Mental Spaces Theory

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I. Who Developed MST?

French-American Linguist and Psychologist

Gilles Fauconnier (1944-)

II. What is MST?

- **A theory of dynamic meaning construction developed in particular by Fauconnier and extended in work of other people.**
- **MS are conceptual structures.**
- **MST also forms the basis for Blending Theory.**

III. The Theory

- **The central insight of MST is that when we think and speak, we set up mental spaces.**
- **MS describe how language users assign and manipulate *reference*, including the use of names, definite descriptions, and pronouns.**

IV. The Basis of MST

- **Fauconnier's structures are set up in the light of a particular view of meaning: when we study linguistic meaning we are studying the way that language provides a patchy and partial trigger for a series of complex cognitive procedures.**

V. Some Tenets

- **Meaning is not 'in' language; rather, language is like a recipe for constructing meaning, which relies on a lot of independent cognitive activity.**
- **This process of meaning construction is a discourse-based process, implying that typically a single sentence is only a step in the recipe and cannot be clearly analysed without recognizing its relation to and dependency on earlier sentences.**

- **This theory talks about *reference*: the issue how speakers and hearers keep track of the entities referred to in the language.**
- **The main idea is that when we talk we are continually constructing domains, *mental spaces*.**

VI. Space Builders

1. Adverbials:

in the novel, in 1990, possibly

2.Connectives like:

If…….then

3. Verbs like:

Believe

Hope

Imagine

VII. Application

Example 1: Julius Caesar was too young!

When we talk about, e.g. Shakespeare's play Julius Caesar, in our mind, we might maintain several domains, i.e., mental spaces:

1. **Domain of the play**
2. **Domain of the real world, where Julius Caesar is a historical figure.**
3. **Domain of Performance:**

Example 2: Shakespeare is on the top shelf.

Identification Principle.

If A is related to B by a pragmatic function (F), then an associative of B (X) can be used to refer to A (X=A)

A: Shakespeare (The Person)

B: His book

F: Metonymy in traditional semantics but here it is

X: Shakespeare (The Name)

Example 3: The boy with green eyes has blue eyes

REAL WORLD

Boy Having Blue Eyes

IMAGE WORLD

Boy Having Green Eyes.

Cases of Ambiguity

Example 4: In 1992 my wife was very young.

Here we have 2 time spaces:

1. **The 'now' of the speaker**
2. **The time 1992**

My wife can be:

- **A wife in 1992 and consistent with speaker's 'now'.**
- **Not wife in 1992, but referred as 'my wife' by shifting mental spaces .**

Selected References

- **Evans, V. (2007). *A glossary of cognitive linguistic terms*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.**
- **Fauconnier, G. (1985/1994). *Mental spaces. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*.**
- **John, S. I. (2009). *Semantics* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.**

THANK YOU!