

Chapter 23 Metaphor and the Literal/Nonliteral Distinction

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1. Introduction: Gricean pragmatics and nonliteralness

A fascination with nonliteral language, how it works and what effects it has on hearers and readers, goes a very long way back. In the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans, it was associated with the study of rhetoric; in particular, with figures of speech (or tropes), including metaphor, hyperbole, metonymy and irony, and how they can be used to make a text or a public speech more effective, attractive and convincing to its recipients. The emphasis in this tradition was on the unusual and ornamental nature of these tropes, the assumption being that the *content* they convey (their ‘figurative meaning’) can be captured by a literal paraphrase. Referring to a person as a ‘lion’ or a ‘mouse’, describing a marriage as a ‘sunlit garden’ or a ‘bloody battleground’ are simply vivid, lively ways of expressing a more sober literal counterpart, e.g. ‘brave man’ for ‘lion’, ‘unhappy, acrimonious relationship’ for ‘bloody battleground’. Similarly, describing someone who has just made a series of blunders as a ‘brilliant fellow’ is a humorous or striking way of expressing the opinion that he is a ‘stupid fellow’.

This view of tropes was vigorously criticised by the Romantics, who insisted that metaphorical language is normal and frequent, and that nonliteral uses quite generally express meanings and have effects that cannot be captured by any literal paraphrase (see Sperber and Wilson 1990). However, the classical view resurfaced in modern pragmatics, albeit in a different guise, in the inferential account of linguistic communication pioneered by Paul Grice (1967). The components of Grice’s general framework that are crucial to his treatment of nonliteral language use are his system of communicative norms (‘conversational maxims’, in his terms), which enjoin speakers to be truthful, informative, relevant and clear, and his distinction between what a speaker says and what she (merely) implicates. What a speaker says by the words she utters is determined by the semantic conventions of the language and the contextually relevant referents for any indexical expressions. Inevitably, then, nonliteral uses of language are seen as in some sense abnormal or at least as employing an indirect

means of communication: the speaker is not saying what she means. Grice treated all instances of nonliteral language use (metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, understatement, irony, etc.) as cases where a speaker says something so blatantly false, uninformative or irrelevant, that her hearer is prompted to undertake an inferential process to recover what she really means (and so is indirectly communicating):

1. A: Mary's new boyfriend is a robot.
- B: No, he's not. (He's just a bit shy).

A's utterance flouts (i.e. blatantly violates) Grice's maxim of literal truthfulness ('Say only that which you believe to be true'), while an utterance of its negative counterpart is such an obvious truth (we all know that human beings are not robots) that it flouts his first maxim of informativeness ('Make your contribution as informative as is required'). In order to maintain the prevailing presumption of speaker rationality and cooperativeness (Grice's Cooperative Principle), the addressee, B, is led to infer a related proposition that could well be true, and is relevant and informative, perhaps that Mary's boyfriend lacks feeling and sociability.¹ The same broad picture applies to verbal irony. The sentence 'John is a brilliant fellow', uttered in a context in which speaker and hearer have just witnessed John making some elementary mistakes, is likely to be (and to be recognised as) an overt violation of the maxim of truthfulness, on the basis of which, in order to preserve the presumption of speaker cooperativeness, the hearer infers that the speaker meant (implicated) that John is very incompetent.

This approach is a version of the classical rhetorical view mentioned above, whereby tropes have a 'figurative meaning' which replaces their literal meaning: using 'robot' is a more vivid way of expressing what could be literally expressed by 'lacks social skills'; saying that John is a brilliant fellow is a humorous way of expressing what could be literally expressed by 'John is an incompetent fellow'. However, Grice's account goes beyond the descriptive taxonomy provided by the classical rhetoricians, in that he provides an explanation of how figurative meanings are produced and understood. He explains the other traditional

¹ It's worth considering how B's negative response here is interpreted. According to the Gricean account, she is explicitly denying that Mary's boyfriend is a robot (a patently true, hence uninformative, proposition) and is thereby implicating that he doesn't lack feeling or sociability. Intuitively, however, it might seem that B is simply directly denying that the boyfriend lacks feeling or sociability. The account given in section 3 captures this intuition.

categories of nonliteral language use (e.g. metonymy, hyperbole, litotes) in essentially the same way, that is, as instances of maxim flouting at the level of what the speaker said, which prompt the hearer to undergo a reasoning process to recover the intended figurative meaning. On this account, then, all instances of nonliteral language use are cases of indirect communication, with the speaker-meant content (the figurative meaning) arising entirely at the level of conversational implicature.

Of course, the nature of the meaning implicated in each case must be different, but Grice says little about what it is that distinguishes a metaphorical use from an ironical use, an ironical use from a metonymical use, and so on, or how a hearer, having recognised that a maxim is being flouted, goes on to infer the right kind of implicature for the particular trope (the contradictory of what the speaker said in the case of irony, a proposition with a particular resemblance relation to what was said in the case of metaphor, and so on). Furthermore, he doesn't consider what is achieved by the speaker's choice of the more vivid nonliteral expression rather than the content-equivalent but duller literal expression, what cognitive effects it has on the hearer/reader, hence why a speaker chooses to use a figurative expression instead of the (allegedly) readily available literal equivalent.² In fact, despite its initially appealing systematicity, there are so many problems with Grice's treatment of nonliteral language use that, within the field of cognitively-oriented pragmatics at least, it has been largely abandoned.

The rest of this chapter is structured as follows. In the next section, I set out some of the problems with Grice's account in more detail and indicate the resulting new directions taken in the pragmatic study of nonliteral language. Then sections 3 and 4 focus squarely on metaphor, though comparisons with other kinds of nonliteralness are made in passing. In section 3, recent work in the field of lexical pragmatics is discussed, in particular the idea that metaphorical uses of words are instances of *ad hoc* concepts which contribute to the proposition directly communicated (the explicature of the utterance). In section 4, this approach is compared with work in cognitive linguistics which takes metaphorically used language to be a surface reflection of a more fundamental location of metaphor within thought. Finally, in section 5, the intuitive literal/nonliteral distinction is reconsidered in the light of the theoretical discussions in the preceding sections.

² There is one interesting exception to this in Grice's (1978) brief discussion of what's involved in speaking ironically: 'irony is intimately connected with the expression of a feeling, attitude or evaluation. I cannot say something ironically unless what I say is intended to reflect a hostile or derogatory judgment or a feeling such as indignation or contempt' (ibid: 124).

2. Figurative language – what is said, what is implicated, and how?

Most of the problems with the Gricean account of nonliteral language use fall into one or other of the following two groups: (a) internal tensions between that account and his wider ‘logic of conversation’; (b) inconsistencies of the account with newer perspectives on communication coming from empirical work in the cognitive sciences.³ Let’s start with a theory-internal problem. In ordinary (nonfigurative) cases of implicature, what the speaker meant (intended her hearer to believe) includes both what she said and what she implicated:

2. A: Is Mary’s boyfriend good-looking and well-mannered?
 B: He’s good-looking.

Here B conversationally implicates that Mary’s boyfriend is not well-mannered, and what she communicates (i.e. what she means and endorses) includes both what she said (that Mary’s boyfriend is good-looking) and what she implicated. This is just what the notion of ‘what is said’, as Grice defined it, requires: it is both the (context-relative) semantic content of the utterance and it is speaker-meant (communicated). So when Grice comes to discuss cases of irony and metaphor, he does not talk of what the speaker has said but rather of what she has ‘made as if to say’ (Grice 1975: 51) – he has to do this because the speaker patently doesn’t mean (endorse, communicate) the proposition that is the semantic content of her utterance (e.g. John is a robot). But now this leads to a worry about the maxim of truthfulness, which is supposed to play the key triggering role in the understanding of many figurative language uses: ‘Do not say what you believe to be false’. It seems that this maxim is not, after all, flouted by metaphorical utterances like ‘John is a robot/lion/mouse’ or by verbal irony, because in these cases the speaker doesn’t, in fact, say anything – she merely makes as if (pretends) to say something, and that kind of act doesn’t fall under the maxim.

