Homework 5: Metaphors We Think By (Due on June 28, 2004 Monday)

This homework with a total of 100 points is worth 10% of your final grade.

In this exercise, you will collect and analyze data containing linguistic metaphors in a chosen social/cultural domain. Categorize the metaphors you find, and determine the underlying metaphorical processes. Also comment on what your analysis shows about the socio-cultural context. (This homework should be typed.)

Target Domains you may work on include the following.

- Politics (political parties, wars, etc.)
- Law
- Language
- Business
- Information technology (computers, internet)
- Human knowledge and information (books, etc.)
- Human mind and cognition
- Education
- Music, songs, melody
- Emotion
- Media, News
- Love & Romance
- Lust & Sex
- Sports
- Religion
- Health, disease

Or you may choose to look at how certain Source Domains are used for abstract concepts in various Target Domains. For example, you can work on prepositions such as with, of, at, before, after, on, etc. to see what target domains have benefited from these concepts in the spatial, orientational domain. Again, a dictionary is always a good place to start with.

Steps:
1. Pick a domain.
2. Determine several keywords (usually abstract concepts) to focus on in that domain.
3. Start with a dictionary or an encyclopedia. Look the keywords up to see their definitions and related usages.
4. An easy way to find linguistic data is to browse through some magazines or books within that domain.
5. Google WebPages using the keywords. Look for instances of using words in a more concrete domain to describe words that represent abstract concepts. (Some other search engines such as the following are also useful in searching texts as your data.)
   http://www.magportal.com/ [Find magazine articles.]
   http://articles.findarticles.com/p/home?tb=art [Looksmart also looks for articles.]
   http://www.goarticles.com/ [Go Articles]
6. Remember, the examples could be very simple verb phrases that are used with that abstract concept. Dig deeper for the underlying metaphors.

7. Determine the underlying metaphorical mappings for your instances.

8. Discuss the metaphorical processes as to what they show about human mind and culture.

You will give a 5-minute oral report on June 28's class. The oral presentation will be worth 20% of this homework. Be prepared to talk to the class about your findings. Prepare a handout if you have examples to show to the class.

Here is an example of how to collect metaphor data and doing analysis. This is my own writing on metaphors of economy and their relation to commodity fetishization.

Seeing commodity as an empowered creature is a metaphorical process. Taussig emphasizes this, providing as evidence examples of linguistic metaphors in a capitalist society that are associated with money. His examples include economic climate, sagging dollar, cash flows, climbing interest rates, bull markets, plants (= factories), growing money, etc. Indeed the language we use is replete with linguistic metaphors that seem to instill money and capital with life and energy. However, are these metaphors reflections of commodity fetishism? In the following, I look into more metaphors associated with capital and examine the conceptual basis for these metaphors. By looking more closely at these metaphors, we will then compare between metaphorization and fetishization, and look at their relationship.

Glancing through the headlines of two recent issues of Business Week (May 3 and 17, 2004), I gathered the following linguistic metaphors about money and economy. The underlying conceptual metaphors are given in small capital letters in the parentheses following the examples:

- A pricey way to get job growth (ECONOMY IS A CREATURE 5/3/2004, p.14);
- The economy is showing real muscles (ECONOMY IS A PERSON 5/3/2004, p.33)
- China's economy is overheated … Can new leaders rein in a runaway financial system? … heat by the numbers; What's fueling the fire (ECONOMY IS A HEATABLE OBJECT; ECONOMY IS A CREATURE 5/3/2004, p.36)
- the world's hottest company will struggle to keep its edge (A COMPANY IS A PERSON; ECONOMY IS A COMPETITION 5/3/2004, p.82)
- Companies are jazzing up plant tours and store visits to build customer loyalty (A COMPANY IS A PERSON 5/3/2004, p.94)
- How Xerox gets up to speed (A COMPANY IS A PERSON; ECONOMY IS A COMPETITION 5/3/2004, p.103)
- Why the Fed may tighten at the speed of a tortoise (A COMPANY IS A PERSON; ECONOMY IS A COMPETITION 5/17/2004, p.33)
- slow and steady rate hikes (ECONOMY IS A CREATURE 5/17/2004, p. 33)
- crude oil and gasoline prices are soaring. (PRICES ARE MOVING OBJECTS 5/17/2004, p. 36)
- Acer: How far can it ride this hot streak? (A COMPANY IS A PERSON 5/17/2004, p. 52)
- Will souping up TiVo save it? (A COMPANY IS A CREATURE 5/17/2004, p.63)
- Startups catch overseas fever (A COMPANY IS A PERSON 5/17/2004, p. 65)

