Toward a Decompositional Approach to Metaphor Analysis

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In the last thirty years, metaphor studies have proven to be one of the most fruitful areas of research in Cognitive Linguistics (CL), propelled by its conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999). Despite its enormous success, CMT has also encountered considerable criticisms for its limitations and weaknesses both within and beyond the CL field (for reviews and evaluations see, e.g., Cameron and Low 2011; Gibbs 2008, 2011; Kertész and Rákosi 2009; Kövecses 2008, 2011; Steen 2008, 2011). There is need and room for its improvement in several aspects. Growing out of the CMT tradition for the purpose of refining it is the theory of primary metaphor (Grady 1997a, 1997b; see also Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 2003), which distinguishes between two kinds of conceptual metaphors: *primary* and *complex* metaphors. In short, as posited, primary metaphors derive directly from our embodied experience whereas complex metaphors are composed of primary metaphors in combination with commonsense knowledge and cultural beliefs.

In the spirit of the theory of primary metaphor as a decompositional account, this paper continues the author's (2008, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, forthcoming) effort in developing a Decompositional Approach to Metaphorical Compound Analysis (DAMCA), one that is potentially capable of analyzing through decomposition metaphorical compounds with multilevel structure of complexity. As an analytical tool, therefore, this approach is designed to conduct "deep analyses" of more complex cases of conceptual metaphors so as to reveal (a) their possible internal structure and composition comprising metaphoric and metonymic mappings as well as literal propositions, and (b) their underlying embodied and situated bases in terms of experiential and cultural motivations. Thus, for example, the complex metaphor PRESTIGE IS FACE can be decomposed into the following array of metaphoric and metonymic mappings and literal propositions based on linguistic evidence, with multilevel structure of complexity indicated by the degrees of indentation. The relations among the entities, frames, and mappings involved are also illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 1 in Appendix.

(1)   PRESTIGE IS FACE   (Complex Metaphor)
    a.   PRESTIGE IS A DESIRABLE FEELING   (Proposition)
    b.   FACE IS A VALUABLE POSSESSION   (Complex Metaphor)
    c.   FACE STANDS FOR A FEELING   (Metonymy)
    d.   A VALUABLE POSSESSION IS A PHYSICAL OBJECT   (Proposition)
    e.   A FEELING IS A PHYSICAL OBJECT   (Primary Metaphor)
    f.   AMOUNT OF PRESTIGE IS SIZE OF FACE   (Complex Metaphor)
    g.   PRESTIGE IS A FEELING   (Proposition)
    h.   FACE IS A PHYSICAL OBJECT   (Complex Metaphor)
    i.   FACE STANDS FOR A FEELING   (Metonymy)
    j.   A FEELING IS A PHYSICAL OBJECT   (Primary Metaphor)
    k.   MUCH IS BIG (→ PRESTIGIOUS IS BIG)   (Primary Metaphor)

As shown above, this in-depth analytical approach allows complex metaphors at the intermediate levels (b and f, and h below f) and also allows metonymies into the formulas (c and i). Despite its limitations as an introspective method, if conducted properly and sensibly, it has the advantage of being able to show the primary metaphors beneath, the metonymic motivations for, as well as the cultural beliefs inside, metaphorical compounds. It therefore can serve as a useful instrument when deeper analyses are needed.