It might seem then that for the maxim of truthfulness to do the work required of it in accounting for nonliteral uses, what’s needed is a reinterpretation of ‘saying’ so that to say

³ However, it needs to be kept in mind that Grice’s approach is very much that of a philosopher and his account of nonliteral language use falls within his large-scale analysis of the nature of meaning (natural vs. nonnatural meaning, speaker vs. sentence meaning) and was not intended to reflect actual processes of communication or comprehension. With regard to metaphor specifically, the Gricean account has been further developed by Searle (1979) and Bergmann (1982), both philosophers who are similarly concerned with the nature of metaphorical language use, rather than with the processes of its understanding.

that P is merely to express the proposition P, without any presumption that the speaker is committed to its content. Then the maxim of truthfulness would become ‘Do not express a proposition that you believe to be false’ and there would be no need for a shift to the speaker merely ‘making as if to say’ in cases of figurative use: the speaker has expressed a proposition that she overtly believes to be false, thus flouted the maxim, and the hearer must infer an implicature as the intended meaning. However, this does not seem to be the right way to go.⁴ First, it is clearly not what Grice had in mind with his speaker-meant notion of ‘what is said’ (see Recanati 2004: chapter 1) and his explicit shift to ‘making as if to say’ for the nonliteral cases. Second, and more important here, this weaker construal of ‘what is said’ does not save the truthfulness maxim-flouting treatment of nonliteralness from its biggest problem, which is that it undermines the whole Gricean account of conversational implicatures. According to this account, attribution of an implicature to a speaker is made in order to maintain or restore the hearer’s assumption that the maxims have been observed: ‘A man who, by saying (or making as if to say) that P has implicated Q, provided that (i) he is to be presumed to be observing the conversational maxims, or at least the cooperative principle; (ii) the supposition that he thinks that Q is required in order to make his saying or making as if to say P ... consistent with this presumption; ...’ (Grice 1975: 49-50). While this is the case with the example above in (2) (and with ‘ordinary,’ nonfigurative implicature cases quite generally), it is clearly not so for (1) or for other figurative uses of language, where, the maxim of truthfulness is irretrievably violated at the level of what is said.⁵

More generally, an account that rests on a presumption of literal truthfulness, which is patently violated in the case of nonliteral uses, is beset by myriad problems. To deliberately produce a blatantly false utterance seems a strange and irrational act (at odds with Grice’s view of conversation as an achievement of rational agents), and also a pointless one, given that the speaker could express her intended meaning by producing a literal utterance, which would meet the truthfulness maxim and would be easily grasped by the hearer (on the basis of the semantic conventions of the language). Furthermore, it seems that the requirement on

⁴ A strong advocate of this reconstrual of ‘what is said’ is Bach (1994), but he doesn’t address its repercussions for the Gricean account of nonliteral language use. See also Bach, this volume.

⁵ See Wilson and Sperber (2002) for a deconstruction of Grice’s maxim of truthfulness on various interpretations of his notion of ‘saying’ and for compelling arguments against there being any maxim or presumption of literal truthfulness at work in communication and comprehension. On their account, utterance interpretation conforms to a single inviolable principle of relevance, where ‘relevance’ is defined in such a way that our undeniable orientation toward acquiring true information follows from our relevance-based processing (see, in particular, Sperber and Wilson 1995).

implicatures that they be recoverable by a process of reasoning from premises, which include a description of the speaker's having said (or made as if to say) that P – the calculability requirement – simply cannot be met in these cases (see Hugly and Sayward 1979).⁶

Moving now beyond theory-internal issues, Grice's account of nonliteral meaning has been further undermined by recent work on utterance comprehension within more cognitively-oriented frameworks. Again, the target under fire is Grice's pivotal notion of 'what is said'. The big problem with this construct is that it is required to play two distinct roles which no single level of meaning can, in fact, encompass; it is required to be both sentence semantics and a component of speaker-meant content. Here is just one of the many examples (due to Bach 1994) that illustrate the problem:

3. Mother (to young Billy crying over a cut on his knee): *You're not going to die.*
 - a. YOU (BILLY) ARE NOT GOING TO DIE FROM THAT CUT
 - b. YOU (BILLY) SHOULD STOP MAKING SUCH A FUSS ABOUT IT

What the mother means (what she intends to communicate to the child) is given in (a) and (b), where (b) is clearly an implicature and (a) seems to be what she has said (explicitly communicated). But the proposition delivered by conventional linguistic meaning and the assignment of a referent to the pronoun 'you' (hence the Gricean 'what is said') is *Billy is not going to die*, which seems to entail that Billy is immortal, something that the mother has no intention of conveying. For other examples of this problem and more detailed discussion, see Carston 1988, 2002, Bach 1994, Recanati 1993, 2004.

In recent years, this has led to a clear split between sentence semantics (or a semantic notion of 'what is said'), on the one hand, and the primary level of speaker-meant content (a pragmatic notion of 'what is said', known as 'explicature' in Relevance Theory), on the other. The key point is that typically the semantic content provided by the linguistic system greatly underdetermines the speaker-meant propositional content of an utterance and a hearer must, therefore, not only linguistically decode the sentence uttered and perhaps fix some referents, but also perform various pragmatic tasks of meaning adjustment in figuring out the speaker-

⁶ A much smaller, but interesting, issue concerns cases of what are known as 'twice apt' metaphors, that is metaphorical utterances which comply with the maxims at both the level of what is said and what is implicated (see Hills 1997, Camp 2007), e.g. an utterance of 'Jesus was a carpenter' in a context in which both the literal proposition expressed and the metaphorical meaning (Jesus was a crafter of men's souls) are plausibly true, informative and conversationally relevant. Since there is no maxim violation, whether actual or merely apparent, at any level, it is difficult to see how a Gricean account could explain such cases.

meant content. So, for instance, in grasping the content of Amy's response in (4) to his question, Max's pragmatic capacity has to augment the linguistic meaning of her utterance by supplying at least the components of meaning highlighted in (5a). This is the explicature (the speaker-meant enriched 'what is said), on the basis of which he can infer the implicated answer to his question, given in (5b):

4. Max: *How was the party? Did it go well?*
 Amy: *There wasn't enough drink and everyone left early.*
5. a. **THERE WASN'T ENOUGH ALCOHOLIC DRINK TO SATISFY THE PEOPLE AT THE PARTY_I AND SO EVERYONE WHO CAME TO THE PARTY_I LEFT IT_I EARLY**
- b. **THE PARTY DID NOT GO WELL**

Without spelling out all the details of the example (see Carston 2009), I hope that (5a) indicates clearly the important and extensive part played by pragmatics in the derivation of the speaker's primary meaning (the explicature of the utterance). One result of this 'contextualist' or 'pragmaticist' (Carston 2010a) view of utterance content is that some elements of pragmatically-inferred speaker meaning that Grice treated as conversational implicatures have been reanalysed as instances of pragmatic enrichment that affect the primary speaker meaning.⁷ A case in point is the cause-consequence enrichment of the 'and'-conjunction sentence uttered by Amy in (4) above: the pragmatic move from the decoded 'P & Q' to the more specific proposition 'P & as a result Q', which Grice considered a (generalised) implicature, is now fairly widely agreed to be contributing to the primary utterance content (explicature) (for extensive supporting argument, see Carston 2002). The importance of this shift is that it opens up a new possibility for accounting for tropes like metaphor, hyperbole and metonymy. Rather than simply assuming that when a speaker uses language nonliterally what she means must inevitably be seen as conversationally implicated, it could be that her nonliteral meaning contributes to, even constitutes, the content that she directly 'says' or asserts. Such a move is obviously controversial and, *prima facie*, has

⁷ This is sometimes described as the truth-conditional content of *an utterance* (as opposed to the much more minimal truth-conditional content of the sentence uttered, if indeed sentences can be said to have truth-conditional content at all, an issue I won't pursue here). Thus Recanati (1993, 2004, 2010) talks of 'truth-conditional pragmatics' and develops an account of the 'primary pragmatic processes' that are instrumental in delivering that content as opposed to the 'secondary pragmatic processes' employed in implicature derivation.

problematic consequences for the literal/nonliteral distinction; it is explored in some detail in section 3.

Grice intended his account as a reconstruction in wholly rational analytical terms of whatever subpersonal processes actually go on in comprehension. However, in the early days of experimental investigation of the online processing of nonliteral language, Grice's work was the dominant pragmatic account, so experimental psychologists took it as the starting point for constructing a processing model. As such, it predicts that the interpretation of a metaphorical utterance (or, indeed, the interpretation of any of the other tropes) is a three step process: (a) the hearer, expecting literal truthfulness (as required by the maxim of truthfulness), tries the literal interpretation first; (b) then rejects it on the basis of its blatant falsehood (or blatant un informativeness or irrelevance); and (c) then proceeds to infer the intended nonliteral interpretation. On some variants of this model, the third step involves converting the false categorical form of the metaphor (X is Y) into the corresponding true simile form (X is like Y) and deriving implicatures on that basis. The prediction, then, is that a metaphorical use of language should take longer to process and understand than a comparable literal use. This hypothesis has been extensively tested and has repeatedly been found to be false.

