Image-Based Internet Memes
as Conceptual Blends

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Abstract   The present text aims to discuss a certain kind of internet meme, construed here as an image macro, in the context of Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier and Turner 2002). Image-based memes (image macros) that contain a verbal layer appear to be the most popular form of such memes. Their concise form demonstrates a creative potential: memes are packed with meaning, reflected in various conceptual packets integrated into their verbal and visual semiosis. Blending theory thus seems an appropriate framework for a discussion of the cognitive mechanisms of memes and the relation between the verbal and the visual, as well as for tracing how the analogy between given domains/input spaces contributes to the effectiveness of a message.

Keywords   cognitive linguistics; conceptual blending; conceptual integration; internet memes; multimodality

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1. Introduction

Internet memes have become an omnipresent digital phenomenon. These "funny pictures" are shared by internet users mainly to assist with linguistic communication, and as such they function as "an ancillary linguistic apparatus" just like visuals, emoticons, emojis or fonts (Wiggins 2019, 19). Memes, however, can also be treated as a fully fledged means of communication, as they display various communicative functions. Their cognitive linguistic function is visible in disseminating information or referring to objects, people and situations. Memes can also capture someone's viewpoint, work on a level that appeals to our emotions, or be created for aesthetic reasons. They are also used to start up a conversation, contribute to it, or finish it, since they can perfectly substitute for phatic verbal exchange. Using the word "meme," we mostly think of so-called image macros—pictures with superimposed captions in the form of top text and bottom text, exemplified by such classic meme templates as Advice Animals, Success Kid or Ancient Aliens. Of course, there are various types of memes, starting with traditional image macros, GIFs, or comics panels, and ending with dance moves or short-form videos such as those published as Tik-Toks.

The effectiveness of this form of communication can be related to its multimodal configuration, which brings together different semiotic codes to capture a lot of meaning in a compact form. This dense structure communicates a lot thanks to multiple associative links engaging the recipient: memes are intertextual, allusive, self-referential and dependent on extra-contextual knowledge. Thus, their complex and multilayered mechanism can be analyzed with reference to Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier and Turner 2002), which allows one to treat such cases as resulting from the merging together of new and existing elements to create some kind of original meaning.

The present text aims to discuss the concept of an internet meme (understood here as an image macro) and present it as a conceptual blend, in which various input spaces enter a process of selective projection in order to generate a new meaning in the emergent structure. It also seeks to show why blending theory seems appropriate as a framework for discussing the cognitive mechanisms of memes. In our investigations we will focus on the relation between the verbal and the visual, as well as tracing how the analogy between given domains/input spaces contributes to the effectiveness of a given message.

2. What is a Meme?

Over the last two decades, internet memes have become a notable topic of scholarly research in the humanities: that is, in philosophy (Evnine

2018, Vulliamy 2021), culture and media studies (Shifman 2013, 2014, Gal, Shifman & Kampf 2016, Bown & Bristow 2019, Wójcicka 2020), cultural linguistics (Davison 2012), pragmatics (Grundlingh 2017), visual rhetoric (Hungtington 2013) and, most importantly in the context of this paper, cognitive linguistics (Dancygier & Vandelanotte 2017, Lou 2017, Zenner & Geeraerts 2018, Coulson 2022).

Almost every definition of memes starts with a reference to Dawkins (1976) and his understanding of memes as cultural equivalents of biological genes. This approach, however, is barely applicable to internet memes, given that Dawkins (2013) himself claims that internet memes differ from his original view of memes as cultural units when it comes to their emergence/generation: "instead of mutating by random chance, before spreading by a form of Darwinian selection, internet memes are altered deliberately by human creativity" (4:24). Deliberation in creating alterations is what differentiates these two concepts. Wiggins (2019), though, observes two common characteristics between them: they both need human attention and their reproduction should not cause difficulty to people.

