistic integration of mental spaces into various branches of disciplines may give birth to a new inter or multi-disciplinary approach to study or analyse certain linguistic innovations and synchronic or diachronic entities of the literary analysis, discourse analysis, philosophy, etc.

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