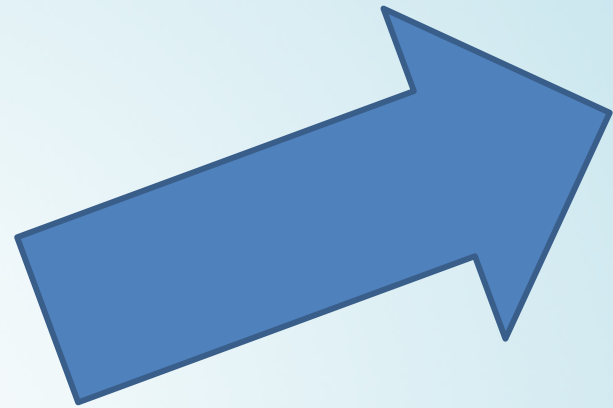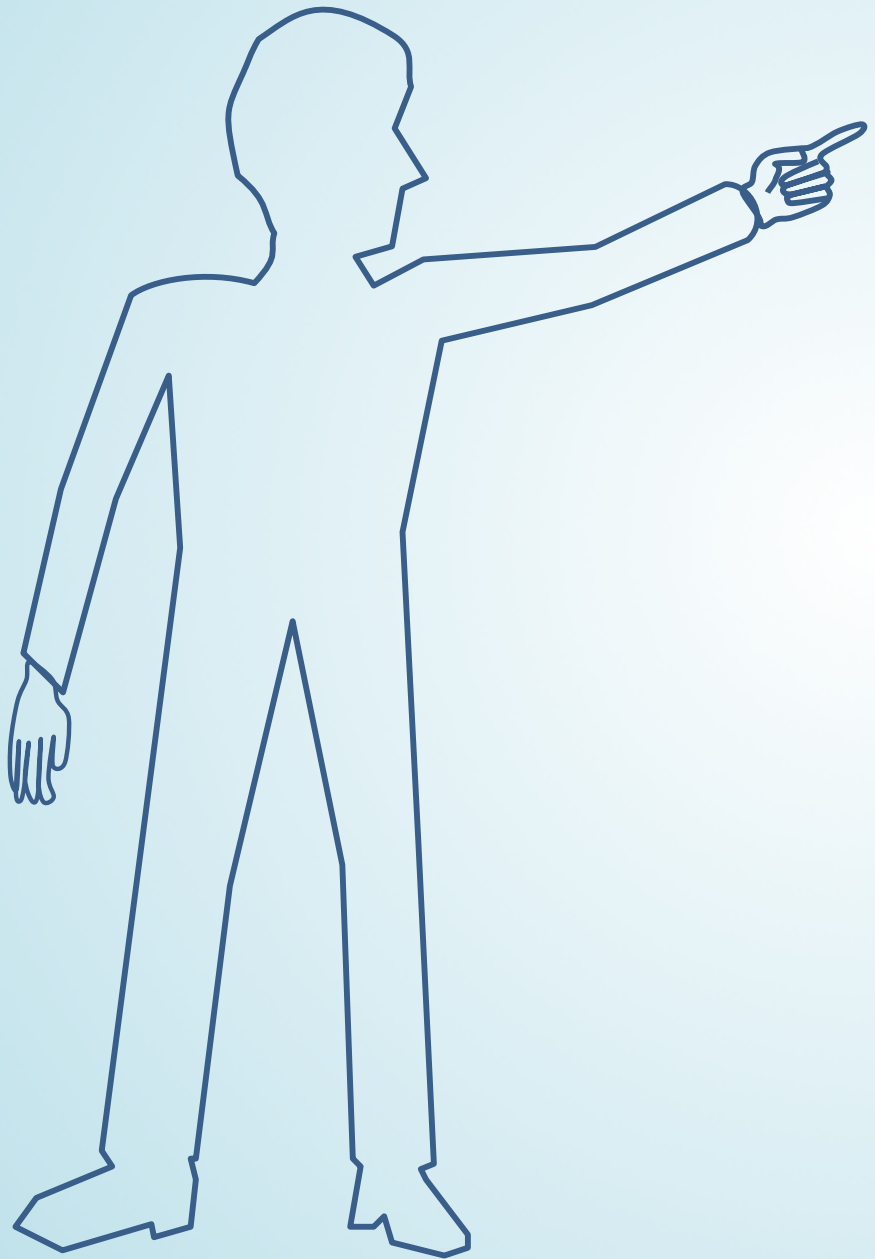# Conceptual Metaphor & Conlanging

John Quijada

The Traditional View of Metaphor

1. Metaphor is a property of words, i.e., a linguistic phenomenon

2. Used only for artistic or rhetorical purposes

3. Based on a resemblance between two entities being compared

4. Used consciously and deliberately, usually requiring literary/rhetorical skill

5. It is a figure of speech only; it is not needed for everyday communication

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Conceptual Metaphor

- **Lakoff & Johnson (1980):** *Metaphors We Live By*
  - Human beings structure their understanding of their experiences in the world via "conceptual metaphors" derived from basic sensorimotor and spatial concepts (spatial primitives and image schemata) learned during infancy and early childhood.
  - Learned via interaction with external environment.
  - The process is largely subconscious.
  - These simpler, more basic concepts are used as a framework for conceptualizing and understanding more abstract experiences and situations.

