

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

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## To begin with advantages

The paper handles the well-documented issue of whether figurative meaning is grasped in a direct or indirect fashion. Indeed, scholars' positions diverge on whether literal meaning is processed first or in parallel with figurative meaning (see Gibbs & Colston (2012) for an overview). On the whole, three main distinct views can be distinguished in the literature on the topic. The first view, which can be traced back to Grice (1975) and Searle (1975), argues that processing figurative meanings of expressions requires understanding first their literal meanings. The second is advocated, more particularly, by psycholinguists whose main claim is that processing figurative meaning turns out to be as cognitively effortless as processing literal meaning. The third is an in-between position, the central assumption of which is that literal meaning can be active in the way figurative meaning is comprehended. Thus, the author discusses these conflicting views, with a special emphasis on Grice's conception of metaphor. The author's position is clearly set forth from the outset. His focus is on showing that Grice's rational model of metaphorical implicatures is misunderstood. The significance of the paper is that it attempts to reconcile Grice's multi-stage model of understanding figurative meaning with opposite viewpoints that may all fall under what is commonly dubbed "direct access view". The author based his argumentation especially on findings from neurolinguistics. As such, the paper provides us with important insights into the issue at hand and helps us assess the plausibility of Grice's indirect access view in relation to the direct access view.

I think such a debate is far from over, for the findings vary incredibly along the methods and the technics called upon. To have a clear idea about such a confusing situation, we may consider how Gibbs & Colston (2012) and Giora et al. (1998) disagree over whether it is the literal or the ironic meaning of a statement that takes more time to process.

The author's paper is also important for an additional reason: it aims to create some clarity about the controversy itself, in that it leads us to reconsider the extent to which the disagreement is well-founded. It seems to me that this is one of the reasons behind what the author refers to as *strawman*. I believe, as the author seems to do, that the strawman originates in a misunderstanding that deeply blurs our understanding of the issue, in that it boils down the difference between the indirect access view and the direct access view to a mere question of whether it is the literal or the figurative meaning that is first processed. Some clarification is needed in this respect. First, Grice is a philosopher of language, not a linguist or psycholinguist. So, he was interested in making generalizations over context-specific use of language rather than drawing empirical and/or experimental conclusions. There is therefore every reason to believe that any figurative utterance for Grice is first processed literally, say, linguistically. This must come as no surprise insofar as literal meaning is inherent in

verbal communication. On this view, no conversational implicature could be conveyed but via an utterance.

Incidentally, highly conventionalized figurative meaning of an expression like *kick the bucket* may serve as counterexample to this claim. But after all, is a well-entrenched figurative meaning not already a literal/literalized meaning? Once again, there seems to be no agreed-on position as to whether highly conventionalized figurative meaning is or not metaphorically motivated. I would refer here, for the purpose of illustration, to Gibbs (2011) and Steen (2008, 2011)'s disagreement over the deliberateness/non-deliberateness of metaphor.

Second, opponents of the direct access view do not argue that literal meaning takes more time to process, nor do they deny that understanding of figurative meaning is sensitive in some way to expressions' literal meanings. Gibbs & Colston (2012) emphasized this point, and provided some cautionary remarks to better elucidate the way the direct access view should be thought of. They indicated that comprehension of an utterance's figurative meaning need not require going through its complete literal meaning. Gibbs & Colston's view may fall under the in-between position which manifests itself in many psycholinguistic and experimental studies on idioms (Gibbs, et al., 1989; Titone and Connine, 1999; Libben and Titone, 2008; Titone and Libben, 2014; Cacciari and Corradini, 2015; Carrol and Littlemore, 2020; among others).

### **One major shortcoming**

The paper has also some shortcomings. The major one has to do with its main focus, that is, metaphor. So far, I used the expression "figurative meaning", thereby avoiding the word "metaphor". The reason for that is that metaphor, as the author pointed out, is not the main goal of Grice's investigation. In fact, metaphor only happened to be a kind, among many others, of conversational implicatures. Grice aimed to describe the general principles that govern people's understanding of indirect meanings in the free flow of discourse. Thus, it is unclear why the author's emphasis is rather on metaphor than figurativity in general. I raise this issue, for it has a great bearing on the way the author sketched his program. In section 6, the author reduced Grice's broad theory of conversational implicatures to a mere theory of metaphor, and even enumerated some of its flaws. I presume this reduction is dictated by the author's need to base his claim on data from neurolinguistic studies. Of note, such studies would also match his line of reasoning should he extend his focus to figurativity at large.

### **Some corrections at the discretion of the author**

Page 2, paragraph 2: provide → provides.

Page 2, paragraph 4, line 3: from → by. The same line: Members → Scholars.

Page 3, paragraph 1, line 3: 'a speaker utters a sentence that p → either remove 'that' or add 'is'.

Page 3, paragraph 5, line 1: figuration → 'figurativity' would be better here.

Page 3, paragraph 5, line 4: 'some' → who exactly?

Page 7, subsection 3.2, paragraph 4, line 2: fact → the fact.

Page 10, paragraph 1: a comma before 'for'. The same line: 'impart' is not correctly used. The same paragraph, last line: if whether???

Page 10, paragraph 2: Although → Although being.

Page 10, paragraph 5: sentence 3 should be rephrased → 'This suggests that it is not the unfamiliar juxtaposition of terms but rather the explicitness of literal sentence that bears on processing time'.

Page 10, paragraph 6, line 5: 'All studies cited above' → All these studies ~~cited above~~.

Page 13, paragraph 6: At base → Basically.

Page 13, section 7, line 1: 'of their words' → of his/her utterances

Page 14, the last paragraph, line 1: These open questions do not mean Grice is no help at all → These open questions do not mean that Grice is no help at all.

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