PATTI D. NOGALES

METAPHORICALLY SPEAKING

CSLI LECTURE NOTES NUMBER 93

Metaphorically Speaking

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CSLI PUBLICATIONS
Center for the Study of Language and Information
Stanford, California

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CSLI Publications
Center for the Study of Language and Information
Leland Stanford Junior University
03 02 01 00 99   1 2 3 4 5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Nogales, Patti D.
Metaphorically speaking / Patti D. Nogales.
p. cm. — (CSLI lecture notes : 93)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 1-57586-159-3 (alk. paper) —
ISBN 1-57586-158-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Metaphor. 2. Semantics (Philosophy). 3. Concepts.
I. Title. II. Series.

B840.N64 1999
121'.68—dc21   98-54375
CIP

Acknowledgments

First of all, I want to thank the people at Stanford University, in particular my editors, Dikran Karagueuzian and John Feneron. I am also grateful to my advisor, Julius Moravcsik, and the other members of my reading committee, John Perry and Dagfinn Follesdal, for keeping in touch and providing comments while I was in Chicago. I also thank Herb Clark and Rob Robinson for being willing to join a committee to discuss topics of concern to philosophers.

At the University of Chicago, I want to give special thanks to Josef Stern, for many hours in fruitful discussion of metaphor, for being willing to exchange sources with me, and for his confirmation that part of what a theory of metaphor requires is an assumption of the distinction between meaning and content. I also thank Boaz Keysar for his willingness to exchange materials and ideas.

My thanks also to Kathy Felts and Tricia Boggs, without whose help this work would not have been possible.

Finally, I want to thank family and friends (with an extra nod to my husband), who have provided an abundance of examples of natural language use, and who have put up with a wife/mother/friend who has always has one ear listening to *how* they communicate what they say.

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Introduction

Why Metaphor

Consider an utterance of "Steve is a sheepdog" by a woman to her mother. In the absence of contextual information, it is not clear whether the utterance is metaphorical or not and what the speaker intends to convey. However, given the information that Steve is the name of the woman's husband, most people would call this utterance *metaphorical* and would observe, as evidence for this classification, that the main point of the utterance has nothing to do with dogs. In fact, as our experience tells us and the work of psychologists confirms, ordinary speakers are almost always able to distinguish metaphorical utterances from literal utterances, even in the absence of an explicit context, and are even able to rank them according to degree of metaphoricity. As a result, one of the tasks for a theory of communication is that of accounting for metaphoricity, that which distinguishes metaphorical utterances from literal utterances.

Philosophers, psychologists, and linguists of different bents have attempted to account for the way we understand metaphors, what we grasp when we understand them, and what knowledge enters into our processing of them. The process is of particular interest because it seems (at least to most people)[1] to be different from the process of understanding the class of literal utterances. For example, in the case of a literal utterance, if the subject is being assigned to a class or identified with an individual, the subject must be thought to have all the characteristics of that class or individual designated by the term in order for the utterance to be considered

[1]David Rumelhart disputes this in "Some Problems with the Notion of Literal Meaning," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. A. Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 78–90.

true. However, this does not seem to be so in the case of metaphorical utterances. That is, despite the fact that the woman's husband obviously lacks many of the traits of sheepdogs (such as being a member of the canine species), we can imagine circumstances in which an utterance of the sentence in question could make a true assertion about a man named Steve. In fact, although their interpretations of what exactly the utterance conveys might vary (i.e. Steve has a job guiding people vs. Steve is always telling people what to do, etc.), most people would agree that the utterance expresses a proposition (or thought) that the mother can agree with, learn from, or openly debate. That is, most people have the intuition that a metaphorical utterance expresses a metaphorical content which is capable of being judged true or false.

In fact, to communicate effectively, it is essential to be able to comprehend a metaphorical utterance, a process which seems, at the very least, to result in a different message than if the same utterance were taken literally. In other words, if the mother were to take the utterance literally she would fail to understand what the speaker was trying to communicate. So too when a child too young to conceive of or recognize nonliteral speech interprets a metaphorical utterance literally, that child has failed to understand the utterance.[2] The parties have in all cases failed in their communicative task because of their inability to interpret an utterance metaphorically rather than literally.[3] Yet the problem of comprehension can work in the other direction, one can mistakenly take an utterance intended literally as a metaphor. For example, consider the following conversation:

> *Dena:* The man lives without a doorbell or any windows.
> *Diane:* He's hard to get in touch with, huh?
> *Dena:* No, seriously, his house doesn't have a door or any windows.

