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**CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION OF SWAN MAIDEN IMAGE IN  
RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH FAIRYTALES**

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*Abstract*

The article reveals the comparative research of Swan Maiden image in Russian and English fairytales carried out with the help of the conceptual integration theory, or the theory of blending, by G. Fauconnier and M. Turner. Based on the theory of conceptual metaphor, blending is a productive method of digging into the origin of folk tales. The aforementioned fairytale image is regarded as a blend formed by the combination of two input spaces – ‘woman’ and ‘swan’ – each of which possesses its own cultural, historic and associative peculiarities. The derivation of the blend is mostly stipulated by historical traditions mixed with mythological thinking. Contextual and linguo-stylistic analysis enables to highlight the elements of the generic space, as well as to point out the features of the cross-space mapping making up the blend, and to define the borders between myths, traditions and reality. The decoding of the fairytale context with the help of blending theory encourages a deep understanding of heroines’ origin and helps to reconstruct the mindset of the Russian and the English people.

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**Keywords:** Blend, conceptual integration, mental space, input space, generic space, fairytale discourse.



## 1. Introduction

Fairy tale discourse is considered to be an encoded source of information about the historical past of different nations. Tales, as well as myths, appeared on the basis of primeval traditions and rituals. The disappearance of mythological sense in folk tale narrations led to the formation of fairy tale canons, the most common among which are 1) metaphoricalness of both language and image, 2) specific correlation between phantasy and reality, 3) unstandard forms of time and space and 4) threefolding.

The structure and the figurality of tales, especially in folk art, are highly metaphorical. However, metaphor in this case is understood not as a stylistic device, but as a tool of cognitive analysis. Metaphorical interpretation of reality can be virtually called one of the most pristine means of understanding the world. Due to interpreting one thing via another, new concepts and notions appear inevitably. Fairy tale discourse is a good illustration of this fact. First tales developed from totemic myths and stories of hunters about real events mixed with phantasy. These tales reflect archaic understanding of the natural world by a man: animism (ensoulment of nature), anthropomorphism (attribution of human features to nature, animals and things) and totemism (the belief that people's origin is connected with this or that animal). What we usually perceive as a bog-standard entertainment for children is in fact a complicated attempt to explain the reality by imposing features of the animal and natural world on the tenor of people's life.

## 2. Problem Statement

Metaphorical interpretation within the framework of fairy tale discourse has a strong pragmatical sense. The main problem is to draw a line between the reality reflected in tales and phantasy, between rituals that served as basis for the plot and generally accepted beliefs. To solve the issues, we addressed the theory of conceptual integration, or the theory of blending, by G. Fauconnier and M. Turner. The theory gives an insight into how new notions and concepts appear. According to the theory, two input spaces (paralleled counterparts) are connected with cross-space mapping that unites counterpart's elements (their main features) and the generic space that contains elements typical of both input spaces at a certain time of the conceptual integration development. Thus, all these spaces form a new one – blend (Fauconnier & Turner, 2006). Mark Turner describes blending as a natural process that lies beneath our consciousness: *Blending is not something special or costly. Blending operates almost entirely below the horizon of consciousness. We usually never detect the process of blending and typically do not recognize its products as blends. Very rarely, the scientists can drag a small part of blending onstage, where we can actually see it. But the mind is not made for looking into the mind, and as a result, we see blending only infrequently, and poorly (Turner, 2014).*

This process is characterized by analogue as it unites either similar elements of the counterparts or the common semantic fields that make them similar at a certain time. In other words, conceptual integration is based on analogue ties between all mental spaces. While analyzing blending, the notion of which is more complex than that of metaphor, it is essential to pay attention to input spaces, or counterparts, and find the peculiarities of the cross-space mapping between them. As this research is devoted to the analysis of the blend 'swan-maiden' in Russian and English fairy tales, the theory is used to investigate thoroughly the input spaces that form the blend in both languages. The study deals with historical, cultural, contextual and language aspects of the mentioned mental spaces.

