

Dossier

Cognition, Blending and Evolution of Conspiracy Theories

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Abstract

This article applies methods of Cognitive Linguistic Analysis, specifically Blending Theory and Conceptual Evolution Theory to Conspiracy Theories (CTs). It outlines the conceptual elements of CTs and their function as building blocks for a narratively presented pseudo-argument. In the place of building a (practical-) logical connection between premises and conclusions, CTs project a figurative story onto a disturbing crisis event or state of affairs, which is suspected of being covered up by official authority statements. Although both elements of CTs (crisis account and conspiracy backstory) have little factual basis and are shrouded in speculation, they are presented so as to confirm each other, providing a seemingly perfect explanation of the crisis and outlining its solution. Blending analysis shows how an integration of diverse input CTs produces new emergent CT scenarios that motivate believers to engage in political activism. Conceptual evolution theory also highlights CTs' adaptive potential to seemingly fit new experiences. Together, the two cognitive approaches provide avenues for a better understanding of the conceptual development of CTs and of the chances for countering their dissemination.

Keywords: Blending, Conceptual evolution, Conceptual Integration, Conspiracy Theory, Narrative, Scenario.

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Introduction

“Conspiracy theories” have a bad image, not just in the media but also in academic research. They have been described as psychologically and socially “pathological” products of perverted ideologies, as “blueprints for genocide” or, less dramatically, as logically deficient arguments (Hofstadter, 1964; Barkun, 2013; Keeley, 2018; Uscinski, 2020; Butter; Knight 2021). They have also been connected to strategies of mis- or disinformation, especially in the realm of public communication (Demata; Zorzi; Zottola, 2022; Maci, *et al.* 2024; Danesi, 2023; Musolff, 2025). Like “fake news” and “post-truth”, “conspiracy theory” has thus become a keyword in debates about the erosion of trust in public culture (d’Ancona, 2017; Finger; Wagner 2023). In cognitive terms, however, conspiracy theories seem at first sight to be merely linking two main conceptual elements: 1) the emphatic assertion of a negatively evaluated event or state of affairs, e.g. a crisis or catastrophe such as a terrorist attack or a pandemic, and 2) a narrative that purports to explain that catastrophe by blaming its cause on a ‘conspiracy’ (or several connected conspiracies).

This explanatory link between catastrophe and conspiracy may indeed be plausible for some famous ‘proven’ conspiracies in history, such as the plans for the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC, the 1605 “Gunpowder Plot” in England against King James I and his parliament, or the 1972 break-in at the “Watergate” offices in Washington from which the US Democrats’ election campaign was conducted. But historical theories about such ‘real’ conspiracies are not usually counted as “conspiracy theories”, as the latter are deemed to be fundamentally false or flawed and used for the purpose of deception. Recent examples of such “unwarranted” (Keeley, 2018) conspiracy theories are the allegations that secret groups planned and/or effected the COVID-19 pandemic, the global financial crisis 2008-2009 (“Great Recession”) or mass migration aimed at wholesale exchanges of population (“The Great Replacement”) (Camus, 2011; Slobodian, 2020; Önnersfors, 2021). The category of CTs also include specific, personalised defamations supposedly covered up by the “mainstream media”, e.g. that French President’s wife, Brigitte Marie-Claude Macron, is a man (Henley, 2025), or that former US President Barak Obama was not born on American soil and should therefore have been barred from being President (Freedland, 2016). Historically, the label “conspiracy theory” has been applied to antisemitic pseudo-explanations for the outbreak of World War 1 and for Germany’s defeat (“Protocols of the Elders of Zion”, “Stabbing-in-the-back” myth) or for the preparation of revolutions by secret societies such as the “Freemasons” (Evans, 2020; Oberhauser, 2020; Hagemester, 2022).

