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## A COGNITIVE BLENDING ANALYSIS OF IDIOMS IN NTV'S SEGMENT: "BULL'S EYE"

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### ABSTRACT

The choreography of certain language data requires analysis beyond the boundaries of conventional provisions is the blast-off point in the studies investigating the correlation between cognition and language. However, delimited attention has hitherto been paid to the unlocking of blended idioms within the Cognitive Integration Perspective in the Kenyan locale. In this chapter, therefore, we analyze the processes of perception and meaning of blended idioms vis-à-vis the canonized forms in *Bull's Eye* aired every Friday on NTV. The program is a hilarious satire summarizing weekly socio-political unfolding in a manner exhibiting a rarity of linguistic expression. In order to unlock both literal and figurative meanings, it is salient to explicate the mechanisms by which local context affects the process of idiom construction within the postulates of Cognitive Integration Theory (CIT) whose premise penetrates minds thus forming networks of mental spaces exploring human information integration. Using conventional content analysis, the chapter identifies, classifies and attempts a conceptual interpretation of new knowledge based on metaphorical mappings to illustrate the emergent structures. The general finding of the chapter is that a striking feature of human communication is to create new meanings using blending which improves figurative competencies. The chapter, therefore, recommends that for a better understanding of blended idiomatic expressions and other phraseological items, one should consider contexts expressed in language. We, therefore, conclude that idioms achieve creativity and novelty and should be explained using a cognitive linguistics approach. Further, blended idioms, when subjected to inadequacies of grammar alone, robs one of the ability to appreciate new interpretations.

**Keywords:** *Idiom, blending, Cognitive Integration, Mental spaces, Bull's Eye*

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Nexus between Language and Cognition

The occurrence of certain experiences in communication beckons linguistic intervention which ultimately unearths perceptual orientation of the world around us in spontaneous and unconscious ways. Manifold

linguistic phenomena require lenses over and above the basic branches of language in their interpretation (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002). The desire to break away and form an autonomous branch of linguistics going beyond the yardstick of fundamental branches of language (phonology, semantics, pragmatics, morphology and syntax) begot the concept “Cognitive Linguistics” which matured a perceptual apparatus defining the nexus between language and thought (Johnson and Lakoff, 2002). Verifiably, Cognitive Linguistics dates to scores of years in scholarship taking momentum in 1970’s (Fillmore, 1975). Henceforth, intellectual efforts have considered Cognitive Linguistics a field that illuminates minds to retrieve mental processes and images as motivated by neural functions which are the basis for linguistic expression. Along these lines, Coulson and Oakley (2005) postulate that language is primarily a matter of thought and action and that the explication of any abstract concept leans on the background of the utterance. The utility of Cognitive Linguistics was verified in the study of abstract imagery such as analogy, idiomatic expressions, metaphor, metonymy and counterfactual reasoning, all of which Formal Linguistics cannot unwrap for lack of principles of operation.

The nexus between the mind and socio-cultural setting falls within Cognitive Linguistics which is an appliance exploited to make sense of experiences in contexts where provisions of grammar are not up to scratch (Evans, Bergen and Zinken, 2007). In a dry run to unmask the term *cognitive*<sup>1</sup>, Evans and Green (2006) penetrate the human mind and outline an imaginative process in which language gives way to well-ordered thought processes. They add that human interaction with the environment coins new expressions that have to rely on sensory experiences and contextual information for decoding, a reality that neatly ascertains the relationship between language and cognition.

### **The place of Modified Idiomatic Expressions in Communication**

Idioms, the burden of this paper, have been associated with metaphors, a truism, which places it within the domains of cognition. Gibbs (1980) defines an idiom as the kind of language used by particular people at a particular time or place and adds that idioms are composed of words whose meaning is different from individual elements. Commenting on the rampancy of idiomatic expressions in speech, Cacciarai and Tabosi (2014) observe that a striking feature of human communication is to create new meanings using either canonized forms of idioms or modified (blended) forms to improve figurative competencies. As supported by De Caro (2009), the creative use of idiomatic expressions achieves novel meanings and indirect reference to situations that conventional language may discuss with varied degrees of limitation. Etymologically, the word “idiom” is derived from the Greek word “idioma” which means “a peculiar phraseology of a people” (Bollas, 1989). He adds that it is against the background of the cultural orientation that we can comprehend the use of and idiom because it does not appeal to every reader.