Utterances like those in (6) can be meant literally or metaphorically: for (6b), the predicate could be used to express being a member of the military or being brave, obedient and dutiful; in (6c), 'the lacy blanket' might be an actual blanket, perhaps hanging outside on a clothes-line, or a light layer of snow covering the ground:

6. a. That lecture put me to sleep.
- b. David is a soldier.
- c. The winter wind gently tossed the lacy blanket.

The widespread finding with such cases is that people take no longer to read and understand the metaphorical use than the literal use, provided, of course, that they are properly contextualised. The conclusion of extensive work by Ray Gibbs and colleagues (see overview in Gibbs 1994: chapter 3) and Sam Glucksberg and colleagues (summarised in Glucksberg 2001) is that literal interpretation does not have priority over metaphorical interpretation and, even stronger, that metaphorical interpretations are derived automatically whenever the context makes them accessible. So, construed as a comprehension model, Grice's account of metaphor fares badly and it's not clear that its construal as (merely) a rational reconstruction stands up against evidence of this sort either.

With regard to verbal irony, the experimental results are less clear-cut. While Gibbs (1986, 1994) reports experiments in which processing times for ironies and equivalent literal interpretations seem to be very similar, Rachel Giora and colleagues report contrary results: grasping an ironically intended utterance (e.g. ‘How clever John is!’) often takes significantly longer than grasping an equivalent literally meant utterance (e.g. ‘How stupid John is!’). Giora presents strong evidence that the literal interpretation of an ironical utterance is accessed first, even when it is incompatible with the context (Giora and Fein 1999, Giora 2003, this volume). On the basis of her findings, she concludes that irony interpretation is both a complex and an error-prone process (hearers sometimes take the literal content to be speaker-meant). Assuming that these results are robust, it might seem that the three step processing model based on Grice’s account of nonliteral language use is vindicated in the case of irony.

However, post-Gricean theoretical work on irony indicates that the source of its complexity and the particular demands it makes on hearers/readers are quite different from anything envisaged by Grice. Many theorists working within distinct frameworks and different disciplines (linguistics, psychology, philosophy) have converged on the view that verbal irony is intrinsically metarepresentational, that is, it involves the representation of a representation (rather than of a state of affairs), and an attitude of dissociation towards this representation is implicitly expressed by the speaker. According to Sperber and Wilson (1981, 1986/95, 1998a) and Wilson and Sperber (1992), irony involves a particular kind of metarepresentational use of language, which they call ‘echoic use’: the speaker in irony is not expressing her own thoughts, but is echoing a thought she attributes to some source other than herself at that moment, and expressing a mocking, sceptical or derisive attitude to that thought. Consider an example of irony that is clearly echoic in this way:

7. *Scenario:* John has declared to Sally that he’s giving up smoking and that he’s sure it’ll be easy now that he’s completely resolved. A few weeks later she notices smoke wafted out from under the bathroom door. Later, she confronts him:

Sally: So giving up smoking is no problem at all – just takes a bit of resolve.

Sally is not asserting the proposition that giving up smoking is not a problem but is metarepresenting John’s earlier thoughts on the matter and expressing a mocking attitude toward them (and, thereby, toward him).

But there are many cases of ironical utterances where it is much less obvious that anyone has expressed or entertained the thought that is allegedly echoed. Consider the following:

8. *Scenario:* Mary has had a particularly bad day: she received a letter saying her application for promotion has been rejected, she tripped on an escalator and twisted her ankle, and when she got home she found her house had been burgled:

Mary: What a wonderful day!

Sperber and Wilson respond to this sort of case by pointing out that echoed thoughts need not be tied to particular individuals at particular times and places, but can be thoughts that are widely entertained or expressed by certain groups of people or by people in general. The thought which Mary echoes in (8) is of this latter sort: that one will have a happy, productive and/or fulfilling day is a common human hope and so is quite generally available to be echoed. An observation which supports this broad notion of echoic use is the widely noted positive-negative asymmetry of ironical utterances: when someone has had a bad day, it's always possible to say ironically how great it was, but when someone has had a wonderful day, it is not always possible to say ironically how awful it was. In fact, such negative ironical comments are only appropriate when some pessimistic thought about the day has been expressed or entertained by someone earlier on and so is available to be echoed (see Wilson 2009b).

The main rival to Sperber and Wilson's echoic account is the view that the key to verbal irony is pretence: the ironical speaker is not performing a genuine speech act (of, say, assertion) but is pretending to do so, in order to convey a mocking, sceptical or contemptuous attitude to the speech act itself, or to anyone who would perform it or take it seriously (Clark and Gerrig 1984, Kumon-Nakamura *et al.* 1995, Recanati 2000; Currie 2006).⁸ I won't try to

⁸ Some of these writers mention Grice's talk of an ironical speaker 'making as if to say' as indicative of a pretence account and Grice himself makes the connection explicit in a brief discussion of why it is inappropriate to preface an ironical utterance with the phrase 'to speak ironically': 'To be ironical is, among other things, to pretend (as the etymology suggests), and while one wants the pretense to be recognized as such, to announce it as a pretense would spoil the effect.' (Grice 1978: 125).

assess the relative merits of the two kinds of theory here⁹ but simply note that they have important features in common: both recognise that irony is essentially metarepresentational and dissociative, that is, whether the speaker is echoing a thought or is pretending to perform a certain speech act, her utterance represents, not a state of affairs, but a thought or proposition, which she openly, albeit tacitly, distances herself from. This is quite different from the classical Gricean account according to which a speaker says one thing in order to implicate its contrary and, most important, it makes for a striking distinction between irony and other nonliteral uses such as hyperbole, metaphor and metonymy, which are not metarepresentational in this way. That there is this representational difference between metaphorical language use and ironical use has been noted for some time by independent groups of investigators. For instance, Sperber and Wilson (1986/95) make a distinction between descriptive and interpretive uses of language, with both literal uses and metaphor being descriptive, and reported speech/thought and irony being interpretive (metarepresentational). Somewhat similarly, Winner and Gardner (1993) distinguish the understanding of irony from the understanding of metaphor on the grounds that irony requires an ability to infer other people's beliefs which is not necessary for metaphor understanding, a difference in complexity that is reflected in the different stages at which young children produce and understand these two kinds of nonliteral use (Winner 1988).

There is strong experimental support for this representational distinction between metaphor and irony, starting from Happé's (1993) study of whether people with varying degrees of autism are able to comprehend these tropes. She found a correlation between levels of theory of mind (specifically, the ability to attribute beliefs to other people) and different kinds of nonliteral language understanding: irony understanding required a higher order level of belief attribution (beliefs about beliefs) than metaphor. Although some details of this study have been criticised, the basic difference in representational complexity between metaphor and irony emphasised by Happé (who was testing predictions of Sperber and Wilson's (1986/95) work on the pragmatics of nonliteral language) has been corroborated by extensive subsequent experimentation. This includes the testing of different populations of language users, including normally developing children, people with autism, with Asperger's syndrome, with schizophrenia and with right-hemisphere damage (see, for instance, Smith

⁹ See Wilson (2006, 2009b) for detailed analysis of the differences between the echoic and the pretence accounts and comparison of their adequacy in handling a wide range of examples of verbal irony, both conversational and literary.

and Tsimpli 1995; Giora *et al.* 2000; Langdon *et al.* 2002; Martin and McDonald 2004; Norbury 2005; Mo *et al.* 2008).¹⁰

In the next section, the focus will be on metaphor and its relation to other tropes such as hyperbole and simile all of which, unlike irony, appear to function at the same (descriptive) level of representation. In recent years, there has been a remarkable convergence among psychologists, linguists, pragmaticists and philosophers on a view of metaphor which differs significantly from Grice's maxim-flouting, implicature account. The majority view now is that metaphorical language use contributes not just to what a speaker implicates but also to what she directly communicates (even asserts).¹¹ I will present this view as it has been developed within relevance-theoretic work on lexical pragmatics (e.g. Carston 1997, 2002, 2010a, 2010b; Sperber and Wilson 1998b, 2008; Wilson and Carston 2006, 2007), drawing also on closely related work from the psychology of metaphor processing (e.g. Glucksberg and Keysar 1993, Glucksberg 2001, 2008) and the philosophy of language (Recanati 1995, 2004; Bezuidenhout 2001, Wearing 2006).