In this conversation Diane interprets the utterance *metaphorically*, in that she thinks Dena is describing the man's character rather than the features of his house. In doing so, she is misinterpreting the utterance; that is, she is not deriving the appropriate message. This example shows not only that interpreting an utterance metaphorically is different than interpreting it

[2]Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," in *The Philosophy of Language*, ed. A. P. Martinich, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 430–41, p. 433.

[3]Note that analysis leaves room for cases in which the person successfully interprets an utterance metaphorically *without* identifying it as metaphorical (i.e. knowledge of whether something is metaphorical is not a prerequisite to being able to interpret an utterance metaphorically).

literally, but also that the process of interpreting a metaphorical utterance depends upon contextual information. In other words, the fact that this metaphor can be taken either metaphorically or literally (with different results) indicates that the metaphoricity and metaphorical content of an utterance depends on the context in which it appears, including such diverse features as other information in the linguistic context and the role a certain object plays in a cultural community.

If metaphors were a tiny subset of ordinary language use, one might dismiss their eccentricities as interesting but irrelevant. However, despite a positivist tradition which dismisses metaphor as irrelevant to the study of language, simple observation and recent work by many theorists[4] show the ubiquity of metaphor. In fact, in some realms, such as literature, rhetoric, science, and education, it is difficult to find language that is free of metaphor. The ubiquity of metaphor in literature is most well known. Indeed, the presence of metaphor (and other figures) in literature has often been cited by philosophers of a certain bent (i.e. logical positivism) as a reason for disregarding the intellectual value of literature. The role of metaphor in literature has been almost equally well established. On the one hand, the emotive power of metaphor makes it a powerful tool for provoking catharsis or some other desired emotional reaction. On the other hand, the ability of metaphor to cause the audience to view a known entity from a different perspective is also regarded as important to any field which seeks to provoke insight. These two functions of metaphor have also served to establish metaphor as a traditional tool of both rhetoric, with its goal of persuasion, and education, with its goal of provoking insight and the integration of new knowledge with old. Most recently, metaphor has also established an important role in science. While the emotive aspect of metaphor would be deemed useless in this context, its capacity for offering a different perspective on a known entity and so connecting entities (as defined by their relationships) within different domains is clearly of interest to science.

Beyond the pervasiveness of metaphor in the fields listed above, much of existing literal language use seems to have had metaphorical origins. For example, although the term "hood" now literally refers to the hood of a car, it is likely that it was metaphorical when first used in this way. Similarly, the way we describe such abstract processes of thought, as in "gathering one's thoughts," seems metaphorical in that this process of

[4]George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's work is representative of this group. *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

gathering, while structurally similar to the process of gathering grain, also seems subsidiary to it. In other words, it seems as though the process of gathering wheat was part of our theory of the world before our understanding of what we do with thoughts, such that we use our understanding of the former to guide our understanding of the latter. As a result, the study of metaphor would seem to aid in the creation of a model of how certain terms acquire meaning or how certain objects become part of the extension of a term.

If the ubiquity of metaphorical utterances, along with the fact that competent speakers must be able to distinguish and interpret metaphors, ensures the place of metaphor as a part of a theory of communication, the use of the study of metaphor as a model of how certain words acquire meaning also ensures its place as part of a theory of language. However, even if we reduce our domain of investigation to linguistic metaphors, it is unclear where metaphor falls within the field of philosophy of language, which has traditionally been subdivided into the study of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Thus one of the fundamental questions that emerges regarding metaphor is, At what level it should be analyzed? According to the traditional taxonomy, metaphorical utterances are a subclass of the class of nonliteral or figurative utterances. However, the question remains whether this distinction is semantic, such that metaphors are semantic phenomena and the knowledge their processing requires is semantic or whether it is pragmatic. Most traditional theories of metaphor (such as that of Black) hold metaphor to be a matter of semantics. However, as we shall see in Chapter 2, these theories use the terminology of semantics in a way that seems to be inconsistent with traditional semantics (i.e. they violate the constraints on meaning specified by semantics such as that of relative context independence). As a result, more recent theories of metaphor analyze metaphor as a matter of pragmatics, mostly within the framework of speech act theory originated by Austin[5] and subsequently developed by Grice and Searle. For example, Searle analyzes metaphorical utterances as a subclass of the class of indirect speech acts, itself a subset of the class of speech acts.[6]