In this article, the term “conspiracy theory” (from here on abbreviated as “CT”) will be used in this critically, or derogatory meaning. However, it is *not* presumed that this negative bias is only based

on the ‘falsity’ of CTs’ factual information, ‘logical gaps’ or speakers’ intentions to ‘lie’. All such qualifications beg the question of *why a CT should seem believable in the first place*. Nobody believes a lie because it is a lie, so if its falsity or implausibility were blatantly obvious, there would be hardly be CTs believers. Hence, there must be more, i.e., something cognitively attractive, to CTs than the conceptual link of a catastrophe with a conspiracy that supposedly caused it. This article aims at exploring the seemingly attractive traits of CTs by applying *cognitive-linguistic methods*, specifically *blending theory* and *conceptual evolution theory*, to demystify them.

Blending Theory and Concept Evolution Theory

Consisting of diverse conceptual elements as they do, CTs may be said to involve figurative *mappings* in the sense of *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (CMT) (Lakoff; Johnson, 2003; Lakoff; Johnson, 1999). Danesi (2023, p. 44) locates the conceptual basis of CTs in the “mapping of conspiratorial source domains onto targets of self-serving interest, allowing the conspiracists to provide illusory evidence [...] of the central conspiracy”. In the case of the ‘COVID-19 as a hoax’ CT, for instance, CT believers interpreted “protective masks and vaccines as political symbols [of a suspected anti-President Trump conspiracy], rather than [as] prophylactic devices against the spread and persistence of the virus” (2023, p. 41), and therefore refused to accept them. Danesi views CTs as “false narratives based on underlying metaphorical constructs” (2023, p. 8). This approach to analysing CTs is coherent on its own terms but still begs the question mentioned above, i.e. that of how a lie based on metaphor(s) can be made to appear believable. Logically, all metaphors are trivially false insofar as they provide “an understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff; Johnson, 2003, p. 5), thus violating the law of identity; but obviously this type of ‘falsity’ is not a lie in its communicative, pragmatic sense (Meibauer, 2014). It is here where *blending theory*, understood as the analysis of how diverse “mental spaces” or conceptual “inputs” (Fauconnier, 1994; Fauconnier; Turner, 2002) are integrated to produce new meanings, promises to yield further insights. Conceptual integration or blending theory is compatible with CMT but focuses on how the input of diverse mental spaces generate *new*, emergent meaning units, which may be improbable, counterfactual or completely fictitious but still apparently coherent in terms of their own conceptual structure, i.e. the “blended space” (Fauconnier; Turner, 2002, p. 221-222, p. 299-308). Crucially, the factual truth of the inputs is *not* presumed to be a condition of successful conceptual integration and innovation. Blending theory may thus provide a starting point for explaining the cognitive attractiveness of CTs.

During the last decades, cognitive linguistics has also started to link linguistic innovation to a “naturalistic” or “evolutionist” account of

conceptual change (Croft, 2000; Croft; Cruse, 2004, p. 204-210). Referencing Dawkins' (1976) and Hull's (1988) accounts of memetic or conceptual evolution, Croft proposes a "two-step" model, in which meaningful units, including metaphors, are viewed as *replicators* whose *survival* and development is a function of semantic innovation on the one hand and adaptive entrenchment in socio-communicative contexts of usage on the other (Croft, 2000, p. 23-29). The analytical distinction of *innovation* and *entrenchment* seems to me important for an understanding of development of CTs as conceptual blendings. As I will try to show later, this distinction also has a bearing on assessing the chances of combating CTs, insofar as they can have highly detrimental or even catastrophic social consequences.

