

A Cognitive Grammar analysis of metaphoric xyz constructions

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A Cognitive Grammar analysis of metaphoric *xyz* constructions

- The *xyz* construction (as in *necessity is the mother of invention*) is commonly associated with metaphor (cf. Brooke-Rose 1958, Turner 1987, 1991).
- How can metaphor, a conceptual phenomenon (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Gibbs 1994), be associated with specific linguistic structures such as the *xyz*?
- Are the metaphoric uses of the *xyz* related to its non-metaphoric uses?

A Cognitive Grammar analysis of metaphoric *xyz* constructions

This talk aims to:

- Evaluate previous analyses of the *xyz* construction
- Use Cognitive Grammar to represent the role of constructions in metaphoric language
- Analyze the constructions inherited by *xyz*
- Apply this analysis to the full range of metaphoric uses of *xyz* constructions

Previous analyses of xyz constructions

- Christine Brooke-Rose describes the “**double metaphor: A is B of C**” which combines a “Genitive Link” (B of C)” (1958:108-110), such as *the foundation of an argument*, with an “Equation” (A is B) to produce constructs such as *logic is the foundation of an argument*.
- Brooke-Rose notes that both the “Equation” with the “Genitive Link” are used independently in metaphoric language.

Previous analyses of *xyz* constructions

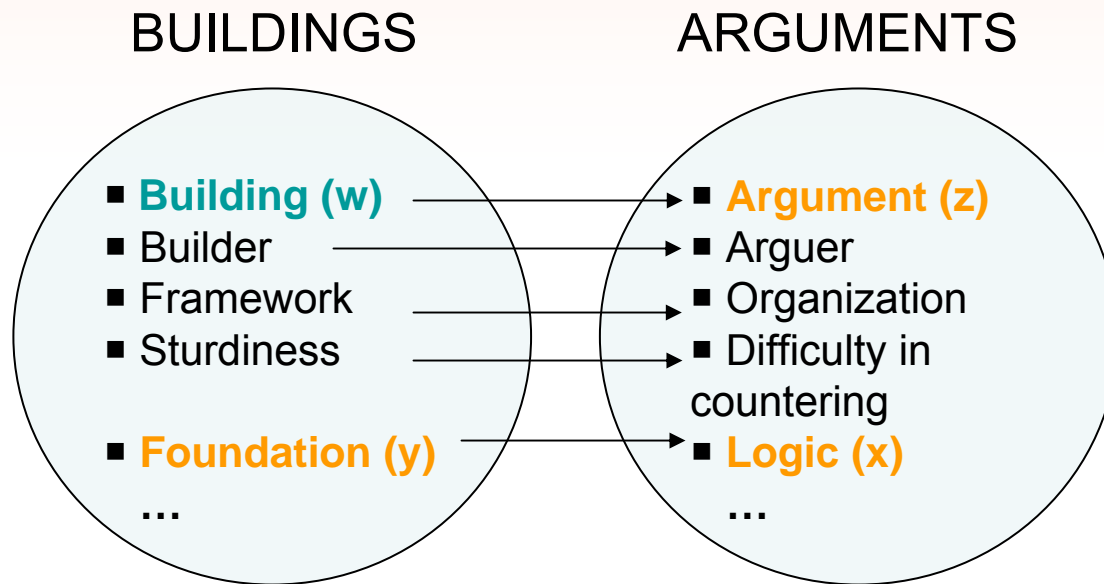
- Turner (1987, 1991) describes how in the “**xyz metaphor**,” **y** typically establishes the **source domain** of a metaphor and is “metaphoric,” and **x** and **z** establish the **target domain**.
- In *logic is the foundation of an argument*, the noun *foundation* evokes the source domain of ARGUMENTS ARE BUILDINGS, and *logic* and *argument* evoke the target domain.
- (BUT: Some *xyz* constructions have *y* and *z* elements from the same domain, as in *the Iraq war is a pit of quicksand*)

Previous analyses of *xyz* constructions

- In the common type of *xyz* constructions, the *y* element is usually a “relational noun” that is part of an unstated whole, *w* (:201).
- In ***logic is the foundation of an argument***, the noun *foundation* is relational, and strongly suggests *building* as the unmentioned *w*.

Previous analyses of xyz constructions

ARGUMENTS ARE BUILDINGS:



- a *solid* argument
- a *well-founded* argument
- The lawyer *constructed* her statement
- Her response *toppled* his argument

Metaphoric language typically indicates both domains of a metaphor

- Turner's observation that certain elements of an *xyz* construction evoke different domains is also true of **other** metaphorically used constructions.
- Some of these give a clearer sense of how a Cognitive Grammar analysis can help us understand metaphoric uses of constructions.

a

bright

“metaphoric”

source domain

(SEEING; LIGHT-EMISSION)

student

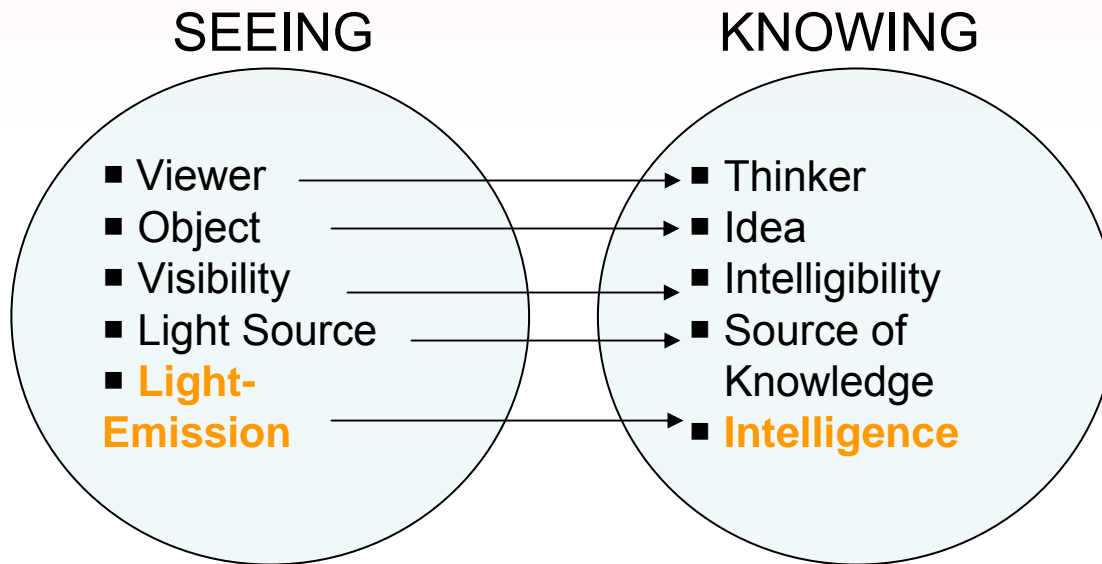
“non-metaphoric”

target domain

(KNOWING; INTELLIGENCE)

Conceptual metaphor and metaphoric language

KNOWING IS SEEING:



- a *bright* student
- a *dim* student
- a *transparent* excuse
- I see what you're saying
- your answer really *illuminated* the topic
- poor organization *obscured* his argument

Metaphoric language typically indicates both domains of a metaphor

a

bright

“metaphoric”
source domain
(SEEING; LIGHT-EMISSION)

student

“non-metaphoric”
target domain
(KNOWING; INTELLIGENCE)

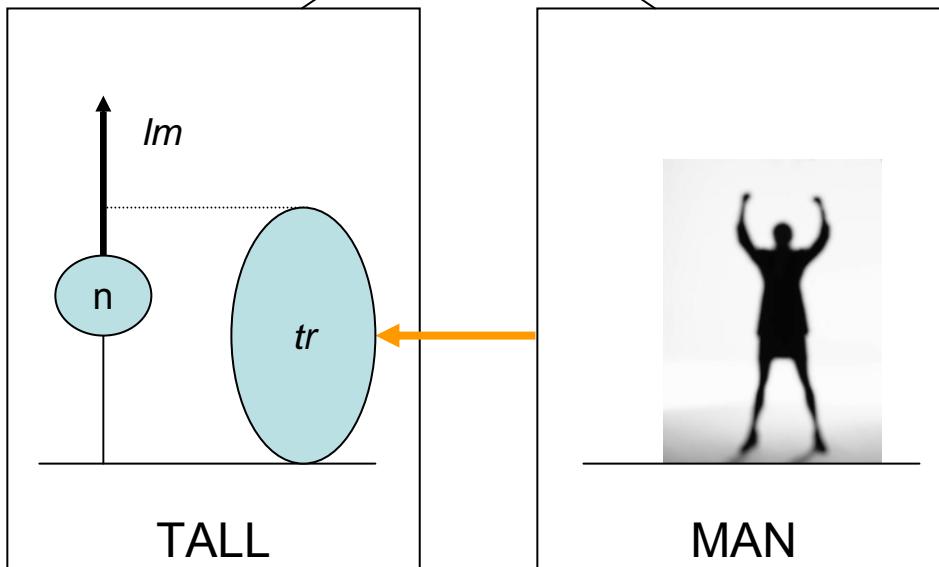
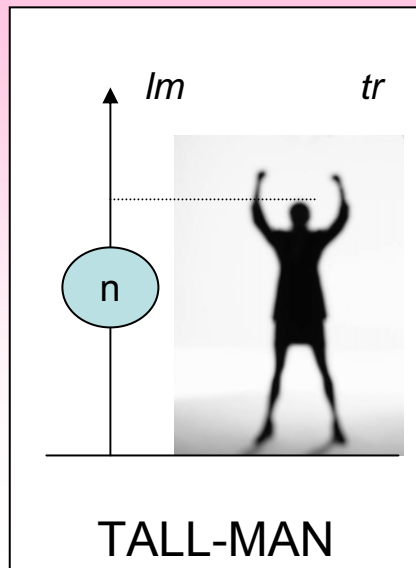
Cognitive Grammar: conceptual autonomy and dependence

tall is **conceptually dependent**,
because its meaning is
“filled in” by that of *man*

