

Metaphor

“... understanding one thing in terms of another” — Lakoff & Johnson

Three levels of meaning for the term *metaphor*:

- **Metaphor**: a phenomenon of human Language and Cognition
- **Metaphor Theme**: an individualized symbolic pattern in a language (e.g, *TIME is MONEY* in English)
- **Instantiations** of metaphor themes: (e.g, *I spent an hour.*)

Some metaphor themes:

- 1) *TIME is MONEY* A **Metaphor Theme** that licenses English speakers to refer to their experience of **duration** with words defined in terms of the commercial exchange of valuable resources, i.e, **money**:

- I spent **thirty hours** on that job.*
- I spent **thirty dollars** on that lamp.*
- I lost **quite a bit of time** in the traffic jam.*
- I lost **quite a bit of money** in the casino.*
- I saved **a few minutes** by taking the shortcut.*
- I saved **a few dollars** by painting it myself.*
- That cost him **two years** of his life.*
- That cost him **two million dollars** of his money.*
- I thought that was worth the **time** it took.*
- I thought that was worth the **money** it cost.*
- I contributed **a lot of time** to charity.*
- I contributed **a lot of money** to charity.*

a) What counts as what in the metaphor theme?

e.g,	<i>TIME</i>	<i>MONEY</i>
	(amounts of) time	(amounts of) money
	state or event experienced	commodity purchased
	(human) experiencer	(human) purchaser
	[no equivalent].....	(human) seller

b) What doesn't work?

e.g, **I paid thirty **hours** for that job.* (because *pay* refers to seller)

c) How else do we refer to time?

- 1)a *TIME is SPACE*: A metaphor theme that licenses English speakers to refer to temporal phenomena with words and expressions defined in terms of (their experience of linear motion in) space.

e.g,	a <i>long/short</i> time	<u>before/after</u>
	put it <i>behind</i> you	look <i>forward</i> to it
	years <i>passing</i>	the <i>coming</i> weeks
	at this <i>point</i> in time	

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2) *What's UP?* English speakers (like all humans) are oriented vertically with respect to a gravitational field, so the **up/down** dimension is significant, and English uses it in a variety of metaphor themes. All of them are **coherent**, i.e. we tend to think of them in the same ways (e.g. *LESS*, *SAD*, *WEAK*, *PASSIVE*, and *WORSE* are all negative evaluations, and vice versa.)

a) *UP is MORE (DOWN is LESS):*

The prices are *rising/falling*.
The stockmarket's *moving up/crashing*.
Turn the volume *up/down*.

b) *UP is HAPPY (DOWN is SAD):*

He's *depressed*.
feeling *up/down*
What a *downer!*

c) *UP is POWERFUL (DOWN is WEAK):*

upper/lower classes
superior/subordinate
the *highest levels* of the government
oppressed masses

d) *UP is ACTIVE (DOWN is PASSIVE):*

The computer is *up/down*.
Are you *up* for some handball?
Rise to the occasion.

e) *UP is BETTER (DOWN is WORSE):*

higher/lower animals
He *fell down* on the midterm.
a *rise/fall* in performance
aim *high*
upwardly-mobile

f) *UP is ABSTRACT (DOWN is CONCRETE):*

He's got his *head in the clouds*.
He's got his *feet on the ground*.
Come *back to earth*.
higher mathematics
high-level cognitive functions
low-level details
new *heights* of abstraction
down-to-earth solution

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We know almost nothing about the human mind, yet we talk about thoughts and beliefs and emotions constantly, and have thousands of words in every language that refer to the mind. Such a concept is a good candidate for a metaphor, and indeed there are several big themes in English that purport to inform us what “The Mind” is.

One example is already provided for each of the following metaphor themes.

Find 5 more examples for each.

Ideally, you should listen/watch for them in others’ speech or writing.

1) *THOUGHT is LIGHT; KNOWING is SEEING*

That’s a *bright* idea; I *see* what you mean.

2) *THE MIND is A CONTAINER*

He has a pretty *closed* mind.

3) *THE MIND is A PLACE*

That thought had *crossed* my mind.

THE MIND is A HOUSE is a specific combination of all of the themes above. A house is a **place**, and is a **container** as well. More importantly, it is a container for **people**, who are implicated in the first theme as being the ones who do seeing, and therefore thinking. This, in turn, is coherent with the theory of thought and consciousness which attributes one’s inner experience to a **homunculus** (Latin, ‘little man’) inside one’s mind. As a scientific theory, this is a bust, since it just raises the question of what’s inside the homunculus’s mind, and so ad infinitum; but as a satisfying explanation for why we do what we do, it has a long history.

Other metaphor themes are found in other contexts.

For some more examples, in a somewhat novel context, point your browser at:

<http://www.umich.edu/~jlawler/meta4compute.html>