Another rather false association is made when internet memes are linked with memetics, which sees the meme as a unit of culture and in this sense is closely connected to a Dawkins-style approach. Shifman (2013) points out two basic differences between memetics and internet memes: longevity and the object of analysis. Internet memes are concrete but short-lasting items, while memetics perceives memes as successful (meaning replicable) instances if they are long-lived and abstract.

With reference to these differences (and some similarities), an internet meme can be simply defined[1] as a "particular idea presented as a written text, image, language, 'move,' or some other unit of cultural 'stuff'" (Knobel & Lankshear 2007, 202). Shifman (2014, 8), however, defines memes as polyphonic social constructs, and suggests defining them as groups (i.e. not particular items) sharing similar characteristics (such as context, form, stance) that were "created with awareness of each other and were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the internet by many users." Constant circulation is indeed inscribed in the definition of memes, often called "virals[2]"—a name that refers to the virus-like contagious qualities due to which memes are rapidly

1. The understanding of an Internet meme adopted here is rather simplified and informal, but seems sufficient in the context of the present paper. For a more ontological or systematic approach, see Evnine (2018) and Wiggins (2019).

2. Some researchers draw a distinction between memes and virals: the former rely on mutation, the latter solely on imitation—e.g. dance moves such as "Gangnam Style" (Zenner & Geeraerts 2018).

reposted by internet users. This property surely belongs to "attractive" memes and the attractiveness of memes can be connected to their relatability—their accuracy in describing a given situation, the feeling that we can identify with them and that the argument presented coheres with our own viewpoint (as was especially evident in the "Me when I. . ." series, or POV[3] memes). However, it should be pointed out that there are also memes contradicting this approach, the so-called "antimemes"[4] that mock viral conventions and are neither relatable to nor appealing. Similarly, ironic memes[5] are also meant to flout mainstream conventions and be humorless or even rude.

Viewpoint is posited as another crucial characteristic by Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2017, 568), who define memes as "viewpoint driven multimodal constructions." An observer's perspective determines interpretation as memes build upon extra-contextual knowledge or pre-existing assumptions, such as observers' attitudes, stances, experiences and cultural/political/social background. It also seems crucial to be familiar with a meme's stylistics, as some memes can be interpreted (and, obviously, imitated) only in line with a given convention. For instance, in an image macro series known as Advice Animals, each character gives advice that is controversial, useless or silly according to an animal's archetypal traits or character associations triggered metonymically by the animal's appearance: e.g. Advice Dog, Confession Bear and Seal of Approval.[6] Only by knowing this convention can one get a meme's meaning right.

Moreover, these creative multimodal communicative acts can be playful, and often require an observer's engagement as they mingle verbal and visual elements while employing various tools for purposes of clarification; the latter include intertextuality and allusion (hints at other memes, works of culture, events, people, affairs), semantic wordplay (e.g. based on homonymy, semantic ambiguity), syntactic ambiguity (e.g. garden-paths[7]), background knowledge (convention, inside jokes, "meme literacy"[8]), irony

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3. POV stands for "point of view" and refers to a series of memes depicting a given situation from an unusual perspective; see https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pov-memes, accessed August 30, 2024.

4. See https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/anti-memes, accessed August 30, 2024.

5. See https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/ironic-memes, accessed August 30, 2024.

6. The constellation of Advice Animals has grown rapidly, with numerous spin-offs including various animals and also humans; see https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/advice-animals, accessed August 30, 2024.

7. See Dynel (2008).

8. See Milner (2013). Shifman (2014) sees memes' reciprocal awareness as being one of their distinctive intrinsic features.

and metatextuality (e.g. antimemes, ironic memes), metaphor and simile (see, e.g., Lou 2017).