Conspiracy theories to die (or kill) for

CTs seem to be characterized by the paradox of enjoying both "stigmatized" (Barkun, 2013) and "privileged" status. They are stigmatized by critics as unwarranted or deceptive pseudo-theories (see above), but for their believers the same theories are sacrosanct truths that must be defended at all cost. Nothing demonstrates this extreme degree of belief than the suicidal and/or criminal actions of CT believers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their conviction that COVID-19 was invented and/or artificially fabricated, and that its official treatment by public health authorities (from mask wearing mandates to vaccination programmes) was just a 'trick' to make financial profit, to control people's minds or to curb their human rights, led some believers to effectively commit suicide by refusing treatment and others to attack or threaten health staff, state representatives or members of the public (*Modern Healthcare*, 2021; Kale, 2021; Brumfiel, 2022; Hotez, 2023). As several overviews of pandemic-related CTs (Birchall; Knight, 2023; Butter; Knight, 2023; Thielemann; Weiss, 2023) have shown, even the most fantastic and speculative suspicions could be propagated by politicians, journalists and other public voices, as well as occupying swathes of social media and of the blogosphere. In view of this enormous impact, COVID-19 related CTs may be viewed as extremely 'successful' in terms of their dissemination across diverse socio-cultural environments. How did this success come about? What made CTs so attractive to believe?

Out of multitude of documented COVID-19 related CTs and their 'careers' in public opinion I will select one case-study to analyse in detail, that of a sub-group of German far right activists who integrated a particular type of COVID-19 related CTs into their own, initially unconnected revanchist CTs about their nation's alleged 'enslavement' post WW II. This "blended" CT led them to make an attempt at storming the parliament and plotting to overthrow the government of the German Federal Republic (FRG).

On 29 August 2020, at the front of an otherwise largely peaceful protest rally against COVID-19 restrictions in the German capital Berlin a group of far-right extremist “citizens of the Empire” (*Reichsbürger*), who self-identified on their banners bearing the colours of the 1871-1918 German Empire (black, white and red) and the symbol of its “imperial” eagle, broke through the barriers around the main Parliament building and tried to get inside. They were, however, stopped by the police guarding the parliament (*Die Welt* 2020a, 2020b; *Der Tagesspiegel*, 2020; *Die Zeit*, 2020; Thorwart, 2022). Despite their small number (400 out of 40.000) and the lack of success, photos of the storming attempt by the group made it onto the front pages of the international press (e.g., *The Guardian*, 2020; *The New York Times*, 2020; Pantenburg; Reichardt; Sepp, 2021; Reichardt, 2021). Until then, the ‘Reich citizens’ had been seen as a marginal group of disaffected people who refused to pay taxes or community charges on the pretence that the current German state was not legitimate (and that therefore its taxation and legislation laws were irrelevant and did not need to be obeyed). This pretence was based on a nationalist-revanchist historical ideology, i.e. that the German nation state (nominally ‘German Empire’ until 1945) had been refused a Peace Treaty after WW II and had never ceased to exist, and that, as a consequence, the two post-war German states (West and East Germany) and their post-1990 unified successor state, the FRG, had only ever been zones of occupation controlled by a conspiracy of foreign elites (Mahler; Schönhuber, 2000; Schönberger, 2023). Events in the following months and years showed that the 2020 attack on the parliament was part of larger strategy that fitted this ideological agenda. Over the course of 2021-2022, various sub-groups of *Reichsbürger* were arrested and put on trial for preparing to kill members of the regional and national governments, and even to launch an armed putsch (*Der Spiegel*, 2022; 2023; Thorwart, 2022; Pantucci, 2022). They appear to have seen the pandemic as a chance to launch their campaign to overthrow the hated federal state and to re-found a German Empire.

But what had this far-right ideology got to do with the 2020 pandemic protests? *Prima facie*, the connection between idolizing the authoritarian “German Empire” (1871 to 1918) and the COVID-19 healthcare protests was counter-intuitive, as the historical Empire had been known for its highly restrictive policies against infectious diseases (Thießen, 2013). Nor is it clear why far-right extremists should make common cause with the anti-authoritarian, “alternative” protest movements that made up the majority of the 2020 rally.