Examples of Conceptual Metaphor

- **LOVE IS A JOURNEY**
  - Look *how far* we've *come*.
  - They *went their separate ways*.
  - We're *at a crossroads*.
  - This relationship *isn't going anywhere*.
  - We can't *turn back now*.
  - It's been a *long bumpy road*.
  - We're just *spinning our wheels*.
  - Our marriage is *on the rocks*.
  - So *where are we*?

- **AN ARGUMENT IS WAR**
  - Your claim is *indefensible*.
  - He *attacked every weak point* in their argument.
  - Your criticisms are *right on target*.
  - I *demolished* his argument.
  - He's yet to *win* an argument with her.
  - If you use that *strategy*, he'll *wipe you out*.
  - They *shot down* each one of my arguments.

Examples of Conceptual Metaphor

- **STATES ARE SHAPES**

  What shape is the car *in*?

  I'm *out of shape*.

  Prison *reformed* me.

  He doesn't *fit in*.

  She's a *square peg*.

  Shape up!

- **SEEING IS TOUCHING / EYES ARE LIMBS**

  I can't *take my eyes off* her.

  I can *pick out* every detail.

  His *eyes are glued* to the TV.

  He *ran his eyes over* her body.

- **LOVE IS MADNESS**

  I'm crazy about her.

  He always *raves* about you.

  You're *driving me out of my mind*.

  I'm just wild about Harry.

Examples of Conceptual Metaphor

- **INTIMACY IS WARMTH / LACK OF INTIMACY IS COLDNESS**

  She finally *warmed up* to him.   He is a *cold* person
  I treated her very *cooly*.   Those two *are hot* for each other.

- **INTIMACY IS PROXIMITY / LACK OF INTIMACY IS DISTANCE**

  I feel very close to you.   Her manner is *very distant*.
  We're *drifting apart*.   He is very *unapproachable*.

- **AN ARGUMENT IS A BUILDING**

  That *supports* what I'm saying.   The evidence *buttresses* my statement.
  Your argument is *crumbling*.   I'm *building up* evidence for my claim.

- **AN ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY**

  What are you *driving at*?   I want to *take* that point *a little further*.
  I don't *follow you*.   That *leads to* the following conclusion.
  I'm *not with you*.   You've *lost* me.

The Traditional vs. Cognitive View

1. ~~Metaphor is a property of words, i.e., a linguistic phenomenon.~~

1. Metaphor is a property of *concepts*, not *words*, i.e., we don't simply use metaphor to *describe* one thing in terms of another, we use it to *understand* a thing in terms of another.

The Traditional vs. Cognitive View

2. ~~Metaphor is used only for artistic or rhetorical purposes.~~

2. Metaphor is not simply or even primarily used only for artistic or rhetorical purposes; its primary purpose is to allow us to better understand abstract concepts.

The Traditional vs. Cognitive View

3. ~~A metaphor is based on a resemblance between two entities being compared.~~

3. A metaphor is often *not* based on similarities;
   - rather, it is based on systematic correspondences ("mappings") of elements from a concrete "source" domain onto elements of a more abstract "target" domain.

The Traditional vs. Cognitive View

4. ~~Metaphor is used consciously and deliberately, usually requiring literary/rhetorical skill.~~

4. Metaphor is used effortlessly (and often subconciously) in everyday life by ordinary people

The Traditional vs. Cognitive View

5. ~~Metaphor is a figure of speech only; it is not needed for everyday communication~~

5. Metaphor is far from being merely a super-fluous linguistic ornament – it is an inescapable and inevitable process of human thought and reasoning.

Mapping Example: LOVE IS A JOURNEY

- **LOVE IS A JOURNEY**
  - Look *how far* we've *come*.
  - They *went their separate ways*.
  - We're *at a crossroads*.
  - This relationship *isn't going anywhere*.
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  - Our marriage is *on the rocks*.
  - So *where are we*?