   General descriptions of memes often mention that they belong to the so-called "remix culture," which assumes that new instances of culture are variations on already existing ones, as "remixed media may quote sounds over images, or video over text, or text over sounds. The quotes thus get mixed together. The mix produces the new creative work—the *remix*" (Lessig 2009, 69). Remixing is highly productive where memes are concerned, as the latter often refer verbally or visually to artifacts of culture, social/political events, or other recognizable scenarios, re-contextualizing them—i.e. framing those original elements in a different context and making us re-conceptualize familiar concepts. Re-conceptualization (originally used in the theory of translation, see Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2012, 2017) endows original elements with new meaning that is a mixture (or a "blend") of the old and the new. In this sense, memes can be seen as variations,[9] transmutations, or modifications that often rely on intertextuality/metatextuality. As such, they can be understood as reference-point constructions (Langacker 1993, 2008), in which a familiar entity provides mental access to a new one. The "familiar entity" can be of a varied nature: a pop-culture reference (such as a film frame, a snapshot, a painting, a quote, verbal stylization, etc.), but also a recognizable internet convention, or a scenario (such as a meme template, an image macro, a dank meme, a surreal meme) that works as a frame metonymy[10] (Fillmore 1976) and enables identification of a cluster of knowledge metonymically represented/encoded by its parts. Any element within a frame can provide understanding of the whole or part of a frame.

   The name "meme" often functions as a metonymy for different types of internet phenomena such as image macros, short-form videos, GIFs, etc. (see Shifman 2014). They can be monomodal (only visual) or multimodal (mostly verbal-visual, though there are also forms combining sound and moving images), with a varying function for the image. Wiggins (2019) sees the picture as the more important component in the word-image dyad, with the function of introducing an argument.[11] Dancygier and Vandela-notte (2017) define memes as predominantly multimodal constructions,

9. The idea of memes as variations employing different construals is expanded on in Majdzińska (2018).

10. "[P]articular words or speech formulas, or particular grammatical choices, are associated in memory with particular frames, in such a way that exposure to the linguistic form in an appropriate context activates in the perceiver's mind the particular frame" (Fillmore 1976, 25).

11. Wiggins (2019, 11) describes an internet meme as a vessel for arguments: "its function is to posit an argument, visually, in order to commence, extend, counter, or influence a discourse."

given their reliance on verbal and visual semiotic codes. However, they distinguish between memes in which pictures introduce a crucial semantic frame (which would be the case in Grumpy Cat memes, where the cat's picture instantly triggers certain given associations[12]) and those in which visual components are only ornamental (e.g. Someecards pictures[13]). In our considerations we will focus on image-based memes, as this type is more pervasive and prototypical amongst the various constructions, and thus we will understand memes as bimodal (verbo-visual) constructions that are shared rapidly by internet users due to their catchiness and attractive potential.

The following pictures show variations on the "You shall not pass" meme template (Fig. 1) that is based on something uttered by Gandalf when blocking the path of the Balrog Demon in "The Fellowship of the Ring" by J.R.R. Tolkien (1954) and visually represented with a frame from the film directed by Peter Jackson (2001). The depicted scene is used by internet users as an image macro to denote an obstacle. The meme is recreated (Fig. 2) on the basis of the same visual template and bottom text, but the addition of a top text recontextualizes it and introduces a new scenario: forgetting one's password. The same meme can be alluded to only through the verbal medium, as demonstrated in Fig. 3, where we see a dog in a quite unusual bodily alignment blocking the entrance to a building. The caption "You shall not pass" works as a frame metonymy as it directly triggers associations with the original meme and makes us recognize it and use it as a reference point. Similarly, the last picture (Fig. 4) presents a car with a registration plate reading "GANDALF" and a caption "Needless to say/He didn't let me pass," hinting at the famous phrase/scene rendered by the original meme.

These examples show that memes can encompass different elements from the source meme and mix them freely with other elements (existing outside of the present discourse frame) to change the context. This operation might employ various dimensions of construal (Langacker 2008), and play with convention, intertextuality, or modality. These highly creative constructions can thus be seen as instances of conceptual blending, understood as a rudimentary instrument of human creativity (Fauconnier & Turner 2002). The conceptual blending model allows for the development of a dynamic interaction between mental spaces whose effect is to create a blend with an original/distinctive emergent structure.

