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“Metaphors of cognition and the FORCE image schema”

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The cognitive linguistics tradition defines images schemas as preconceptual topological abstractions) which serve to organize much of our experience and understanding of the world (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987, 1989; Turner, 1991, 1996; Gibbs and Colston, 1995). One of these structures is the FORCE image schema. Force is an element present in most of our everyday encounters with objects and people (e.g. the wind or gravity are inherent forces in our everyday life in such a way that we barely notice their presence as forces).

It is the purpose of this paper to explain a number of metaphorical expressions related to the field cognition in terms of the FORCE image schema. I will show the pervasiveness of the use of this construct in the expression of different mental processes in English. There is an agreement on the subdivision of FORCE into seven of the image schemas originally proposed by Johnson (1987: 45-48): COMPULSION, BLOCKAGE, COUNTERFORCE, REMOVAL OF RESTRAINT, DIVERSION, ENABLEMENT, and ATTRACTION/REPULSION. I will observe the impact of each of these topological constructs on some metaphorical expressions of cognitive processes.

As an illustration COMPULSION or COUNTERFORCE can be considered. The COMPULSION image schema explains some common expressions such as *Reason forces/leads me to that conclusion*, in which reason is seen as the force that compels people to do something. In this case the forced action is not physical motion, but intellectual motion (conceptualized by means of the metaphor THINKING IS MOTION). The image of the BLOCKAGE schema is represented by a force vector encountering a barrier, and this encounter opens up a number of possibilities. One of them invokes the COUNTERFORCE schema, which involves a meeting of forces. Common instances of counterforce in mental processes are those which exploit the metaphors IDEAS ARE ADVERSARIES and THINKING IS STRUGGLING, as in *He wrestled with the new subject until he came to understand it*. These and other examples will be dealt with in detail.