Primary metaphors and conceptual metonymy

1 Primary versus compound metaphors

Consider the following linguistic examples:

(1) That marriage is on the rocks.
(2) This once great country has become weaker over the years.
(3) In defending her point of view she took no prisoners.
(4) Those two are still quite close.
(5) We’ve got a big day ahead of us tomorrow.
(6) A different species is going extinct everyday.

a. Identify the conceptual metaphors that underlie these examples. Identify possible source and target domains, and state the metaphor in the form ‘A is B’.

b. For the conceptual metaphors you identified, determine whether these are likely to be examples of primary or compound metaphor.

c. Explain your reasoning for each example.

2 Deconstructing a metaphor

Consider the following linguistic examples.

(1) He’s at a crossroads in his life.
(2) He went from his forties to his fifties without the hint of a midlife crisis.
(3) He got a head start in life.
(4) I can’t ever seem to get where I want to in life.
(5) He followed an unconventional path during his life.
(6) During his life things always seemed to get in the way of his success.
(7) His life had been a rather strange journey.
a. What is the conceptual metaphor that motivates all these examples?
b. Is this a complex or primary metaphor? Explain your rationale.
c. Which primary metaphors motivate each individual sentence? Explain your rationale for each.

3 Identifying metonymies

Consider the following examples:

(1) George Bush arrested Saddam Hussein.
(2) The White House is refusing to talk to the Elysée Palace these days while the Kremlin is talking to everyone.
(3) Watergate continues to have a lasting impact on American politics.
(4) She loves Picasso.
(5) The restaurant refused to serve the couple as they weren’t properly dressed.
(6) She xeroxed the page.
(7) Jane has a long face.
(8) She’s not just a pretty face.
(9) All hands on deck!

a. Identify the conceptual metonymies that underlie each of the examples. For each one, identify the vehicle and the target.
b. Explain how you reached your conclusions.

4 Textual analysis

Select an excerpt from a newspaper or magazine article. Analyse the excerpt with respect to conceptual metaphor and metonymy. Identify the source/vehicle and target in each case, and explain your reasoning. Below are some examples of the sorts of texts you might consider selecting:

a. an article from a women’s interest magazine relating to make-up and beauty products;
b. an example from a men’s magazine dealing with health and/or fitness;
c. an article from a newspaper relating to sports coverage, such as rivalry between football teams or their managers;
d. an article from a newspaper’s ‘opinion/comment’ page(s), dealing with a current political controversy;
e. an excerpt from an agony-aunt column dealing with relationships;
f. a pop-song lyric dealing with love;
g. slogans or text from advertisements that appear in newspapers or magazines.
5 Identifying metonymies in a published letter

The following is a letter, written by novelist Sebastian Faulks, to President George Bush. The letter was written on the occasion of George Bush’s (then American President) state visit to the UK, and concerns the occupation of Iraq by American forces, supported by then British Prime Minister, Tony Blair – a controversial topic, and at the time, highly unpopular with the British electorate. The letter appeared in *The Guardian*, Tuesday 18 November 2003.

a. Identify the metonymies used by Faulks in this letter.
b. How does Faulks use these metonymies to achieve his rhetorical effect?

Dear Mr Bush,

Novelists are famous for not knowing much about public affairs, but for what it is worth, I have always liked America. I have only been a tourist, but my family goes back a long way: my grandfather died as a reporter with American troops on the Rhine in 1945, and my father was wounded twice at Anzio fighting alongside the US Third Infantry Division.

After that, we had our Suez; you had your Vietnam, Korea, Guatemala, Chile… I could go on, but we will pass over these things because in the 20th century we won the first, second and cold wars. It wasn’t just the winning, it was the fact that we were on the democratic side, and that we behaved with propriety. We were not the aggressors. We negotiated. You waited. Good heavens, did you ever wait!

Pearl Harbor and the Twin Towers were attacks to which you responded with appropriate force. Saddam Hussein, however, had neither the means nor the motive to attack you. Nor did he supply others. None of the reasons you offered for invading Iraq – taken singly or jointly – stood up to moral or strategic scrutiny. This was clear to even those of us well disposed towards America. We were at first puzzled (‘I’m sure they know something we don’t, they’re just not allowed to tell us’); then, as it became apparent that you knew nothing, we became unhappy.

What we hated was the way you failed to understand the inheritance of the west. It was not a birthright of absolute superiority, but it was the best thing we had; it was something that went, as Mr Blair put it, to the ‘heart of our credibility as a nation’. And this credibility, for which so many millions died – you have let it run through your hands. And in doing so, you allowed a British prime minister to be morally finessed by Jacques Chirac … Dear God, that it should come to that.

You can laugh at the old Stalinists who lead the protest march against you and ignore the anti-western ranting of a few journalists here whose pathology is one of guilt and self-hatred. But please do be aware of the
distaste felt towards what you have done by reasonable, pro-American Britons. I hate to think what the allied dead of two world wars would have made of it, and of your presidency.

Sebastian Faulks
Novelist