However, when studying the conspiracist narratives in detail, convergent trends of (pseudo-) argumentation can be identified. On the presupposition that the state’s containment measures against COVID-19 were superfluous, it made sense for CT believers from across the political spectrum to suspect the authorities of pursuing hidden nefarious aims. Police measures against and judicial prosecution for non-compliance

with the restrictions were likened to the dictatorial and exterminatory Nazi-rule during the Third Reich.¹ The *Reichsbürger* CT about the current German federal government acting on foreign orders could be fitted into a 'resistance' scenario that was attractive for the wider anti-pandemic restrictions movement (Rensmann, 2023).

This identity-building function of the 2020 COVID-19 protests for the *Reichsbürger* group was confirmed by a newspaper dossier published three years later, which reported interviews with 29 demonstrators who had participated in the "storming" attempt (*Die Zeit*, 2023). As could be expected in view of ongoing judicial investigations and prosecutions, the 'Reich citizens' tried to minimize their personal responsibility, but they insisted on their right to "resist" supposed violations of their human rights by the government's "COVID-dictatorship" (*Corona-Diktatur*), which allegedly compared badly the 1871-1918 German Empire where "everything was in order" (*ibid.*). The emotional experience of the 2020 protest was described as "huge joy" (*riesig gefreut*) of being together with "so many wonderful people" (*so viele tolle Menschen*) standing "against the rest of the world" (*Wir gegen den Rest der Welt*) (*ibid.*). Some verbal aggression also came through in the interviews, in the form of insults against journalists, e.g. as "prostitutes" of the ruling "system", combined with threats to prosecute or use violence against them or against members of parliament (*ibid.*). All in all, the 2020 rally was assessed retrospectively as a self-empowering experience in which long-held suspicions against the FRG were revealed as true through its manifestly repressive actions. The integration of their narrative of alleged national enslavement with the suspicions against COVID-19 restrictions provided the 'Reich citizens' with a unique opportunity to view themselves as part of a wider popular uprising.

In terms of conceptual integration or blending analysis we can thus identify two main "input spaces", the 'Covid-19 as a hoax' CT on the one hand, and the CT of 'Germany as enslaved by a foreign-controlled dictatorship' on the other hand. The two narratives are unrelated in terms of historical provenance, so their merger into an integrated CT was an innovative construal that involved both alignment, selection and realignment of the conceptual material involved. In the first place, the 'Covid-19 as a hoax' CT input formed a selection from the wide range of COVID-19-related CTs that had emerged after the start of the pandemic. These included, *inter alia*, conspiracist interpretations of the virus release as an attack (or at least as a negligent "leak") from a Chinese (or American or Ukrainian, ...) bioweapons laboratory, or as the fabrication of an international conspiracy of "Big Pharma" and industrial-administrative "Deep State" elites to control the world population or to exchange some parts of it (Imhoff; Lamberty, 2020a; Bruns; Harrington; Hurcombe, 2020; Birchall; Knight, 2023, p. 66-146). Pandemic-sceptics across the whole range of the protest movement used these – logically partly contradictory – CTs in all kinds of combinations, but for the German *Reichsbürger*

¹Some protesters even posed as present-day successors of Jewish Holocaust victims by wearing mock-"Star of David" symbols in which the label "Jew" was replaced by "non-vaccinated" and denounced COVID-19 related legislation as a repeat of the "Enabling Act" that had legalized the Nazi dictatorship (*Der Spiegel*, 2020).

faction, the focus on the pandemic-as-hoax version was crucial to align with their nationalist-revanchist CTs which formed the second main input space. This input space included, besides the alleged illegitimacy of FRG legislation, a historical myth about the glories of Germany's "imperial" past, the alleged lack of a post-WW II peace treaty and the notion of a continuing occupation of Germany (Rathje, 2025; Nocun, 2025). These further ideologemes were not centrally important to the cross-CT alignment but, being entrenched in *Reichsbürger* beliefs, they contributed to the "generic space". The central alignment of the two CT "input spaces" was, however, between the hoax-version of the COVID-19 CT and the CT that all FRG laws, including COVID-19 legislation, were *per se* illegitimate and did not need to be followed. In the blended CT space, this conceptual alignment was foregrounded against a vast array of further ideological inputs which exert a partial influence but do not directly sustain the main pseudo-conclusion. Schematically, this analysis is illustrated in Figure 1.

