

PHIL 3710/LING 3332: Philosophy of Language
Week 10: Metaphor

1. Clear(?) examples:
 - a. Simon is a rock
 - b. Juliet is the sun
 - c. She wore me down
 - d. I stepped up to the plate
 - e. Now is the winter of our discontent

Note: It is not expressions that are metaphorical, but *uses* of expressions. Each of these sentences can be used non-metaphorically (I am careful here not to say: can be used literally).

2. This raises a couple of questions:
 - a. Are there any expressions which *cannot* be used metaphorically?
 - b. Are there any expressions which can *only* be used metaphorically?
3. Lycan claims that “virtually every sentence produced by any human being contains importantly metaphorical or other figurative elements” (p. 209). (Note the sloppiness.) I guess he has in mind:

‘caged emotions’, ‘abandon the project’, ‘carry out the agenda’, ‘execute the plan’, ‘an aging joke’, ‘anarchy on the freeway’, ‘bound by a contract’, ‘brand of music’, ‘braking news’, ‘bursting with flavor’, ‘colliding philosophies’, ‘comfortable with my decision’, ‘direction in life’, ‘political fallout’, ‘road map to peace’, and so on.

Is he right?

4. Are typical uses of the following metaphorical uses?
 - a. It is raining
 - b. Sarah uses a nice font
 - c. It’s raining cats and dogs
5. We also have *dead metaphors*: ‘river mouth’, ‘inclined to drink’, ‘rich dessert’, ‘dead microphone’, ‘dead metaphor’.

Does the dying happen slowly, or abruptly?

6. It seems that the speaker means something (propositional) over and above what the sentence literally means (what she has said), and that to understand the speaker one must understand what this is. If so:

- a. Is it something that she has also said?
- b. Is it something that she has implicated?

The simile theory

1. The simile theory: metaphors are abbreviated similes (yuck).
 - a. By ‘Simon is a rock’ the speaker meant that Simon is like a rock
 - b. By ‘She wore me down’ the speaker meant that she did something like wear me down

Is what the speaker has actually said? Or is it just something that the speaker means? Is the simile part of the *syntax* of the sentence?

2. Objections:
 - a. If this is right, then metaphors are literally true; but they are not. (I think this is a bad objection.)
 - b. If this is right, then metaphors ought not seem a bit strange. (I think this is a bad objection.)
 - c. If this is right, then metaphors ought to be easier to paraphrase than they are. (I think this is a bad objection.)
 - d. Similes are uninformative, but metaphors are not. (I think this is a bad objection.)
 - e. If x is like y then y is like x . So if Juliet is the Sun then the Sun is Juliet. Is there a problem here?
 - f. How is Simon like a rock? It seems that we have not eliminated the metaphor. (This might actually be a good objection.)
3. Similes can be used metaphorically as well: Simon is like a rock. This suggests a modification to the naïve simile theory: what a speaker means by a metaphor is a simile, understood metaphorically.

Problem: this just moves the lump in the carpet.

Some other theories

1. A Gricean account: The speaker *says* that Simon is a rock, but *implicates* something else. So the same sort of mechanism that is involved in irony, hyperbole, etc.

Problem: why are they so hard to paraphrase?

2. Davidson’s account: metaphorical speech just causes us to notice some similarity between two things. It is like taking a pill.

Problem: It seems to follow that one cannot be charged with misunderstanding a metaphor – that the audience cannot be blamed for not getting it. Rather, the metaphor should be said not to have worked. This seems counterintuitive.

3. Another possibility: By 'is a rock' in 'Simon is a rock' the speaker means a property that both rocks and Simon do actually have – a property that is more general than the one usually meant by 'is a rock'. Compare: 'I am parked out back', " 'Grass is green' is true."

Martinich on Metaphor

1. Martinich uses Grice's theory of conversational implicature to give an account of metaphor.
2. So he takes metaphor to be a pragmatic phenomenon, not a semantic one. What exactly does this mean?
3. But he says, somewhat confusingly: There is a sense in which the sentence used metaphorically has a metaphorical meaning, but it is a consequence of a pragmatic mechanism, not what makes the metaphor possible.
4. Martinich makes a lot of the distinction, which he attributes to Grice, between *saying* and *making as if to say*.

Compare: a speaker sincerely asserting 'This is a fine town', with a speaker using it ironically.

(He claims there are various senses of 'say', but is this right?)

5. Martinich claims that a person who speaks metaphorically is not *saying*, but *making as if to say*. If he uses 'My love is a red rose', he is not saying that his love is a red rose, but making as if to say that his love is a red rose.

He is not asserting that his love is a red rose; he does not speak falsely if she is not literally a red rose.

He is aiming at truth.

6. To some extent he is using 'My love is a red rose' literally – he is using 'My love' literally.

In the case of 'That butterfly is annoying', the speaker is using 'is annoying' literally.

7. In speaking metaphorically, the speaker flouts the maxim of quality and generates a conversational implicature.

(Note that Martinich's account of the mechanism of conversational implicatures is a bit dodgy.)

8. Example: 'My love is a red rose'.

9. Every metaphor either is false (*standard* metaphor) or is supposed to be false (*nonstandard* metaphor).
10. No metaphor can be a lie: lies must be unostentatious – they violate the maxim of quality; metaphors are ostentatious – they flout the maxim of quality.
11. Metaphors are typically vague and indeterminate. The Gricean approach can explain this: conversational implicatures are open disjunctions of propositions.
12. *Hyperbole*. This is also a case of flouting the maxim of quality. It is not the same thing as overstatement. Even if the same sentence is used.
13. *Meiosis*. This is a case of flouting the maxim of quantity. There is no need to interpret the speaker as making as if to say – can interpret her as saying.
14. *Irony*. The speaker is not saying, for otherwise he would be contradicting himself (is this right?). The speaker is making as if to say.
15. *Nonstandard metaphor*. This is rare. Example: ‘Caroline is our princess’. The same mechanism is in play, just a different maxim is being flouted.
16. Martinich argues that the following are not metaphors: ‘No man is an island’, ‘Jesus was a carpenter’, ‘Moscow is a cold city’. (Presumably he means that our typical uses of these are not metaphorical).