

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

Patrick Duffley¹

¹ Université Laval

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In general, this is a very balanced article. I did note three points that might need more reflection:

- p. 3 “for Grice, a speaker utters a sentence that p (‘you are the cream in my coffee’), whose meaning is fixed by the conventional meaning of the sentence.”

A sentence does not have a ‘conventional meaning’, as it is not stored as a conventional association between a stable sign and a stable meaning. *You are the CREAM in my coffee* implies a contrast between cream and something else, perhaps sugar, and would lead to a very different metaphorical interpretation if cream is contrasted with sugar, implying that the addressee is not the person who makes the speaker’s life sweet. *You are the cream in MY coffee* implies a contrast between the speaker and someone else and suggests a romantic rivalry absent from the Gricean example. *You are the cream in my coffee; my wife is the cream on my cake* would convey the message that the addressee only makes the speaker’s life sweet at the office.

- p. 7 “Grice’s rational model belongs to a theory of competence; investigation into psychological processes belongs to a theory of performance. The former specifies how an audience determines the content of a metaphorically used expression—whether an auditor succeeds is another story. By taking into consideration those who succeed in grasping the metaphorical content, Grice implicitly introduces an ideal situation. Hearers who succeed approximate ideal audiences So, claims about how audiences derive such content are claims approximating ideal rational audiences and are therefore not empirical. Theories of competence make no predictions about how our knowledge systems are used to answer questions about, for example, the length of time it takes to compute the inferences or whether such inferences are ‘cognitively costly’ in comparison to some other class of linguistic stimuli.”

Using the competence/performance distinction as a shield to protect Grice’s model from criticism amounts to fudging the issue: of what explanatory value is modeling what an ideal speaker does if this does not correspond to what every speaker must do?

- p. 8 “A rational explanation is concerned with identifying “What makes a certain metaphorical meaning ϕ derivable?”, whereas a psychological explanation asks “What do conversational participants do in order to derive the metaphorical meaning ϕ ?” (see Yavuz, 2018, p. 20). I argued above that Grice has been systematically misrepresented as pursuing the latter question—despite the fact that authors often acknowledge Grice’s pursuit of the former question. Here I continue this line of argument. Among the misrepresentations, one powerful misconception, noted by Bach

(2005), conflates the logic of implicature calculation with the sequential and discrete stages of implicature processing:

It might seem, then, that grasping what someone implicates requires first determining what they are saying. However, this is not true and something that Grice was not committed to. It's a mistake to suppose that what is said must be determined first or to suppose that Grice supposed this. (Bach, 2005, p. 7)"

Rationally, you could postulate a huge number of different interpretive processes all leading to the metaphorical meaning ϕ : perhaps the auditor consults 50 different people to find out what they understand by the metaphorical statement and takes the majority interpretation; perhaps they consult ChatGPT; perhaps they test the statement on a poet whom they trust to identify metaphors; perhaps they test it on a construction worker whose reaction of disgust will identify a metaphor. Mere rationality is not enough in scientific explanations -- the explanation proposed also has to be plausible in the case at hand.