Conceptual Metaphors of the “Self”

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Abstract

The increasing interest in embodied cognition has heightened the need for cognitive models that reflect the relationship of the body with the physical world. Issues of particular interest have to do with the notion of “Self.” According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), there is no unified way to conceptualize our inner life, as the metaphors we use to understand the Self are intrinsically inconsistent and incompatible with what we know about the mind from a scientific perspective. However, once both the source domain and target domain are clearly defined, the inconsistencies surrounding the Self metaphors disappear and leave in their place a coherent explanation: They reflect what William James referred to in 1892 as the “spiritual me, material me and social me.”

1. Introduction

Increasing interest in the cognitive underpinnings of the mind has heightened the need for analytical tools that explain and predict phenomena related to conceptual metaphors. Of particular complexity are the linguistic data related to notions of the Self. Lakoff and Johnson (1999), for example, argue that the linguistic data, in English, on the Self show that “there is no one consistent structuring of our inner lives, since the metaphors [involved] can contradict one another” (p. 288). While it is intuitively plausible to acknowledge that the notions underlying the Self are complex and multi-faceted, it is, at the same time, necessary to question the underlying reason for this
complexity in the hope that the answer will lead to a better understanding of the cognitive and neurological processes underlying the Self.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) begin their chapter on the Self by proposing that we experience ourselves as a bifurcation of two selves: a Subject that is the experiencing consciousness of a person, which exists only in the present; and a Self in which everything is not “picked out by the Subject” (p. 269). The Self, in turn, can consist of many different aspects, including our body and roles in society. Thus, the overarching metaphor is that the SUBJECT IS UNDERSTOOD AS THE SELF. Yet, when the system is examined, inconsistencies appear.

For example, the Inner Self Metaphor has to do with one’s “real self” being internal, as in (1a–b).

(1a) Her sophistication is a facade.
(1b) He won’t reveal himself.

In this metaphor, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), the Self is hidden. However, in the EXTERNAL REAL SELF METAPHOR, the “real self” is external and the “internal self” (the one that appeared momentarily in a fit of anger) is what is hidden (cf. examples 2a–b).

(2a) That wasn’t the real me you saw at the meeting yesterday.
(2b) I’m not myself today.

Thus, as Lakoff and Johnson (1999) point out, there is a conflict between the two instances of the source domain of SELF: In one case, the source domain is the INNER SELF; in another instance, the source domain is the EXTERNAL SELF. Moreover, in both cases, the source domain is the TRUER SELF.
Another set of contrasts has to do with what happens when one is outside of oneself. In one case, the SELF AS A CONTAINER metaphor, moving outside of the container implies decreased self-control, as in examples (3a–b).

(3a) Are you out of your mind?  
(3b) He’s spaced out.

However, in the OBJECTIVE STANDPOINT metaphor, where the Subject is also understood as a container, stepping outside oneself increases one’s objectivity and self-awareness, as in examples (4a–b).

(4a) You should take a good look at yourself.  
(4b) You should watch what you do.

In examples (1a–b) and (4a–b), both sets of contrasts are similar in that in each dichotomy there is a metaphor that is referring to a “social being” – a Self that responds to social norms in the culture. In contrast, in examples (2a–b) and (3a–b) there is an “inner voice” that doesn’t necessarily follow social constraints.

2. Proposal

Thus, the hypothesis proposed here is that there is, in fact, consistent structuring of our inner lives, and that the contradictions that Lakoff and Johnson (1999) noted for the Self are, instead, evidence that the source domains proposed were not delineated correctly. This hypothesis is in line with the findings of Ahrens and Huang (2002) who argue that the conceptual contradictions found for TIME metaphors discussed in Lakoff and Johnson (1999) are, instead, artifacts of incorrect source domain delineation. Moreover, once the source domains have been clearly operationalized, the apparent contradictions in the mappings between what were once thought to be similar
source-target domain pairings are now understood to be different mappings with different entailments.

So far, we have discerned two possible narrow source domains for Self: the INNER VOICE and the SOCIAL BEING. These two source domains of Self have been discussed by philosophers and psychologists alike. William James (1892), for example, writes about the SUBJECT AS AN INNER VOICE when he says, “When we think of ourselves as thinkers, all other ingredients of our Me seem relatively external possessions.” Owen Flanagan (1992), on the other hand, talks about the SUBJECT AS A SOCIAL BEING when he writes that the social self is “constituted by the patterns of thought and behavior that one deploys with different groups and on whose successful deployment one understands one image with that group to depend” (p. 180). Flanagan (1992) also discusses the importance of the Self as a physical body. He writes that it “consists first and foremost of one bodily being, how one experiences one body, and how one thinks one looks and moves.” But is there evidence for a PHYSICAL BODY as a source domain of Self? The next set of contrasting conceptual metaphors in English suggests that this might, in fact, be the case.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) propose two metaphors: the SUBJECT AS MASTER, SELF AS SERVANT metaphor (examples 5a–b), and the SUBJECT IS OBLIGATED TO MEET THE STANDARDS OF THE SELF (examples 6a–b).