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12. See Ostanina-Olszewska and Majdzińska-Koczorowicz (2019a).

13. See www.someecards.com.

Fig. 1

Source: https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/
you-shall-not-pass

Fig. 2

Source: https://www.deviant-
art.com/borgster93/art/
You-Shall-Not-Pass-MEME-541069573

Fig. 3

Source: https://www.ebaums-
world.com/pictures/best-of-you
-shall-not-pass/83050193/

Fig. 4

Source: https://zacharytotah.
com/2017/07/lotr-gifs-memes/
you-shall-not-pass-car-meme/

3. Conceptual Blending

Conceptual integration (Fauconnier & Turner 1998; 2002; 2003), described as one of the "general cognitive theories of human sense making across diverse domains of human activity" (Oakley & Hougaard 2008, 1), is a basic mental operation grounded on merging selected elements from different mental spaces to create novel meanings. Mental spaces, understood as "small conceptual packets" that arise when people think and interact verbally for the sake of comprehension and action are dynamic, structure the process of communication, and can be modified in the course of meaning making (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 40).

In a prototypical blending diagram (Fig. 5), mental spaces inhabit the roles of Input Space 1, Input Space 2, Generic Space, and Blend.[14] Input spaces comprise elements representing different scenarios, situations, or frames.

14. The simplified model depicted showcases only two spaces, but there could be any number of input and blended spaces.

The Generic Space contains counterparts (such as elements/ideas/frames) from both input spaces that can be discerned in the process of cross-space mapping. This space is related to the Blend as it comprises the generic structure and a more concrete structure that could not be nested in the inputs.

Figure 5. Conceptual blending schema (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 46).
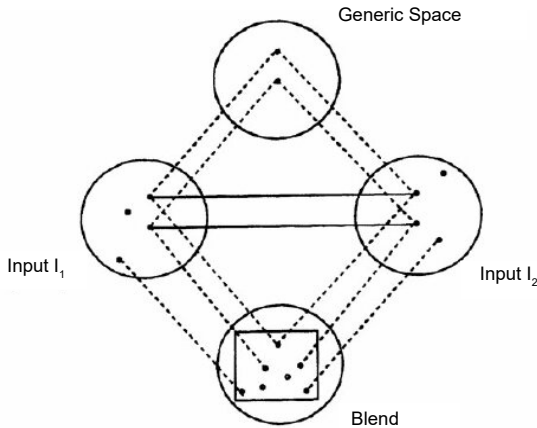
The process of conceptual integration involves several steps, including cross-space mapping of input space counterparts, working out equivalent connections (e.g. frames, roles in frames, identity, analogy, metaphors) between entities in a generic space, selective projection from input spaces into the blended space, and creating the emergent structure in the blend (Fauconnier & Turner 2003). The projection is selective as only certain elements chosen from the input spaces are extrapolated into the emergent blended space: the structures singled out are paired up with their equivalents, while other entities do not enter into the construal operation. The choice may be determined by a verbal or a visual context.

The emergent structure that is the effect of conceptual blending is not copied from any of the input spaces, and shows up due to three processes: composition (composing selected elements from input spaces to generate new connections between them), completion (unconsciously supplementing the emergent construction with elements introduced along with background/contextual knowledge—a process that can be triggered with familiar frames of meaning), and elaboration ("running the blend," making it work) (Fauconnier 1997, 150). Completion and elaboration are unlimited, making for the creative potential of blending:

there are always many different possible lines of elaboration, and elaboration can go on indefinitely. We can run the blend as much and as long and in as many alternative directions as we choose (Fauconnier & Turner 2003, 48–49).

The superlative power of blending relies on combining concepts from superficially distinct domains and creating cognitive mapping counterparts in order to show analogies between them. This process can be likened to ontological metonymy, where an unknown/abstract concept is paired by analogy (there being no pre-existing similarity between the concepts) with a more familiar/concrete concept for the sake of clarification. Blending enables cognitive operations on what is unreal: that is why we perform it to deal with imaginary structures that crop up dynamically in discourse: "people pretend, imitate, lie, fantasize, deceive, delude, consider alternatives, stimulate, make models, and propose hypotheses" (Fauconnier & Turner 2002, 217). Memes often amalgamate seemingly unrelated entities and create hybrid instances, or make us do so when we can relate to a situation depicted, e.g. the "Me when I..." memes.