3. Lexical pragmatics, *ad hoc* concepts and metaphor

It is widely recognised that the meanings of words are often pragmatically adjusted and fine-tuned in context, so that their contribution to the proposition expressed is different from their lexically encoded sense. Word meanings may be narrowed in context: e.g. 'money' used to mean 'a large amount of money' as in 'You need money to buy a house in London', or 'man' used to mean 'ideal man' or 'typical man' as in 'Churchill was a man'. Or they may be broadened (loosened): e.g. 'hexagonal' used to mean 'having roughly six sides that are similar in length', as in 'France is hexagonal', or 'raw' used to mean 'too undercooked to be edible' as in 'This steak is raw'. And there are cases where the adjustment made is both a narrowing and a broadening: e.g. when a long-suffering wife says of her husband 'He'll always be a bachelor', her use of the word 'bachelor' means 'behave according to the stereotype of an

¹⁰ See Wilson (2009b) for a detailed analysis of this fundamental representational difference between metaphorical and ironical language uses, including an important reassessment of the idea that the ability to interpret irony correlates with a higher order theory of mind ability (i.e. an ability to attribute beliefs about beliefs).

¹¹ There is not a consensus on this point, of course: for example, the philosopher Camp (2006) presents a spirited defence of the Gricean position, and neo-Gricean pragmatists, such as Horn (1988) and Levinson (2000), who have revised the Gricean system of maxims while maintaining his saying/implicating distinction, seem to assume his account of tropes (although they are not explicit about this).

irresponsible bachelor’, which would include certain married men and exclude certain bachelors (those who do not behave in the stereotypical way).

According to the unitary approach to lexical pragmatics developed within relevance theory (RT), in each of these cases, an *ad hoc* concept is pragmatically constructed, on the basis of the input provided by the lexically encoded concept and contextual information, and constrained by the addressee’s search for an optimally relevant interpretation of the utterance. These *ad hoc* concepts are marked with an asterisk (MAN*, RAW*, BACHELOR*, etc.) to distinguish them from the context-independent lexically encoded concepts (MAN, RAW, BACHELOR, etc.) and they are constituents of the proposition the speaker explicitly communicates (for detail and argument, see Wilson and Carston 2007).

The key claim for present purposes is that metaphorically used words and phrases are cases of pragmatic broadening of the linguistically encoded concepts and so, like other loose uses, their interpretation results in an *ad hoc* concept which is a component of the speaker’s explicature. For instance, B’s utterance about Sally in (9), in which ‘chameleon’ is used metaphorically, expresses an *ad hoc* concept, CHAMELEON*, whose denotation is broader than that of the lexical concept, CHAMELEON, from which it was pragmatically derived, in that it includes not only actual chameleons (a species of lizard that can change its skin colour so as to blend in with its surroundings) but also people with a certain character trait (a tendency to express different views to different people in order to be in apparent agreement with them, thus unreliability):

9. A: Sally told me that she supports our opposition to the university’s redundancy policy. I think we can rely on her to vote with us.
 B: I’m not at all sure about that. Sally is a chameleon.

The communicated content of B’s utterance is as given in (10), where the explicature containing the *ad hoc* concept CHAMELEON* gives strong inferential warrant to the implicated conclusions:

10. Explicature: SALLY IS A CHAMELEON*
 Implicatures: SALLY CHANGES HER STATED VIEWS TO MESH WITH WHOEVER SHE IS
 TALKING TO; SHE IS UNRELIABLE, FICKLE, UNTRUSTWORTHY;
 WE CANNOT ASSUME SHE WILL GIVE US HER VOTE

So metaphorical use is seen as simply a radical instance of the quite general process of concept broadening, which includes approximations ('hexagonal' above), hyperboles (perhaps 'raw' above) and category extensions (the use of specific names to denote a broader category of entities that share some salient characteristic, e.g. 'Hoover' for the category of vacuum cleaners generally).

On the RT view, then, approximation, category extension, hyperbole and metaphor are not distinct theoretical kinds; rather, they merely occupy different points on a continuum of degrees of broadening with no sharp cut-off points between them. Consider an example which can have a range of loose interpretations:

11. The water is boiling.

An utterance of (11) could be intended and understood in any of the following ways: strictly *literally*, communicating that the water is BOILING, so at or above boiling point; as an *approximation*, communicating that it is close enough to BOILING for the differences to be inconsequential for current purposes (e.g. for making a cup of coffee); *hyperbolically*, so not BOILING but closer to it than expected or desired (e.g. too hot to wash one's hands in comfortably); or *metaphorically*, suggesting, for instance, that the water, although not necessarily anywhere near boiling point, is moving agitatedly, bubbling, emitting vapour, and so on. In each case, a different concept is communicated, all of them derived from the literal encoded concept, and on the non-literal interpretations the concept's denotation is broader to varying degrees than that of the lexical concept.

The claim is that all these interpretations are reached in essentially the same way, namely, by an inferential pragmatic process of deriving contextual implications which meets particular standards of cognitive relevance.¹² In the course of that process, an explicature is pragmatically developed on the basis of the decoded linguistic meaning, elements of which, specifically the concept BOILING, may be adjusted by a backwards inference process in response to particular hypothesised implicatures. Consider a context in which the hearer has just run a bath for the speaker, who steps into it and then utters (11); typically, the relevant

¹² For an account of what these standards of relevance are and how they are motivated by the very nature of ostensive communication (against the backdrop of the general cognitive drive toward maximising the benefits and minimising the costs of processing new information), see Sperber and Wilson 1986/95, Wilson and Sperber 2004.

implications here are that the water is too hot to bathe in, feels unpleasant on the skin, and so on. Much of the information associated with the literal encoded concept BOILING does not enter into the interpretative process at all (information about actual boiling point, the use of boiling water for sterilising instruments, the damage it can do to human skin, etc.). The lexically encoded concept is adjusted to an *ad hoc* concept BOILING* which warrants just these context-specific implications and whose denotation is consequently broader than that of the encoded concept: it includes not only actual instances of boiling point but a range of other lower temperatures. This is an instance of a hyperbolic use and the idea is that a metaphorical use works in essentially the same way. In an appropriate context, perhaps a violent storm at sea, an utterance of (11) would carry implicatures about the way the sea looks (churning and seething, throwing up foam and vapour) and perhaps about how the speaker experiences it (as overpowering, dangerous, frightening), with quite possibly no implications at all concerning temperature. Again, the encoded concept BOILING would be adjusted so that the explicature as a whole can play its role as a premise grounding these relevance-based implications and, again, the *ad hoc* concept derived would be considerably broader in denotation than the lexical concept.

Let me draw out some of the features of this account and some of the questions it raises. First, it is strikingly different from Grice's approach: there is no presumption that literal interpretation is the norm and should always be the first option tried; there is no blatant violation of a maxim, resulting in an interpretation consisting just of implicated thought(s), with nothing explicitly or directly communicated. The account follows the Romantic tradition in seeing the metaphorical use of language as natural, normal and pervasive, and as communicating a usually unparaphraseable content rather than functioning as merely a pleasing stylistic adornment.

Second, the claim that there is a loose use continuum, with literal use as the limiting case and metaphorical use as a case of radical loosening emphasises that, on this view, metaphor is taken to be a descriptive use of language, an employment of words in order to express a thought or impression about some aspect of the external world as experienced by the speaker. This distinguishes it sharply from ironical uses of language, as discussed in the previous section, on which the speaker echoically metarepresents someone else's thought and expresses a negative attitude toward it. Thus, any talk of a continuum from the literal to the nonliteral applies to metaphor (and hyperbole), which are on the same representational level, but not to irony which is a quite distinct (meta-level) kind of nonliteralness.