The schema in Figure 1 builds on the "four space model" in Fauconnier and Turner (2003, p. 59) by identifying the "generic space", two main "input spaces" and a "blended space", plus the mapping and selection relationships between them, symbolised by simple lines. In addition, further CTs and ideologies systems that are conceptually related to the input spaces are represented as overlapping with them and with the generic space, in order to do justice to the diffuse ideological connections among them that may vary across groups of CT believers and activists. The main alignment sub-spaces (*hoax* and *illegitimacy* narratives) are indicated in bold italics. Conceptual integration inferences are indicated by simple arrows from the main input spaces to the blended space and with a bold arrow from the latter space to an action scenario, as a representation of the 'practical' conclusion drawn by the Reichsbürger group (i.e. the attempt at storming the parliament and, later, overthrowing the federal government).

In the blended CT, the alignment between *hoax* and *illegitimacy* narratives were aligned so as to lead to the conclusion that the introduction of repressive COVID-19 laws was 'proof' of the illegitimacy of FRG legislation, and the further inference that this 'exposure' of their illegitimacy was a chance to alert the general populace and motivate them to join in a rebellion that would overthrow the 'COVID-dictatorship'. The argument was fallacious as its main factual premises were false (or at the very least highly speculative), and it lacked any warrant that would sustain the inference according to standard rules of practical reasoning (Toulmin, 1958; van Eemeren; Grootendorst, 2004). However, the "blended space" made use of both the input spaces' content as mutual confirmation, from which it derived a new, emergent conclusion about the political situation (i.e. chance for a putsch). This pseudo-argumentative integration of the COVID-19 case into the general assumption about the illegitimacy of the FRG (within the larger *Reichsbürger* CT framework)

