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A Study on Multimodal Metaphors in Land Rover Automobile Video Advertisements from the Perspective of Conceptual Blending Theory

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Abstract

This study employs conceptual blending theory to analyze multimodal metaphors in 30 Land Rover commercials. Moving beyond traditional dual-domain analysis, it examines how visual, auditory and linguistic modes interact across four network types: simplex (most prevalent), mirror, single-scope (least common) and double-scope. The findings reveal that Land Rover ads creatively blend the target domain (vehicle) with diverse source domains through cross-modal integration. The research demonstrates conceptual blending theory's practical value for decoding multimodal meaning construction, offering both audiences deeper ad comprehension and designers innovative approaches to automotive advertising. By systematically classifying multimodal metaphors in this understudied domain, the study contributes methodologically to multimodal discourse analysis while providing concrete insights for advertising practice.

Keywords

multimodal metaphor; Land Rover automobile video advertisements; meaning construction

1. Introduction

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) revolutionized metaphor studies by framing it as a cognitive process rather than mere rhetorical device, where we understand one concept through another. Building on this, Forceville (1996, 2009) pioneered multimodal metaphor studies, demonstrating how source and target domains can be expressed through different sensory modes (visual, auditory, etc.), thus expanding metaphor analysis beyond language alone. In today's competitive automotive market where video ads dominate, Land Rover's advertisements serve as ideal specimens for studying multimodal metaphors through Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT). This approach reveals how meaning is constructed through four mental-space networks (simplex, mirror, single-scope, and double-scope), where cross-modal interactions

create compelling advertisements. The study aims to: categorize multimodal metaphors across CBT's four networks and decode meaning construction through case analysis.

2. Previous Studies on Multimodal Metaphor in Video Ad

Research on multimodal metaphors in video ads has gained increasing attention in linguistics and media studies. While early metaphor studies focused on single-modal materials (e.g., text or static images), technological advancements have enabled scholars to explore dynamic multimodal interactions in advertising.

Forceville (1996) pioneered multimodal metaphor research in ads, classifying image metaphors into four types. Building on Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, Famelart (2010) analyzed language use in bank ads across multiple languages. Downing & Mujic (2011) examined ICT ads, demonstrating how multimodal metonymy and metaphor create persuasive narratives rooted in sociocultural patterns. Video ads, with their integration of visuals, sound, and text, enhance audience engagement beyond static imagery.

Chinese scholars have expanded multimodal metaphor research since 2010. Zhao Xiufang & Su Huiyan (2010) first applied the framework to analyze China Life Insurance ads, emphasizing conceptual metonymy and metaphor. Zhang Hui & Zhan Weiwei (2011) studied print ads, revealing deeper insights into metaphor and metonymy mechanisms. Later, Jiao Weijie (2016) investigated CCTV public service announcements, highlighting the role of sound in meaning construction.

Most studies adopt a cognitive approach, with some integrating pragmatics or systemic functional linguistics. However, research on automotive video ads from a Conceptual Blending Theory perspective remains limited, warranting further exploration.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Overview of Conceptual Blending Theory

Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) *Metaphors We Live By* revolutionized linguistic research, establishing cognitive linguistics. Fauconnier (1985) introduced mental space theory, later expanding it with Turner (1998) into conceptual blending theory (CBT), which explains how dynamic thinking integrates background knowledge across domains. Fauconnier (1997) systematized CBT in Mappings in Thought and Language, framing it as a cognitive tool for semantic interaction.

CBT gained broad applications: Zhang Hui (2003) analyzed Chinese idioms; Wang Yu & Liu Xiuyun (2013) compared it with conceptual metaphor theory in Avatar's multimodal metaphors; Wang Yin (2020) applied it to translation, revealing its cognitive mechanisms. Fauconnier's later works, like Conceptual Integration Networks (1998), further solidified CBT's role in language cognition.

By transcending traditional metaphor studies, CBT offers a robust framework for analyzing meaning construction, enriching cognitive research across disciplines.

