

Primary metaphors as a tool for cross-linguistic research

Conceptual metaphor has traditionally been defined within Cognitive Linguistics as a partial mapping (i.e. a set of correspondences) between two domains, a source domain and a target domain, in such a way that we can reason and speak about the target domain in terms of the knowledge and language associated with the source domain. Later proposals have pointed to the possibility of decomposing metaphoric patterns into more basic mappings called primary metaphors (cf. Grady 1997; Lakoff & Johnson 1999). Primary metaphors are based on direct correlations between subjective and sensorimotor experience within recurring experiential scenarios (or *primary scenes*; cf. Grady & Johnson 2002). Lakoff & Johnson (1999: 205-6) argue that, by virtue of the primary metaphor EXISTENCE IS BEING LOCATED HERE, we conceptualize existence as "presence in a bounded region around some deictic center, that is, around where we are" (e.g. *Things come and go out of existence*). The experiential basis for this metaphor lies in our perception that objects exist somewhere in space.

The notion of existence, however, may also be understood metaphorically in terms of other source domains. It has been argued that existence is metaphorically structured in English in terms of at least four conventionalized mappings of a generic nature: EXISTENCE IS SPACE, EXISTENCE IS PERCEPTION, EXISTENCE IS FUNCTIONALITY, and EXISTENCE IS POSSESSION (AUTHOR 2001). The last two ones are partly related to the two branches of the EVENT-STRUCTURE metaphor, according to which different aspects of the internal structure of events (including states, changes, and attributes) are conceptualized in terms of motion in space (the LOCATION EVENT-STRUCTURE metaphor) and object manipulation (the OBJECT EVENT-STRUCTURE metaphor) (Lakoff 1993: 219-229; Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 170-234). These high-level mappings are conceptually grounded in what Lindner (1981: 171) calls the *region of interactive focus*, i.e. "the realm of shared experience, existence, action, function, conscious interaction and awareness". In broad terms, when an entity accesses this subjective region it may become available to us in all those ways (i.e. we can experience it, interact with it, think about it, or even make use of it in order to obtain something else). The idea of existence is included in Lindner's definition on a par with all the other facets of shared experience. However, the latter are more directly apprehended than the concept of existence, which is often understood metaphorically in terms of them by virtue of perceived connections within the region of interactive focus.

With these considerations in mind, we analyze here other primary metaphors which figure prominently in the conceptualization of existence in English and Spanish (e.g. PERSISTING IS REMAINING ERECT, ORGANIZATION IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE, EXISTENCE IS PERCEPTION, and the mappings of the EVENT-STRUCTURE metaphor) and which may be variously related to the high-level mappings discussed in AUTHOR (2001). The comparison reveals certain cross-linguistic differences and allows exploring the usefulness for contrastive analysis of some potentially universal patterns described in the Cognitive Linguistics literature. It should be noted, however, that the universality of primary metaphors is not a matter of innate knowledge, but it rather depends on the degree of universality of the associated embodied experiences.

References

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