In the present study, idiom blending forms a fertile area to probe as it operates within the domains of cognitive linguistics which evokes our conceptual system and domains of experience to make sense of the world around us. In the study of Idioms of freedom in Kenya, Nyairo and Ogude (2005) underscore that peculiarity in meaning of idioms evoke universal acceptability and an attempt to restructure the choreography of the canonized forms leads to novel meanings that can be interpreted against geographical, political, social and economic backdrops. Ogola (2006) observed that a popular culture has arisen where speakers and writers blend idiomatic expressions to create novel impressions against cultural understanding.

### **Rationale of the Study**

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<sup>1</sup> The analysis of language as applied in descriptive and theoretical frameworks heavily relies on Cognitive Linguistics, a framework prescribed by many scholars as a new arrival that unravels meaning where formal branches of linguistics have dismally failed (Geeraerts, 2006). In this model, abstract concepts are considered a process of cognition of ideas. He adds that previous studies on applicability of Cognitive Linguistics in investigating abstruse concepts have not attained much assiduity among scholars. Thus, a coherent answer would be attained by immersing one’s self in studious endeavors to unpack meaning using this apparatus.

There is an apparent scanty formally documented empirical research on the role of Cognitive Linguistics in unwrapping meaning of non-phraseological elements of language especially idiom blending where grammatical functions cannot explain constructional operations. By way of example, Gathigia (2014), undertaking a Cognitive Linguistic Analysis of metaphors of love in *Gīkūyū*, posits that provisions of grammar are deficient in unpacking meaning of metaphors, a concept applicable to idioms which are non-phraseological elements. This corroborates Zhang's (2009) observation that there is limited research on the role of Cognitive Linguistics in revealing modified forms of canonized expressions. He underscores that rigorous efforts should concentrate on this area. The first motivation in this study is the sparsity Cognitive Linguistics in the unearthing meaning of modified forms of non-phraseological items.

Secondly, our impetus to scrutinize idioms was due to a number of factors. To begin with, in the words of Simpson and Mendis' (2003, p.1), there is an observation that "the notion of idiom conjures up language that is thought to be entertaining, engaging, charming, colorful and memorable". This translates into a large number of audience that will appreciate utterances having idioms that are either pure or modified as such are avenues for achieving communicative brilliance. This is evident in the televised segment "Bull's Eye", a hilarious satire summarizing weekly socio-political unfolding in a manner exhibiting a rarity of linguistic expression thus drawing millions of views (Nyabuga et. al, 2013). Thus, television programs often have an allure to the viewers who are attracted to the brilliancy of language. Additionally, idiomatic expressions, whether pure or modified, are not only linguistic features but vital handiwork of varied cognition dependent on contexts (Coulson and Oakley, 2005). This makes them perform deeper discourse functions than superficial lenses can appreciate. Against this background, the skilful use of idioms may be pervasive as the viewers concentrate on the sarcasm yet ignoring the internal processes underlying the non-phraseological items and their effects.

Consequently, this research was motivated by the fact that blended idiomatic expressions in speech or writing are often very pervasive. Steinel and Hulstijn (2007) contend that the brilliancy in certain communications sweep audiences to such a great degree that they do not even realize that some linguistic features have been modified in order to create novel meanings and interpretations. Finally, our motivation to use CIT<sup>2</sup> to study idiom blending in Bull's Eye is housed in Coulson and Oakley's (2005) contemplation that contemporary researchers on idiom blending should "give more serious consideration to the precise nature of the role of contextual information in background cognition." Along these lines of thought, we chew over Idiom blending in NTV's Segment *Bull's Eye*.

