If TIME IS A RESOURCE, Is It Really *Metaphorically*?

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1 Introduction

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) [1] is one of the most influential theories of metaphor. It makes a number of intriguing descriptive generalizations, and interesting claims about human cognition and understanding in general. Some of its bold claims of the latter kind go without problem, however. This paper examines if CMT is not a framework that forces researchers into **systematic overgeneralizations**.

2 Problem

We took the case of ⟦ TIME IS A RESOURCE ⟧, which Lakoff and Johnson [1, pp. 161–169] made use of to account for the boldfaced expressions:

(1) **1.** *You have some time **left***; **2.** *You've **used up** all your time*; **3.** *I've **got plenty of** time to do that*; **4.** *I don't have **enough** time to do that*; **5.** *That **took** three hours*; **6.** *He **wasted** an hour of my time*; **7.** *This shortcut will **save** you time*; **8.** *It isn't **worth** two weeks to do that*; **9.** *Time **ran out***; **10.** *He **uses** his time efficiently*; **11.** *I **need** more time*; **12.** *I can't **spare** time for that*; **13.** *You've given **a lot of** time of your time*; **14.** *I hope I haven't **too much of** your time*; **15. Thank you for** your time.*

The definition of ⟦ TIME IS A RESOURCE ⟧ is:

(2) "The Time Is A Resource Metaphor is a mapping that applies to a conceptual schema [i.e., their Resource Schema] that characterizes what a resource is" (p. 161)

But in exacltly what way is TIME a RESOURCE? — metaphorically? or nonmetaphorically? — this was the question we addressed.

3 Results and Discussion

We conducted a series of experiments asking about Japanese expressions related to ⟦ TIME IS MONEY ⟧ and ⟦ TIME IS A RESOURCE ⟧, and got evidence that ⟦ TIME IS MONEY ⟧ is a metaphor, but did not get any good evidence that ⟦ TIME IS A RESOURCE ⟧ is a metaphor.

Why such difference? Clearly, TIME is not a kind of MONEY in any sense. Based on this, it is safe to say that this establishes ⟦ TIME IS MONEY ⟧.

⟦ TIME IS A RESOURCE ⟧ is different: it is a conceptual metaphor at a more general level, and unlike ⟦ TIME IS MONEY ⟧, it is not obvious if ⟦ TIME IS A RESOURCE ⟧ is a proper metaphor rather than a case of **schema instantiation**.

Note crucially that schema instantiation is not a metaphorical mapping *per se*: it is a clear overinterpretation of the term "metaphor" if one tries to identify schema instantiations as metaphorical mappings, which we suspect is what Lakoff and Johnson did in their characterization of ⟦ TIME IS A RESOURCE ⟧.

To validate their characterization, Lakoff and Johnson needed to exclude the possibility that TIME is a kind of RESOURCE in **loose categorization/conceptualization** based on **spontaneous conceptual extensions**, which have some effect similar to metaphor but are not a metaphor *per se*. Note that conceptual extension does not presuppose metaphorical mapping. Note also that RESOURCE itself is an abstract concept whose denotational range is broad enough to embrace TIME as one of its proper instances along with OIL. Here come a number of annoying questions: Is (CLEAN) AIR a RESOURCE? If so, is it metaphorically or nonmetaphorically? Is (CLEAN) WATER a RESOURCE? If so, is it metaphorically or nonmetaphorically? — There are no clear answers to these questions. Theoretically, it is possible and empirically very likely that conceptual extensions occur independently of conceptual metaphors.

Now, it is clear that CMT, at least the version presented in [1], risks a few fatal wrong premises: among others, **the metaphor/nonmetaphor distinction is not the same as the metaphor/literal distinction**, but CMT makes use of the **logic of mutual exclusion** ("if the sense of the word *w* is not literal, it is metaphorical"; and "because it is metaphorical, it is a result of metaphorical mapping"). Making use of the logic of mutual exclusion suffers from the **confirmation bias**, and this strongly suggests that some generalizations that CMT makes are empirically invalid.

Methodologically, development of an effective method for the **proper identification of metaphors** is in order, so that we can identify only metaphors as metaphors, and nonmetaphors as nonmetaphors using it. CMT does not come with this kind of identification method. Its identification is always done with researcher's **biased** inuition. This is why CMT often fails to distinguish nonmetaphors from metaphors, thereby claiming that nonmetaphors are metaphors, as is the case with ⟦ TIME IS A RESOURCE ⟧, and running the risk of circularity in its "explanations." To this end, we proposed a method that works, which makes uses of acceptability patterns.

References

[1] G. Lakoff and M. Johnson. *The Philosophy in the Flesh*. Basic Books, 1999.