Meaning Extension of the Word ‘Sight’

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1. Introduction

*Sight* is one of the five senses that enable the human beings and animals to see things in the world through the two eyes which are the path that allows the visible details of the world outside to enter our brain. Hence, this sense is one of information suppliers for our inner world. The range or distance within which a human being can see is limited to a particular number of meters, and the situation is similar in the case of animals. In the discussion below we will trace the cognitive processes which underlie some senses of the word ‘sight’:

a. ‘*The act of seeing*’ (Gralnik, 1984:1324)

5. “*Marcle will faint at the sight of blood*”. (Quirk, 2003,1533)

The function of the eyes is to see through focusing on a particular object in the world. This is only one function among the many ones that contributes to the sense of sight. In this instance, the sense name (sight) is specialized to encode the function of a sense organ (eye). ‘Sight’ is employed metonymically as the whole sense is used to indicate part of it; i.e. a function of its organs which is ‘the act of seeing’.

b. ‘*How far you can see* (the distance within which you see)’. (Hornby, 2004: 1195)

Human sight functions within a limited range. For instance, we can see things that are at a distance of only a number of meters beyond which we cannot see. There is a range within which, or out of which we can see, or cannot see. This factual experience prompts the following senses of ‘sight’:

c. **Visible/ invisible Sense**: People tend to conceive the relation between our sight and the limit within which we can see in terms of visibility and invisibility; hence ‘sight’ in these examples is used metaphorically to mean visible, and invisible:

6. “At last we come at *sight* of a few houses.” (ibid.) (Visible sense)

7. “*Keep out of sight*.” (ibid.) (Stay where you cannot be seen- invisible sense)

d. **Close/ Far sense**: As the range of seeing is expressed in terms of distance, things can be either close to or far from our sight. Thus, ‘sight’ metaphorically encodes the (close sense) and (far sense) in the following instances:

8. “The end is in *sight*.” (ibid.) (Will happen soon, close sense)

9. “The boat disappeared from *sight*.” (ibid.) (far)

e. “*Something seen.*” (Dalgish: 2001, 685.)

10. *The museum attempts to recreate the sights and sounds of war time Britain*. (ibid.)

‘Sight’ here means the images of the war. The sense of ‘sight’ involves a number of elements like the eyes, the range within which to see, the act of seeing, and the image of things to be seen. Again conceptual metonymy underlies the use of ‘sight’ to mean ‘image’ where one of the elements (part) related to the sense is encoded in the word which represents the whole sense.
f. “A thing worth seeing (the sights of the city).” (Gralnik, 1984:1324.)

11. “We are going to Paris for the weekend to see the sight”. (Hornby, 2004: 1195)

Metaphtonymy is the conceptual device which underlies the meaning of ‘sight’ in this example. The act of seeing involves directing our eyes and attention to things we want to see. The tourists used to direct their attention to the interesting places in a city. The association between directing one’s attention towards visiting the interesting places is conceptualized in terms of directing one’s eyes towards objects to be seen. Metaphor is the motivator for this meaning due to the similarity between the two experiences in terms of focusing attention upon the goal.

The effect of metonymy is also present. ‘Sight’ which is the name of the whole sense is used to refer to a place to be seen ‘i.e. image’ which is related to the sense of sight, and is an element of the act of seeing. The whole ‘sight’ stands for the part ‘interesting places’. Hence, the use of ‘sight’ in this instance is to mean “interesting place: in a town or a city”; therefore it is an example of metaphtonymy.

g. “Any of various devices used to aid the eyes in lining up a gun, optical instrument, etc. on its objective” (Gralnik, 1984:1324)

12. He has the deer in his sight now. (Hornby, 2004: 1195.)

The instrument through which one sees things is correlated with the sight organ (i.e. eyes) through which we can see the world around us. Conceptual metaphor is activated due to similarity of function of the eyes and that of the instrument (gun in the example above). While metonymy is also present here as the whole ‘sight’ replaces the ‘eye’ which is the first element in the ‘sight sense’ that picks up the goal image. Accordingly, metaphtonymy underlies the extension of meaning of ‘sight’ to be a gun or a device to see through.

h. “A goal or aim” (ibid.)


Things within our range of sight are all like goals that is reached by our eyes (conceptual metaphor). Things to be seen (goals) are one of the elements involved in the domain of ‘sight’ sense. Due to metonymy, ‘sight’ stands for things to be seen. Again, metaphtonymy extends the meaning of the word ‘sight’ to be ‘goal’ in this example.