3.2. Network Model of Conceptual Blending

The conceptual blending network, central to blending theory (Fauconnier & Turner 2002), comprises four mental spaces: Input Spaces (I & II): Foundation for blending, containing partially mapped elements . Cross-Space Mapping: Selective projection of corresponding elements between inputs (Fauconnier 1997), crucial for meaning construction. Blended Space: Integrates projected elements, generating new structures (emergent structure) not present in inputs. Generic Space: Contains shared background knowledge enabling projection and emergent meaning. The blend's emergent structure dynamically refines inputs, yielding novel cognitive outcomes.

3.3. The Process of Conceptual Blending

After finishing the selective projection of elements from two input spaces into the blended space, those elements undergo three procedures to be blended, thus forming a new structure, known as the emergent structure. These three procedures are composition, completion, and elaboration. The blending process will be introduced in details below.

The first procedure is composition. The elements from different input spaces are combined into the blend space, and they simultaneously form a new relationship in the input space.

The second procedure is completion. It involves schematic induction, which can unconsciously and effortlessly recruit the background framework. With the help of background knowledge, cognitive and cultural models, the composite structure in the blended space is regarded as a large self-contained structure.

The last procedure is elaboration. It creates a unique structure within the blend space through online processing, and the unique structure is known as the "emergent structure".

3.4. Four Types of Conceptual Blending

According to Fauconnier& Turner (2002), there are four types of conceptual blending networks. The simplex network is the simplest type where Input I contains an abstract framework and Input II provides elements to fill it. In mirror network, all spaces share the same organizational framework, with inputs mirroring each other to create emergent structures. In single-scope network, Inputs have different frameworks; only one framework projects to the blend (metaphor's source domain), while the other provides content (target domain). In double-scope network, both input frameworks project to the blend simultaneously, creating complex integrations. These networks explain how we organize knowledge and construct meaning through blending processes.

4. The Analysis of Multimodal Metaphors in Land Rover Video Ads

4.1. Distribution of Multimodal Metaphors in Four Networks

Table 1. Ratio of Multimodal Metaphors in Four Types of Networks

Blending Networks	Number	Ratio
Simplex Network	15	50%
Mirror Network	7	23.3%
Single-scope Network	2	6.7%
Double- Scope Network	6	20%
Total	30	100%

According to Table 1, 30 multimodal metaphors in Land Rover automobile video ads are categorized into four types of networks, including simplex network, mirror network, single-scope network and double-scope network. As for their ratios, the multimodal metaphors in simplex network accounts for 50%, 23.3% in mirror network, 6.7% in single-scope network and 20% in double-scope network. In addition, the multimodal metaphors in simplex network occupy the largest proportion. According to Table 1, the source domain of multimodal metaphors in simplex network are related to our daily life, like family, storehouse and lion, etc. Thus, it can be seen that the multimodal metaphors in Land Rover automobile video ads are close to people's life and can help the audience better understand the meaning of the ads.

4.2. Meaning Construction of Multimodal Metaphors

The meaning construction of multimodal metaphors in Land Rover automobile video ads in four types of network will be presented in this part with examples, and all the examples are selected from bilibili.com. Four types of network including simplex network, mirror network, single-scope network and double-scope network.

4.2.1. Meaning Construction in Simplex Network

The simplest of the four network types is the simple network, which involves only two input spaces, one containing an abstract organization frame and the other containing equivalent values. According to Table 2 above, there are 15 multimodal metaphors in simplex network, accounting for 50% of the total. In order to better understand the meaning construction process of multimodal metaphor in simplex network, a Land Rover automobile video ad will be selected as an example and the multimodal metaphor contained in it will be analyzed, as shown in the following Figure 1.