Third, this account of metaphor drives a wedge between metaphors (e.g. ‘Sally is a chameleon’) and their apparently corresponding similes (e.g. ‘Sally is like a chameleon’) since it is the literal encoded concept CHAMELEON that figures in the explicature of the simile utterance rather than the broadened concept CHAMELEON* (Sally isn’t *like* something in that category, she is a member of that category). This might be seen as a shortcoming of the account as, intuitively at least, there is a close relation between these two figures of speech and, on many previous analyses, they have been taken to be versions of each other – metaphors analysed as elliptical similes or similes as hedged metaphors – hence as interchangeable. In fact, there is some psycholinguistic evidence that supports the view that they are distinct tropes with significantly different effects (see Glucksberg and Haught 2006), thus supporting the difference between them that we get on the *ad hoc* concept account of metaphor. However, this is a more complex issue than it appears to be when we confine our attention to very simple cases of the form ‘X is (like) Y’, as the experimental work does. On the one hand, there are metaphors that have no obvious simile counterpart (e.g. ‘The winter wind gently lifted the lacy blanket’, as in (6c) above) and vice versa (e.g. ‘Mary sings like an angel’, for which ‘Mary is an angel’ is not the corresponding metaphor and it’s not clear what is). On the other hand, both metaphor and simile seem to be based on a process of recognising relevant resemblances between the figurative vehicle and the topic, and, in more extended metaphors, they may work closely together in developing a single idea or conceit, as in the following:

12. If they be two, they are two so
 As stiff twin compasses are two;
 Thy soul, the fix’d foot, makes no show
 To move, but doth, if th’ other do.
- And though it in the centre sit,
 Yet, when the other far doth roam,
 It leans, and hearkens after it,
 And grows erect, as that comes home.

(from John Donne: *A Valediction Forbidding Mourning*)

Here there is an initial simile form, in which the souls of the lovers (the referent of ‘they’ in the first line) are likened to (are ‘so as’) a pair of mathematical compasses, which is followed by a series of metaphors that develop the analogy. The difference between the comparative form and the categorical form seems inconsequential here, with both working towards the development of an extended metaphorical conception. For further discussion of similarities and differences between metaphors and similes, and how they may be explained, see Carston (forthcoming).

Fourth, on this loose use continuum view, there is claimed to be no clear cut-off point between hyperbolic uses and metaphorical uses – both are simply cases of concept broadening, differing only in the degree and direction of their broadening, and, in some cases, apparently indistinguishable (‘John is a saint’ may be metaphorical, hyperbolic, or both). However, there is a strong intuition that in many cases of metaphor (and simile), the properties of one domain are carried over to a quite different domain (e.g. from animals to human personalities in ‘Sally is a *chameleon*’; from physical landscapes to human institutions in ‘Their marriage is a *minefield*’). This seems to distinguish metaphors from other kinds of loose use, including hyperboles, whose comprehension simply involves relaxing the encoded property (e.g. ‘I’m *starving*’, ‘It’s *boiling* outside’). This ‘domain mapping’ view of metaphor is fundamental to the approach of the cognitive linguists (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1993), who assume that metaphor is a particular phenomenon with distinctive properties and so warrants its own theory, as will be discussed briefly in the next section. However, within the unitary approach to lexical pragmatics set out here, it is worth exploring the possibility that the key property of metaphors (which distinguishes them from hyperboles) is that grasping a metaphorical use requires not only a broadening of encoded content, but also, essentially, a narrowing. In other words, not only is a defining property of the literal concept dropped (e.g. ‘lizard’ in the case of *chameleon*), thereby broadening the denotation, but some other property, accessed by context-sensitive relevance-based inference, becomes central to the *ad hoc* concept (e.g. perhaps ‘inconsistency’ in the case of *chameleon*), and so the denotation is narrowed. On this basis, we may be able to account for the intuition that, for instance, ‘John is a *saint*’ is both metaphorical and hyperbolic. In brief, on this use of *saint*, a defining property of the literal concept SAINT, namely, ‘canonized’, is dropped and thus the denotation is broadened, while the property of a self-sacrificial degree of kindness is promoted to central prominence and thus the denotation is narrowed (it excludes cruel saints, like Thomas More, who perpetrated the torture of heretics). It seems that it is this latter

property that accounts for the hyperbolic feel of the utterance, as we take it to be an exaggerated expression of John's actual degree of kindness.¹³

Fifth, there is another possible objection to the explicitly 'deflationary'¹⁴ RT *ad hoc* concept account of metaphor: it might not seem to do justice to what people usually find most striking about metaphors – their sensory, imagistic, phenomenal properties. The *ad hoc* concepts that the account delivers seem rather general and abstract¹⁵ and, even if this is not what's intended, there is very little said about the apparently nonconceptual (imagistic or affective) effects of metaphors. One line of response to this objection would be that the theory applies only to relatively conventionalised or routinised cases like 'saint', 'angel', 'chameleon', 'boiling', 'block of ice', 'minefield' and 'butcher', for which a second, metaphorical, sense is listed in some dictionaries and whose evocative aspect could be argued to have been lost or greatly diminished as its conceptual content solidified. However, relevance theorists intend the scope of the account to be considerably wider than this. The interpretive process of *ad hoc* concept formation is context-sensitive and pragmatic, so applies also to the understanding of relatively novel, unconventional cases, such as the following:

13. My garden is a *slum* of bloom.

14. *Context:* The protagonist has expressed an opinion that is very much at odds with what her addressee, Sarah, wants to hear.
Description: Sarah's face became a *polished stone*.

15. *Context:* A group of young people are discussing older, rather dominant, female members of their families.

¹³ Another interesting question here is whether metonymic uses (e.g. 'The handlebar moustache made a stately entrance') are to be accommodated in the unitary lexical pragmatic account and, if so, how, since they constitute neither a narrowing nor a broadening (the concept MAN WITH A HANDLEBAR MOUSTACHE is not a broadening of the concept HANDLEBAR MOUSTACHE). For some preliminary discussion, see Wilson and Carston (2007: 253-4).

¹⁴ 'There is no mechanism specific to metaphor, no interesting generalisation that applies only to them. In other terms, linguistic metaphors are not a natural kind, and "metaphor" is not a theoretically important notion in the study of verbal communication. Relevance Theory's account of metaphor is on the lean side, and is bound to disappoint those who feel that verbal metaphor deserves a full-fledged theory of its own, or should be at the centre of a wider theory of language, or even of thought.' (Sperber and Wilson 2008:84-85)

¹⁵ This is most marked for accounts that take the *ad hoc* concept to be superordinate to the literal encoded concept, e.g. analyses on which 'My lawyer is a shark' expresses a concept SHARK*, which includes all actual sharks and certain human beings, and is paraphrased as the category of predatory, aggressive, tenacious entities (Glucksberg 2001).

Utterance: You should meet my granny, Paul. She's the one would put manners on you. She's a real *paint remover*.¹⁶

Thus, the account's intended scope requires that it offer some explanation of the imagistic effects of these more creative examples. Further, it is far from obvious that the more familiar metaphorical uses such as 'angel', 'butcher', 'chameleon', 'minefield', etc. are any less imagistic than these more unusual or creative uses, so there does seem to be a further dimension to be accounted for across the board. There are very interesting and challenging questions here concerning how the sensory, imagistic and affective effects of metaphors work; in particular, whether they can be reduced to a cluster of weakly communicated cognitive effects, as Sperber and Wilson (1986/95, 2008) maintain, or not, as Pilkington (2000) and Carston (2010b) argue.

Finally, while the *ad hoc* concept account encompasses examples such as those in (13)-(15) where the metaphorical use, although quite original, is limited to a single word or phrase, it is a lot less clear that it carries over to extended metaphorical texts, in which there may be a hierarchy of interacting metaphors developed at some length. These are typical of, but by no means confined to, poetry and other literary texts. The two verses from John Donne in (12) above are a case in point (and the 'compasses' metaphor there is, in fact, developed over several more verses of the poem). Consider also the following passage from a modern novel:

16. Depression, in Karla's experience, was a dull, inert thing – a toad that squatted wetly on your head until it finally gathered the energy to slither off. The unhappiness she had been living with for the last ten days was a quite different creature. It was frantic and aggressive. It had fists and fangs and hobnailed boots. It didn't sit, it assailed. It *hurt* her. In the mornings, it slapped her so hard in the face that she reeled as she walked to the bathroom.

(Zoe Heller: *The Believers* p.263)

The question here is whether in interpreting this passage we rapidly construct a lot of distinct *ad hoc* concepts, one after the other: TOAD*, SQUAT-ON-YOUR-HEAD*, CREATURE*, FISTS*,

¹⁶ The first example is discussed by Wearing (2006); the second is from Lorrie Moore's novel *A Gate at the Stairs*, p.79 (Faber and Faber); the third is from Colm Tóibín's novel *The Blackwater Lightship*, p.37 (Picador).