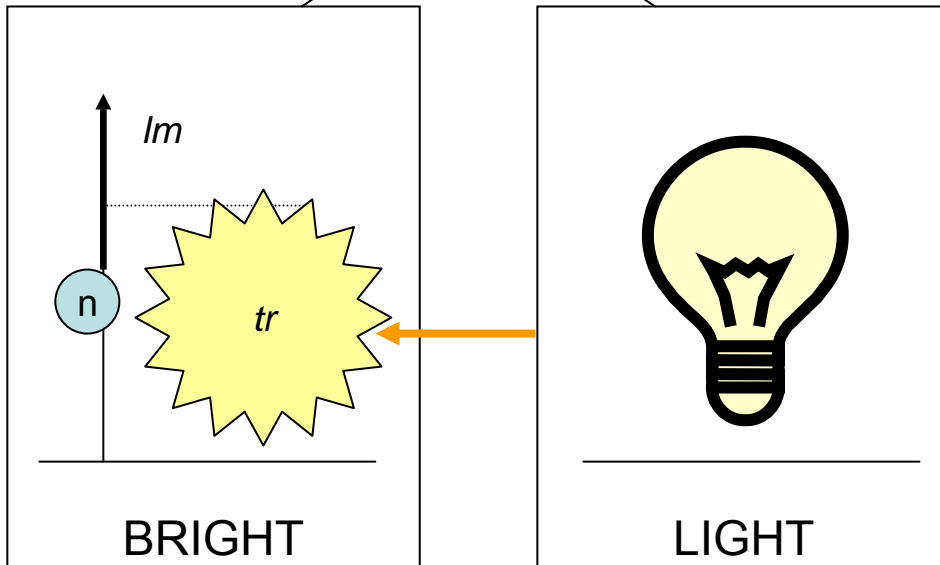
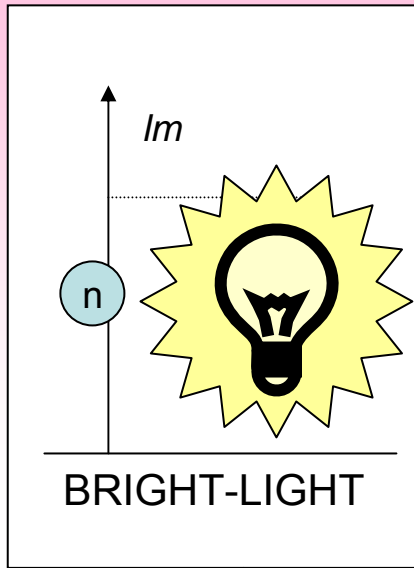
(conceptual dependence
≠ syntactic dependency)

tall man

(Langacker
2002:176)



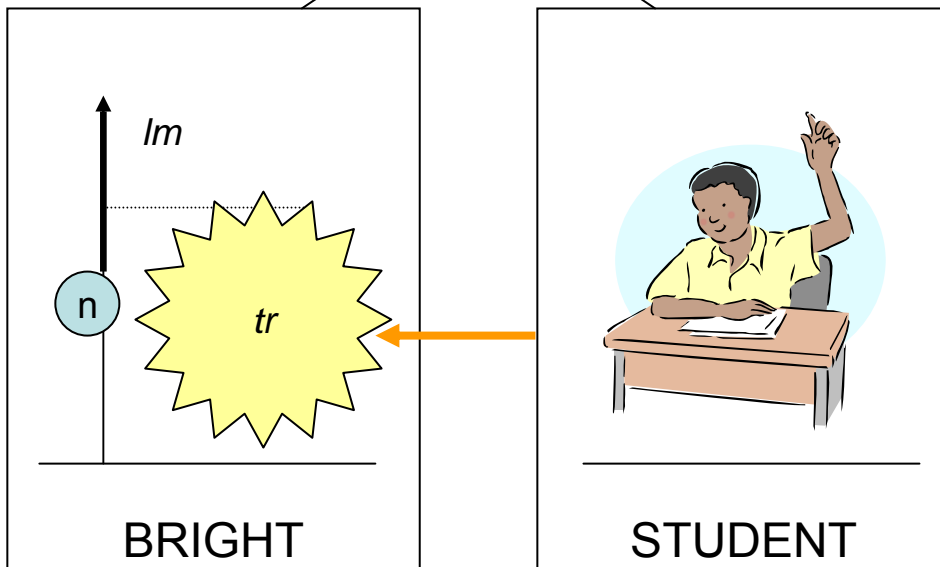
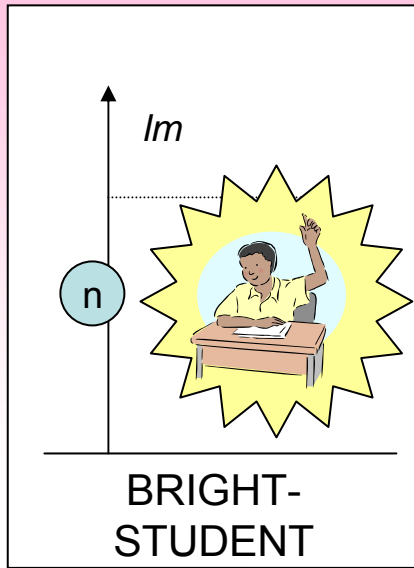
Conceptual autonomy and dependence in a non-metaphoric predicating modifier construction



bright light

(adapted from
Langacker
2002:176)

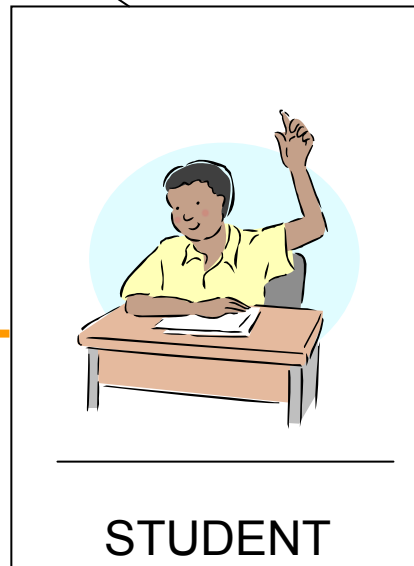
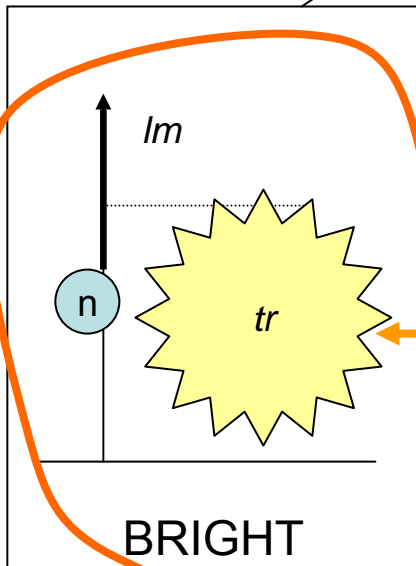
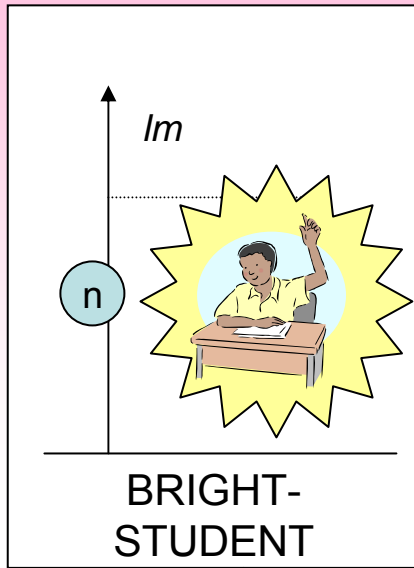
Conceptual autonomy and dependence in a metaphoric predicating modifier construction



bright student

**dependent elements
tend to be
used **metaphorically****
(Croft 2003, Sullivan 2007)

Conceptual autonomy and dependence in a metaphoric predicating modifier construction



bright student

dependent elements
tend to be
used **metaphorically**
(Croft 2003, Sullivan 2007)