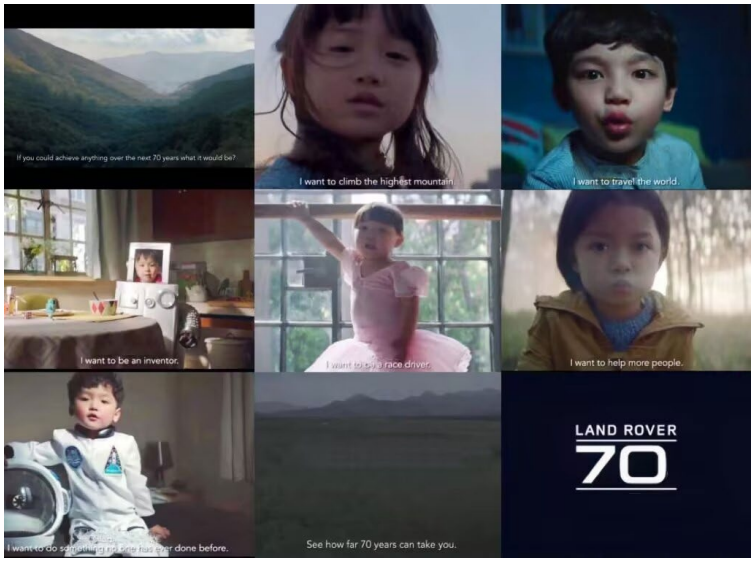

Figure 1. Ad of Land Rover 70th Anniversary

Firstly, it is a video ad of Land Rover 70th anniversary. At the very beginning of the ad, there is a question shown in written text: "if you could achieve anything over the next 70 years, what it would be?" And then, three boys and three girls answer the question. They want be a mountain climber, a helpful person, an inventor, a race driver, a traveler and a challenger. After that, a sentence "See how far 70 years can take you?". is presented in written text. Finally, a picture with words "Land Rover" , "70th anniversary" and "Above and Beyond " is shown.

There is some background information about the history of Land Rover. Since its birth, Land Rover has been adhering to the brand spirit of "Above and Beyond", and constantly committed to manufacturing versatile vehicles with excellent off-road performance that can handle various complex road conditions. For 70 years, Land Rover has always been true to its original intention. It has continuously explored and developed three product families, including Range Rover series, Discovery series and Defender series, and grown into a globally respected luxury all-terrain SUV brand.

The ad of Land Rover 70th anniversary completes its meaning construction through simplex network. Figure 2 presents its blending process clearly:

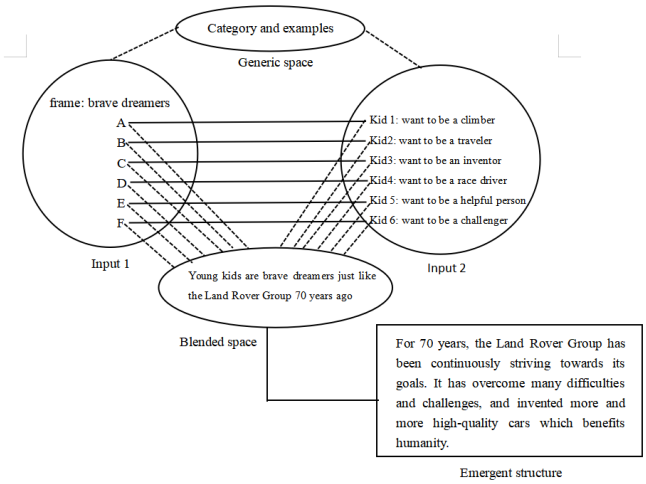

Figure 2. Meaning Construction in simplex network

The text provides Input 1, and Input 2 is provided by picture and text. There is an organizing frame in Input 1 "brave dreamers", but there is no concrete person in it. The elements provided by picture and text in Input 2 including a climber, a traveler, an inventor, a race driver, a helpful person and a challenger. So the elements within Input 2 can be regarded as values for the organizational frame in Input 1. Finally, the organizational frame in Input 1 and the elements In input 2 projected into the blend space: young kids are braver dreamers just like the Land Rover Group 70 years ago. Thus the emergent structure is constructed: for 70 years, the Land Rover Group has been continuously striving towards its goals. It has overcome many difficulties and challenges, and invented more and more high-quality cars which benefit humanity. So the network is regarded as a simplex network.