(5a) I have to get myself to do the laundry.
(5b) I don’t know what to do with myself lately.

And,

(6a) Be true to yourself.
(6b) Don’t betray yourself.
In (5a–b), Lakoff and Johnson (1999) propose that the standard of behavior is located in the Subject. In (6a–b), however, the standard of behavior is located in the Self. But another way of looking at the data is to say that the examples in (6a–b) are referring to the INNER VOICE or inner standard that the Subject must follow, while the examples in (5a–b) are referring to the PHYSICAL BODY that must be controlled by the Subject. In one instance, the Subject must obey the Self (inner voice); on the other hand, the Self (body) must obey the Subject. Thus, limiting oneself to a SUBJECT-SELF dichotomy is what creates apparent contradictions. By expanding the notion of the Self to a three-way source domain distinction (INNER VOICE, SOCIAL BEING, and PHYSICAL BODY), different aspects of our human experience can be captured and understood as different mappings between the Subject and different aspects of the Self (i.e., SUBJECT AS INNER VOICE, SUBJECT AS SOCIAL BEING, and SUBJECT AS PHYSICAL BODY).

Of course, dividing the self up is rife with problems, the foremost being: Why not divide further? Why not also postulate a “spiritual self,” “religious self,” “sexual self,” “creative self,” and so on? In fact, one can propose a variety of different “selves” depending on the question that is being asked. Gallagher (2000), for example, discusses the difference between a “minimal self” (i.e., the Self that has no temporal extension) and a “narrative self” (i.e., the Self that has identity and continuity over a period of time). Taylor (2002) reviews the discussion on the “primitive self”; that is, the Self that experiences pain with no perceptual act on the Subject’s part. And O’Brien and Opie (2000) talk about a “conscious self” in relation to schizophrenics who have a multi-track model of consciousness as opposed to non-schizophrenics who have a uni-track model of consciousness.
However, I will take the constrained and empirically falsifiable view that the major delineations of the Self by human beings are as a PHYSICAL BODY, a SOCIAL BEING, and an INNER VOICE. Moreover, these three source domains may co-exist in any combination (for example, one might think of oneself as a “social being” and a “physical body” at the same time), and, in fact, all three may co-exist at the same time as a unified Subject. Thus, the “narrative self” and the “conscious self” mentioned previously are postulated to be referring to the INNER VOICE source domain, while the “primitive self” is referring to the PHYSICAL BODY source domain. The “minimal self” also refers to the PHYSICAL BODY source domain, with the restriction that the sensations of the body do not extend in time. Putting such restraints on the source domain will, in turn, limit what can be mapped from the source to the target domain of SUBJECT.

3. Neurolinguistic Evidence

Additional evidence for a tripartite distinction of the Self comes from brain-damaged patients. Brain-damage can cause many different types of disorders, including language break-down and physical impairment. If the hypothesis that there are at least three different domains of Self, along with a fourth, unified domain, is to be supported, then it would be advantageous to demonstrate that each of these “selves,” as well as the unified domain, may become impaired depending on the damage sustained to the brain. If this cannot be demonstrated, however, then there is no bodily basis to support such a hypothesis.

We have already mentioned schizophrenia and postulated that it relates to difficulties patients have determining which inner voice should be followed. However, this is not to say that there is a particular location in the brain that maps to one’s inner
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voice. Indeed, as Cleghorn and Albert (1990) and Vogeley (1999) point out, the physical basis of the disease has to do with a breakdown in communication between the frontal, temporal, and cingulate cortices as well as additional sub-cortical structures.

Damasio (1994) has also discussed cases where the patient is impaired in terms of the “social self.” His patient, Elliot, for example, who has damage concentrated in the right frontal lobe, does not respond to violent images; he behaves in socially inappropriate ways when those close to him are in pain. Damasio (1994, 1999) also discusses patients who have anosognosia, a type of brain damage that impairs sensations of the external body, in which patients lose their sense of their external body and do not feel any pain. Patients who exhibit these symptoms have sustained brain damage throughout the white matter in the somatosensory region of the right hemisphere. This area is responsible for external senses of touch and temperature as well as the internal sense of joint position and, as such, may be considered to correspond to our proposed source domain of the PHYSICAL BODY. Damasio does point out, however, that damage to only part of this area will not cause anosognosia; thus, there may be no physical symptoms.