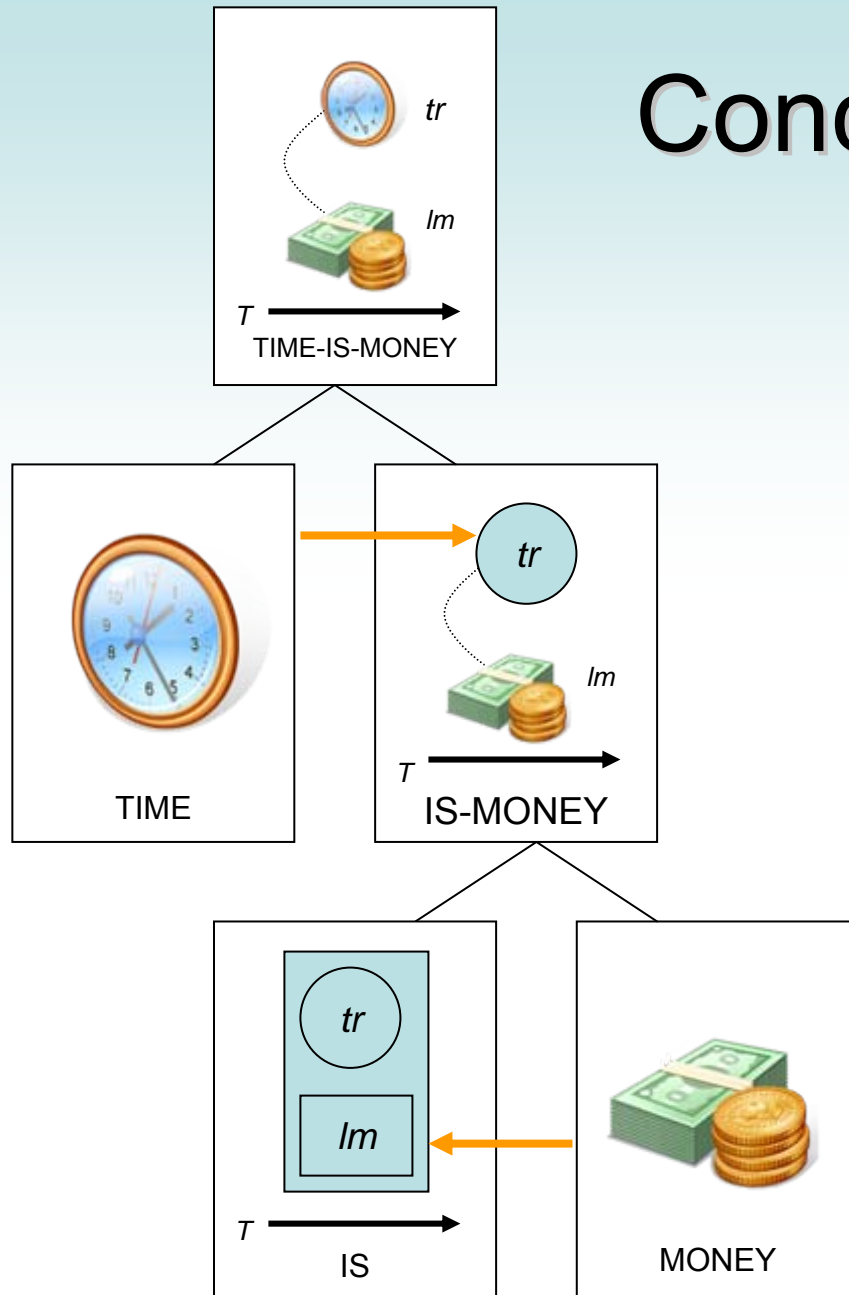
Autonomy and dependence in a corpus of metaphoric sentences

- Corpus represents a subset of the BNC (British National Corpus) produced as a by-product of the FrameNet project
- 1611 excerpts from BNC
- 1723 instances of conceptual metaphor
- 2415 metaphoric constructions (involving open-class items), classified according to their constructional type (predicating modifier constructions, etc.)

Autonomy and dependence in a corpus of metaphoric sentences

Construction type:	Percent of total:	Source-domain (dependent):	Target-domain (autonomous):	Examples from corpus:
Predicating modifier constructions	7.8	predicating modifier	head	<i>bitter thoughts</i> <i>perform brilliantly</i>
Predicate-argument constructions	47.3	head	argument NP(s)	the cinema <i>beckoned</i> fire <i>gutted the embassy</i>
PP/ possessive constructions	34.3	head N	nominal in PP/ possessive NP	<i>the foundation of an argument</i>
Copula constructions	3.7	copula-linked NP, PP, AP	head	trade unionism <i>was a difficult road</i>
Domain constructions	3.1	head	domain Adj/ Adv	political game verbally <i>attack</i>
Compounds	1.8	head N	modifier N	heroin <i>tsar</i>
Other cxns	1.4			They say he's <i>gone soft</i>
Ambiguous	0.6			... the idea of Beuno shackled to a wife