4.2.2. Meaning Construction in Mirror Network

The mirror network consists of two input spaces, the blend space and the generic space, which have the identical organizational framework, and there is no conflict between the frameworks. According to Table 2 above, there are 7 multimodal metaphors in mirror network, accounting for 23.3% of the total. In order to better understand the meaning construction process of multimodal metaphor in mirror network, a Land Rover automobile video ad will be selected as an example and the multimodal metaphor contained in it will be analyzed, as shown in the following Figure 3.

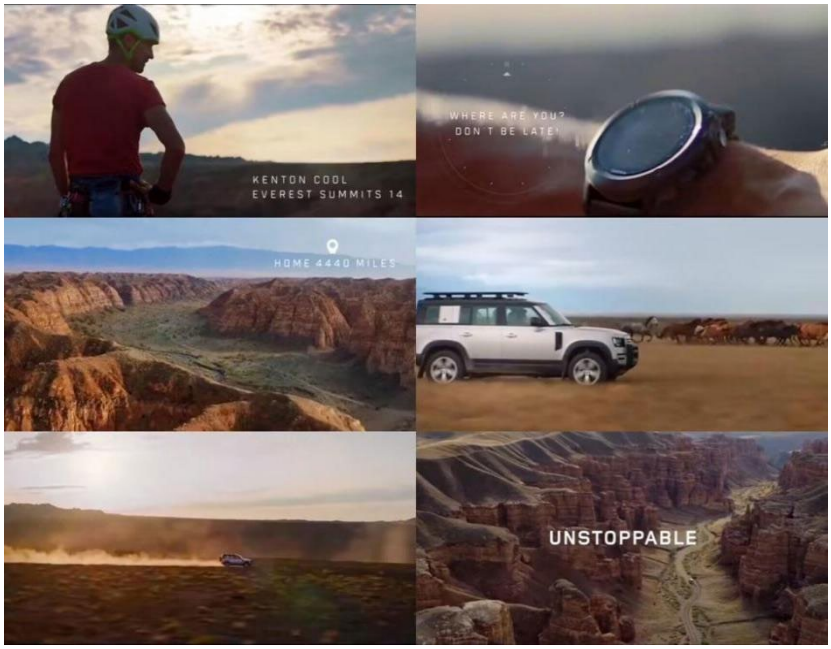

Figure 3. Ad of Land Rover Defender

It is a video ad of Land Rover Defender. At the very beginning of the ad, the man's wife sent a message to him:" Where are you? Don't be late". The message is shown in text. But the man was still 4440 kilometers away from home. He took out a map and a straight line was drawn on the map between the starting point and home. And then he drove his Land Rover Defender to go back home with a fast speed evenly and safely. In the course of driving, he met a group of horses and he overtook them.

There is some background information about Land Rover Defender. The Land Rover Defender is an off-road vehicle with all-terrain capability and it is one of the most rugged and powerful vehicles that Land Rover Group ever built. It can handle extreme terrain with poise, taking drivers from urban forests to ever-changing sandy and icy environments, which embodies its spirit of "unstoppable". In addition, with a all-wheel-drive system and a double-speed transfer box, it can speed up to 100 kilometers in six seconds.

The ad of Land Rover Defender completes its meaning construction through mirror network. Figure 4 presents its blending process clearly:

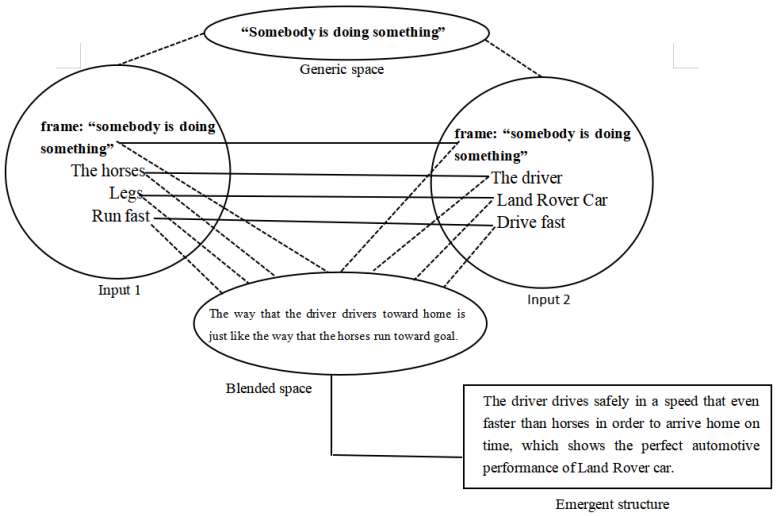

Figure 4. Meaning Construction in mirror network

The picture provides Input 1, in which there is an organizational frame "somebody is doing something". Elements like the horses, legs and run fast are included in Input 1. Input 2 is provided by both text and picture with an organizational frame of "somebody is doing something". The elements in Input 2 includes the driver, Land Rover car and drive fast. On the basis of the construction of generic space, Input 1 and Input 2 have the same organizational frame "somebody is doing something". The elements in Input 1 like "the horses", "legs" and "run fast" can be mapped separately to "the driver", "the Land Rover car" and "drive fast" in Input 2. Finally, the same organizational frame of two inputs and all elements involved in the mapping relationship between two input spaces are project into the blend space, thus forming an emergent structure "The driver drives safely in a speed that even faster than horses in order to arrive home on time, which shows the perfect automotive performance of Land Rover Defender". Four spaces in the network have the same "do" frame, so it is a mirror network.

4.2.3. Meaning Construction in Single-scope Network

According to Forceville (2002), single-scope network is the archetype of the traditional source domain- target domain metaphor. In a single-scope network, two input spaces have different organizational frames, and only the frame in one input space can enter the blend space. According to Table 2 above, there are 2 multimodal metaphors in single-scope network, accounting for 6.7% of the total. In order to better understand the meaning construction process of multimodal metaphor in single-scope network, a Land Rover automobile video ad will be selected as an example and the multimodal metaphor contained in it will be analyzed, as shown in the following example.

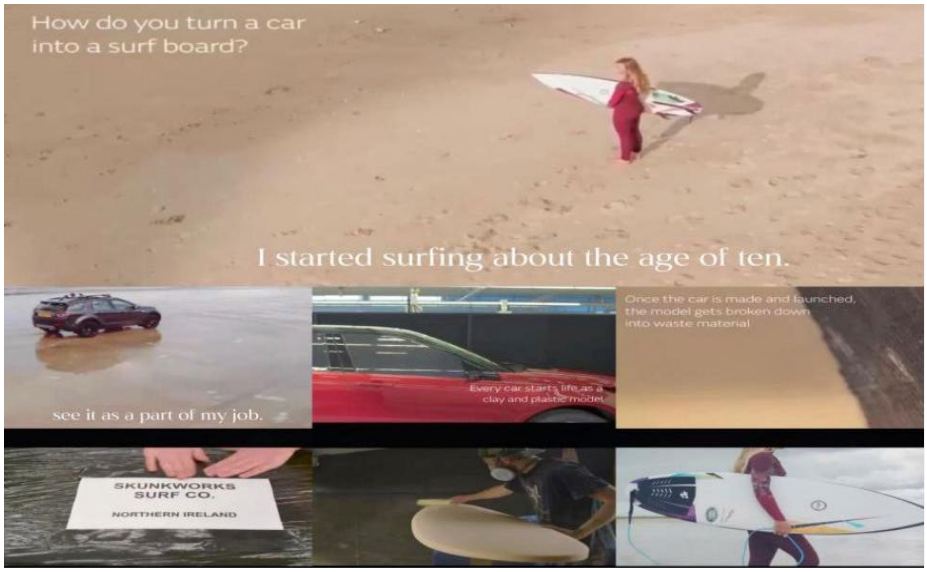

Figure 5. Ad of Rand Rover Sport

It is a video ad of Rand Rover Sport. At the very beginning of the ad, while a woman told the audiences that she has been a surfer since she was ten years old, there was one sentence in written form "How do you turn a car into a surfboard?". After that, a worker was making a surfboard with the waste materials of Rand Rover model. And in this scene, sentences like "Every car starts life as a clay and plastic model" and "Once the car is made and launched, the model gets broken down into waste material" were presented in written text form. Finally, the video shows the scene that the women was using the new surfboard to go surfing.