By definition, the same facts that establish metaphor as an issue of language also provide reasons for a philosopher of language to study metaphor. However, there are other reasons to study metaphor besides those

[5]J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[6]John Searle, "Metaphor," in *The Philosophy of Language*, ed. Martinich, p. 408.

just cited. For one thing, the study of metaphor presents a challenge to the traditional way of conceiving of the distinction between semantics and pragmatics. That is, as we shall see in our examination, metaphorical content possesses some of the attributes of what we consider semantically defined phenomena and some of the attributes of what we consider pragmatically defined phenomena. As a result, metaphor poses a challenge to the usefulness and significance of this distinction between semantics and pragmatics.

Another reason metaphorical utterances are of particular interest to philosophers is that, as with indirect speech acts, the force or ultimate impact of metaphorical utterances cannot be explained solely from the literal meaning of the terms, even though the force is somehow related to that meaning. One indication of a gap between the ultimate force of a metaphorical utterance and its literal meaning is the proposition it seems to convey. That is, metaphors (like indirect speech acts) seem to convey propositional content beyond or instead of that expressed according to the rules of the language. While in some cases it seems easy to express this content using a paraphrase, in other cases a paraphrase seems to elude us. However, even if we grant that a metaphorical utterance expresses a proposition other than the one it would express if taken literally, many claim that even this special or metaphorical interpretation fails to capture the full impact of the metaphor. In fact, most theorists hold that while the paraphrase of a metaphorical utterance may capture the truth conditions of that utterance, the metaphor conveys something more and different, whether or not this difference is cognitive.[7] This difference or special metaphorical quality seems particularly important in the fields in which metaphor is most often employed, namely, literature, rhetoric, science, and education. In all these fields metaphors seem to be employed because of the insight they provide, either in giving a new way of looking at an existing entity or in explaining a new entity in such a way as to incorporate it into an existing schema.

In this work I argue that an analysis of metaphor as reconceptualization explains both the special impact of metaphor and its resulting use in literature, rhetoric, science, and education. In literature, authors typically seek to draw the audience into a new way of seeing the world and the entities within it such that characteristics ordinarily thought necessary to a

[7]This phenomenon is often characterized as the nonparaphrasability of metaphor. I discuss it in more depth in Chapter 2 (Davidson's analysis) and Chapter 3 (my own analysis).

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thing are seen as irrelevant while other characteristics are seen as definitive. For example, Wallace Stevens's poem "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven"[8] helps us see that the ordinary activities of one's daily existence are, in a sense a search for reality which is as essential as the search for God. Yet the process the author seeks to induce is nothing other than the process of reconceptualization. Both perception and literal language depend fundamentally upon the conceptualizations we make in an attempt to comprehend what is around us. Thus it makes sense that the task of the poet (or other writer) be that of reconceptualization which both highlights our current conceptualization, challenges it, and presents an alternative. In the case of education, the fact that metaphors prompt the audience (or student) to reconceptualize an entity so that certain properties are seen as essential and others are not, while tying new domains to old ones, help students abstract (derive the essential properties of a thing) and integrate their knowledge, both of the essence to education. In rhetoric, (1) the emotional impact of the metaphor vehicle, together with (2) the necessity that people processing metaphors must derive the characteristics involved and (3) the fact that the lack of explicitness of what is said allows the speaker to slip in other propositions without scrutiny, all help the rhetorician. Finally, the fact that metaphor is based on reconceptualization of entities often in terms of a system of relationships allows it to assist science as it postulates new entities (via conceptualization and reconceptualization) in order to explain various phenomena and attempts to incorporate these entities into a theory of the world.

Some accounts of metaphor essentially explain metaphoricity away by arguing that the metaphorical is not fundamentally different from the literal. And indeed, as I will argue, the metaphorical and the literal form a continuum rather than existing as noncontinguous sets. Other accounts of metaphor analyze metaphoricity in semantic, pragmatic, or essentially nonlinguistic terms. I explain metaphoricity in terms of reconceptualization, something which straddles the options previously considered in that while reconceptualization is essentially a prelinguistic phenomenon that underlies language use, a metaphorical utterance contains components (such as that of metaphorical content) which follow semantic and pragmatic rules. As a result, metaphor can be fruitfully studied within a study of language that embraces both semantic and pragmatic notions (such as

[8]Wallace Stevens, ed., *The Palm at the End of the Mind* (New York: Knopf, 1971), p. 331.

the notion of meaning, content, and speaker intention). At the same time, since metaphor requires an examination of reconceptualization and, concomitantly, of the conceptualization underlying literal language use, the study of metaphor ultimately yields insight into the origins of literal language.

