

Primary and Complex Metaphors in the History of the Romance Languages

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Much of the cognitive semantic research of the last three decades has revolved around the Conceptual Theory of Metaphor (CTM). This theory was first formulated in the now classic book by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson *Metaphors We Live By* published in 1980. The central tenet of the CTM is that rather than being limited to the ornamented literary language, metaphorical expressions are pervasive in the everyday usage, and that such pervasiveness is due to our cognitive makeup: we conceptualize some concepts in terms of others. For instance, we conceptualize the abstract concept MORE in terms of a more concrete concept UP. This conceptual mapping – MORE IS UP – finds its manifestation in linguistic structures like *The number of people living in poverty went up*. The CTM highlights that such conceptualizations are not arbitrary and have an experiential basis (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

More recent research (e.g., Grady 1997, 2005; Lakoff and Johnson 1999) has made an important clarification: many conceptual metaphors are not experientially based. A distinction should be made between primary and complex metaphors. Primary metaphors “are motivated by tight correlations in experience” (Grady 2005: 1600). For example, the primary metaphor IMPORTANT IS BIG (e.g., *Tomorrow is a big day*) is based on the “frequent correlation in our experience between the size of an object and its salience or importance to us” (Grady 2007: 194). In contrast, complex metaphors do not have experiential motivation; they are combinations of primary metaphors. For example, the complex metaphor ABSTRACT ORGANIZATIONS ARE ERECT PHYSICAL STRUCTURES, including its subtype THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS (e.g., *The theory will stand or fall on the strength of that argument*) is a combination of two primary metaphors: ORGANIZATION IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE (e.g., *The Federal Reserve is the cornerstone of the nation’s banking system*) and PERSISTING IS REMAINING ERECT (e.g., *The speed record for the mile still stands*) (Grady 1997).

The present study focuses on the historical development of the complex metaphors. More specifically, we analyze the evolution of the complex metaphors on the way from Latin to Romance in order to uncover how and why these associations were able to emerge. Because the Romance language family is a family that has the attested proto-language (Latin), documented intermediate stages (e.g., Old Italian) and great synchronic spread and diversity, it is particularly well suited to explore these types of questions. The scope of the present study is pan-Romance, that is to say that our examples come both from the standard languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Catalan and Romanian, as well as from the non-standard varieties such as Raeto-Romance. The methodological principles that we follow are those outlined in Grady (1997, 2005). We conclude that although so far the distinction between primary and complex metaphors has mainly been addressed within cognitive linguistics on the synchronic level, this distinction is fully relevant for the study of language change.

References

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