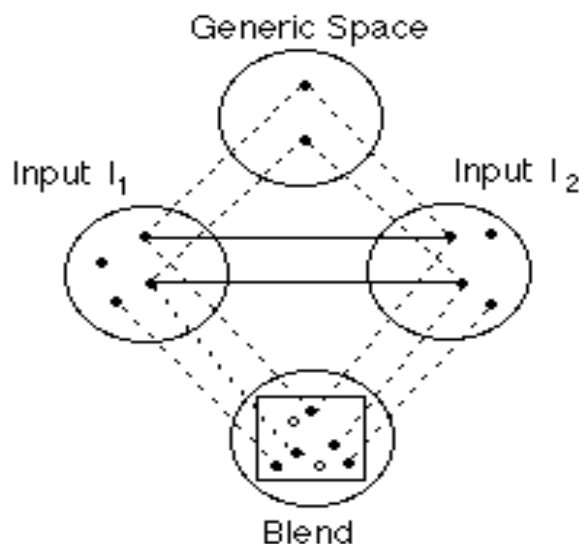
### **Theoretical Framework**

The present study is guided by Fauconnier and Turner's (2002) *Conceptual Integration Theory* which was later modified by Coulson and Oakley in 2005. This appliance is a conduit for investigating the vital relations underlying cognitive operations of both phraseological and non-phraseological features of language. This theory is also called *Blending Theory* (BT) and it seeps into our minds and establishes connections "between our understanding of language and the way we comprehend human thought and activity in general" (Delibegović 2007). This theory found its departure point in the seminal work of Fauconnier (1997) entitled *Mappings in thought and language*. Cognitive Integration Theory constructs mental spaces that unfold the internal choreography and meaning of linguistic and non- linguistic features above hyper-literal thinking.

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<sup>2</sup> Conceptual Blending Theory is an apparatus that adopts a more scientific approach to account abstract notions in language in terms of mental spaces which give rise to novel inferences motivated by contextual orientation. Delibegović (2007) notes that blending falls under Cognitive Semantics which comes in handy to decode heavily coded meanings so that speakers avoid hyper literal reasoning by creating spaces that are not grounded on the superficial structures of the messages.

In this apparatus, there is a construction of cognitive domains that are connected through Conceptual Integration Networks. Coulson and Oakley (2000) propose that the network consists of four intertwined spaces: *input spaces, a generic space, the blended space and the emergent structure*. The interconnectedness of the mental spaces in various contexts gives rise to the novel meaning (Delibegović, 2007). In the process of modifying or blending canonized forms, the theory proposes three processes: *composition, completion and elaboration*” all of which are the tenets of the theory. With these three tenets, the theory gives an insight into our mind to provide local understanding. The connective threads of the theory include cognitive blending networks, blending processes, optimality principles and Vital Relations which help in the elaboration of meaning. The modification or blending of an idiom occurs in such a way that certain relations as *identity, time, space, cause-effect, uniqueness, part/whole, representation, similarity, analogy, disanalogy, category, intentionality and role* are maintained between the original and blended form (Delibegović, 2007). The vital relations refer to mental spaces that form a connection in the inner and outer space using the solid lines. Optimality Principles on the other hand, are descriptions that further clarify or elaborate “the relations within the conceptual integration network” (Gibbs, 2000). The spaces can be diagrammatically presented as shown below.



**Figure 1. Blended space (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002)**

In order to analyze a blending occurrence, the theory goes through a number of stages: the hypothetical blend is introduced, followed by description of the conceptual structure in the spaces; as such, mappings are established between the elements in the input spaces; finally, the structure of the blended space is described depending on which aspects originate from the input spaces. The emergent structure which sustains reasoning arises from contextual accommodation of one domain applied to different domains (Coulson and Oakly, 2000). After the description, there is completion which occurs when information in the long term memory is matched with the blend, a process which spreads activation of Semantic networks. Lastly, Fauconnier and Turner (2002, p.44) explain that elaboration involves preserving the links in the input spaces so that connections can pop out automatically to yield novel comprehension.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design. This is a precursory system explaining how things are by informing the reader of phenomena as experienced by investigators and interpreted in relevant contexts (Bryman, 2006). It used descriptive survey design since it focused on collection of blended idioms in NTV’s Segment *Bull’s Eye* aired Mohammed Juma every Friday. *Bull’s Eye* was purposively sampled due to the following reasons; to begin with, satirical program employs blended idiomatic expressions in very subtle