This work has two main goals: (1) to present and justify an analysis of metaphor based on reconceptualization and (2) to establish a list of criteria against which a theory of metaphor can be measured. Since the best way to evaluate a theory of metaphor is to see whether it accounts for the major attributes of metaphorical utterances, the latter goal serves the first. After Chapter 1, which presents my analysis of metaphor in terms of reconceptualization, each chapter not only argues for the major claims of my analysis but also contributes to a list of criteria against which to measure both my own analysis and more traditional analyses of metaphors. Some of the criteria I list are already an established part of the theory. For example, almost all theories of metaphor begin with the announced task of explaining (1) metaphoricity (i.e. what distinguishes the metaphorical from the literal) and (2) how metaphors are understood (i.e. metaphor comprehension), both of which are needed to explain the role of metaphor in communication. Certain features of metaphor are easily demonstrated, simply by examining metaphorical utterances in general or by considering particular metaphorical utterances. For example, we have noted (3) the intuition that metaphors express a metaphorical content (i.e. are potentially true), (4) the difficulty of determining the content of some or all metaphors (i.e. apparent nonparaphrasability), (5) the context dependence of metaphor, requiring that the audience go beyond linguistic competence to comprehend the metaphorical content of a metaphor, and (6) the ubiquity of metaphor (i.e. why it is used). Finally, additional conditions have been added to the list by various theorists. For example, it is thought that a theory of metaphor should be able to account for: (7) the relationship between metaphor and the other figures (specifically, the relationship between metaphor and simile), and (8) the different types of metaphor (i.e. novel vs. common, simple vs. complex, alive vs. dead, nominative vs. nonnominative).[9] One further condition I must add to the list of desiderata for a theory of metaphor is that (9) it account for the incorporation of some metaphors into the language. In the course of examining traditional se-

[9]Ina Loewenberg discusses some of these types in "Truth and Consequences of Metaphor," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 6 (1973): 30–45, p. 36.

mantic and nonsemantic theories of metaphor (such as that of Black, Davidson, Grice, Martinich, Searle, and Fogelin), I elaborate on the need to meet these conditions and I add a few more to the list.

The remainder of this book is devoted to presenting and arguing for my analysis of metaphor in terms of reconceptualization. In Chapter 1 I present the major claims of my analysis in terms of reconceptualization and examine and argue for some of its underlying assumptions. In Chapters 2–6 I argue for the major claims of the analysis, via an evaluation of existing theories of metaphor. Finally, in Chapter 7 I use the list of conditions established in this introduction and in Chapters 2–5 to evaluate my analysis of metaphor.

1

Metaphor as Reconceptualization

Consider the following utterances:

(1) That [pointing to a sheep dog] is a sheep dog.
(2) I think I'll visit the bank tomorrow.
(3) He lives without a doorbell or any windows.
(4) Steve is a sheep dog.
(5) Margaret Thatcher is a bulldozer.
(6) Shirley Temple is a bulldozer.
(7) Mom, my sock has a hangnail.
(8) I promise to give the butterfly [speaking of one's daughter] a real talking to.
(9) The philosopher is the city's pilot.
(10) In the days that came after my father's death, I walked the halls of my memories day and night.
(11) A semicolon is a period.
(12) The ham sandwich wants a cup of coffee.