Mapping Example: LOVE IS A JOURNEY

Source: **JOURNEY**   *Target:* **LOVE**

- the travelers → the lovers

- the vehicle → the love relationship itself

- the journey → events in the relationship

- the distance covered → the progress made

- the obstacles encountered → the difficulties experienced

- decisions about which way to go → the choices about what to do

- the destination of the journey → the goal(s) of the relationship

Mapping Example:
ANGER IS A HOT PRESSURIZED FLUID IN A CONTAINER

Source: **HOT FLUID UNDER PRESSURE IN A CONTAINER**

Target: **ANGER**

- the fluid → anger
- the container → one's body (or one's head)
- the heat → the intensity of the anger
- the pressure → one's control over the anger
- bursting/overflow of the container → loss of control over the anger

Limitations on Conceptual Metaphors

- Re: the **ARGUMENTS ARE BUILDINGS** metaphor:
  - We can say:
    "Your argument *rests on a solid foundation*."
    "Her theory has *withstood* attack after attack."
    "Without *supporting* evidence, his argument will *collapse*."
  - But we **can't** we say:
    ??"I like the *view from* your argument's *windows*."
    ?? "Your argument could use a *taller chimney*."
    ?? "If his theory is true, it should have more *tenants*."

- So why aren't all elements of the source domain mappable to the target domain?

Limitations on Conceptual Metaphors

- **Complex metaphors** built from two or more **primary metaphors** can only incorporate elements common to all the primary metaphors, e.g.,

  - **ARGUMENTS ARE BUILDINGS** is a complex metaphor based upon two primary metaphors:
    - **LOGICAL STRUCTURE IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE**
    - **PERSISTANCE IS REMAINING ERECT/UPRIGHT**

  - Elements such as *foundation*, *support* and *collapse* are common to both metaphors, whereas *windows*, *chimneys*, and *tenants* are not.

Limitations on Conceptual Metaphors

- **The Invariance Principle**
    - In a metaphorical mapping, all elements from the source domain can be mapped onto the target domain *as long as those elements are coherent with the **image-schematic properties** of the target domain*.

- This explains why the following instance of the **LIFE IS A JOURNEY** metaphor is incoherent:

    - *"Having chosen the path culminating in my marriage to Juliette, I turned around and went back to the fork to marry Helen instead."*

Conceptual Metaphor

- Based on body symmetry/orientation, sensorimotor interaction with the external environment, proprio-ception, and emotional experience, we come to metaphorically conceive of ourselves and others as
  - more UP than DOWN
  - more FRONT than BACK
  - more ACTIVE than PASSIVE
  - more GOOD than BAD
  - more HERE than THERE
  - more NOW than THEN

- Implications for non-humanoid con-cultures/conlangs

Conceptual Metaphor

- Most conceptual metaphors are specific instances of more general metaphors:
    - STATES ARE LOCATIONS
    - CHANGES ARE MOVEMENTS
    - CAUSES ARE FORCES
    - ACTIONS ARE SELF-PROPELLED MOVEMENTS
    - PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS
    - ACTION IS DIRECTED MOTION

Conceptual Metaphor & Conlanging

- When translating, identify any English conceptual metaphors. Decide whether to adopt, substitute, or avoid them entirely.

- Choose from any source domain which can be logically mapped onto another,
  - while excluding elements not common to all underlying primary metaphors, and
  - without violating the invariance principle

- Don't violate pre-linguistic bodily-based metaphors arbitrarily (UP, FRONT, ACTIVE, GOOD, HERE, NOW).
  - On the other hand, if your speakers are non-humanoid, you should rethink your bodily-based metaphors.

Conceptual Metaphor & Conlanging

- Example: the **TIME IS A RIVER** metaphor
  - Is "upriver" the future or the past?
  - Is "downriver" the future or the past?

  - ❑ From the point of view of:
    - *a tribe living on the riverbank*
    - *a nomadic tribe descending the river's course*
    - *a nomadic tribe following the river inland*
    - *a sentient avian species flying overhead*

Conceptual Metaphor & Conlanging

- Think up metaphors whose underlying conceptual logic matches your con-culture or the psyche of your speakers, e.g.,

LOVE IS DANCING

MEMORIES ARE DISEASES

THE FAMILY IS A JUNGLE

THE FUTURE IS A JESTER

A PROJECT IS A PREGNANCY

SEX IS ART

SEX IS WEATHER

SEEING IS EATING

CRIME IS A CIRCUS

LOVE IS DEFUSING A BOMB

GOD IS THE SEA

LOVE IS A SCHOOL

LIFE IS MUSIC

LIFE IS WAR

EMOTIONS ARE ZOO ANIMALS

THE MIND IS A LIVING BODY

COMMERCE IS SEDUCTION

ANGER IS A HOSPITAL

Conceptual Metaphor & Conlanging

COMMON SOURCE DOMAINS

- The human body
- Health and Illness
- Animals
- Plants
- Buildings and Construction
- Machines and Tools
- Games and Sport
- Money and Business
- Cooking and Food
- Heat/Cold/Light/Darkness
- Forces
- Movement and Direction

COMMON TARGET DOMAINS

- Emotion
- Desire
- Morality
- Thought
- Society / Nation
- Politics
- Economy
- Human Relationships
- Communication
- Time
- Life and Death
- Religion