ways that meaning often eludes the viewers who only concentrate on the humorous sections; political occurrences sway many viewers as these form a good way to summarize the happenings at the end of the week (Nyabuga et al. 2012). Fifteen episodes of *Bull's Eye* were purposively sampled. Content analysis, a component of qualitative research paradigm proposed by (Creswell, 2012) guided the analysis of idioms because the researchers are conversant with the English idiomatic expressions. The justification to use content analysis was based on the fact that it is highly analytical and describes varied approaches including but not limited to impressionistic, intuitive, and interpretive analyses. As echoed by Rosengren (1981), any thorough undertaking and strict textual analysis requires content analysis for complete immersion into the text. Further, content analysis was premised on the fact that it does not deal with haphazard extraction of content to make meaning but rather a deeper analysis involving relational themes (Patton, 2002). Finally, scores of researchers find content analysis as a flexible method for analyzing text data (Patton, 2002). Thus, the researchers watched the episodes and presented findings as guided by CIT.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Having purposively sampled fifteen *Bull's Eye* episodes, the researchers identified 10 blended idiomatic expressions with different types of modification. The reason for including such a limited data is because certain expressions were not properly represented and the connections were therefore unclear, making the researchers unable to account for them. The summary of the data is as presented in the table below. Because diagrammatic representations would consume much space, the researchers chose to illustrate just five blends as the rest would take a similar structure.

**Table 1: Blended idioms in sampled episodes**

<b>Canonized idiom</b>	<b>Blended form</b>	<b>Category of blend</b>
Love triangle	Slap ( boxing) triangle	substitution
Go bananas	Go popcorns	substitution
Take to task	Take to the movies	substitution
Washing dirty linen in public	Dirtying washing linen in school	Permutation and substitution
Cup of tea	Hot cups of kofi	Addition
Burn bridges	Burn mattresses	substitution
All work and no play makes jack a dull boy	All work and no swim and massage makes MCAs dull boys and girls	Addition and substitution
New sheriff in town	New jogoo in town	substitution
Play cards right	Play many cats	Addition and substitution
Suffer the same fate	Share the same gizzard	Substitution

### ***Love triangle (Boxing triangle)***

This blended idiom has undergone substitution of the words boxing and slap for love. In the episode where politicians' tempers have flared and they are going for each other's jugulars, the canonized idiom (*love triangle*) which means "two people vying for the affection of a third" is modified to accommodate the Kenyan context in which politicians, depending on their inclination, gang up against each other and physically go for their throats. Since there is no one to one mapping between love and slap or boxing, the Vital Relation in this blend can be considered as that of dysanalogy. The blend is closely integrated and manipulated as a single unit. The diagrammatic representation using mental spaces is as shown below.

### ***Go bananas-Go popcorn***

This substituted idiomatic expression was collected from an episode entitled "*Week of Political Discovery*" in which members of the Senate went mad after a senator was infuriated after certain members were allegedly bribed to de-emphasize a case requiring financial accountability. In this

case when everyone goes bananas (*mad*), others are said to have gone popcorns. The vital relation between bananas and popcorns is that of category because both are foodstuffs. However, considering the nature of popcorns and how its alleviation of hunger is short-lived, it would be imperative to borrow the political happenings in which certain hot tempers do not take eternity to calm down. The banana republic is compared to popcorn republic. The mental spaces can account for this as shown below.