Conceptual autonomy and dependence in a metaphoric equation

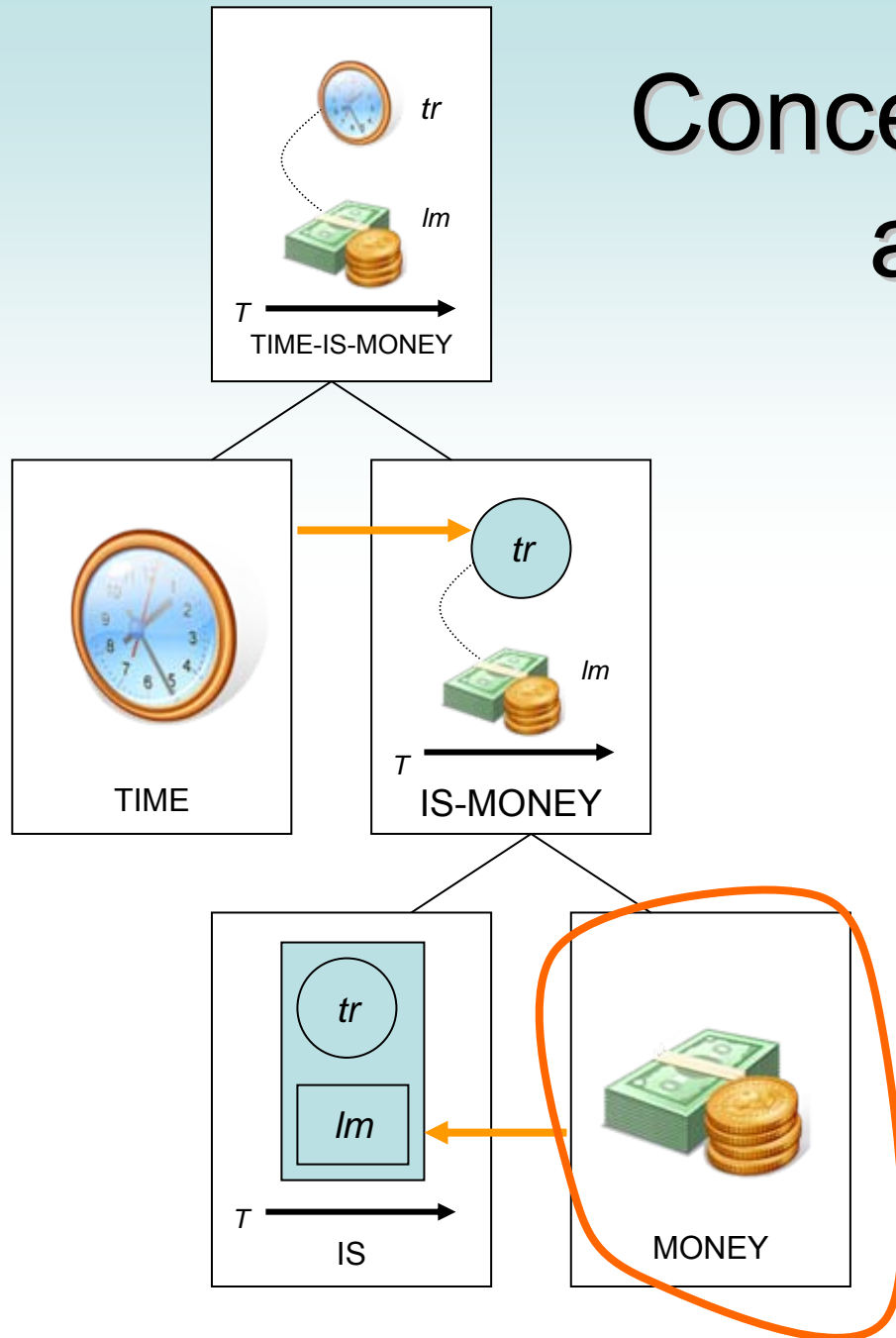


time is money

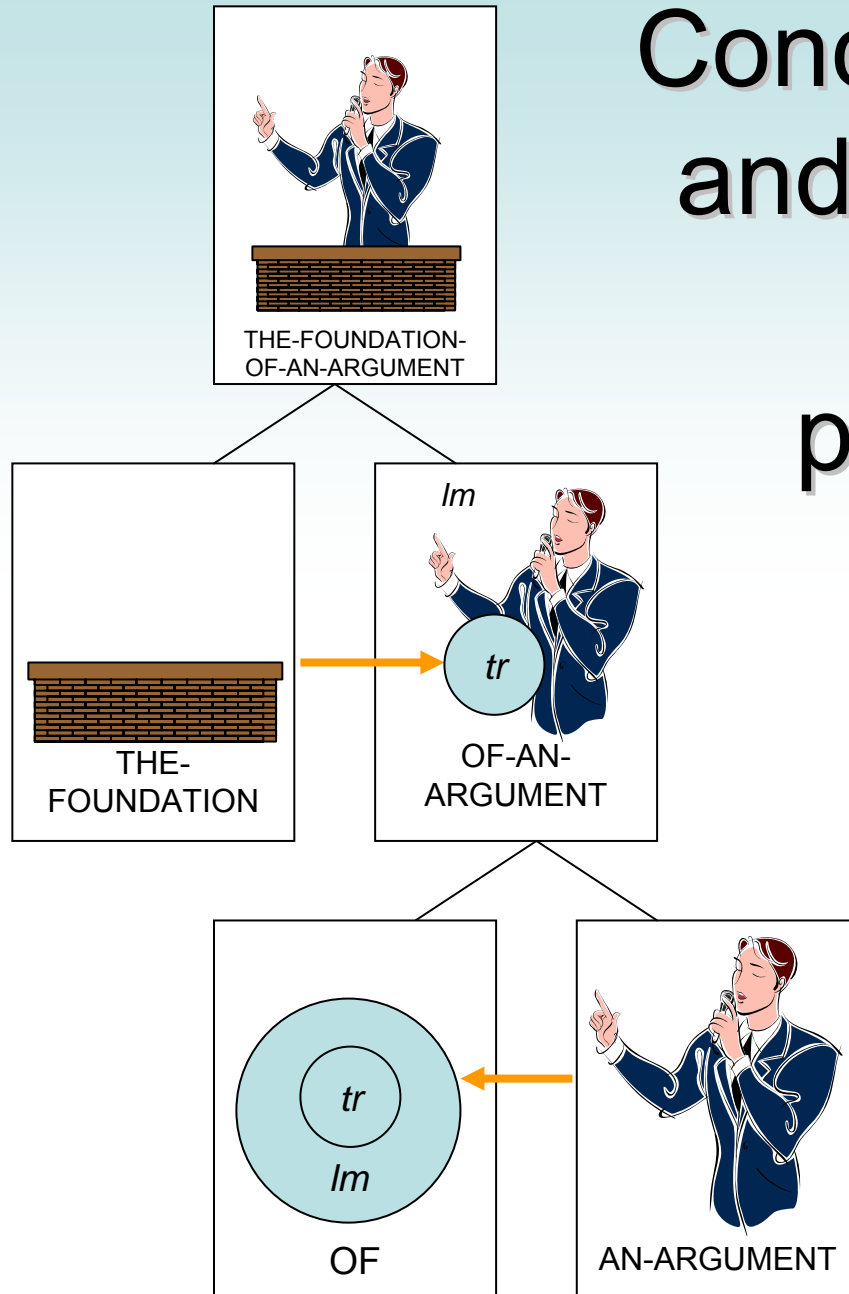
Conceptual autonomy and dependence in a metaphoric equation

time is money

*money is part of the
dependent element,
and is metaphoric*

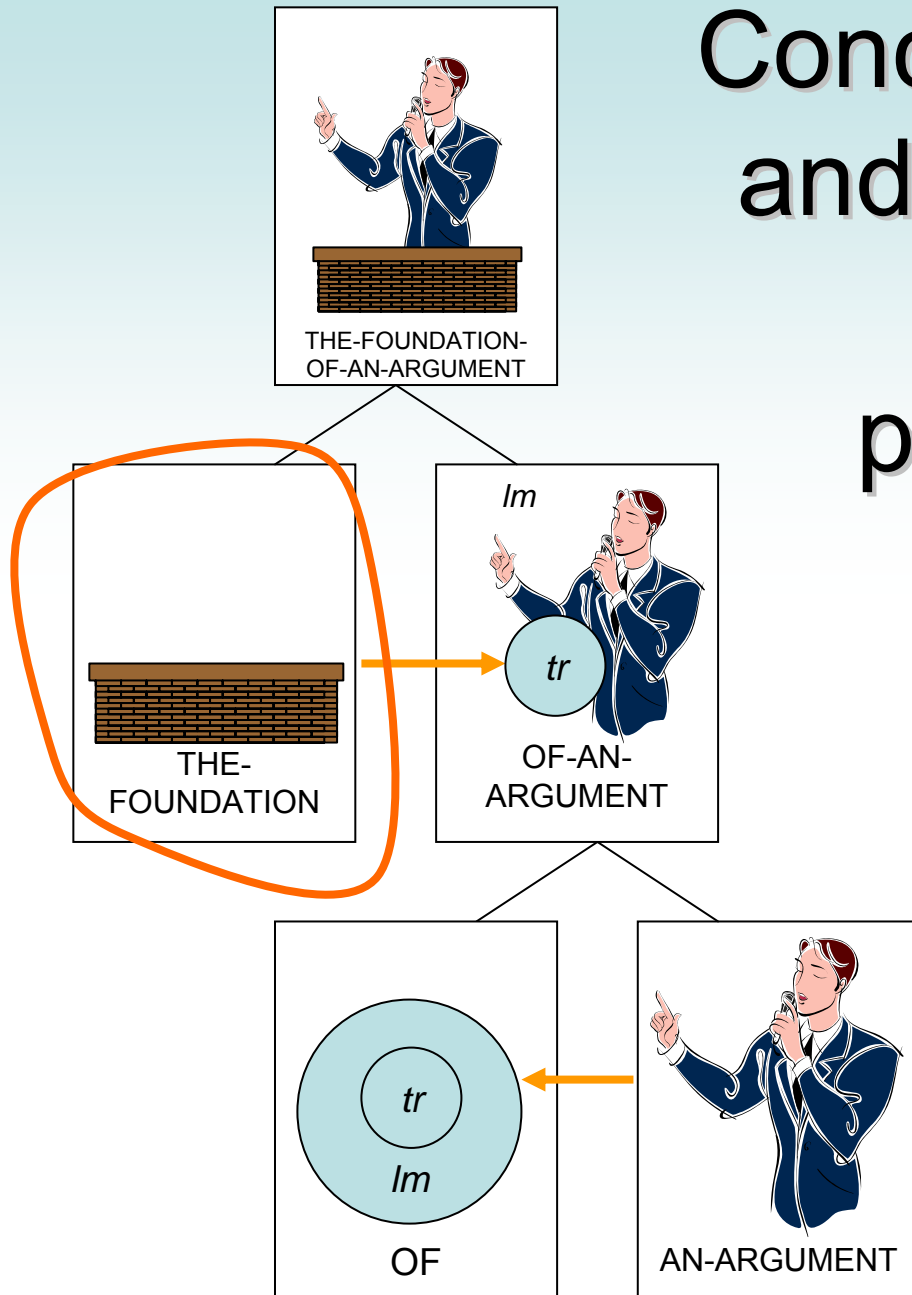


Conceptual autonomy and dependence in a metaphoric preposition phrase construction



*the foundation
of an argument*

Conceptual autonomy and dependence in a metaphoric preposition phrase construction



*the foundation
of an argument*

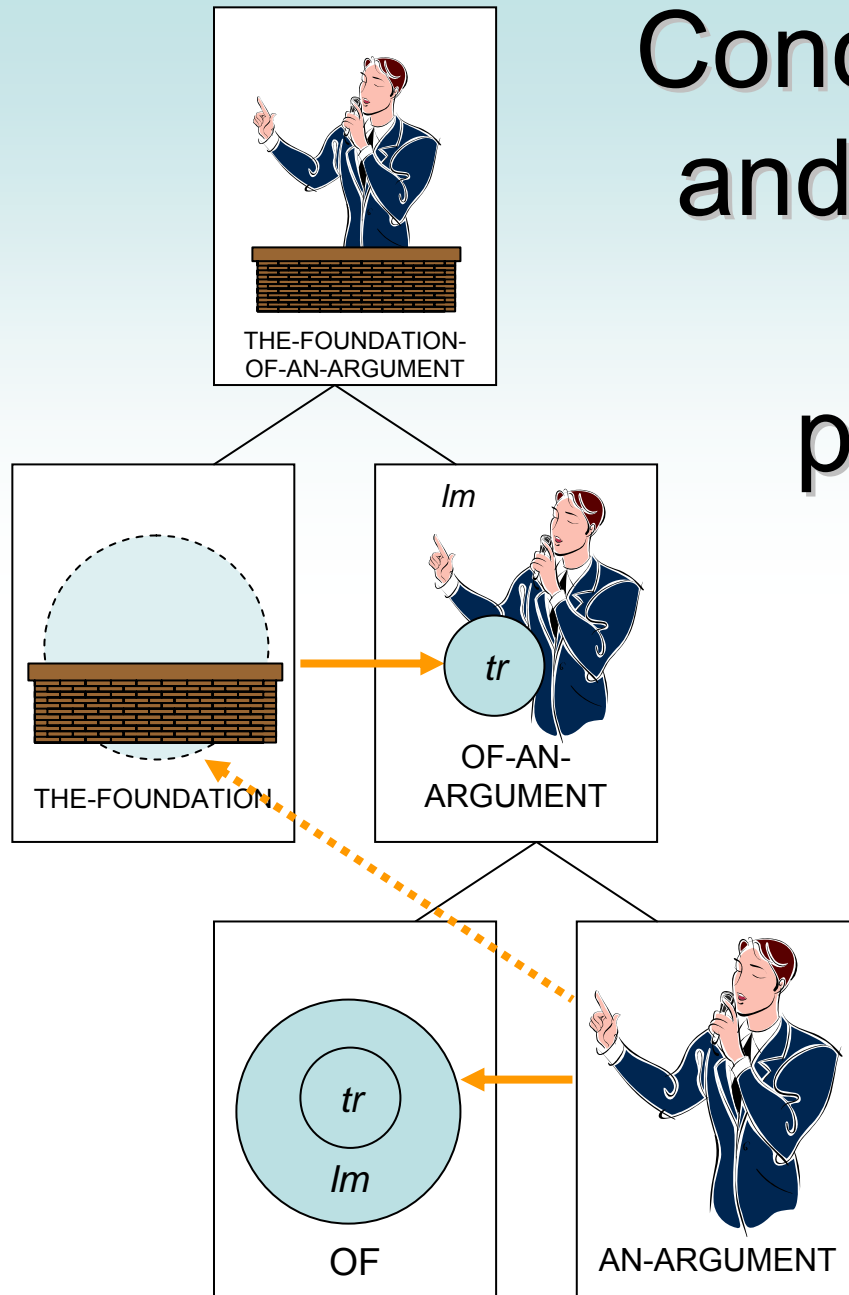
why is *foundation*
metaphoric?