Damasio (1999) also talks about disruption of the “core consciousness.” This happens in cases of akinetic mutisms and epileptic automatisms, absence seizures, persistent vegetative state, and coma. In all of these cases, the patient has lost “a sense of knowing and self” (p. 105). Moreover, the brain damage in all of these cases is usually near the brain’s mid-line, in the internal surface of the brain. These brain-damaged patients no longer have an inner voice, no longer record or react to sensations from their body, and can no longer interact with others. Thus, they have lost all three aspects of the Self.
Furthermore, reports of patients losing an “intellectual self,” a “religious self,” a “sexual self,” or a “business self” have not been documented in the literature. Although one may view oneself in various ways, what is essential is that all other “selves” can be reduced to or understood as an INNER VOICE, a PHYSICAL BODY, and a SOCIAL BEING.

4. Corpora-Based Linguistic Evidence

So far, the hypothesis that we conceptualize the Subject in terms of three source domains has been based on a re-analysis of Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) data for SUBJECT IS UNDERSTOOD AS THE SELF metaphors, which was originally limited in scope, and a cursory review of neurological literature. We formulated this hypothesis on the basis of the assumption that source domains should be as clearly and narrowly delineated as possible. Other researchers, including Steen and Gibbs (1999), Ahrens, Chung, and Huang (2003, 2004), Chung, Ahrens, and Huang (2004), and Semino, Heywood, and Short (2004), have also attempted to formulate criteria to establish the systematic linguistic correspondences involved in conceptual metaphor understanding and formation.

Steen and Gibbs (1999) list a five-step process from linguistic to conceptual metaphor, which Semino et al. (2004) later attempt to refine. One difficulty, as Semino et al. point out, is that listing de-contextualized sentences under a particular conceptual metaphor may obscure alternative analyses, which is similar to our reason stated previously for re-analyzing the Self metaphors that Lakoff and Johnson (1999) proposed. What Semino et al. then do is look at metaphors for cancer within a corpus of doctor-patient discussions, postulating that the contextual use is necessary to determine the correct non-literal mapping identification (i.e., Step five of Steen’s procedure).
While this approach does have the advantage of contextualizing the metaphor, thus allowing for a better hypothesis concerning its possible source domain, the number of instances found is still quite small, and questions remain as to both the efficacy and reliability of such an approach.

Chung, Ahrens, and Huang (2004) take a different tack by using the definitions in SUMO (Niles & Pease, 2003) to delimit the source domain in question for target domains, such as CAREER and ECONOMY in Chinese and English. First, the target term is narrowly delimited (i.e., “Economy”), and then all instances are extracted from the corpora. Next, metaphorical instances are hand-picked (i.e., “Your career is on track.”). Then all lexemes that were judged to be metaphorical have their SUMO definition and node determined. The definitions are analyzed for overlapping terms (i.e. “Organism” or “Transportation”), and the most frequent term is then postulated to be the source domain.

One advantage of this approach is that the target domain is restricted, which should hopefully lead to a clearer generalization if there is enough data at hand. A disadvantage is that the metaphors involved must still be determined by hand, going through individual examples one by one. One way to simplify this step is to use Sketch Engine (http://www.sketchengine.co.uk), which uses the British National Corpus (BNC), with a total of over 100,000,000 words, to run concordancing programs (Kilgariff & Tugwell, 2001). The Word Sketch program, for example, can list all instances of verbs that appear with “economy,” and the cut-off point can be manually determined so that only verbs that appear more than ten times with “economy” may be listed. Additionally, all adjectives that co-occur with “economy” can be listed. “Ailing economy,” for example, occurs nineteen times in the corpus. A check of the ontological node for “ailing” in SUMO is
“DiseaseOrSyndrome” and its definition includes the key word “Organism.” Checking all terms with the SUMO nodes and the prototypical key words in SUMO definitions can then, as Chung et al. (2004) propose, lead to a source domain postulation. In addition, Word Sketch can list all the contexts in which the usage occurred, and these contexts can be expanded as well.

Yet difficulties remain, one being that sometimes the SUMO node is “Proposition” or “Subjective Assessment Attribute”; in these cases, no salient information can be gleaned from either the node or the definition. Another problem is that sometimes Word Sketch returns data that is incorrect because the lexical category assigned to the corpus is incorrect (which leads to the information that “self” is the subject of “employ” instead of a modifier.). However, if the goal is to determine whether the senses of “self” can be categorized into the three categories of INNER VOICE, SOCIAL BEING, and PHYSICAL BODY, then an analysis of the BNC corpora data should allow us to see if that is, in fact, the case.

