Chapter 6 – Metaphor and Metonymy

6.1 Two of the conceptual metaphors mentioned by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) are LIFE IS A CONTAINER and LIFE IS A JOURNEY. Investigate what ‘life’ is likened to in COCA.

(i) Log in to COCA. Under “Display”, click on the “List” button. Type in the search string: life is a * (note the asterisk) and click on “Search”.

(ii) Analyse the first 100 examples given in the right-hand part of the window and try to organise them into semantic groups. How many fit the conceptual metaphors suggested by Lakoff and Johnson? Can you suggest some more conceptual metaphors?

(iii) Now turn to ‘love’. Try searching for love is a *. You will find that many of the words following love is a are adjectives, so you cannot see what metaphor is used. To solve this problem, search for the following string instead: love is a [j*][n*]. (You can either type in [j*] and [n*] or go down to “POS LIST”, scroll down and click on the tags you want one at a time.) This will retrieve all examples like love is a winding way and love is a temporary derangement.

(iv) Analyse the love examples in the same way as you did the life ones.

These ways of looking for metaphors are not perfect, since they will not find instances like I want to fill my life with something meaningful or Our love has grown and many others.

6.2 Another way to find metaphors in corpora is to search for words which from experience you know or suspect are used in metaphorical expressions. For instance, see to what extent the game of chess is used in metaphors in the BNC.

(i) Log in to BYU-BNC. Search for the phrase game of chess. Analyse the examples. How many are (a) references to real chess games, (b) similes and (c) metaphors?

(ii) Repeat the procedure with the words roller-coaster ride. To retrieve all possible spellings, first search for roller*coaster ride, which will retrieve rollercoaster ride and...
roller-coaster ride, and then search separately for roller coaster ride. Analyse and answer the same questions.

(iii) Think of some other words which are likely to be used in metaphors and investigate them in the BNC.