Conceptual blending has previously been used with reference to memes. Coulson (2022) discusses an integration of seemingly unrelated domains via analogical inference in the context of examples of cartoons and image macros: e.g. the distracted boyfriend meme. The publication demonstrates how blending imparts generative capacity to memes, enabling their creativity, and integrates textual and visual elements at the same time as activating schematic meanings. Lou (2017) utilizes blending as a clarifying tool to discuss the "when" meme as an example of multimodal simile, and to demonstrate how these two devices are connected. Delibegovic, Dzanic and Berberovic (2017) show that blending acts as a rhetorical persuasive tool, thanks to which hidden ideologies can be encapsulated in political memes. Barczewska (2020) considers three types of meme—Advice Animals, character-based image macros, and demotivators—identifying them as complex blends. A two-step blending process is required in the case of Advice Animals and demotivators, as these need either pre-determined knowledge or trigger re-interpretation of the initial blend, while character-based image macros (e.g. Chuck Norris memes) are described as one-stage blends, in that the character itself carries the meaning potential. Meanwhile, Hirsch (2023) applies blending when discussing a multimodal internet meme featuring parody.

In our earlier publications on memes (Ostanina-Olszewska & Majdzińska--Koczorowicz 2019a, 2019b, Majdzińska-Koczorowicz & Ostanina-Olszewska 2021, 2023), we discussed conceptual blending construed as a device enabling

the creative potential of such concise forms as memes through the integration of a network of meanings residing in their verbal and textual properties as well as our own background information, individual experiences, and interpretations of the world. Employing multi-spaced models can also be helpful in elucidating analogies between seemingly unrelated/incongruous concepts hidden in conceptual packets, often triggering frames and scenarios crucial for interpretation. The present paper not only discusses the application of conceptual blending to the analysis of particular examples, but also proposes that internet memes are instances of conceptual blends.

Memes can be reworked/expanded by completing them with different contexts, highlighting and hiding various aspects of a message, or providing alternative interpretations of a given situation—all these are possible thanks to the creating of amalgamates. A variety of internet memes on the same topic might bring to light different features from given domains, and in this way trigger different blends: e.g. the group of memes shown as Figs. 1–4 relates to encountering an obstacle, either physical or digital. In the following section we are going to discuss three of these, Figs. 2–4, with reference to blending theory, in order to show how effective this tool can be when it comes to the recognition of meme components and sources, and to annotating conceptual mappings between seemingly unrelated notions.[15] The original Gandalf meme (Fig. 1) automatically becomes one of the input spaces in the creation of subsequent variations, where these can be recognized as blends of elements from the initial idea of blocking passing and the new inputs provided by the authors of the memes. Hints concerning the primary source are visible in the verbal and/or visual layers.

4. Conceptual Blending at Work

The memes' humor and relatability draw heavily on the cultural significance of *The Lord of the Rings* and the universally recognized character of Gandalf. By invoking a well-known scene where Gandalf stands alone, facing Balrog on the narrow bridge, and declares "You shall not pass!," the meme taps into shared cultural knowledge, making it instantly recognizable and amusing to a broad audience.

Meme 1 (Fig. 2) effectively blends elements from two different contexts/domains/mental spaces to create a humorous and memorable image. The meme does not merely juxtapose two different contexts but integrates them into a single, coherent, and humorous narrative.

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15. We have decided to discuss only three examples, as we would not expect to demonstrate vastly different results by multiplying research material of the same type (image macros).

