Coextension-path fictive motion and metaphor typology

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A central concern of cognitive science is how speakers modify concepts that are directly based on sensorimotor experience in order to create concepts that are not directly grounded in that way. Relevant phenomena include Primary Metaphors (PM) such as PURPOSFUL ACTIVITY IS GOAL-DIRECTED MOTION (Example 1: We're approaching the final stage of the project [Lakoff & Johnson 1999]), and Coextension- path FM (fictive motion) (2: The mountain range goes from Mexico to Canada [Blomberg 2015; Talmy 2000a]). Coextension-path FM (CFM) has been assumed to be a metaphor (e.g. Matlock 2017) and also claimed to not be a metaphor (Fauconnier 1997:177). The reasons why one scholar would say that CFM is a metaphor while another says it is not need to be made explicit in order for the community of scholars to understand each other well. The discrepancy is resolved by analyzing the conceptual mapping of Coextension-path FM as having properties of both Primary and Resemblance Based metaphor (cf. Grady 1999), thus serving the general purpose of clarifying our understanding of metaphor and fictivity.

Primary Metaphors systematically map inferences between distinct frames such as those involved in arriving at a location and achieving a purpose in (1). The frames (Fillmore & Baker 2010) in the mapping are distinct in that they do not share any elements. For example, achieving a purpose does not have a Location as a frame element. Primary metaphors are motivated by experiential correlations (Lakoff & Johnson 1999).

Resemblance-based metaphors (3: a hair-line fracture), by contrast, are motivated by resemblance such as the resemblance in a SHAPE frame between a human hair and the shape of a kind of fracture in a bone as in (3). This type of metaphor does not systematically map inferences (Dancygier & Sweetser 2014). An image metaphor is tightly constrained by the resemblance that motivates it.

CFM consists in depicting a stationary object in terms of a Path over the object's extent (Talmy 2000a:138). (Example 4 (LE = Located Entity): Pipes [LE] went through the roof). In other words, CFM portrays the Site of a stationary object as the Path of a moving object. Site is the frame-specific name for the relation between the Figure and the Ground in a LOCATION frame, while Path is the frame-specific name for the relation between Figure and Ground in a MOTION frame (Talmy 2000b:218). Crucially, the concept of Ground is exactly the same in both frames. Since LOCATION and MOTION share an element (the Ground), a mapping between the two frames does not qualify as primary metaphor.

The contrast between CFM as a mapping between frames that share an element and PM as a mapping across distinct frames can be seen in a comparison of example (4) above with examples (5) and (6): (5: Rats went through the roof. 6: Prices went through the roof.) In (5) a canonical Mover in place of the fictive Mover of (4) depicts an event of motion involving the same concept of the roof as in (4). This is because the LOCATION and MOTION frames share the Ground element relative to which the figural LE or Mover is located or moving. By contrast, in PM as in (6), a different frame is involved in which the Ground element evoked by the roof is distinct from that concept of the roof which is evoked in (4) and (5).

The sharing of the Ground frame element in CFM between the fictive construal and the non-fictive situation, as suggested by the comparison of (4) and (5), constitutes a resemblance which constrains what a CFM expression can depict (cf. Matsumoto 1996). At the same time, because motion is involved, the inferences of motion schemas are applicable. Here are some examples of inferences relevant to an interpretation of (4) in which the long axis of the pipe is perpendicular to the plane of the roof, and the roof is one of the outer surfaces of a building: a) Part of the pipe is inside the building and part of the pipe is outside; b) Part of the pipe is contiguous with the roof. c) There is a hole in the roof (i.e. a gap in the continuity of the material that constitutes the roof); d) There is a potential for interchange between the inside and the outside of the building.

In sum, Coextension-path (and probably other types of fictive motion as well) is constrained by resemblance due to a frame element which is shared between the fictive construal and the non-fictive situation — but CFM also yields relatively rich inferences. Thus it has properties of both Resemblance-based and Primary metaphor. A scholar can say that CFM is a kind of metaphor in the sense that something which is really believed to be stationary is depicted as moving. A statement that CFM is not a kind of metaphor can be reasonably understood to mean that CFM is not a mapping between distinct frames.