

Review of: "Grice's Café – Coffee, cream, and metaphor comprehension"

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This is an excellent paper that convincingly reveals several shortcomings of some interpretations of the results from psycholinguistic research on metaphor. Similar processing times of literal interpretations of rather conventionalized metaphors is certainly not enough to falsify the Gricean treatment of metaphor. The detailed discussion of results from psycho- and neurolinguistics as well as the distinction between comprehension and performance help to clarify the debate and the discussion of the Gricean model. I only have a few critical remarks:

First, the author claims that one hypothesis (X) of the revised Gricean model is that "the literal meaning of a metaphorical utterance facilitates the comprehension process of the metaphorical meaning". It is not entirely clear what this means. The author cannot mean *the knowledge* of the literal meaning since this does not facilitate the processing of the metaphorical meaning but is a necessary condition for it. Therefore, I suppose that the author means "the processing" of the literal meaning. But also with this interpretation I see two readings of the hypothesis (X):

1. The processing of the literal meaning of *the expression that is understood metaphorically*, facilitates the comprehension process of the metaphorical meaning.
2. The processing of the literal meaning of *the whole sentence that is uttered* facilitates the comprehension process of the metaphorical meaning.

I have problems with both readings. The first reading suggests that the processing of the literal meaning is just something facilitating for the comprehension process of the metaphor. But it seems that we always have to process the lexical meaning of an expression at least to some degree in order to have a basis to infer a metaphorical interpretation of it. It is simply impossible to infer a metaphorical interpretation of an expression from which we don't know and, therefore, also can't process the literal meaning. We need a certain basis from which we can derive the metaphorical interpretation. This seems to be in no tension with for example RT since the ad hoc concepts also have, at least to some degree, to be derived from the lexicalized concepts. And this derivation needs some processing of the lexical meaning. The author might mean something such as "full processing and comprehension of the literal meaning". Sometimes we almost unconsciously go through a lexically stored meaning to infer the metaphorical interpretation without even realizing the rudimentary processing of the literal meaning. Still, *some* processing of the literal meaning of the expression understood metaphorically always seems to be involved in its interpretation process.

The second reading appears to be false to me. The processing of the literal meaning of a whole sentence where some

expressions are understood metaphorically is not facilitating the metaphorical interpretation. As Roger White (1996) argued convincingly, the literal meaning of the whole sentence must in fact be suppressed to some degree because it hinders the derivation of the metaphorical interpretation. For example: The processing of the nonsensical proposition that Juliet is literally an astronomical object that produces energy via nuclear fusion does not facilitate the successful comprehension of the metaphor “Juliet is the sun”.

This relates to a further topic. The author concedes that the Gricean account has several shortcomings. A central argument against treating metaphors as implicatures is that metaphors and classical cases of conversational implicatures are structurally very different. Quantity, relevance- and manner-implicatures for example presuppose the derivation of a meaningful content of the respective utterance. This content or “what is said” then serves as the springboard for the implicatures. Metaphorical interpretations (in contrast to for example ironical ones) don’t presuppose such a meaningful content of what is said. Grice might have realized this striking disanalogy when he introduced the concept of “making as if to say”. Still, this notion doesn’t seem to help much. As the author notes, we do not say something, when we make as if to say. The striking and crucial disanalogy between metaphors and for example quantity implicatures remains.

The author acknowledges this disanalogy and other problems of the classical Gricean treatment of metaphor and agrees that it needs improvement. He, therefore, speaks of a “broadly Gricean model”. Now, I am skeptical how much Gricean a model can be that doesn’t treat metaphors as implicatures that work in the same way as standard cases of Gricean implicatures. The importance of the processing of the literal meaning of an expression for its metaphorical interpretation is also stressed by Josef Stern (2000) and (at least to some degree) Robyn Carston (2010). Would it follow from the considerations of the author that they are both “broadly Gricean”?

My critical remarks are not intended to deny or question that this is an excellent paper that importantly contributes to the debate about metaphors.

Typos:

The author should proofread the paper once again since there were some typos in it.

At the end of the paper I am not sure about one passage. The author writes “Carston (2002b; 2010) is less willing to admit this aspect in cases involving novel metaphorical utterances; less so for conventional metaphors.”

Given the content of the Carston 2010 paper I guess the author should (and perhaps also intended to) leave out the first “less”.