- **Input Space 1:** The scene from *The Lord of the Rings* where Gandalf stands at the bridge, preventing the Balrog from crossing, depicted as a meme.
- **Input Space 2:** The situation of a user forgetting their computer password.
- **Input Space 2 encompasses two additional mental spaces.**
    2a: The concept of a computer system as a digital realm or territory.
    2b: The idea of a password as a key or gatekeeper.

By blending these mental spaces, the meme creates a rich and multi-layered image. The forgotten password becomes not only a barrier but also a gatekeeper that prevents access to the digital realm. Gandalf, as the powerful guardian of the physical realm, is projected into the digital realm to symbolize this gatekeeper role.

- **The Blended Space:** The meme creates a blended space by combining elements from each Input Space. Gandalf's iconic pose, and the phrase "YOU SHALL NOT PASS!," are projected into the new context, suggesting that the meme's subject is acting as a guardian or barrier, preventing someone from achieving their goal.

The meme uses the metaphor of a "barrier" or "obstacle" to represent the forgotten password. This helps to convey the idea that the password is preventing the user from accessing their computer. The metaphor of the "barrier" or "obstacle" is interconnected with other metaphors within the meme. For example, the computer system is often metaphorically understood as a "machine" or "tool" within the conceptual metaphor ABSTRACT STRUCTURE IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE. It is worth noting that computer systems and the digital world in general have to be conceptualized as concrete entities for the sake of our understanding, which is manifested in the present meme. When a password is forgotten, it can be seen as a "problem" or "hindrance" that stops the machine from working properly.

The image uses metonymy by representing the forgotten password with the image of Gandalf, who is associated with the idea of a powerful guardian or protector. The meme activates the frame of "access denied," which involves a person trying to gain access to something but being prevented from doing so. By representing the forgotten password with Gandalf, the meme suggests that the password is not just a simple sequence of characters but a powerful entity that controls access to the digital realm. The meme is presented from the perspective of the frustrated and helpless user, highlighting the emotional impact of this particular frame.

Memes 2 and 3 depart from the original visual representation, relying on the reader's recognition of the Gandalf allusion. In Meme 2 (Fig. 3), the

line "You shall not pass," combined with a certain scene from The Lord of the Rings, have become emblematic, symbolizing a stance of unyielding determination, authority and protection, making it recognizable as a cultural symbol. In the visual layer there is a dog stretched across the entrance of a building. It becomes an obstacle which is "blocking" the doorway. This layout emphasizes a humorous contrast between the visual and textual elements.

In the blended space, the dog takes on Gandalf's role as a "gatekeeper" who prevents passing. This meme operates successfully as a blend because it relies on the viewer's ability to recognize and integrate the culturally epic context of The Lord of the Rings (Input Space 1) with the commonplace reality of a dog in a doorway (Input Space 2), transforming a simple image into a multi-layered, humorous statement.

Meme 3 (Fig. 4) blends elements from multiple mental spaces to generate its humorous significance:

- **Input Space 1:** The iconic scene from *The Lord of the Rings* where Gandalf is famously declaring "You shall not pass!" as depicted in the first meme.
- **Input Space 2:** A common traffic situation where one car blocks another, preventing it from passing.
- **Input Space 3:** The use of a license plate as a symbolic identifier.
- **The Blended Space:** In the blended space, Gandalf is metaphorically represented by the car with the "GANDALF" license plate, which humorously acts as a barrier, echoing the way Gandalf prevents the Balrog from crossing the bridge.

The meme here leverages the metaphor of a "barrier" or "obstacle" to illustrate how the car with the "GANDALF" plate prevents other cars from advancing. This implies that the driver is either intentionally blocking others or signaling that it might be difficult or even dangerous to try to overtake him.

The meme adopts the perspective of the driver stuck behind the car with the "GANDALF" license plate. This viewpoint is critical to the humor and effectiveness of the meme. By presenting the scenario from the vantage point of someone who is being blocked, the meme instantly creates a sense of frustration that is relatable to—a common experience for anyone who has been in traffic and found themselves unable to pass a slower vehicle. This frustration is humorously exaggerated by the cultural reference to Gandalf, a character famously known for preventing passage in a pivotal moment of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Table 1. Mappings that contribute to the meme showing a car with the "GANDALF" plate blocking the traffic.