### 3. Research Questions

National and cultural values are determined by many social factors and one of them is the perception of women and their roles in the society. The attitude toward a woman, reflected in the linguistic view of the world, characterizes the nation in whole. The input space ‘*woman*’, and any blend consisting of this space, includes the projection of stereotypes about women formed on the basis of biological and social functions. This counterpart exists in all languages and carries a prominent national print. Most commonly women are associated with such characteristics as beauty, fondness, motherhood, domesticity, wisdom. Zoomorphic blends depict women on the principle of the so called mirror reflection. On the one hand, nature and its phenomena are attributed with anthropomorphical female features, for example the Russian expression «матушкаприрода» and the English “mother nature”. On the other hand, natural and zoomorphic characteristics are assigned to women. The most common of course is the comparison of women with swans: «лебединашая», «плыветкаклебедь», «белаялебедь», ‘swanneck’, ‘glide like a swan’, ‘swan maiden’.

In most cultures, swans are associated with beauty, gracefulness, wisdom and purity. In Christian culture, it is the symbol of the Virgin Mary. Its dying song represents sufferings of martyrs and Christian resignation. The fondness of these birds is widely known all over the world. The couple of swans are inseparable. They mate for life (The truth about swans, 2014). There is even a belief that if one of them dies, another one raises high into the sky and crashes down. In Slavic mythology, swans were considered to be revered and sacred birds. It was a big sin to kill them and eat. Penance fell not only on the offender, but also on the family. Among young women there was a tradition to dress up like a swan. They put on dresses with long sleeves, which looked like wings, and danced to music (Guru, 1997). Even the notion itself is of the feminine gender and is usually referred to as *she*.

The symbolism of the English perception of swans is very similar to the Russian one. This can also be explained by a great respect towards the birds. In the English culture, it was strongly forbidden to kill swans. The tradition goes back to the Celtic mythology, in particular, to the Irish legend ‘*Children of Lir*’. The legend says that one of the gods of Tuatha DéDanann, Lir, got married for the second time and his new wife hated his children so much that she turned them into swans for ninety years. Since then, people have adopted the law according to which no one in Ireland should hurt swans from here to eternity (Celtic Mythology Collection, 2016).

The description of the input spaces ‘*woman*’ and ‘*swan*’ shows that they are very similar in Russian and English traditions. More than that, the parallels between the two input spaces themselves are obvious. Both women and swans are associated with beauty, wisdom and fondness. These common elements can form a generic space in the image of a swan maiden. But are they manifested in the fairytale blend? How do these two input spaces interact in tales? How were legends and beliefs preserved in the folklore? Let’s try to answer these questions analyzing the language and the context of Russian and English fairytales.

### 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to study all mental spaces forming the blend ‘swan-maiden’, describe the cross-space mapping reflected in tales, and find out how ancient beliefs can still be traced in the fairytale narration. The study is aimed at conducting the contextual and linguistic analysis of the Russian and English tales with swan maidens as main heroines. The tales for analysis are «СемьСеменов» / ‘Sem’ Semenov’ (Afanasjev, 2017),

«ДанилоБессчастный» / ‘Danilo Besschastnyj’ (Afanasjev, 2017), «Белаялебедка» / ‘Belaya Lebedka’ (Kruglova, 1988), ‘The Swan Maidens’ (Jacobs, 2017), ‘The Seventh Swan’ (Kerven, 2009)

## 5. Research Methods

To accomplish the objectives of the research, we will conduct the contextual analysis of the Russian and English tales and will find out what linguistic means bear witnesses of elements of the input spaces and the generic space.