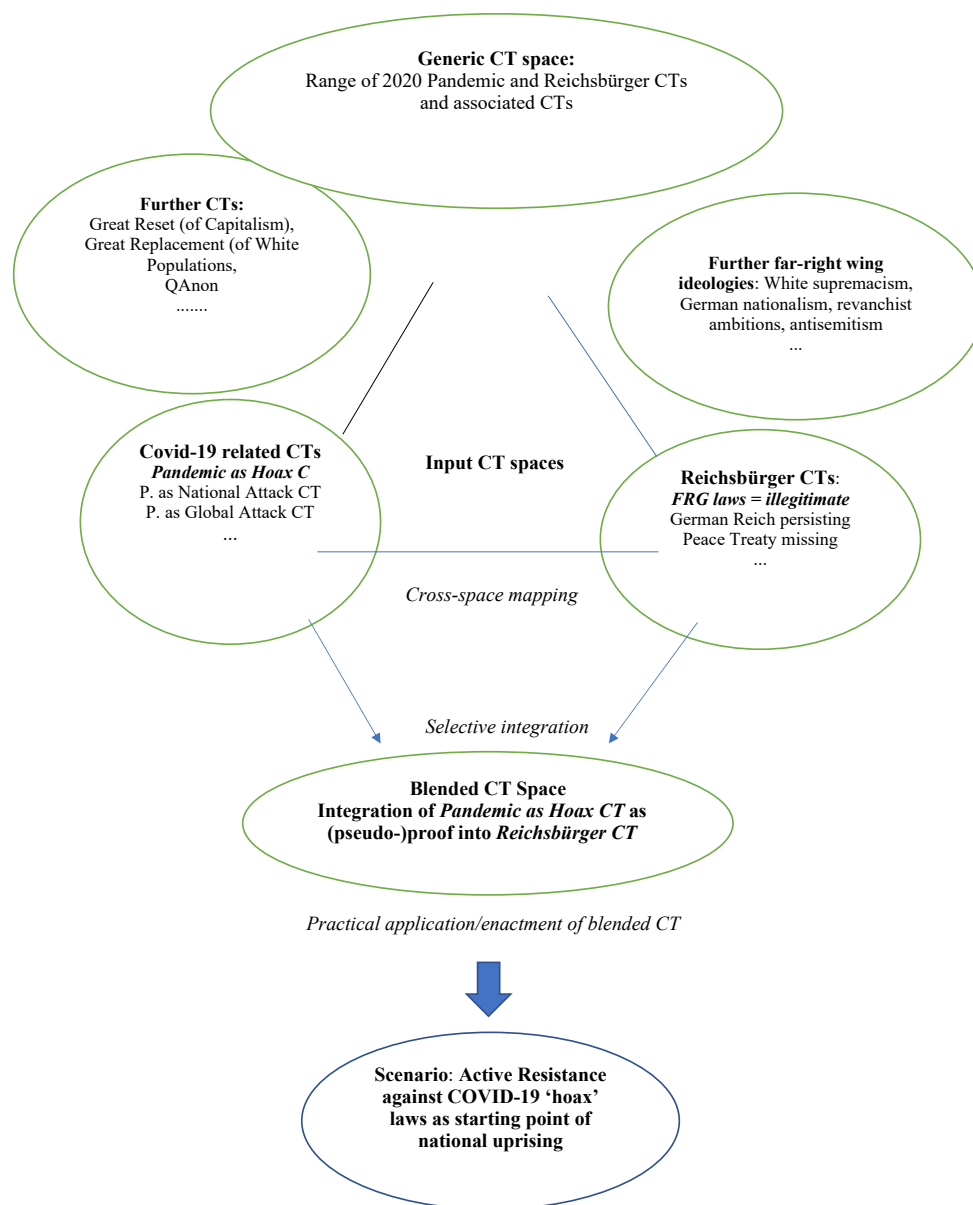


Figure 1. Conceptual blending and scenario construction in the *Reichsbürger* COVID-19 CT.

was logically without merit but conceptually innovative and, as the 2023 testimonies showed, emotionally uplifting. For the *Reichsbürger* CT believers it provided a revelatory insight into the deceitfulness of the FRG authorities, which corroborated all their long-held suspicions. Little wonder, then, that they not only considered it to be factually proven but believed in it emphatically to the point of ‘taking action’.

This last aspect is indicated in the schema by the further “space” derived from the blending, i.e. that of a practical application or implementation of the derived scenario, indicated by the bold arrow. If the pandemic-as-hoax CT is seen as manifest proof of the FRG general illegitimacy, its supposed exposure (in the form of the persecution of

innocent people by the police and justice) can be seen as a 'call to arms' in a scenario of violent confrontation that is first imagined and then partly realized, as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy (Musolff, 2025, p. 6-8). In this scenario, the active resistance against the imposition of a COVID-dictatorship appears both morally justified and practically feasible. The protesters' proud reminiscences of their 2020 attempt to storm the Parliament even after three years, as reported in *Die Zeit* (Die Zeit, 2023), bear witness to such an epiphany-like experience.

As absurd as this CT-based uprising scenario may look retrospectively, it shows the conceptual flexibility and adaptability of CTs to accommodate changing socio-cultural environments. This characteristic should not be underestimated. Many historical CTs, such as the racist suspicions against Jews as "well-poisoners", "child-murderers" or "manipulators" of the world economy, the equally spurious beliefs in "witches", or the perennial allegations that wars, terrorist attacks or assassinations were directed behind the scenes by secret societies, have proved to last for decades or centuries (Coward; Swann, 2017; Butter; Knight, 2020; Hagemester, 2022; Butter *et al.*, 2024). Recent studies about witch-belief CTs have shown that they survived even in the face of sustained campaigns to disprove them, only to resurface sporadically in specific communities as a kind of "mind-virus" infection (Hofhuis; Boudry, 2019; Hofhuis, 2022). New CT "outbreaks" were triggered again and again by slightly changed and topically updated CTs narratives, and were spread further through rumour, media and persecution practices that 'produced' ever more culprits through torture, until the renewed prosecutions had damaged the communities in question to the point of destruction.