These metaphors show that economy is often taken as a creature (a plant or an animal) that grows and moves. Prices are seen as moving objects that can go up and down. The most common metaphor is to see a company (or a corporation) as a person who strives to survive in a competitive (financial) world (with economy being metaphorized as a competition). A company thinks and makes decisions. In order to bring in cash, it innovates and keeps up with the competitors.
The question now is whether these metaphors tell us anything about the actual social behaviors and beliefs of language users. Is the fact that we take a company as a person evident that a company is instilled with life of its own and that people working for the company are therefore under its power? Does the fact that money, like a moving object, can flow and move imply that we as humans are losing control of it and fall under the predicament of commodity fetishism?

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Lakoff's later work (1987), metaphor is a cognitive process. It is how people think about knowledge in a more abstract domain based on their experiences in a more tangible domain. People use certain metaphors because they experience correlations among two domains of knowledge. As Kovecses (2002) points out, the conceptual domains associated by metaphors do not necessarily have to be similar. They usually have correlated structures. He suggests that "some metaphors are not based on similarity but generate similarities (72)."

The idea that metaphors are both producers and receivers of similarities is important. This implies that metaphor is a cover term for two distinct processes. We use metaphor to associate similarities. We also use metaphors to construct conceptual mappings and generate correlations. Take the metaphor, A COMPANY IS A PERSON, as an example. It reflects the similarities that people perceive between the properties of a company and those of a living and thinking person. At the same time, this metaphor also causes people to make a company person-like. The crucial fact is that both domains already existed in the culture prior to the initial mappings. Metaphorization is a diffusing process. Once certain properties are associated across the domains, a conceptual metaphor is constructed. Then more properties are associated based on that conceptual metaphor. A metaphor finally becomes a habitual thought. It becomes an impenetrable capsule integrated with ideas from both the source and the target domains. Where is fetishization in relation to this metaphorization process?

When commodities are fetishized, they are "thingified as parts of a living system (Taussig 1980: 36)." Taussig discusses the relation between fetishization and reification in the following passage:

"It logically follows that the things may well be regarded or spoken of as though they were alive with their own autonomous powers. If regarded as mere things, they will therefore appear as though they were indeed animate things—fetishes. Capital, for instance, is often compared to a tree that bears fruit; the thing itself is the source of its own increase. Hence, reification leads to fetishism. (ibid)"

Quinn's (1987, 1991) cultural theory of metaphor, in contrast with that of Lakoff and Johnson's (1987), offers insights. She suggests that metaphors are ordinarily selected to fit a pre-existing cultural model. They are not mere cognitive manifestations, but rather culturally-based processes. This cultural basis is the source of most metaphorical mappings.

Coming back to the question of commodity fetishism, we come to the conclusion that the metaphors that see economy as a competition, and companies as creatures etc. stem from the fact that in a capitalist society, companies, like people, compete to bring in money, and that the goal of corporations is usually to make money breed more money. This cultural understanding of capitalist economy leads to people's metaphorical associations between living creatures and capital. Further conventionalization of these metaphorical usages strengthens the correspondences and extends the mappings. Commodity fetishism describes the process of people taking commodities as divine or animate and thus worshipping or falling in love with them. This is partly reflected by the linguistic metaphors we use. Fetishization of commodities underlies the metaphorization of economic entities. It is, however, worth noting that linguistic metaphors may also result simply from cognitive processes or the similarities between two entities. Fetishization may or may not play a role in these metaphors. When using linguistic metaphors as evidence for commodity fetishism, we need to be aware that metaphors suggest a possibility, not a necessity, that fetishization of commodities is the underlying force.