

Active zones revisited and revised.

The paper is an attempt to restrict the notion of active zones so that it becomes distinct from metonymy, the distinction considerably blurred in cognitive literature. In particular, Langacker (2000) defined the concept of active zone so broadly that it covers all kinds of co-activation, which renders it descriptively useless. I suggest that active zones should be restricted to the Whole for Part transfers whereby the Part is vague, i.e. in the prototypical cases it is not conceptualized and lexicalized, as in the standard examples of active zones phenomena, e.g.

- 1) Your dog bit my cat
- 2) John kicked the table
- 3) My car got scratched in an accident.

In this sense, active zones are an important aspect of linguistic underdetermination. Whole-for-Part metonymy would occupy the other extreme of the spectrum, whereby the Part is readily conceptualized and lexicalized. Thus, contrary to Langacker, examples:

- 4) I'm in the phone book
- 5) Kettle is boiling,
- 6) That car doesn't know where he's going,

should not be regarded as active zones, but as Whole-for-Part metonymies, activating, respectively, clearly identifiable target concepts: MY NAME, WATER IN THE KETTLE, DRIVER OF THAT CAR.

One reason why Langacker extended the scope of the active zone phenomena was that he considered them to be involved in the ellipsis of grammatical material (in parentheses) in sentences like:

- 7) That barber is fast (at doing your hair)
- 8) He began (eating) dinner
- 9) Landscapes are tough (to paint)

According to Langacker's analysis, the ellipsed, rather well-defined material, is accessed as active zones through the named parts, which are, respectively, *barber*, *dinner* and *landscapes*. I believe this extension of the scope of active zone phenomena to Part-for-Whole transfers is unwarranted and unnecessary and I suggest an alternative analysis, which does not involve active zones, but one which is based on the notion of formal metonymy (Bierwiaczonek 2007) and grammatical constructions (Fillmore, Kay, O'Connor 1988, Goldberg 1995, Leino 2004), conceived as wholes which may be accessed through their parts.

References:

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