Conceptual autonomy and dependence in preposition phrase constructions

Croft (2003), Turner (1991):

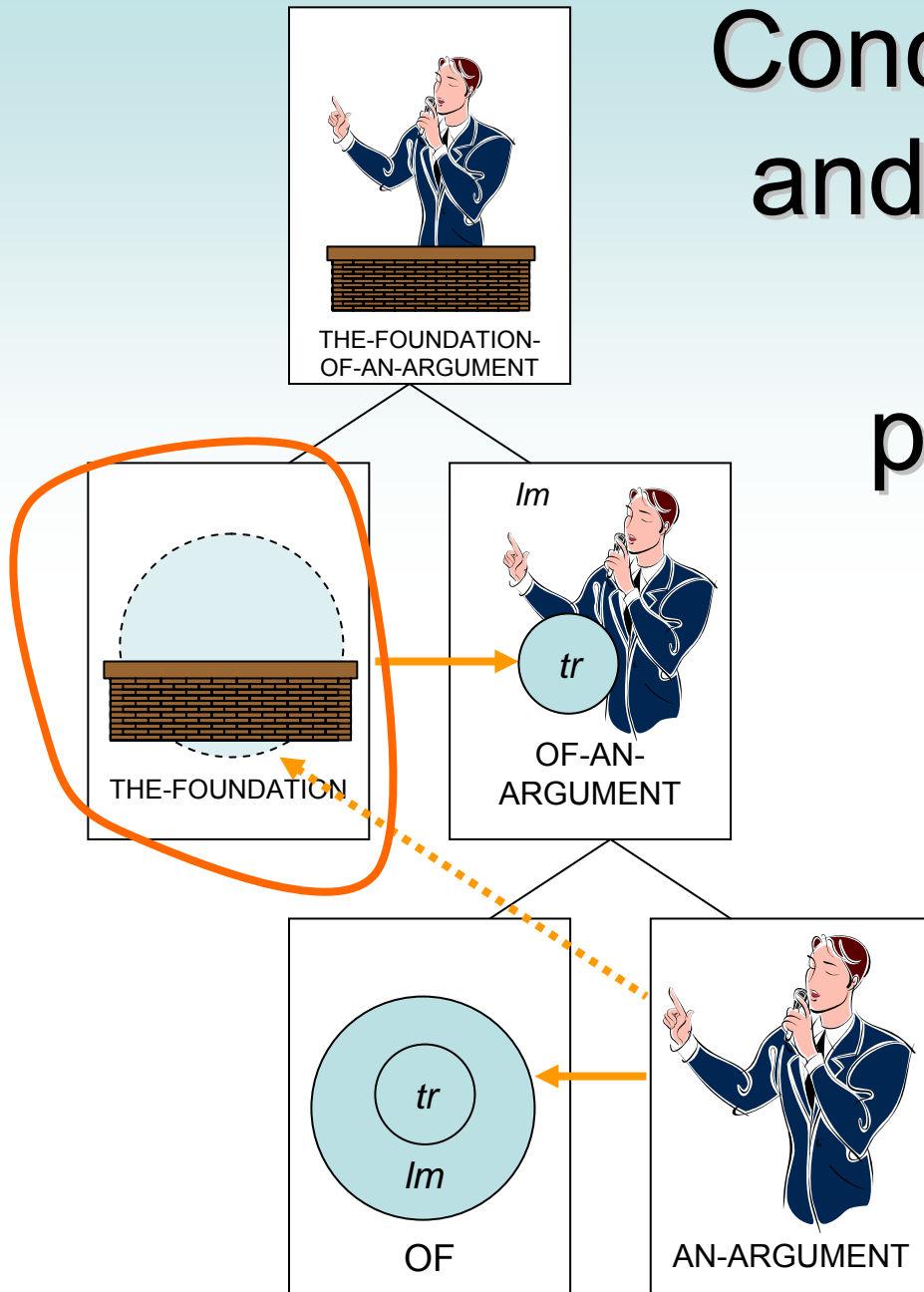
- The head noun in a metaphoric NP-PP construction is a “relational noun,” or a profiled part of a whole, as in *mouth of the river*
- The whole (Im) – Turner’s *w* element – elaborated by *river* is therefore a very salient part of *mouth*
- The part of *river* elaborated by *mouth* is a less salient part of *river*

Conceptual autonomy and dependence in a metaphoric preposition phrase construction



*the foundation
of an argument*

Conceptual autonomy and dependence in a metaphoric preposition phrase construction



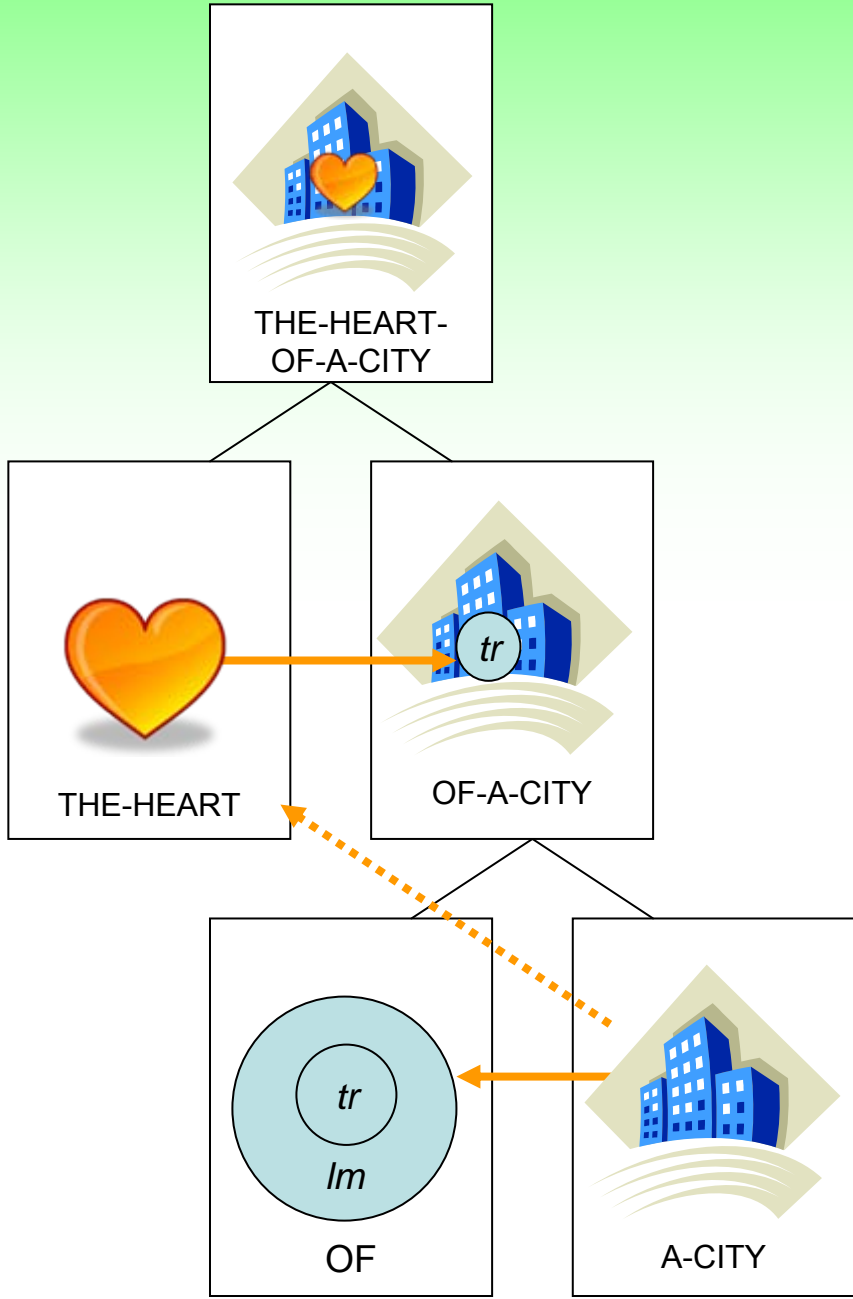
*the foundation
of an argument*

*foundation is dependent
relative to argument,
and is metaphoric*

Types of *xyz* constructions

- The *xyz* constructions combine equations and NP-PP constructions in 2 main ways.
- “Type 1” *xyz* constructions involve two items, *x* and *z*, that relate to the target domain of a metaphor. For example, *a library is the heart of a city* evokes A CITY IS A BODY. The items *city* and *library* both relate to the CITY domain, whereas only the item *heart* relates to BODY.