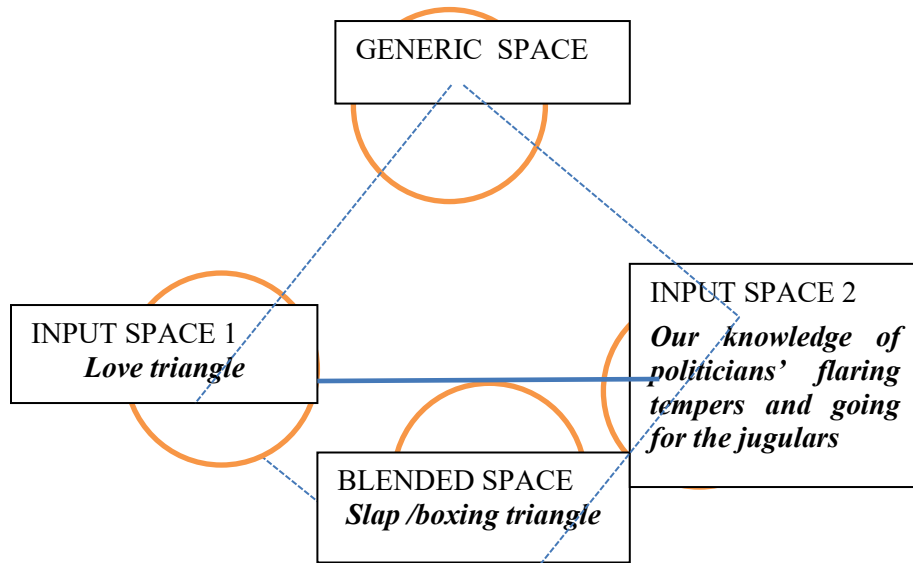
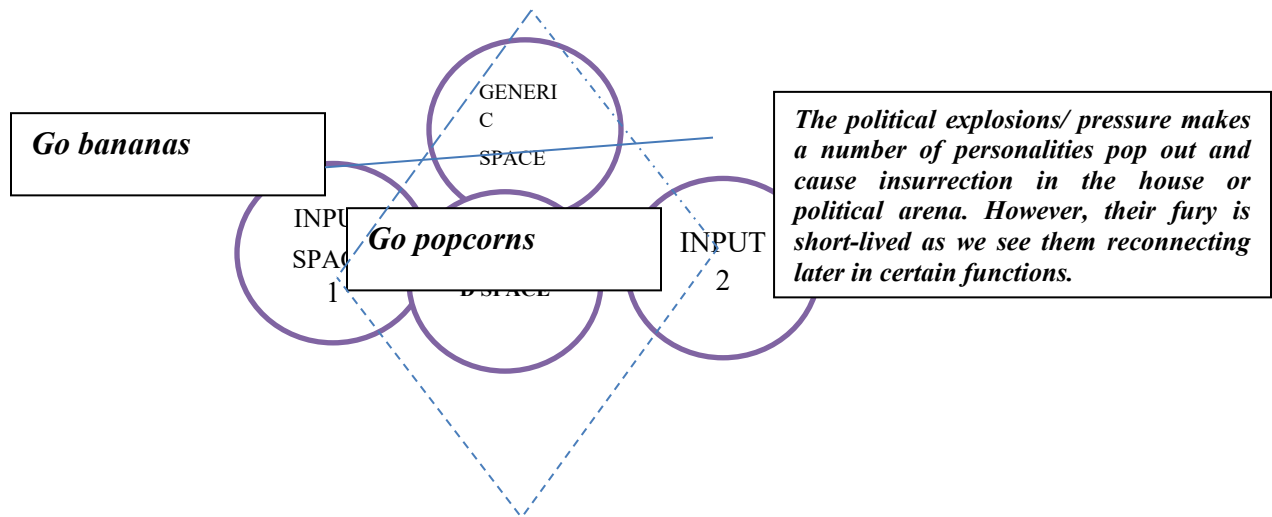


