

Shared subcases, constitutive classification, and the blending configuration

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Complex semantic configurations result when a concept is a member of two different categories (classified under two different schemas). In particular the four-concept pattern often described as characteristic of blends (e.g. in Grady, Oakley & Coulson 1999) is almost certain to arise, in repeated, almost fractal configurations.

For instance, a machete may be considered to be both an agricultural tool and a weapon. The schematic concepts AGRICULTURAL TOOL and WEAPON are easily joined under a higher schema such as TOOL (or IMPLEMENT), yielding the traditional four-space blending configuration (Fig. 1a).

A closer consideration of the blended conception MACHETE reveals a similar kind of complexity. For the conceptions of MACHETE-ÁS-TOOL (using Langacker 2008's notational suggestion) and MACHETE-ÁS-WEAPON differ significantly from each other. They can be united under a relatively bleached schematic concept (MACHETE-ÁS-NEITHER) and a combined subcase (MACHETE-ÁS-BOTH). The four conceptions of a machete again instantiate the classic blending pattern (Fig 1b).

The combined conception MACHETE-ÁS-BOTH again, it might be claimed, manifests the same patterning, at a higher level of delicacy. Presumably there is a sort of principle of diminishing returns at work here, where it ceases to be worthwhile for the analyst, and possibly for the language-user's cognitive system as well, to continue to try to tease out further details.

It is probable that all blends involve similar complexities.

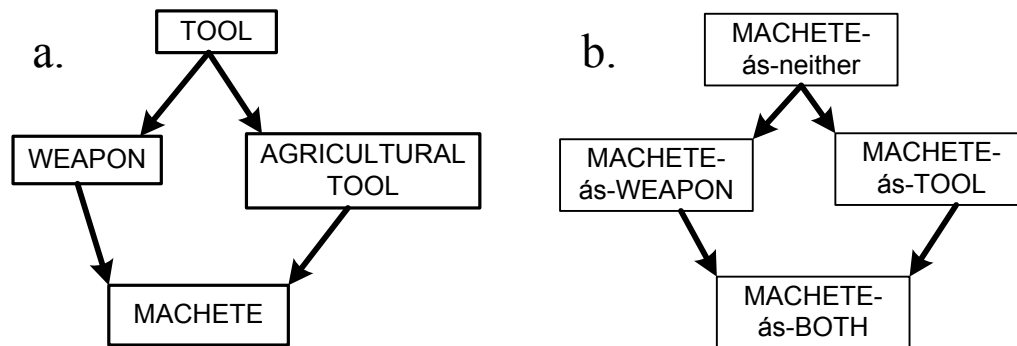


Fig. 1

References

- Grady, J., Oakley, T., & Coulson, S. 1999. "Conceptual Blending and Metaphor." In R. Gibbs (Ed.) *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Langacker, Ronald W. 2008. *Cognitive Grammar: A basic introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.