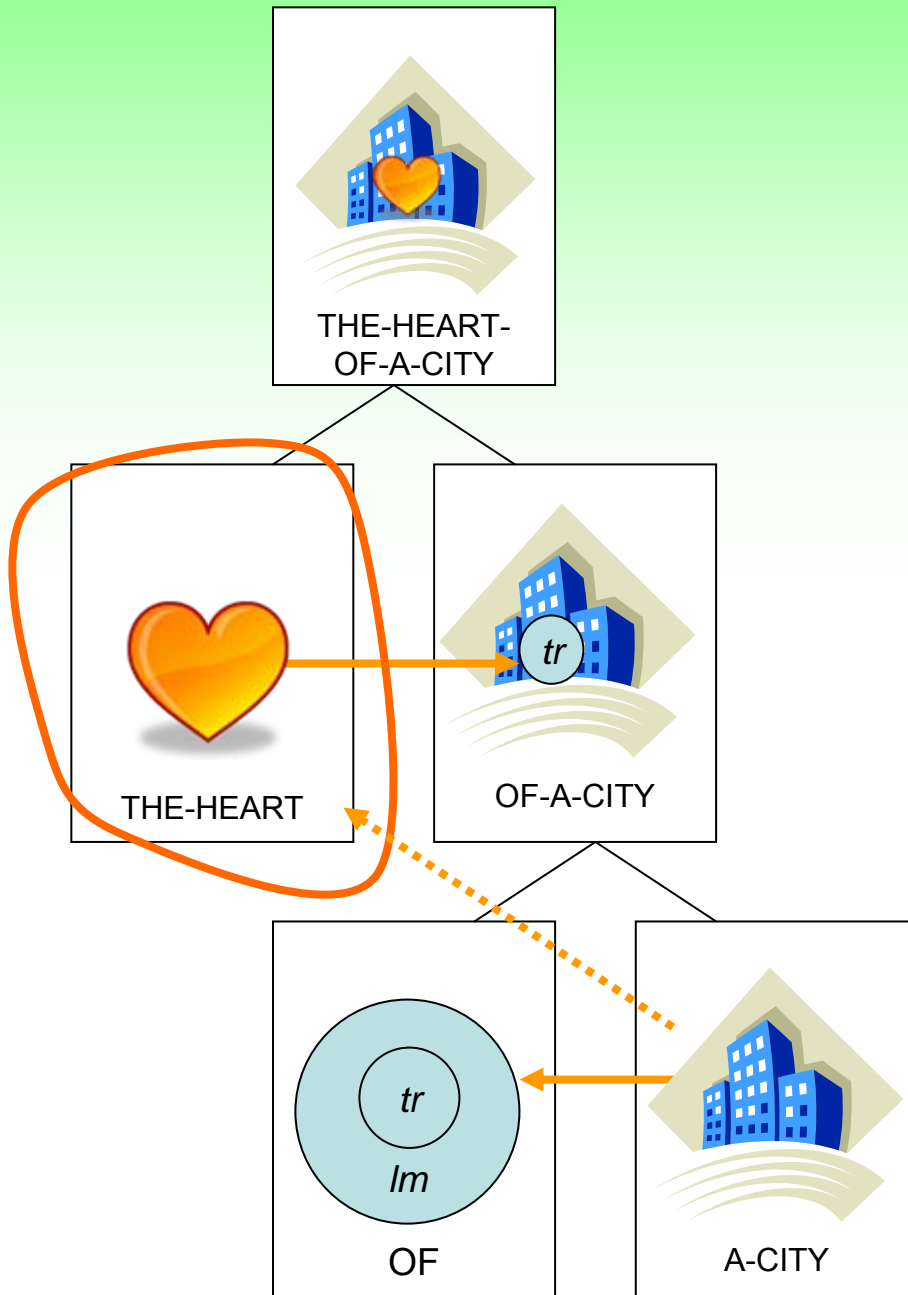
Types of xyz constructions: Type 1



(a library is) the heart of a city

heart is dependent and city is autonomous

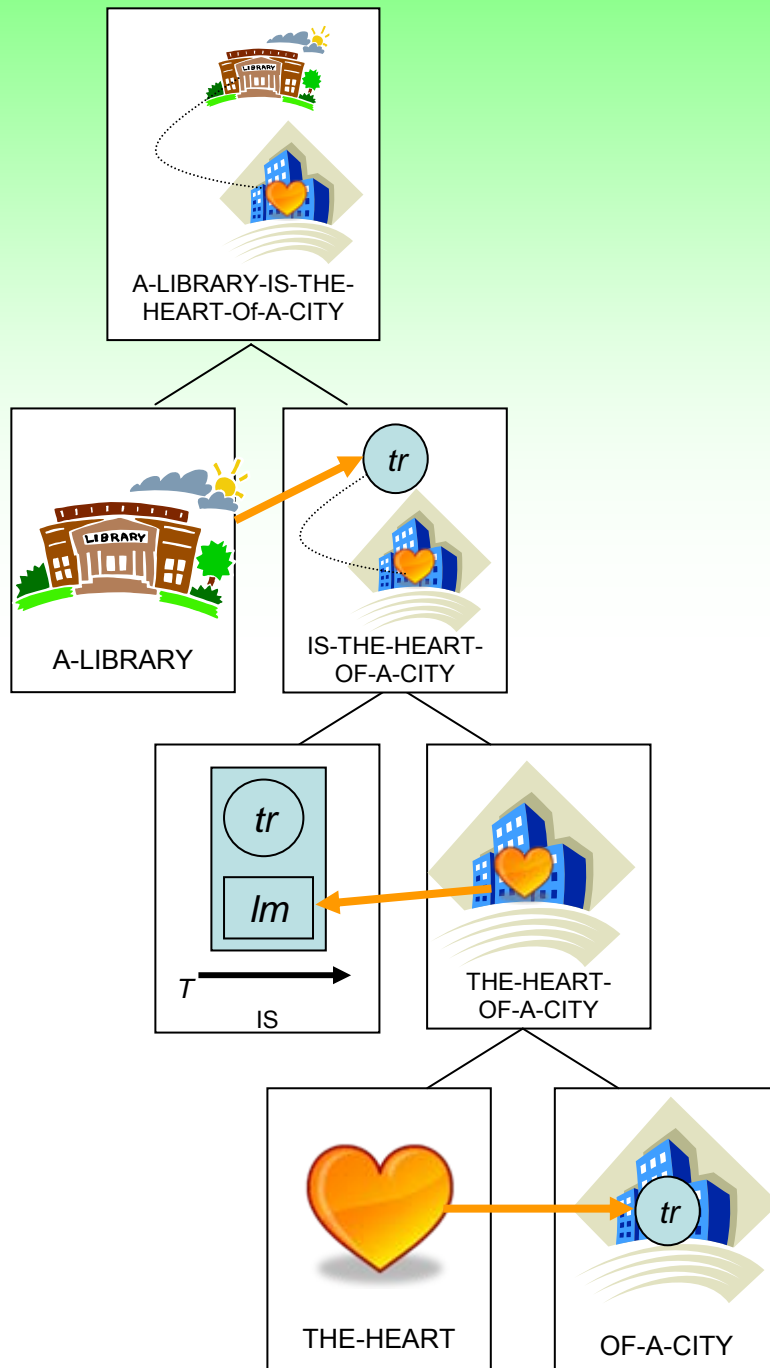
Types of xyz constructions: Type 1



*(a library is) the
heart of a city*

*heart is dependent and
city is autonomous*

Types of xyz constructions: Type 1



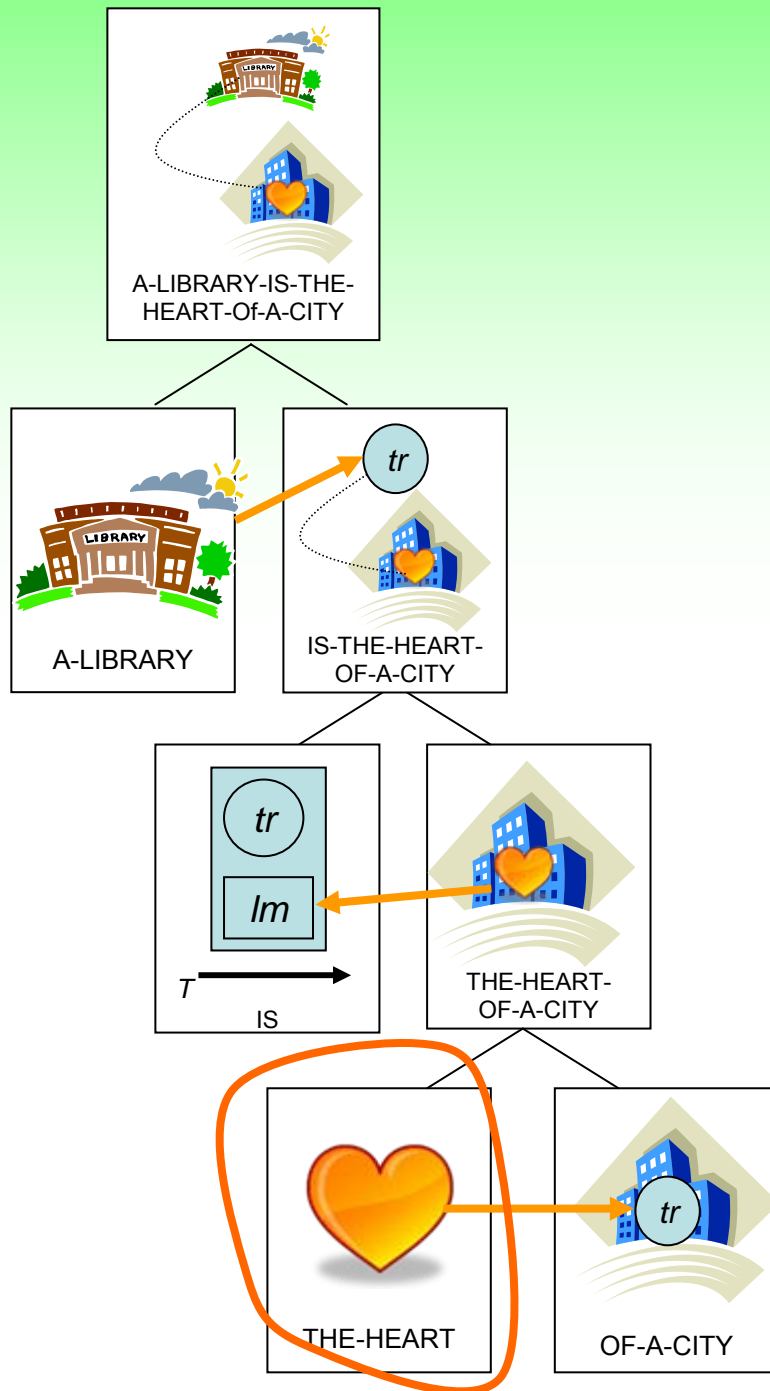
*a library is the
heart of a city*

*is-the-heart... is
dependent and library
is autonomous*

Types of xyz constructions: Type 1

a library is the heart of a city

heart is dependent within the dependent phrase *is the heart...* and evokes the source domain