FRANTIC*, FANGS*, HOB-NAILED-BOOTS*, and so on. In my view, the literal meanings of the many metaphorically used words here are so mutually reinforcing that, relative to their high activation, the effort of deriving multiple *ad hoc* concepts is too great and instead the literal meanings win out temporarily, so that an internally coherent mental scenario is formed representing a somewhat surreal world consisting of repulsive amphibious creatures with different kinds of characteristics (some sitting inertly on human heads, some kicking and biting). Of course, the work of grasping the intended metaphorical interpretation has yet to be done and that requires a further pragmatic inferential process of deriving from the representations comprising the literal interpretation those of its implications that can plausibly apply to the human experiences of depression and grief.¹⁷

The suggestion, then, is that it may be necessary to supplement the *ad hoc* concept account with a second kind or mode of metaphor processing, in which the literal meaning of a stretch of metaphorically used language is maintained as a whole and subjected to slower, more reflective interpretive inference which separates out the implications that are speaker-meant from those that are not. The difference between these two routes to metaphor understanding can be summed up succinctly as follows: on the first one (*ad hoc* concept formation), word meaning is pragmatically adjusted so as to capture the thought, and, on the second one, the thought or world conception is (albeit temporarily) made to correspond to the (literal) language. The first mode is, as it were, the normal mode – we are adjusting word meanings to a greater or lesser extent all the time in comprehending utterances, in accordance with our occasion-specific expectations of relevance. The switch to the second mode is made only when a certain processing threshold or tipping point is reached, when the effort of local *ad hoc* concept formation is too great relative to the dominance, the high accessibility, of the literal meaning. For further discussion of this ‘two process’ account of metaphor comprehension, see Carston (2010b, forthcoming).

In the next section, I will consider a different account of metaphor, one which takes its prevalence in language use to be a reflection of its origin in our conceptual system.

¹⁷ Clearly, this mode of metaphor processing gives a much greater (and more prolonged) role to the literal meaning of the metaphorically used language. In Carston (2010b), where I develop the idea that there is this second processing mode or route for the understanding of certain cases of metaphor, I give some empirical evidence to support the ongoing dominance of the literal meaning. Interestingly, the account meshes quite well with the controversial stance of the philosopher Donald Davidson that ‘Metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation mean, and nothing more’ (1978/84: 245).

4. Conceptual metaphor and pragmatics

Within the approach to language known as ‘cognitive linguistics’¹⁸, metaphor is viewed as, first and foremost, a phenomenon of thought. It consists of conceptual mappings across cognitive domains such that certain abstract domains of thought (e.g. psychological states, time, life, verbal arguments) have the structure of more concrete domains projected onto them (e.g. physical states, space, journeys, wars or physical struggles, respectively). These domain mappings then surface, derivatively and pervasively, in our use of language:

17. a. After he lost his job, John was *very low* for months, but he seems to be *rising above* it now. <SAD IS DOWN>, <HAPPY IS UP>
- b. *From Monday to Friday* he worked hard, but *in* the weekend he rested. <TIME IS SPACE>
- c. I’ve *reached an impasse* and really don’t know *where to go* next. <LIFE IS A JOURNEY>
- d. Her *defensive strategy* worked and his objections were *knocked down* one after the other. <ARGUMENTS ARE WARS>

In their book, aptly entitled *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) carried out what can be thought of as a consciousness-raising exercise by comprehensively demonstrating how metaphor-laden our ordinary conventional language use is and how systematically related many of these metaphorical uses are. For example, there are a lot of different terms we use for talking about time which come from the source domain of money (specifically, its property of being a valuable and limited resource): ‘*spend* time’, ‘*save* many hours’, ‘*waste* several days’, ‘*invest* one’s time *profitably*’, ‘*budget* one’s time’, ‘*squander* decades’, ‘live on *borrowed* time’, etc. These uses of language, and many others, are claimed to be underpinned by the general metaphor <TIME IS MONEY>, which is part of our conceptual system and structures our thinking about time (the target domain). Another example is the vast array of expressions whose literal meaning concerns spatial location but which are regularly employed for talking about nonspatial domains; for instance, words for being

¹⁸ The study of language (grammar and semantics) in cognitive linguistics is based on the hypotheses that language is not an autonomous faculty of the mind but arises out of general cognitive capacities and that knowledge of language emerges from language use. The approach was developed in opposition to Chomskyan generative grammar, on the one hand, and truth-conditional semantics, on the other. For a very useful overview and assessment, see Croft and Cruse (2004).

physically up/high or down/low are used to express positive or negative states of health, emotion, morality, and social ‘standing’. These then are taken as evidence for the conceptual metaphors <GOOD IS UP>, <BAD IS DOWN>. The domain of physical containers is another source domain that figures in a wide range of metaphors with target domains including human minds (e.g. we have thoughts ‘*in, on, and at the front/back of our minds*’), visual fields (e.g. things come ‘*into and out of view*’), emotional states and relationships (e.g. ‘falling *in and out of love*’, ‘she got more *out of it* than she put *into it*’), activities (e.g. ‘get *into or out of*’ a particular line of work or business). Again, based on this linguistic evidence, the claim is that our knowledge of the physical domain of containers structures a number of more abstract domains of thought via conceptual metaphors such as <THE MIND IS A CONTAINER>, <RELATIONSHIPS ARE CONTAINERS>, etc.

The system of conceptual metaphors is claimed to consist of both basic or primary metaphors and more complex ones that are composed out of the simpler ones together with ordinary general knowledge. So, for example, the metaphor <LOVE IS A JOURNEY> is composed of several more basic conceptual metaphors, including <PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS>, <DIFFICULTIES ARE IMPEDIMENTS TO MOTION>, <RELATIONSHIPS ARE CONTAINERS>, <INTIMACY IS CLOSENESS> (plus ordinary literal knowledge about, for instance, travelling, containers, motion, etc.). For more detail about the system of primary metaphors and the compositional structures built from them, see Grady 1997, Lakoff 1993, 2008.¹⁹ Grady and Lakoff have noted that such primary metaphors are acquired by people all over the world and claim that this is because they are grounded in our shared bodily experience of the world (the ‘embodiment’ thesis). For example, there is a bodily experiential basis to the (associative) connection between positive/negative experiences and being physically upright/down, hence the primary metaphors <GOOD IS UP> and <BAD IS DOWN>, between knowing something and the experience of seeing it, hence the metaphor <KNOWING IS SEEING>, and between emotional connectedness and physical proximity, hence the metaphor <INTIMACY IS CLOSENESS>. A further, more recent development within conceptual metaphor

¹⁹ Just how simple and general the primary conceptual metaphors are is very unclear and, as they get more and more schematic, they threaten to undermine the notion of domain mapping which is the central plank of the theory. Thus, in discussing Grady’s (1997) proposal that the conceptual metaphor <THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS> is composed of more basic metaphors including, for instance, <ORGANIZATION IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE>, Croft and Cruse (2004: 201) point out that the problem with such highly schematic metaphors as this is that both the alleged source and target domains could be seen as instantiations of this general conceptual schema, making any mapping from source to target redundant. See Jackendoff and Aaron (1991) and McGlone (2001) for more detailed exposition of this particular issue, and see Stern (2000: 176-87) for a particularly insightful critique of the conceptual metaphor approach.

theory is the idea that there is a neural basis to enduring metaphorical thought (and hence to metaphorical language). Basic metaphorical mappings (e.g. from bodily states and processes to psychological states and processes) are claimed to consist of neural maps that bind sensorimotor information to more abstract ideas so that source domain structures and inferences are carried over to the target domain via neural links (Lakoff 2008).

As this brief outline of the cognitivists' position indicates, their view of metaphor could hardly be more different from that of the classical rhetorical or Gricean approach, according to which metaphors, along with other tropes, are not natural or normal uses of language (they violate an assumed norm of literalness) and are not essential to the content being communicated, but are merely attractive or attention-grabbing ways of presenting it. Like relevance theorists, cognitive linguists follow the Romantic tradition, according to which metaphor is an entirely natural and normal phenomenon; it pervades language use and is both contentful and unparaphraseable.²⁰ However, despite this very basic similarity in outlook, the cognitive linguistic and RT positions are strikingly different in other respects. The most fundamental difference is their distinct views on the origin of metaphors: in thought/conceptualisation, according to the former, and in communication, according to the latter.