Figure 2: Conceptual integration network for *slap triangle / boxing triangle*



Take to task -take to the movies

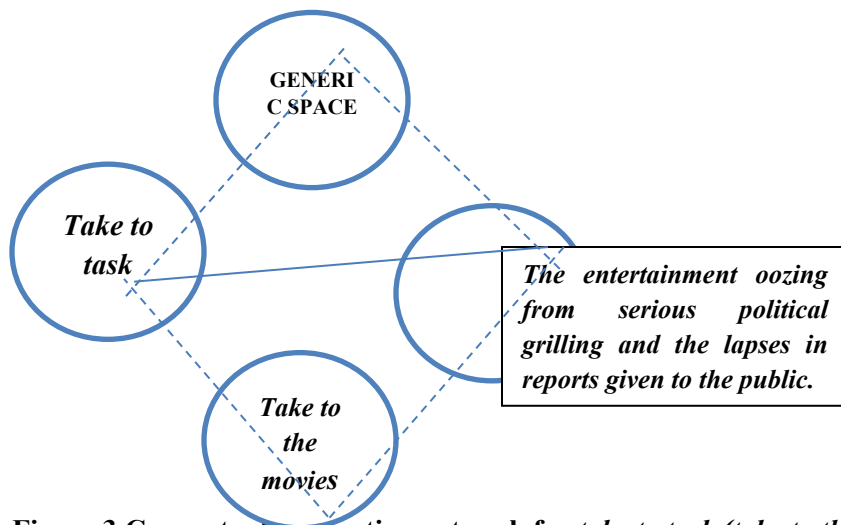
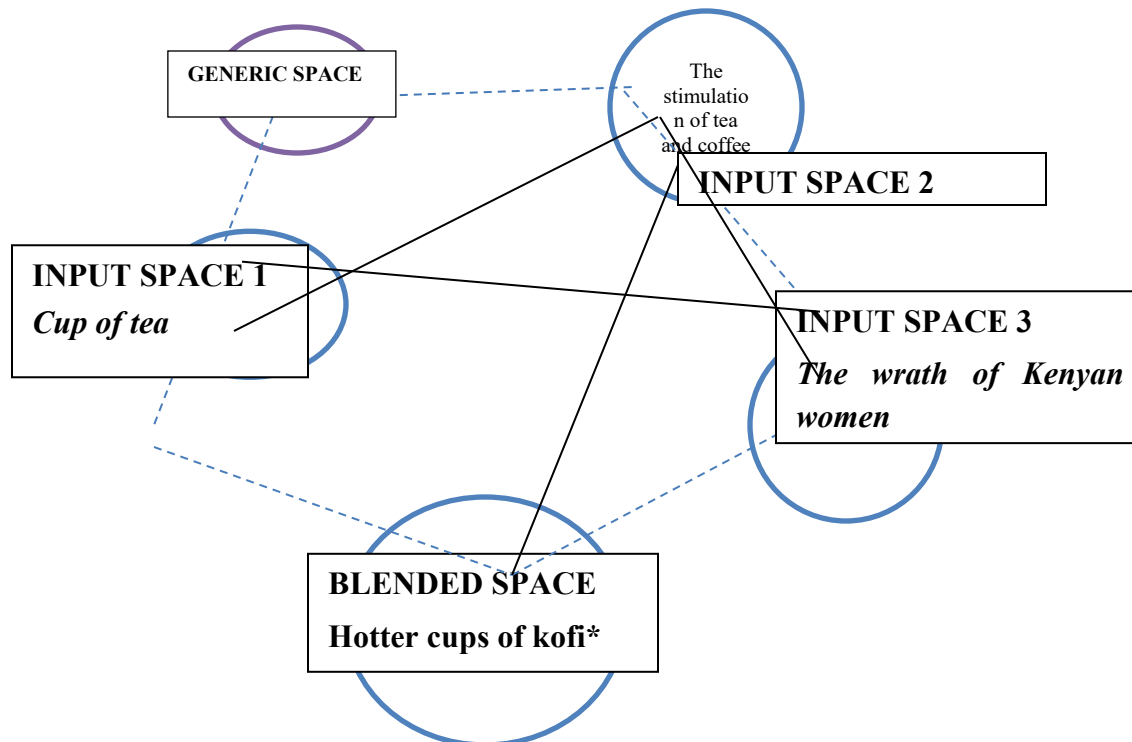


Figure 3 Conceptual integration network for *take to task (take to the movies)*

The canonical form “take to task” means to berate or make somebody accountable for their actions. Blended in this form, the idiom take to the movies ignores the tensed atmosphere as a movie is an occasion or relaxation. In the input space 1, we have *take to task* while in space 2, we have *take to the movies*. Using the background of political cases in Kenya evoking little concern from the affected parties, the episode likens the indifference to that of a movie viewer who does all in utmost relaxation and in full cognizant of the fact that the episodes in a movie are purely fictitious and only meant for merriment. As discussed by Zang (2009), the most likely Vital Relation connecting spaces 1 and 2 would be that of intentionality where one’s actions are motivated by desire, fear, memory and hope among others. Political grilling is therefore a moment of relaxation because members come out entertained by the culprits. The mappings would be as shown.

