On “On Metaphor and Blending”, by Gilles Fauconnier and George Lakoff

This long and surprisingly defensive response to Cognitive Semiotics, posted on CogLing, contains many lessons. Let me just mention two or three.

1. There is, in the cognitive community, a conceptual metaphor TRUTH IS FRIENDSHIP, yielding important inferences. So if two researchers, say G1 and G2, are friends, and G1 likes what G2 is doing (P), then that verifies P, and if G2 likes what G1 is doing (Q), then that verifies Q. P can contradict Q to any extent, both are still truly verified by the CM. It is truly creative.

2. There is another astonishing conceptual metaphor CULTURAL RESEARCH IS NEUROSCIENCE, yielding the inference that if two semantic entities are connected, in a given culture or situation, then they are neurally bound; so CM itself is neural binding, and metonymy is binding, and blending is binding, and mapping is binding, and projection is binding, and compression is binding, and so forth. It has to be a CM, ‘binding’ two different domains, since real neuroscience does not have actual knowledge about the way in which mental contents are held by neurons, let alone how predicative relations, let alone again emergent meaning in blended mental spaces, are achieved in human brains.

3. There seems to be a methodological conceptual metaphor ARBITRARY POSTULATION IS EMPIRICAL RESEARCH, making it possible to claim that using only your own homespun or randomly picked, chaotic, self-serving examples can count as empirical, systematic, critically argued and corpus-based research. This CM binds easily to the first CM.

If you try to teach metaphor theory and analysis based on the above in an academic context, then watch out for students’ response in terms of ballistic eggs and tomatoes. Those are gestural manifestations of a wide-spread CM, DISCUSSING IS FIGHTING (formerly ARGUMENT IS WAR). So a disagreement can be an egg.

In some communities, discussing, arguing and disagreeing about modeling and deep problems can be a friendly and generous discursive activity, serving the search for real knowledge.

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