A second difference concerns the literal-metaphorical distinction. As discussed in section 3, according to the RT view, metaphorical language lies at one end of a literal-nonliteral (loose use) continuum, which also includes approximations and hyperbolic uses of language. Nothing of this sort could possibly enter into the cognitivists' account, given that they take the essence of metaphor to be the associative mapping of a concrete conceptual domain onto a more abstract domain.²¹ This view of metaphor entails a relatively sharp literal-metaphorical distinction, which applies to both thought and language: 'Although I will argue that a great many common concepts like causation and purpose are metaphorical, there is nonetheless an extensive range of non-metaphorical concepts. A sentence like *The balloon went up* is not metaphorical, nor is the old philosopher's favorite *The cat is on the mat*. But as soon as one gets away from concrete physical experience and starts talking about abstractions

²⁰ A further similarity that follows from this basic one is that both approaches predict that metaphorical uses of language need take no longer to understand than literal uses, contrary to the three step (Gricean-derived) processing model. As mentioned in section 2, this prediction has been repeatedly supported experimentally.

²¹ The cognitivists discuss metonymy as another principle of conceptual organisation. It is distinguished from metaphor in that the source and target concepts exist within a single domain (e.g. 'Nabokov' for the novels of Vladimir Nabokov, or 'Downing Street' for the British prime minister or his spokesperson). For a discussion of the cognitive linguistic account of conceptual (and verbal) metonymy, and its interaction with conceptual metaphor, see Croft and Cruse (2004).

or emotions, metaphorical understanding is the norm.’ Lakoff (1993: 205). Given their focus on metaphor and its unique role in conceptualisation, it is not surprising that Lakoff and his colleagues don’t discuss hyperbole or approximation. These kinds of language use are not likely to be of much interest to them since they do not involve mappings between conceptual domains and so do not structure our thinking about the world, as metaphor does. The Lakoffians might well find it a reasonable idea that there is a continuum of loose uses of language which includes approximations, category extensions, hyperbole and other intermediate cases, but would take that to be a quite distinct matter from metaphor.

Another question one might have about the cognitivists’ position is how they view the relation between a verbal metaphor and its apparently corresponding simile. Given that metaphor is taken to be fundamentally a matter of conceptualisation, it might seem that the verbal metaphor/simile distinction is just a superficial difference in linguistic form with little interpretive import; for example, ‘Bill is a bulldozer’ and ‘Bill is like a bulldozer’ would simply be minimally different linguistic manifestations of the <PEOPLE ARE MACHINES> conceptual metaphor. But, while this may be true of some cases, it is only one dimension of what is, in fact, quite a complex issue. First, many of the grammatical forms that manifest prototypical Lakoffian conceptual metaphors cannot be easily recast as similes, e.g. ‘The price has *gone up*’, ‘I’ll be home *around* midnight’, ‘She is *in* danger’, ‘She looked at him *coldly*’, ‘Our *paths* will *cross* again one day’. Second, while there is an open-ended mapping between the source and target domains in a metaphor, many similes explicitly specify a single salient resemblance between the two domains at issue, e.g. ‘He *followed her around* like a puppy dog’, ‘The victim had been shot and *dumped* in a field like garbage’ (examples from Croft and Cruse 2004: 213). Although there is rather little discussion of similes within the cognitive linguistic paradigm, what there is tends to concur with the view described in section 3 that, with the possible exception of a few cases of the ‘X is (like) a Y’ sort, simile and metaphor are quite distinct uses of language (see Israel *et al.* 2004, Croft and Cruse 2004: 211-216). Of course, the deeper difference for the cognitivists is that while metaphor is fundamentally a matter of conceptualisation, simile is (just) a figure of speech.

It is not one of the aims of the cognitivists’ conceptual approach to metaphor to provide an account of how context-specific metaphorical uses of language are understood in online communication. That is, the account is not a pragmatic theory and it could, therefore, in principle, be wedded to an independently developed pragmatic theory, such as the relevance-based account of utterance comprehension. What pragmatics provides is an account

of how a hearer/reader comes to understand a metaphorical utterance in the way *intended by the speaker*. Consider, for instance, different possible interpretations of the following metaphorical uses:

18. a. My younger brother is a *prince*.
- b. Elisabeth is *the sun*.
- c. His feet were *stones* at the end of his legs.

The speaker of (18a) might mean that her brother has a noble character and is destined for greatness, or that he is spoiled and demanding. In some contexts, (18b) might be interpreted as saying that Elisabeth is resplendent and regal; in others, that she is full of warmth and radiantly beautiful. The speaker of (18c) might intend ‘stones’ to be interpreted as heavy weights or as cold lifeless things.²² And for each of these, specific contextualisations could yield numerous further, more fine-grained, interpretive possibilities. So, even if there is a stock of conceptual metaphors which make available an array of domain mappings, context-sensitive, relevance-based inferential processes geared to the recovery of the speaker’s intended meaning are essential. Furthermore, there are some metaphorical uses of language that cannot be plausibly thought of as grounded in any of the kinds of domain mappings put forward by the cognitivists; for instance, describing one body part in terms of another in (19a) or the human ‘heart’ in terms of a part of an item of clothing in (19b):

19. a. His face was a *fist* of fury and pain.
- b. ‘A man’s heart was a *deep pocket he might turn out* and be amazed at what he found there.’ (from *The Secret River* by Kate Grenville, p.302)

For these examples, interpreting the metaphor is wholly a matter of pragmatic inference which takes its premises from non-metaphorical information stored in the encyclopaedic entries associated with the decoded concepts FIST and POCKET. There are probably many cases of this sort, including some of those above (e.g. ‘My garden is a *slum* of bloom’), which are the product of a human imaginative capacity to see resemblances and make analogies, and do not depend on established conceptual metaphors.

²² Consider: ‘In the winter his feet were stones on the end of his legs. At night he and the others lay shivering on the mouldy straw, ...’ from *The Secret River* by Kate Grenville, p. 12, (Canongate).

Recently, Tendahl and Gibbs (2008) have proposed that conceptual metaphor theory and the RT account of metaphor comprehension are complementary and should be brought together into a comprehensive theory of metaphor. They suggest that conceptual metaphors are part of our general encyclopaedic knowledge and may, like other items of such knowledge, be activated when particular concepts are linguistically decoded and so play a role in facilitating the recovery of the speaker's meaning. For instance, in the process of comprehending 'Robert is a bulldozer', the decoded lexical concept BULLDOZER would make available the conceptual metaphors <PEOPLE ARE MACHINES>, <MINDS ARE MACHINES> and perhaps others, each of which provides a system of mappings between the source and target domains. The idea is that these long-standing, entrenched metaphorical mappings interact with more occasion-specific contextual information resulting in certain components of the domain mappings being more highly activated than others and so more likely to be instrumental in the *ad hoc* concept formation process. As Tendahl and Gibbs see it, the advantages of conceptual metaphors playing this role in a relevance-based pragmatics are: (a) they would reduce the processing effort involved in metaphor comprehension (thereby increasing the relevance of the metaphorical utterance), and (b) they could account for cases of 'emergent properties' such as, for instance, 'insensitive to the views and feelings of others' which might well be one of the properties understood as meant by the speaker of 'Robert is a bulldozer'. This is not a property of bulldozers (machines) and so does not feature in the encyclopaedic entry for the concept BULLDOZER, but might be made available via the system of associative mappings between the source domain of machines and the target domain of human characteristics.²³ For more detailed discussion, see also Gibbs and Tendahl (2006).