In English and Russian tales the image of the swan maiden is connected with the motif of shapeshifting. Even in the description of heroines’ appearance, human features are intercrossed with those of birds. In the tale ‘Danilo Besschastnyj’, the servant of Knyaz Vladimir sets off to ChudoYudo with a certain mission and encounters the swan maiden, whose appearance at first sight seems strange and even terrifying, but according to fairytale canons, it is an ideal of beauty:

*«Лебедь-птица, красная девица! сквозьперьев бы тело виднелось, сквозь тела бы кости казались, сквозькостей бы в примету было, как из косточки в косточку мозг переливается, слово жемчуг пересыпается» (Afanasjev, 2017)*

*«Будь, – говорит, – передо мной молода молодица, а за мной – цветно платье!» Вот и стала перед ним молода молодица, а за ним – цветно платье. Уж такая красавица была: зрел бы, смотрел – очей не сводил!»(Kruglova, 1988)*

The element of beauty, which is common for the two input spaces as the previous description shows, is embodied in the blend by means of metaphors («лебедьптица, краснаядевица!», «изкосточки в косточкумозгпереливается, словожемчугпересыпается») and repetitive clip forms of adjectives («молодамолодица», «цветноплатье»).

These descriptions of appearance send us back to the Slavic tradition of dressing up like swans which still can be traced in tales. Moreover, swan maidens always carry a high status. They are always referred to as ‘tzarevna’, what emphasizes a high respect for the bird:

*«Ваше величество! Вижу, за тридевять земель в тридесятом государстве царевна Елена Прекрасная сидит под окошечком, и у ней из косточки в косточку мозжечок переливается». Тогдацарьещёбольшекрасотоюеёпрельстился...»(Afanasjev, 2017).*

The Conventional epithet «белаялебедка» stands for purity and innocence, the qualities from the input space ‘swan’. Swan maidens also possess such a feature as wisdom typical of both input spaces. This element mapped into the generic space and the blend is expressed with the linguistic tunefulness and rhyme:

*«Станет они [князь] тебя в гости звать, станет чару вина подавать – не пей чару до дна, а выпьешь до дна – не увидишь добра! Да не хвались ты мною; не хвались, что за едину ночь дом построили с тобою»(Afanasjev, 2017)*

Fairytales maidens are magical creatures capable of doing wonders. This element does not exist in the input spaces so it comes into the blend from the fairytales context:

*«Лебедь-птица, красная девица, выступила на крылечко, крылышками тряхнула, головкой кивнула – и сделала мост от своего дома до палат князя Владимира: весь устлан сукнами багровыми, а убит звездами полужёнными; по одну сторону цветы цветут, соловьи поют, по другую сторону яблоки спеют, фрукты зреют» (Afanasjev, 2017).*

In English fairytales swan maidens are presented in the same manner as in Russian ones. The first thing that catches the eye is the description of heroine's appearance:

*“But instead of ducks there appeared seven maidens all clad in robes made of feathers, and they alighted on the banks of the lake, and taking off their robes plunged into the waters and bathed and sported in the lake. They were all beautiful, but of them all the youngest and smallest pleased most the hunter's eye.” (Jacobs, 2017).*

Among the linguistic means of expressing the element 'beauty' there are various epithets, like “*unearthly creature*”, “*beautiful swans*”, “*translucent skin*”, “*flaxen blonde hair*”, “*white and flowing dress*”.

The contextual analysis also provides elements of high social status, wisdom and magic as in Russian tales. The great respect for birds and an implicit ban to shoot them are illustrated in the following example:

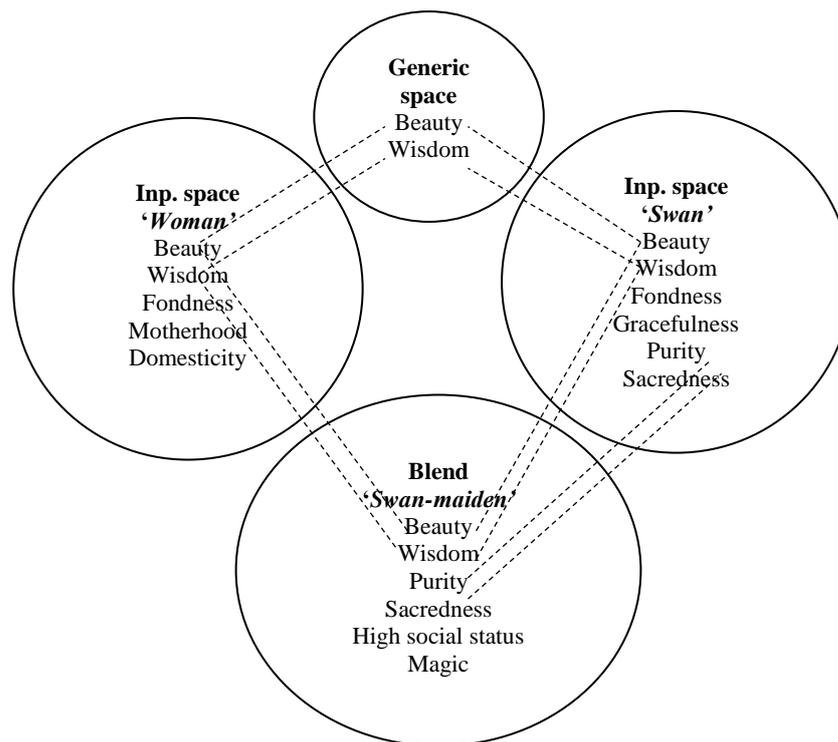
*“A swan would yield plenty of meat to feed a family, but nobody dared to shoot one. Swans were forbidden. Nobody knew why. There were rumours of sinister ancient magic. People were suspicious and didn't hesitate to believe them” (Kerven, 2009).*

After the contextual and linguistic analysis we received qualities typical of swan maidens in Russian and English tales. These qualities, or in other words elements, form a fairytales blend which is identical for both languages.

## 6. Findings

The conducted analysis states that some cultural beliefs and rituals can still be observed in the folktale narration. For example, the Slavic tradition of women's dressing up like swans is preserved in Russian tales, while the ban to kill swans is explicitly described in English tales.

It is also detected that elements of the fairytales blend derive from the elements of the input spaces and the context. The common elements of the input spaces that form the generic space of the swan maiden's image (beauty, wisdom, fondness) are only partly implemented in tales. The element of fondness is absent in the fairytales context, while the rest are vividly expressed. The input space 'swan' projects into the blend such elements as purity and sacredness (revered and sacred bird). The elements appearing only in the context are the following: high social status, and magic. Thus, we received a fairytales blend characterized by such features as beauty, wisdom, purity, sacredness, high social status and magic. Schematically, it can be presented in the following way:



**Figure 01.** Schematical representation of the cross-space mapping in the blend 'swan-maiden'

Among the most spread linguistic means that serve for distinguishing the elements are metaphors, repetitive clip forms of adjectives, epithets, tunefulness and rhyme. In general, the linguistic means and the elements of the blend are similar in Russian and English tales and this is the evidence of an identical symbolic meaning of swans in both cultural traditions.

## 7. Conclusion

The history of nations has always been connected with its folktale heritage. As any other oral genre, tales have passed from generation to generation changing their plots and interpretations. Several centuries ago after acquiring a written form, tales lost their ritual and sacral meanings and started to be used for esthetic purpose only. Nowadays folktales are being studied in philology linguistics, ethnology and folkloristics, but they still preserve many riddles. Initially, these short narrations were created to explain reality by means of imposing features of the natural world on the life of the society. The blending of ideas in tales carries a deep meaning. Folktales present a mixture of different ideas that at first sight seem to be strange and fantastic, though these ideas were not blended spontaneously but are the result of long lasting traditions existed in different times. As a lot of rituals were carried out by women, the later play an important part in folklore heritages. The notion of woman is the basic concept that is characterized by strongly marked national and cultural characteristics. Its interpretation is based upon stereotypes which have appeared due to biological and social functions. The identification of women with swans exist in almost all cultures and deserve a more detailed study.

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