This cognitive-evolutionist view of CTs lends itself to a neo-Darwinian, memetic perspective that focuses on the quasi-"selfish" interest of every CT as a meme- or mind virus-complex to survive by adaptive reduplication (conceptual blending) and social dissemination (Dawkins, 1976; Dawkins, 1982; Hull, 1988; Croft, 2000). If we apply this perspective to the blending of the 'COVID-19 as hoax' and *Reichsbürger* CTs, the believers' enduring enthusiasm for its confirmatory 'revelation' in a violent confrontation with the FRG authorities in the 2020 protests shows how they found both cognitive and emotional fulfilment of their sub-cultural community's psycho-social needs. The confrontation with the police confirmed for them not just that their suspicions were and had always been 'correct', but that they could enact them successfully by storming the parliament (as a starting signal of the hoped-for subsequent overthrow of the FRG government).

Conclusions

Obviously, the above interpretation of CT blending is based on just one case-study of a blended CT being ‘fulfilled’ in the 2020 *Reichsbürger* actions. A lot more case-studies and large-scale comparisons are needed to confirm the analysis. In addition, the distinction between the two phases of *emergence/creation* and *dissemination/spread* of CT narratives as memetic structures (in analogy to the *mutation-reproduction* distinction in genetics, see Croft, 2000, p. 29-32)² needs to be worked out in more detail. If corroborated, the analysis is not only important for understanding the historical development of CTs but also for the chances of combating them. In view of the ample evidence of CTs longevity in cultural history and of the basic human propensity for a “conspiracist mentality” that favours speculative explanations for disturbing events (Imhoff; Lamberty 2020b; Dyrendal; Kennair; Bendixen, 2021; Van Prooijen, 2022), it seems unrealistic to envisage a prevention or deconstruction of CTs at the point of their emergence or creation. In the first place, there is no limit to human speculation about shocking crises or catastrophes as being the product of conspiracies. Such speculation arouses an almost automatic attention, it helps to shift blame and responsibility and also can serve ludic and entertainment purposes, all of which make CTs inherently attractive to invent and believe. Hence, content-oriented strategies to “debunk” CTs through “fact-checking” or “common-sense” counter-argumentation have proved unable to prevent them from being created, as evidenced for COVID-19 CTs as well as for a whole host of historical CTs, be it anti-science prejudices, beliefs in witches, or antisemitic CTs. Furthermore, as the above analysis has tried to demonstrate, CTs lend themselves to conceptual blending, i.e. integration of several conceptual complexes which may be factually and logically unrelated and even contradictory. To ‘falsify’ such a blending is pointless as well as impossible, as the ‘added value’ of CT blends lies in their supposedly new and shocking revelatory insight, i.e. not in the confirmation of ‘established wisdom’.

Given human curiosity and inventiveness, it is just not possible to foresee which CT blends will emerge, nor is there any record of their disappearance due solely to fact-checking, fact-correction or falsification. The witch-belief CT “infections”, for instance, seem to have run their course in some social communities until these communities had almost completely destroyed their own economic basis and cohesion; they appear to have abandoned their CTs more from exhaustion or because the need to secure basic survival took precedence, rather than from being disabused of their beliefs through enlightened scientific truths (Hofhuis; Bowdry, 2019).