The Analysis

When presented with utterances of the sentences above, most people would identify utterances of the sentences (4) through (10) as metaphorical, as opposed to literal. They would probably also classify utterances of sentences (1) through (3) as literal, (11) as false or anomalous, and (12) as either literal and elliptical or, perhaps, as metaphorical. In this book I propose and describe an analysis of metaphor that accounts for the differences between these utterances by appealing to the notion of *reconceptualization*, based on *conceptualization*, something I believe underlies all language use, embodied in a naive metaphysics and challenged by figura-

tive language use.[1] According to my analysis, the utterances that are literal are so because comprehension of the utterances is consistent with a standardized conceptualization that underlies the use of the terms, one which reflects the naive metaphysics embedded in the standardized taxonomy. Because of this consistency, the features one uses to derive what the speaker is saying (i.e. the proposition expressed by the utterance) are either (1) specified directly by the rules of the language (i.e. the meanings of the terms), (2) derivative from the meanings of the terms, or (3) supplied by contextual clues but still consistent with the standardized conceptualization.[2] For example, in comprehending an utterance of (1), the features one uses to derive the proposition expressed by the utterance are those according to which a sheep dog is ranked within the traditional taxonomy, namely, such features as being a member of a certain biological species, performing a certain function, etc.

In contrast, the utterances that are metaphorical (i.e. 4–10) are so because comprehension of them is *not* consistent with the standardized taxonomy. Instead, the comprehension of a metaphorical utterance requires a reconstruction of the concepts underlying the use of the terms, a *reconceptualization*. That is, one must alter one's conception of the entities—in the case of (5), of bulldozers and a particular person—in order to grasp what is being said. As a result of this reconceptualization, to comprehend the utterances that are *metaphorical*, the features to which one must attend are generally *not* specified by the rules of the language or by the concepts embodied in the underlying taxonomy. In fact, for an utterance to be metaphorical at all, these features must be inconsistent with the conception underlying language use. For example, to comprehend an utterance of (5) we must leave behind the features specified by a literal interpretation of bulldozer (such as being inanimate and a mechanical object), since these are clearly inconsistent with features specified by a literal interpretation of the term "Margaret Thatcher" (such as being animate and a human). Thus to process the utterance, the audience must reconceptualize, first the meta-

[1]Heidegger reminds us that, in many cases, we become aware of a tool we use (such as conceptualization), a tool that has become an extension of us, only when it is varied or fails to work.

[2]Sometimes the features associated with an entity and referenced by an utterance may not be required by the definition of the object (i.e. part of it meaning) but can be derived from the meaning. For example, the color of a sheep dog is not specified by the meaning of the term "sheep dog," yet we are able, using collected facts about the biological species of sheep dogs, to rule out certain colors as belonging to sheep dogs.

phor vehicle (i.e. bulldozers) and then the metaphor subject (i.e. Margaret Thatcher). This process of reconceptualization (i.e. of selection and suppression of features to individuate a thing) is guided by the *role* played by the entities within a *system* and with respect to their relationships within the system. For example, in order to comprehend an utterance of (5) one must conceive of a bulldozer (or the class of bulldozers) in terms of the relationships a bulldozer has to dirt, grass, limbs, and other things in its path, without attending to its individual characteristics. What emerges, epiphenomenally, from the network of relationships, is a role.

Finally, sentences such as (11) and (12), which don't seem to be metaphorical but are obviously false if taken literally, can be explained in different ways, depending upon one's analysis of metaphor and the contexts in which the utterances appear. Because of the complexity of what makes an utterance metaphorical, there are many ways an utterance can fail to be metaphorical. For example, an utterance of sentence (11) could be explained as a failed metaphor in that it is impossible to reconceptualize a semicolon and a period in such a way as to result in their being in the same class (i.e. there is no role). Another way of explaining this failure is to say that the metaphor fails because the interpreter cannot generate a class of which the comma is a prototypical representative and to which the semicolon can be assigned. This might seem strange, because semicolons and periods actually have more properties in common than the other metaphor subjects and vehicles on the list (i.e. being a part of speech and being used to punctuate independent clauses). However, it is precisely this great degree of similarity between the metaphor subject and vehicle that causes the utterance to fail to be metaphorical, rather than some general inability on the part of the metaphor subject to be reconceptualized. Note, for example, that in the utterance "Her tasteless remark was a period" the audience can easily reconceptualize a period in terms of the role it plays in language (i.e. that of putting an end to something) and then extrapolate that the person's remark ended the conversation. That is, while it is possible to reconceptualize a period in some contexts (i.e. with the right metaphor subject), it may not be possible in the wrong context. In the example given, the obvious contrast between in the metaphor vehicle (a part of speech) and the metaphor subject (tasteless remark) causes the audience to reconceptualize the metaphor vehicle, that is, to seek a way of understanding the metaphor vehicle in terms of the role it plays, rather than as a collection of individual features. In other words, the audience is forced to take a

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