“Self” is categorized as a noun in 3721 instances in the BNC corpora, and it is modified by 1030 tokens. The tokens that occur more than five times as a modifier of “self” are listed in Table 1.
If the postulation is correct, that there are three different source domains for SELF as a target domain, then we would expect that these different source domains would entail differential distributions. For example, when “self” occurs with “usual,” it typically is referring to a SOCIAL BEING, as the examples in (7a–d) demonstrate:

(7) Usual + Self

(7a) He seemed his usual genial *self* as he greeted me in his new office.
(7b) Otherwise, he was his usual theatrical *self*.
(7c) He looked so animated compared to his usual dour *self* that Walter was compelled to remark, “You know, Alec, I’ve never seen you looking so happy and excited.”
(7d) A massive dose of sun cream and a sun visor and I’m back to my usual prattling *self*.
In the above cases, the intervening adjective between “usual” and “self” is a clue that the Self that is being referred to is a SOCIAL BEING.

In contrast, both “inner” in examples (8a–c) and “true” in examples (9a–c) refer to the INNER VOICE.

(8) Inner + Self

(8a) Some people tend to take advantage of a placid nature – that is only human – so I realized that in order to prevent abuse of my personality I would have to put up a barrier to protect my inner self.
(8b) But this was the first time he’d offered to share any of his inner self.
(8c) In spite of all the traumas of the last four years, Meg’s inner self was too confidently rooted to be prone to that kind of sexual or social self-abasement.

And,

(9) True + Self

(9a) Gedge is often regarded as candid, but he has designed a style of lyric-writing that effectively camouflages his true self.
(9b) Recognition of the true self can only come about when we show the world that we accept the fact that we are not the perfect, flawless human beings we wish to portray – when we stop living a lie.
(9c) Conscious of being a lesbian at the age of eleven, I spent the next seventeen years repressing my true self, taking much spontaneity from my character.
In fact, when the list is examined, it is apparent that only the collocation of “physical” with “self” refers unambiguously to the PHYSICAL BODY, as in examples (10a–c).

(10) Physical + Self

(10a) It made me anxious, focusing on my physical self, keeping a certain shape.
(10b) Doody believes that interest in incarnation can lead to an ironic self-awareness of the gap between that cultural icon, the beautiful female, and the strange physical self.
(10c) But first let us examine the facts and then ensure that we are looking after our physical selves as well as possible.

An analysis of the BNC data indicates that there are six adjectives that modify “self” a total of 215 times, indicating that “self” is referred to as a SOCIAL BEING (Table 2).

Table 2: Adjectives used when “self” is referred to as a SOCIAL BEING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Number of Tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>usual</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>normal</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>old</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cheerful</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ordinary</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast, “self” is referred to as an INNER VOICE 261 times, with a possibility of thirteen different adjectives modifying it, as shown in Table 3. (“Divided” and “female” were not analyzed and not included in Table 3, as all examples came from only one text.)
Table 3: Adjectives used when “self” is referred to as an INNER VOICE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Number of Tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>inner</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>true</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>real</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>higher</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>innermost</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>superior</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authentic</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conscious</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>false</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secret</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individual</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>better</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, according to the BNC corpora data, when the nominal “self” is modified speakers are primarily referring to one’s “inner voice” or being, secondarily referring to one’s “social self,” and only rarely referring to the “physical self.” This may indicate the English-speaking world’s preoccupation with the inner and social selves and may speak to the relative lack of attention modern people need to pay to their physical selves, in comparison. Other languages and cultures, such as Japanese, for example, may emphasize the Subject as a social being more than as an inner voice to be followed (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

When “whole” and “human” are examined, it can be seen that they are being used to modify the unified notion of all three types of self, as examples (11) and (12) demonstrate.

(11) Whole + Self
Not the strength of the body, he wrote, and not the strength of the will, but the strength of the whole self.
In (11), the writer mentions both the PHYSICAL BODY and the INNER VOICE, and notes that they must be combined into a whole.

(12) Human + Self
By learning to understand the effect of their emotional state upon their eating habits, the people concerned will become more aware of what they are – or are not – taking into their bodies. This is why the balance between the different parts of the human self is so very important and why we should all seek to achieve that balance if we possibly can.

In (12), the PHYSICAL BODY and the INNER VOICE (the “emotional state”) need to be balanced within the unified Self.