Input Space 1	Blended Space	Input Space 2
Gandalf, a powerful wizard from *The Lord of the Rings*	The driver of the car with the "GANDALF" plate, acting as a "barrier," "obstacle" or "blocker" on the road	The car blocking traffic
The Bridge of Khazad-dûm from *The Lord of the Rings*	The traffic jam situation	The traffic jam situation
Gandalf is blocking the Balrog, a powerful and fearsome evil creature from *The Lord of the Rings*	The car with the "GANDALF" plate is blocking other cars, preventing them from overtaking or passing	The act of a car blocking traffic
Balrog's rage	The feelings of frustration or annoyance, and the humorous response to the absurdity of equating Gandalf's epic, heroic stance with the mundane and trivial act of a car blocking traffic	The feelings caused by being stuck behind a slow or obstructive car in traffic

This juxtaposition of a common, everyday occurrence (being stuck in traffic) with a powerful and iconic figure like Gandalf creates a humorous and memorable image. It also highlights the human tendency to project cultural references onto our everyday experiences, adding a layer of meaning and significance to even the most mundane situations. Table 1 presents the various elements (elaborated below) from different conceptual domains that form non-obvious mappings to different mental spaces, creating a humorous parallel between the epic fantasy and a mundane traffic scenario.

Gandalf (Input Space 1) is not just any character: he embodies wisdom, power and protection. His act of blocking the Balrog is symbolic of his role as a guardian who stops evil forces from progressing. The humor in the meme hinges on the absurdity of equating Gandalf's epic, heroic stance with the mundane and trivial act of a car blocking traffic (Input Space 2).

The use of a personalized license plate reading "GANDALF" serves as a key to unlocking the blend between the two contexts. License plates are often used as a form of self-expression and, in this case, it humorously signals the car's role in the situation. The plate suggests that the car (and its driver) is metaphorically embodying Gandalf's role as a blocker, making the situation both comical and memorable.

The blend emphasizes the absurdity and heightens the emotional response, making it ironic. The blending of the serious and the mundane relies on the viewer's understanding of both contexts as a basis for their fully appreciating both the incongruity and the humor involved.

5. Conclusion

The present paper has sought to examine three memes that reconceptualize the situation depicted as the "You shall not pass" meme from various perspectives. Each of these interpreted a given situation as an obstacle associated with the character of Gandalf preventing someone's passing. The subsequent variations can be seen as blends of the original meme and the new inputs introduced by the memes' creators. Through the use of mental spaces, Meme 2 transforms the forgotten password into a powerful gatekeeper akin to Gandalf, projecting his authority and protective stance into the digital realm. In Meme 3, the dog is humorously recast as a guardian figure, embodying Gandalf's authority and determination. In Meme 4, the license plate serves as an indicator, inviting the viewer to see the car blocking traffic as a metaphorical "guardian." Examining internet memes through the lens of Conceptual Blending Theory can provide valuable insights into their function as sophisticated communication tools. Though often viewed as simple forms of entertainment, memes act as complex multimodal constructions that blend verbal and visual elements, creating new meanings that resonate with different audiences. A meme's success lies in its ability to invoke complex associations and cultural references. Through diversity based on internal integration—such as cultural references, social commentaries and everyday experiences—memes create emergent structures that are both humorous and rich in meaning.

The effectiveness of a meme seems also to depend on its ability to engage shared cultural knowledge and background information. Memes rely on viewers' recognition of intertextual references and their frequency of use, creating connections between seemingly disparate concepts. This sharing of ideas is central to humor and relatability.

Conceptual Blending Theory also highlights the creative potential of memes. They are not merely reflections of their input spaces, but rather new constructions that blend the familiar with the new. It is this process of creative meaning-making that makes memes such an important cultural phenomenon, capable of shaping and expressing collective identities and ideas.

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