#### *Cup of tea (hotter cups of kofi)*

This idiomatic expression that has undergone addition was collected from the episode “*Confusion on the Dance Floor*” featuring a woman giving a man serious blows. Against the background of being thwacked by Kenyan women-especially those from Nyeri (whom the commentator cites), the idiom acquires the new meaning. Tea and coffee are related by category. The Vital Relation is therefore that of Category. However, the commentator must have used the word *kofi*\* (a Kiswahili word for slap) which is a homophone of the word coffee. Citing instances like the Kidero’s slap and Nyeri beatings, the reader settles for *Kofi* instead of *coffee*. The blended meaning will therefore mean a woman’s wrath in disciplining men in Kenya. The diagram is therefore as represented b



**Figure 4. Conceptual integration network for *Cup of tea (hotter cups of kofi)***

***Play cards (I have many cats to play)***

This idiom was collected from the episode “*A new Jogoo in Town*” in which even the title itself is a substituted idiomatic expression. Originally, the idiom *play cards right* means to behave in a manner that is likely to make you succeed. However, the blended idiom which involves both addition and substitution occurs in an environment of political violence in the assembly where people are fighting for accountability of financial resources. Considering the nature of a cat and a card, the Vital Relation in this process would be that of similarity in behavior. Politicians would therefore be portrayed as those with nine lives just like cats which shove, push, manipulate and sweat out in the name of accountability yet they just pursue their filthy lucre. The meaning of the blend therefore comes out as illustrated below.

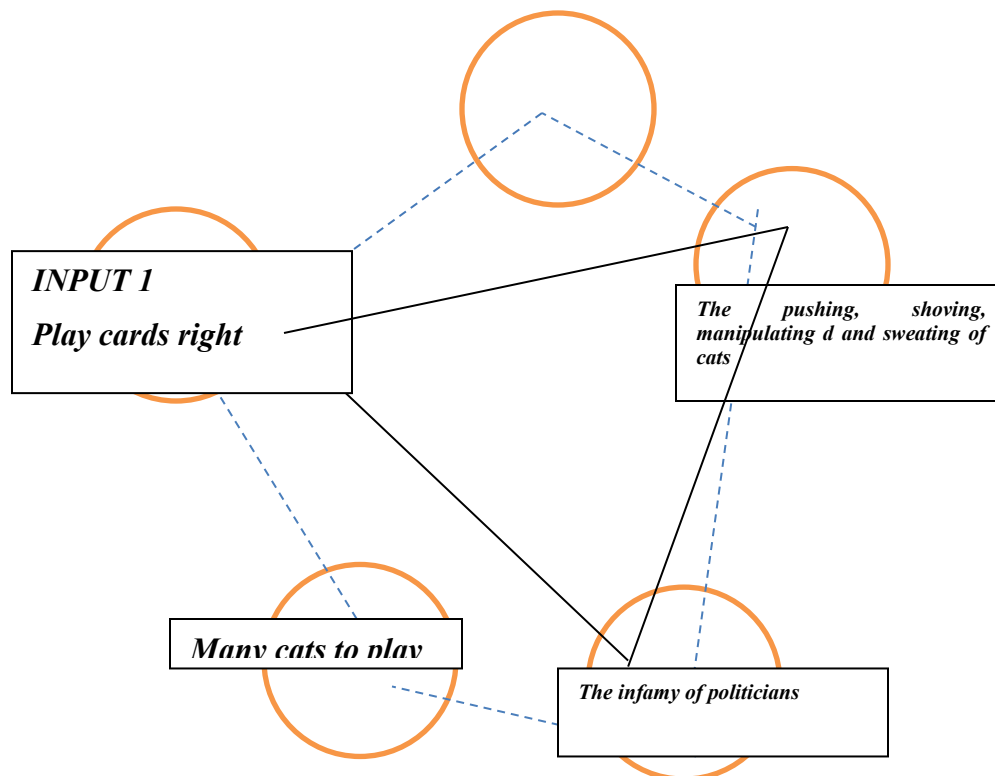


Figure 5. Conceptual integration network for *play cards right (many cats to play)*

## CONCLUSION

This research has established that there are certain principles governing the modification of idiomatic expressions. It can be argued that certain canonical forms of idioms form the frames of thought and assist in the structuring of mental spaces that lead to novel meanings or interpretations. The chapter therefore concludes that a general feature of human nature is to create new meanings using blending which leads to figurative competencies. We therefore recommend that because idioms are non-phrase logical elements, their meanings should be explained using the postulates of Cognitive linguistic Approach. Lastly, the inadequacies of grammar rob a reader of the ability to appreciate blended information, a condition that necessitates the borrowing of a cognitive linguist's lenses.

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