Lastly, the modifier “other” is interesting because it modifies one or more aspects of the Self, either the inner, physical, or social self, or the unitary whole. For example, in (13a), “self” refers to the “inner self,” which is hiding behind the “social self.”

(13) Other + Self
(13a) All of his energy was concentrated on putting one foot in front of the other, to get out to the Lock before Marie provoked Simon into uncoiling his other self, the one hidden behind the attentive, polite, charming Simon in whom Marie had invested so much of her trust and hope for the future.

In (13b), the “physical self” is prominent in the discussion of cosmetics being applied, but it also carries the connotation that social expectations are driving the physical changes.

(13b) It always fascinates me, the way my other self appears as I carefully apply concealer and foundation, shader and blusher,
eye shadow and liner. The lips come last; I outline them first and then fill them in with a brush. I did my hair first thing, so now I untie the ribbon and shake it free. I have to say that I look pretty damn good. Marcus would think so, I’m sure.

In (13c), the “other self” is the entire person of Dr. Jekyll.

(13c) The next day the news of the murder was all over London. The servant girl had seen the crime and recognized Mr Hyde. My other self was wanted by the police. In some ways I was glad. Now Hyde could not show his face to the world again.

Thus, “other” modifies any one or more of the three aspects of “self” that have already been postulated based on the previous analyses of adjective-self combinations.

It is often useful, when trying to determine the senses of a word, to compare its lexical patterns with that of a near-synonym (Huang et al., 2000). For example, when we compare “self” with the near-synonyms of “being” and “person,” it becomes apparent that the adjectives modifying “being” have to do primarily with a person’s relative level of intelligence and rationality (see Table 4), although “social being” and “inner being” also occur, as does “living being,” which refers to the physical body. This fact points to the observation that the selection of the target word is as crucial to determining the most salient mapping as is the determination of the source domain. “Being” may sometimes be used to refer to “self” but other times it may not. If one is to draw the proper conclusions about the source-target domain mapping, it is first necessary to ascertain that the lexical items involved are necessarily in that domain (Ahrens, 2002).
Table 4: Adjectives used with the nominal “being”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Number of Tokens</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Number of Tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>human</td>
<td>2080</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fellow</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>individual</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intelligent</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>very</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>superhuman</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>spiritual</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rational</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supernatural</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>whole</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>living</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>divine</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>largest</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inner</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>perfect</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>real</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>social</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>different</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autonomous</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>new</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>normal</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adjectives describing “person,” on the other hand, do not refer to “self” but, rather, primarily describe an individual’s status in society, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Adjectives used with the nominal “person”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Number of Tokens</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Number of Tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>disabled</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>handicapped</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elderly</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>self-employed</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>deceased</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authorised</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>non-natural</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>displaced</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>homeless</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>876</td>
<td>deaf</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bereaved</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>young</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>connected</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accused</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>older</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qualified</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>lay</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>named</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>average</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the tripartite distinction of “self” into three narrow sub-domains distinguishes it from that of “being” and “person.” This suggests that the categorical breakdown for SELF into
INNER VOICE, PHYSICAL BODY, and SOCIAL BEING is not merely an *ad hoc* stipulation, as they cannot be replicated in words with similar meanings.

This line of reasoning will work for any ambiguity. For example, if two people are talking about cars, and one is talking about the wheel on the car, the conversation will not get very far if one is talking about a steering wheel and the other is talking about the tires. Yet, the words that collocated with wheel (i.e., “steering” or “hubcap”) will ultimately clarify the type of wheel that is being discussed (Kilgariff, 1997). This is similar to the problem that occurs when discussing the Subject - one person might be talking about the Subject as a social being, while another might be talking about the Subject as an inner voice. The understanding that each person has of the Subject will become apparent through the metaphors that are used, as evidenced by the collocates that occur with it. If the metaphors that are used are based on different source domains, then the two people will soon be talking at cross purposes.

5. Conclusion

Previous paradoxes for metaphors of the Subject can be shown to have arisen as a result of the conflict between understanding oneself as an INNER VOICE as compared with understanding oneself as either a PHYSICAL BODY or a SOCIAL BEING. This analysis, originally postulated by James (1892), is also discussed by Flanagan (1992) and receives additional empirical support based on the collocational data from the BNC corpus presented herein. In addition, this proposed tripartite distinction of the Self mirrors neurological phenomena found in brain-damaged patients. In short, this paper modifies Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) analysis of the Subject based on corpus linguistic and neurolinguistic data and suggests that the Subject can be understood through bodily
experience with the physical world, through social interaction with others, and as an inner voice in one’s mind, thus restoring coherence to the conceptual underpinnings of the Self.

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References


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