The Range Rover Sport has a strong wading capacity, with a maximum wading depth of 900mm and a minimum ground clearance of 220mm. More significantly, when the air suspension is raised to the highest rear air inlet, the distance from the ground reaches 1200mm. Its wading performance is unparalleled, and normal wading conditions are as calm as driving on the level. So it is regarded as a land submarine.

The ad of Rand Rover Sport completes its meaning construction through single-scope network. Figure 6 presents its blending process clearly:

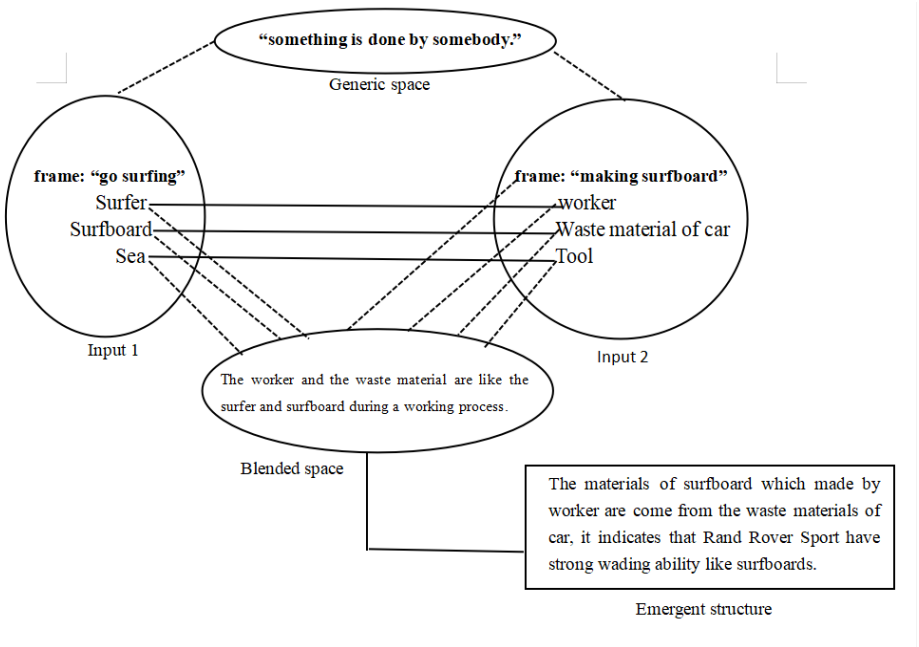

Figure 6. Meaning construction in single-scope network

The picture provides Input 1 that equipped with a frame of "go surfing", in which there are three major elements: surfer, surfboard and sea. Both text and picture provide Input 2 with a frame of "making surfboard", in which there are three major elements: worker, waste materials of car and tool. Input 1 and Input 2 are connected with a structure "something is done by somebody". On the basis of the constructed generic space, elements like "surfer", "surfboard" and "sea" in Input 1 are mapped separately to the elements "worker", "waste materials of car" and "tool" in Input 2. Finally, the frame structure within Input 2 and all the elements involved in the mapping relationship between two input spaces are project into the blend space, thus forming an emergent structure "The materials of surfboard which made by worker are come from the waste materials of Rand Rover Sport, it indicates the Rand Rover Sport have strong wading ability like surfboard". It is a single-scope network, because only the structure in Input 2 is projected into the blend space.

4.2.4. Meaning Construction in Double-scope Network

In a double-scope network, the organizational frameworks of the two input spaces are different or even conflicting, so the double-scope network brings some difficulties to understanding, but makes the ads lively and interesting. According to Table 2 above, there are 6 multimodal metaphors in double-scope network, accounting for 20% of the total. In order to better understand the meaning construction process of multimodal metaphor in double-scope network, a Land Rover automobile video ad will be selected as an example and the multimodal metaphor contained in it will be analyzed, as shown in the following Figure 7.

