Criminally Insane: A Cognitive Approach to a CDA of Mental Illness

Chilton observes that despite the best efforts of CDA, discourse continues to produce and reproduce social inequality. Although large gains have been made in recent decades, there remains a great deal of stigma surrounding mental illness. This paper aims to expose aspects of the ideology surrounding mental illness by critically examining the metaphor of mental illness as criminality in discourse through the application of conceptual blending theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002).

One goal of CDA is to make explicit productions and reproductions of social inequality through the identification of ideological structure in discourse. Hart (2008) argues that metaphor qualifies as ideological structure in discourse as metaphors contribute to one's perception of reality. However, to meet the needs of CDA, an approach where the speaker is viewed as selecting metaphors is needed in analyzing metaphor in discourse. Conceptual blending theory fulfills the constraints dictated by CDA because the metaphor is grounded in discourse rather than originating at the conceptual level (Hart, 2008, p.94).

Conceptual blending theory dictates that words prompt the construction of mental spaces rather than referring to entities in the world (Fauconnier & Turner, 1996, p.113). Over the course of a discourse, networks of related mental spaces are constructed. In a blended network, such as those prompted by metaphor, there are typically four mental spaces: two input spaces, a generic space, and the blended space (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p.46).
Emergent structure is generated in three ways: composition, completion, and elaboration (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998, p.271). This emergent structure is significant to a critical approach to discourse. In metaphor, a type of composition termed *fusion* forms compound elements from the projection of two counterpart elements (Hart, 2008, p.97). With completion, relevant background knowledge is projected into the blended space. This projection is selective, however, and not all structure will be recruited from the input spaces to the blended space. Elaboration allows for further cognitive work to be accomplished according to the logic established by the blend (Hart, 2008, p.97).
The application of conceptual blending theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) to the metaphors utilized in the data source for this research has revealed conceptualizations that contribute to the ideology surrounding mental illness and the mental health care system. Six tokens of metaphorical language use were identified and examined for contributions toward the construction of a metaphor. Evidence of the diminished value assigned to the treatment of mental illness was revealed as well as perceptions of the effectiveness of the modern mental health care system. Additionally, tentative indication of entrenchment for the metaphor of the mentally ill as criminals was identified. These findings are significant not only for those who are concerned with the stigma surrounding mental illness but also to the fields of cognitive linguistics and critical discourse analysis. The application of blending theory to metaphor in discourse seems fruitful and may encourage further collaboration between the two fields.

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