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“Some notes on the expression of existence in English: a cognitive analysis”

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In this paper I attempt to map in some detail the linguistic expresión of existence-related concepts in English. In other words, I examine the fundamental lexical and grammatical resources which are available in the English language when it comes to speaking about the existence of various kinds of entity, either concrete (people, animals, plants, tools, etc) or abstract (organizations, systems, ideas, etc). As will be seen, more often than might be expected everyday language deals with such issues as creation and destruction (or, to avoid the causative bias, how entities come into existence and go out of existence), transformation (how a given entity may turn into a different kind of entity), persistence (how the existence of an entity extends over time), and other existence-related circumstances. Following the methods of Cognitive Semantics, linguistic expressions are associated with the conceptual structures which support them (propositional models, metaphors, metonymies, and image-schemas; see e.g. Lakoff 1987, Lakoff & Johnson 1999). Existence is a pervasive concept which may be characterized at different levels of genericity.

In principle, the notion of existence presents a high degree of abstraction which makes it elusive but, at the same time, it is not completely disembodied reality (consider for instance the physiological consequences of life and death; e.g. life is generally associated with activity, proper functioning of all organs, an erect posture, etc., while death brings about the loss of all kinds of action and functionality). Given the wide-ranging nature of the domain of existence, it may be argued that it constitutes a perfect testing ground for the tools of analysis developed within Cognitive Linguistics.

REFERENCES

- Lakoff, G. 1987. *Women, Fire & Dangerous Things. What categories reveal about the mind.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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