The fictive source domain:
Extending metaphorical worlds via the *X as if Y* construction

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Fictive worlds in metaphorical communication are constructed by mapping the source domain onto the target domain. Although cognitive linguistic research typically assumes that metaphorical source domains are based on physical experience (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, Gibbs 2006), we argue that there are metaphorical expressions whose source domain lacks embodiment, which can be termed a *fictive source domain*.

Moreover, the X *as if* Y construction in English can create a fictive source domain of metaphorical understanding. This construction expresses a hypothetical comparison (Dixon 2009), and its metaphorical usage (*e.g.*, "He speaks as if he were a king") has been described as a "clausal simile" (Goatly 2011). This study aims to identify and describe metaphorical examples in which the subordinate clause Y expresses an event that cannot be experienced in the real world.

We randomly extracted 500 examples of the X *as if* Y construction from the *British National Corpus* and analyzed them in terms of two semantic properties of Y. The first is the literal/figurative distinction. In the literal use, such as "He closed his eyes as if he were tired," Y expresses an event that may be the case if additional information were to be supplied to indicate the same. In contrast, in the figurative use, such as "He crushed the man's hand as if it were an eggshell," Y represents an irreality that cannot possibly be true. The second property, the experiential/fictive distinction, divides the figurative use into two subtypes. In the experiential use, the metaphorical source domain is structured on an experiential basis, such as crushing an eggshell in the above example. In the fictive use, such as "The recoiling backwash of the seas was heaped with fluffy spume as if some giant hand had emptied a mammoth packet of detergent there," the source domain is fictive, as entities such as "some giant hand" and "a mammoth packet of detergent" cannot be conceptualized without fictive imagination.

We observed 251 (50.2 %), 197 (39.4%), and 52 (10.4%) examples of the literal, experiential, and fictive uses, respectively. Although relatively rare, dozens of instances of fictive source domains appeared in our data, indicating that the subordinate clause Y can accept a wide variety of fictive expressions to describe concepts represented by the main clause X.

Upon further examining the examples of fictive use, we found that fictive concepts are introduced as source domains by extending experiential concepts through three types of cognitive processes: imagination (*e.g.*, "as if *ghosts* hiding in the shadows"), metaphor (*e.g.*, "as if all the stones were *listening*"), and hyperbole (*e.g.*, "as if you are *the only girl in the world*"). Our findings suggest that a fictive source domain can be formed through a limited number of cognitive abilities and that fictive conceptualization has and is bound by experiential foundations despite the apparent freedom of creativity.

References
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