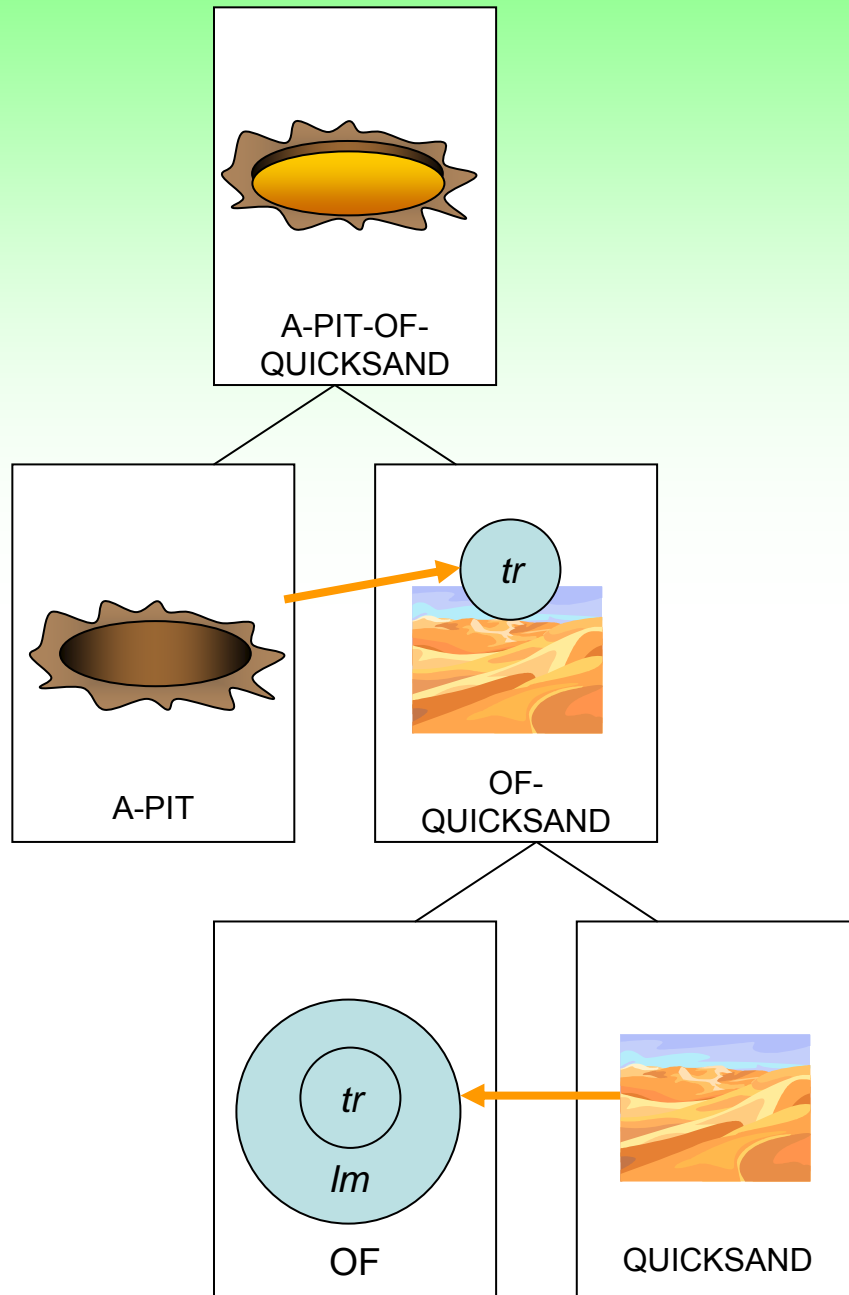
Types of *xyz* constructions

- “Type 2” *xyz* constructions put a second source-domain item in the *z* slot, as in *the Iraq war is a pit of quicksand*, in which the items *pit* and *quicksand* both refer to physical OBSTACLES, and the phrase *the Iraq war* refers to a DIFFICULTY that can be understood via DIFFICULTIES ARE OBSTACLES.
- These *xyz* constructions do not usually involve relational nouns.

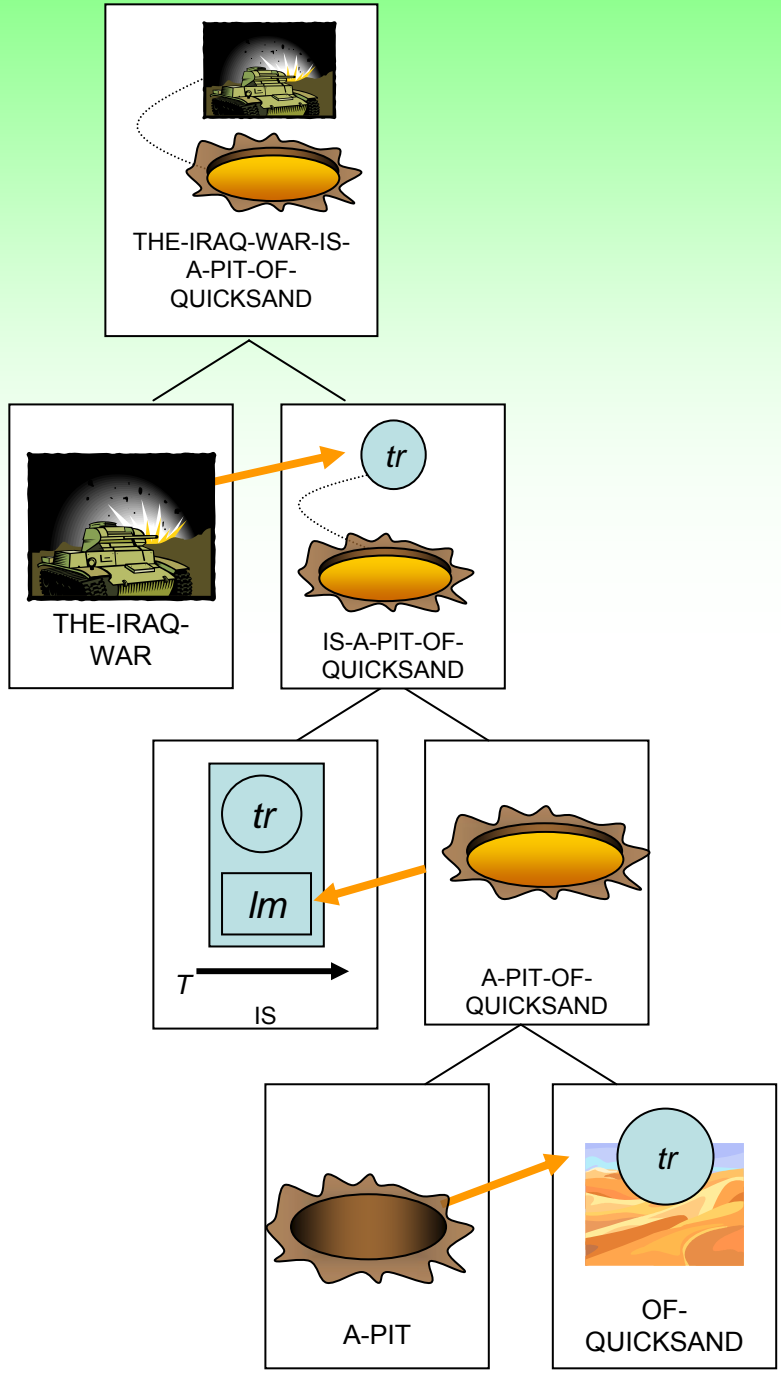
Types of xyz constructions: Type 2

*(the Iraq war is)
a pit of quicksand*

quicksand is autonomous
and *pit* is dependent, but
no metaphor is involved
here.