Rather than preventing the emergence of new CTs, it may seem more realistic to influence their dissemination and especially the further social effects. Fact-checking and -correcting must still be included in such a deconstruction strategy but must be complemented by moves to obstruct the seeming confirmation of CT blends by enactment scenarios

²For a critical commentary on the *meme-gene* analogy, see Sperber 2000,

that provide their believers with ‘self-fulfilling’ cognitive and emotional reassurance, as the August 2020 epiphany did for the ‘Reich citizens’. It has to be borne in mind that CTs always pretend to be alternatives to official accounts that are suspected to be untruthful. Rather than focusing on the facts presented by CT propagators and believers as pseudo-premises of their speculative conclusions, the underlying reasons for this basic suspicion against authority narratives have to be investigated and taken seriously. If needed, a discursive strengthening of the credibility of official, scientific and mainstream explanations of crises has to be attempted, especially by responsible media and news agencies, rather than going for the sheer sensation value of the most outrageous CTs. Secondly, the fact that mainstream or official explanations are usually less exciting and less speculation-friendly than CTs, due to their lack of a conspiracy backstory and sensationalist and wildly speculative formulation, does not entail that non-conspiracist accounts should be presented in unimaginative, non-figurative plain language or only supply ‘facts and figures’. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, ways of science popularization have been developed in the form of blogs and audience-targeted public communication projects, to explain the complex subject matter both to wider audiences but also to specific target groups such as school children (Chen, 2020; Hudgens, 2020; Muelas Gil, 2022). Likewise, public educational institutions in Germany have developed materials to explain issues of national identity and sovereignty in didactically efficient ways, e.g. through online games (Wilking, 2015; Cheema, 2021). CT blends’ popular appeal can be countered by non-conspiracist narratives that satisfy curiosity and help recipients to explore them further. Results from AI-based learning programs, for instance, have produced positive results in empowering CT holders to engage in learning experiences without making them feel exposed as gullible victims of “fake news” (Costello; Pennycook; Rand, 2024). These initiatives align with psychological findings that highlight the importance of taking the identity-building aspects of CTs into account, so as to enable believers to reflect on why they feel a need for the pseudo-reassurance of having to fight a national or global conspiracy (Sunstein; Vermeule, 2009; Krekó, 2020). CT-critics also have to admit that critiquing unwarranted CTs may involve the speculative elements that are open for debate rather than sacrosanct. Ultimately, combating the dissemination of socially detrimental CT blends has to aim at providing holistic counter-narratives that enable audiences to trust their own epistemic competencies to overcome emotional and cognitive dissonances without resorting to violence-promoting and -justifying scenarios of fight/war.

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Cognição, Mesclagem e Evolução das Teorias da Conspiração

Resumo

Este artigo aplica métodos da Análise Linguística Cognitiva, especificamente a Teoria da Mesclagem e a Teoria da Evolução Conceptual, às Teorias da Conspiração (TCs). O artigo apresenta os elementos conceituais das TCs e sua função como blocos constitutivos de um pseudoargumento apresentado narrativamente. Em vez de estabelecer uma conexão (prático)lógica entre premissas e conclusões, as TCs projetam uma história figurativa sobre um evento de crise ou sobre uma situação preocupante, que se suspeita estar sendo encoberta por declarações de autoridades oficiais. Apesar de ambos os elementos das TCs — a explicação da crise e o contexto conspiratório — terem pouca base factual e estejam envoltos em especulação, eles são apresentados de modo a confirmarem-se mutuamente, fornecendo uma explicação aparentemente perfeita para a crise e delineando sua solução. A análise da mesclagem demonstra como a integração de diferentes elementos de TCs produz novos cenários conspiratórios emergentes, que motivam os adeptos a se envolverem em ativismo político. A teoria da evolução conceptual também destaca o potencial adaptativo das TCs para aparentemente se ajustarem a novas experiências. Juntas, essas duas abordagens cognitivas oferecem caminhos para uma melhor compreensão do desenvolvimento conceptual das TCs e das possibilidades de combater sua disseminação.

Palavras-chave: Mesclagem, Evolução conceptual, Integração conceptual, Teoria da Conspiração, Narrativa, Cenário.