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Primary Scenes and Metaphoric Conceptualization

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There are a number of reasons to believe that metaphoric expressions in natural language (e.g., "time's wingèd chariot," "stock prices are *up* this quarter") reflect not only communicative strategies, but conceptualizations which map structure and inferences from one entity or relation onto another. This general view, which contrasts with traditional analyses of metaphor as a literary or rhetorical strategy, is known as "conceptual metaphor theory" (See Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Gibbs 1994; etc.)

Much of the work on conceptual metaphor has emphasized the apparently systematic correspondences between complex domains of experience, such as "ideas" (including thinking, believing, communicating and so forth) and "food" (including eating, food preparation, etc.). Expressions such as *food for thought, to spoon-feed a class, to swallow a claim, to chew on an idea*, etc. have been taken as evidence that these two areas of human life are linked by a thorough mapping which captures the ontological and inferential structure of one (food, the *source*) and imposes it onto the other (ideas, the *target*).

Recent work on this topic, however (e.g., Grady et al 1996), has shown that the correspondences for which there is direct linguistic evidence are typically much narrower — e.g., the metaphorical conceptualization of desirability as flavor, or of acceptance as an act of swallowing (*primary* metaphors). These narrower correspondences are not logically dependent on one another, and expressions which combine them often have the "flavor" of mixed metaphor — e.g., ?*She couldn't swallow all the food for thought*; ?*He spoon-fed them the food for thought*

Given that conceptual metaphor theorists emphasize the importance of *experiential bases* for metaphor in their theory — i.e. they stress that adequate analysis of a conceptual metaphor must include an account of the experiences which give rise to the cognitive link between the respective concepts — the difference between the types of experiences which could motivate primary metaphors and those which could motivate complex mappings takes on considerable significance. Though the claim that experiential motivation is an important aspect of metaphorical analysis has often been repeated, however, there have been no serious proposals to date regarding what those motivations should look like.

The theory of primary metaphors suggests a particular direction in which to look for such experiential bases. Rather than pointing to broad isomorphisms between experiential domains — such as the fact that ideas, like food, may be created or developed by one person and then presented to another, who will either accept or reject them, etc. — we gain greater insight, and more specific accounts, by looking at *primary scenes,* narrowly defined aspects of experiences, which recur in numerous sorts of settings, and which are commonly correlated with each other in ways that give rise to metaphor and a number of other conceptual-linguistic phenomena. For instance, the experience of tasting a piece of food, whose flavor we we may have an immediate positive or negative response to, is a primary scene which gives rise to a metaphor of "Appeal as Flavor." Another primary scene involves manipulating (e.g., taking apart) a complex object, and forming a mental representation of the causal relations embodied in the object (e.g., support, connection). This primary scene, which pairs a physical experience with a conceptual one, gives rise to a metaphor of "Organization as Physical Structure." Other primary metaphors are similarly based on primary scenes, which involve fundamental dimensions of activity.

Importantly, primary scenes are relevant not only to conceptual metaphor but also to other aspects of language. C. Johnson (to appear) has sugggested that a primary scene involving the visual perception of a stimulus and the inference of information from the stimulus, may play a central role in English-speaking children's acquisition of the verb *see*, which they typically use (at a certain stage) to refer not to a visual experience alone — what the adult considers the primary sense of *see* — but to the combination of seeing and "finding out," as in *Let's see what's in the box.* The acquisition of *with* in its instrumental sense, as in *He's eating with a fork*, appears to follow a pattern which can also best be accounted for in terms of primary scenes: the child does not readily acquire the instrumental sense of *with*, but instead interprets adult *with*-phrases as referring to the simpler relation of "temporary possession" — a primary scene in which a person "has," or holds, an object. It is only later that the child is able to map the word onto the complex representation which integrates this primary scene with another involving purposive action. (See Grady & Johnson, to appear.)

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