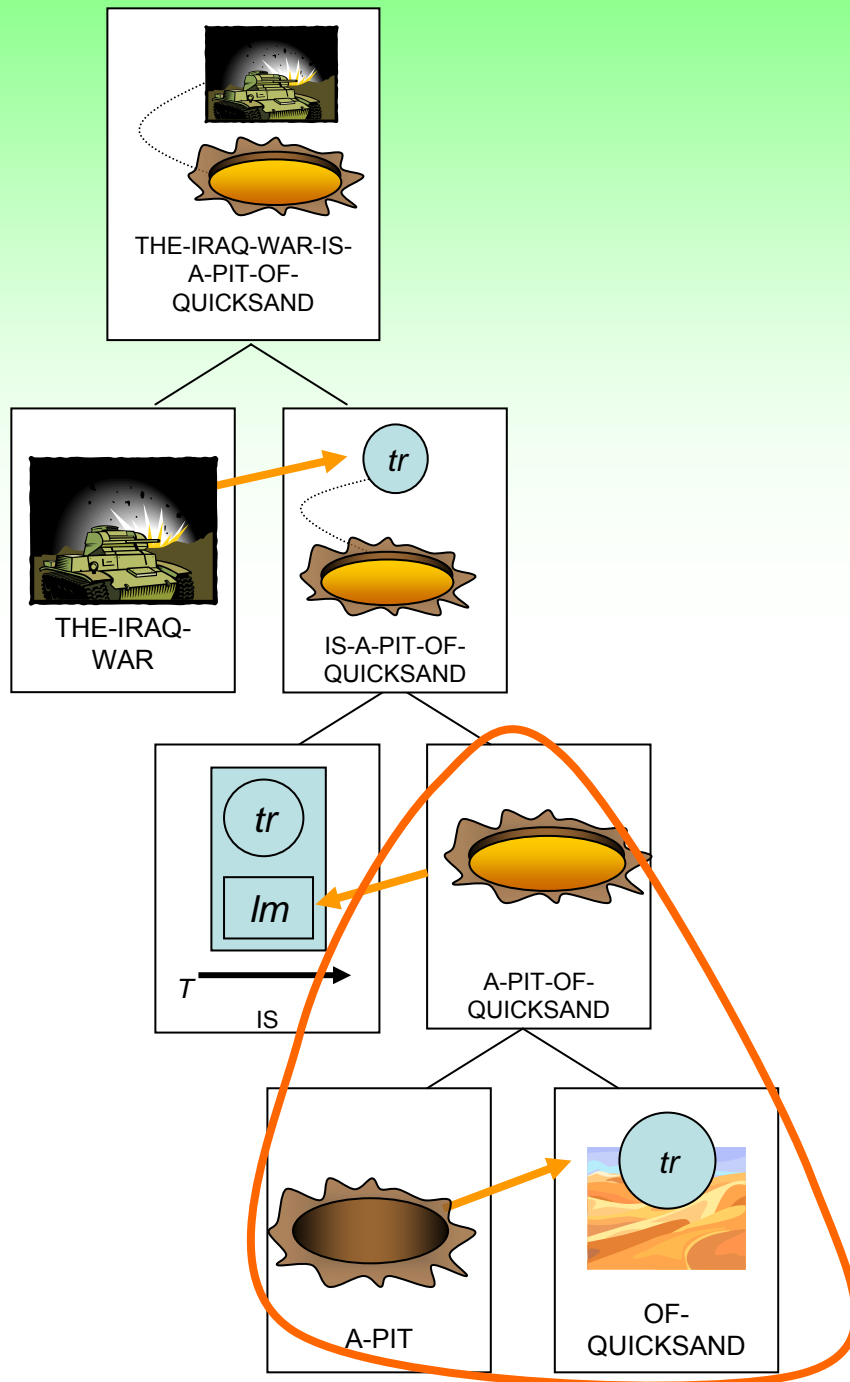
Types of xyz constructions: Type 2



the Iraq war is a pit of quicksand

the-iraq-war is autonomous and evokes the target domain; the entire NP *a-pit-of-quicksand* is dependent and evokes the source domain. Here, the phrase's internal structure is irrelevant.

Types of xyz constructions: Type 2



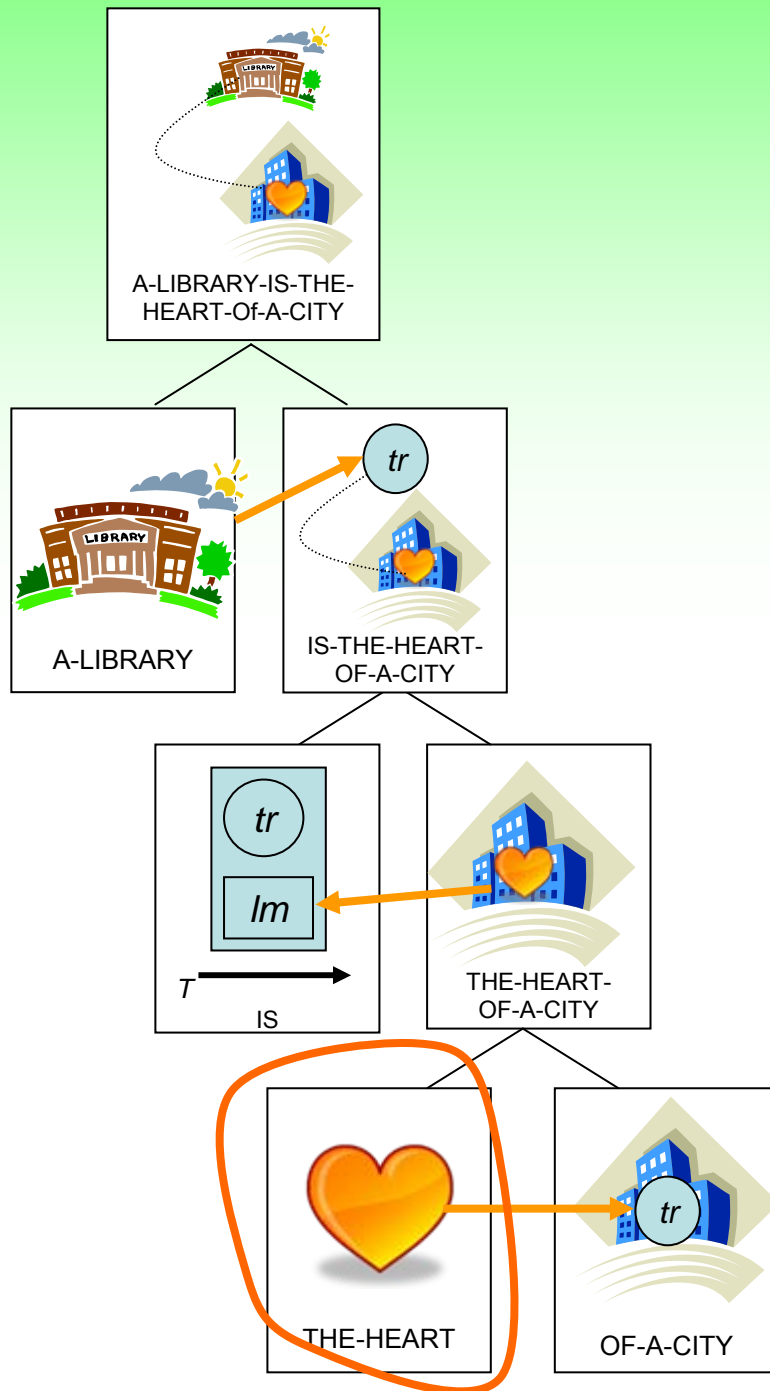
*the Iraq war is
a pit of quicksand*

the-iraq-war is autonomous and evokes the target domain; the entire NP *a-pit-of-quicksand* is dependent and evokes the source domain. Here, the phrase's internal structure is irrelevant.

Types of xyz constructions: Type 1

a library is the heart of a city

heart is dependent within the dependent phrase *is the heart...* and evokes the source domain



Summary

A Cognitive Grammar analysis of metaphoric *xyz* constructions represents and explains:

- Brooke-Rose's observation that *xyz* constructions' metaphoric uses are partly compositional;
- Turner's observation that specific elements of *xyz* constructions indicate the source and target domains of metaphors;
- How the *xyz*'s semantics permit both "Type 1" and "Type 2" *xyz* constructions;
- How constructions' semantics shape their metaphoric uses as well as their non-metaphoric uses.

Thank you!

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