Figure 7. Ad of Rand Rover Spirit

The video tells a story of a team in which all the team members united as one to win a rugby game that lasted from day to night with the encouragement of their coach who drove the Rand Rover Sport. The game spirit is reflected in the spoken language of rugby players and presented in written signs "I want the ball", "I am not stoppable", "I never want to stop" and "never give up". And at the end of the video, when the team won the game, their coach drove his car to the playground to cheer them up. In this picture, there is a sentence presented in written form "IT'S WHAT MAKES RUGBY, RUGBY".

The development process of Range Rover Sport is a growth history of constantly facing challenges and fearlessly moving forward.Launched in 2004, Rand Rover Sport has conquered desert roads, icy roads, steep mountain roads and world-class racetracks. Relying on ATRS Land Rover all-terrain technology, powerful power and excellent dynamic performance, Rand Rover Sport constantly transcends itself in a series of trials, vividly interpreting Land Rover's brand spirit of "Above and Beyond".

The ad of Rand Rover Spirit completes its meaning construction through double-scope network. Figure 8 presents its blending process clearly:

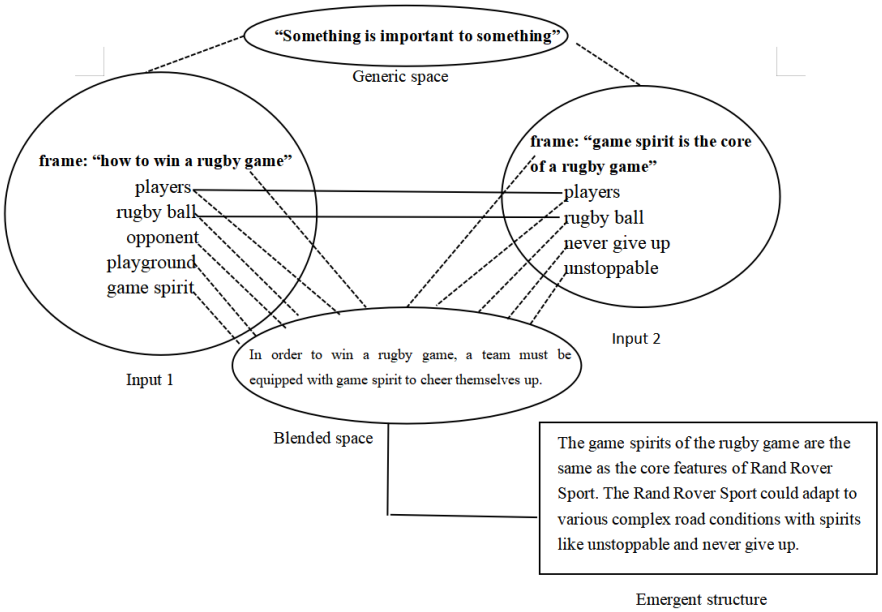

Figure 8. Meaning construction in double-scope network

The picture provides Input 1which has a organizational frame of "how to win a rugby game". Elements like players, rugby ball, opponents, playground and game spirit are included in Input 1. To combine the background information of the Rand Rover Sport, obviously the spoken language in the ad provide Input 2, which has a frame structure of "game spirit is the core of a rugby game". The elements of Input 2 includes players, rugby ball, never give up and unstoppable. After the generic space is constructed, Input 1 and Input 2 are connected by the structure of "something is important to something". And then , the elements id two inputs are selectively mapped with each other. Finally, the frames of Input 1 and Input 2 and all the elements involved in the mapping relationship between two input spaces are project into the blend space: In order to win a rugby game, a team must be equipped with game spirit to cheer themselves up. And an emergent structure is constructed: The fame spirits of the Rugby game are the same as the core features of Rand Rover Sport. The Rand Rover Sport could adapt to various complex road conditions with spirits like unstoppable and never give up. It is a double-scope because the frame structures of Input1 and Input 2 are both projected into the blend space and both of them are come into play in the emergent structure.

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