Underpinning the RT account of metaphorical language understanding in terms of *ad hoc* concepts is the view that the concepts that humans can mentally entertain and manipulate are considerably more numerous and fine-grained than the concepts encoded in public language systems. Thus, the range of concepts we can communicate to each other far outstrips those that are lodged in our linguistic lexicons and it is relevance-based pragmatic processes that make this possible (Sperber and Wilson 1998b). Some of these nonlexicalised concepts

²³ Any fully adequate account of metaphor interpretation will have to confront the issue of emergent properties. A different sort of account is presented by advocates of blending theory, a theory with a broad domain, including both utterance interpretation and more general problem solving, but which, it is claimed, shows how emergent properties can arise from a mental operation of 'blending' two mental spaces (e.g. the space of human traits and the space of bulldozers). For discussion of blending and metaphor, see Grady *et al.* (1999) and for critical assessment of blending theory, see Croft and Cruse (2004), Vega Moreno (2007) and Lakoff (2008). Within the RT framework, Vega Moreno (2007) and Wilson and Carston (2006) have attempted to provide a wholly inferential account (i.e. one that employs no special associative mappings) of how hearers recover emergent properties in interpretation.

may be established in an individual's conceptual repertoire, while others may be formed on the fly, in response to immediate occasion-specific concerns (Barsalou 1987, Carston 2010a). RT doesn't rule out the possibility of metaphorical thought, but, contrary to the cognitivists' stance, takes it that the vast majority of metaphorical language use in communication is a reflection of nonmetaphorical thoughts about the world; we can think about mental states, life, love, arguments and other abstract concepts without necessarily having to employ concepts from more concrete domains such as bodily states, journeys, containers and wars in order to do so.

Working within the RT framework, Wilson (2009a) suggests that at least some of the cross-domain correspondences discussed by the cognitivists might be the result of repeated encounters with linguistic metaphors that link the two conceptual domains. Wilson starts by demonstrating how a hearer who encounters a metaphorical use such as 'Bill's marriage is *on the rocks*' for the first time could interpret it successfully via the kind of lexical adjustment process (specifically, lexical broadening) outlined above in section 3. That is, without any metaphorical scheme of the type <MARRIAGES ARE JOURNEYS> in his conceptual system, he could, following the usual relevance-driven interpretation process, infer an *ad hoc* concept ON THE ROCKS* which carries the intended implications about Bill's marriage. Then she points out that, while many *ad hoc* concepts are a one-off occurrence, others may recur regularly and frequently enough for the inferential route from the lexical concept to the *ad hoc* concept to become routinised to varying degrees. In very frequently used cases that link two domains (e.g. relationships and journeys, arguments and wars, time and money), the routinisation may go so far as to amount to the kind of systematic cross-domain correspondences that the cognitivists discuss. So, for instance, thoughts about marriage may come to automatically activate aspects of our encyclopaedic information about journeys, and thoughts about arguments may come to automatically activate aspects of our encyclopaedic information about wars. These automatic co-activations would then facilitate the development of further related metaphorical uses of concepts from the same source domains applied to the same target domains, hence the families of related metaphors that the cognitive linguists have highlighted (e.g. 'reached a dead end', 'made a new start', 'sailing along', 'stormy', 'entered calmer waters', etc. used in describing marriages and other relationships). While Lakoffians see these linguistic uses as external manifestations of a prior conceptual metaphor <MARRIAGE IS A JOURNEY>, Wilson's view is, in effect, the opposite, in that she takes the basis of the apparent domain mapping to be communicative rather than cognitive/conceptual.

It will be interesting to see how this fundamental difference in the explanation for certain well-established and thematically-related clusters of linguistic metaphors is ultimately resolved. One possibility is that there are some primary cognitive mappings, such as the universally instantiated analogy between the physical and the psychological, the body and the mind, while other, more culture-specific cases, such as <MARRIAGE IS A JOURNEY> or <PEOPLE ARE MACHINES>, arise from repeated patterns of linguistic communication.

Finally, whether or not the claim that many metaphors have their origin in our conceptual systems is true, it does seem irrefutable that metaphor abounds in our use of language and has a strong presence in the lexical system itself. This, then, is another difference from ironical uses of language, which are considerably less frequent, apparently less basic among our communicative needs than metaphor, and not a force for semantic change – there aren't ironical sense extensions in the lexicon. Irony is not conceptual in the sense in which the cognitivists believe metaphor to be: no-one, as far as I know, has claimed that there are ironical mappings which structure our conceptual systems, and indeed it is difficult to imagine any cognitive utility in such a system.

5. Conclusion: kinds of nonliteralness and the literal/nonliteral distinction(s)

Metaphor is usually taken to be the paradigm case of nonliteralness. Most ordinary untutored communicators are aware of a distinction between literal and metaphorical uses of words – speakers may, on occasion, preface their utterances with the phrase ‘metaphorically speaking’ and hearers may question whether someone meant a word literally or metaphorically. Similarly, people are typically alert to the distinction between ironical and literal utterances and may correct someone’s apparent misinterpretation of an utterance by saying ‘no, she meant it ironically’. In this concluding section, I will briefly consider the extent to which this kind of intuitive folk distinction between the literal and the nonliteral is reflected in the kinds of theories discussed in the previous sections.

On the Gricean account of saying and meaning, there is a relatively clear distinction between literal and nonliteral language use: a speaker uses language literally when she means what she says (in Grice’s semantically-oriented sense of ‘say’), and she uses language non-literally when she does not mean what she says (or makes as if to say), as in ‘Mary is a bulldozer’ or ‘Bill is a fine friend’ (uttered in the appropriate context). The move to a

pragmatically enriched conception of what a speaker says (or explicitly communicates), as discussed in section 2 above, obliterates this way of drawing the literal/nonliteral distinction. On this view, speakers, trading on their hearers' pragmatic capacities, may employ a word to communicate any of a wide range of concepts inferable in context from the encoded lexical concept, and these communicated *ad hoc* concepts, e.g. MONEY*, BOILING*, BULLDOZER*, ON THE ROCKS*, contribute to what the speaker said (her primary meaning). So, on this account, even in clearly metaphorically used cases the speaker means what she says (a conclusion that the cognitivists would draw too, although basing it on different assumptions).

Relevance theorists maintain that adjustment of lexically encoded meanings is standard practice in communication and that words are seldom used to express just what they encode. So if literal meaning is equated with linguistically encoded meaning, it follows that using words literally is a rarity. However, some cases of pragmatic adjustment of word meanings do not, intuitively at least, seem to count as nonliteral uses. Instances of lexical narrowing (or enrichment), e.g. 'money' used to mean 'a lot of money', 'fresh' to mean 'new and bright', 'leave' to mean 'end a relationship', are generally judged to be literal uses of the words. What distinguishes lexical concept narrowing from broadening (loose use) is that while the linguistically encoded meaning is preserved in the former, components of it are dropped in the latter, e.g. a loose use of 'hexagonal' drops the defining feature that the six sides are exactly equal, a broadening of 'saint' to mean 'very kind, unselfish person' drops the 'canonized' component. So we might reasonably suggest that only cases of lexical concept broadening qualify as nonliteral uses.

However, although there is a principled distinction here, it does not mesh with ordinary speaker-hearer intuitions because many loose uses, probably including the two just given, are not any more phenomenologically salient as nonliteral uses than the enrichment cases are. The folk distinction would include banal loose uses (e.g. 'square' to mean 'squarish', 'flat' to mean 'flat in so far as landscapes can be flat') in the class of literal uses of language and distinguish them from clear cases of metaphor (and irony). If the RT view that there is a loose use continuum, extending from the strictly literal at one extreme to the strikingly metaphorical at the other, is correct, it seems that we should simply abandon any attempt to match the distinctions made by the pragmatic theory with the intuitive folk distinction. What is transparently nonliteral to us as ordinary language users would have to be captured in some way that crosscuts the loose use continuum and explains what property

makes it the case that some departures from strict literalness impinge on our conscious awareness while others don't.²⁴

Within the class of intuitive nonliteral uses, however, metaphor and irony are clearly recognised by speaker-hearers as quite distinct phenomena and, consonant with this, they are given very different explanations within current pragmatic theories, as discussed in sections 2 and 3 above. While metaphorical uses require hearers to radically broaden or adjust linguistic meanings, ironical uses typically preserve literal word meanings but make it evident that the speaker does not think those literal meanings apply to the situation under discussion. These are very different ways of using language nonliterally: metaphorical uses are attempts to describe the world accurately by extending the meaning resources of the linguistic code, while ironical uses are a means of using literal meaning to communicate a dissociative attitude towards particular descriptions of the world. That we can express and communicate thoughts and attitudes that go so far beyond what our languages encode is, of course, entirely due to our powerful pragmatic capacities.*

²⁴ For discussion of at least three different ways in which the literal/nonliteral distinction can be drawn on a contextualist (truth-conditional pragmatic) account of utterance meaning and of how the intuitive folk notion of nonliteral use might be reconstructed within such an account, see Recanati (2004, chapter 5).

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