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Introduction

Elisabeth Camp
University of Pennsylvania

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ELISABETH CAMP
University of Pennsylvania

INTRODUCTION

The papers collected in this volume were initially presented at the Third International Symposium of Cognition, Logic, and Communication: “A Figure of Speech.” This was a conference dedicated to philosophical aspects of metaphor, held in Riga, Latvia in December 2007. I believe that these papers nicely reflect both the range of specific topics, and the range of positions on those topics, that have received the most attention in studies of metaphor within philosophy and related fields like linguistics and cognitive science. Here, I offer a rapid overview of the theory of metaphor, in order to situate the papers in relation to one another and within the field more generally.

The dominant topic in philosophical discussions of metaphor for the last 30 years has been how to locate metaphor within an overall taxonomy of language and meaning. If we envision the range of possible positions as a branching decision tree, the first decision is whether there are metaphorical meanings at all. In the literature, Davidson is the most prominent opponent of metaphorical meanings. He argues that if there were such meanings, then we should be able to paraphrase them in literal terms, but that this is impossible. Rather than telling us *that* something is the case, he claims, metaphors make us *see* one thing as another. Among our contributors, Hills and Reimer, as well as myself, all accept Davidson’s positive claim but argue against his negative one. Hills attacks the argument concerning the impossibility of paraphrase directly, by providing a host of examples of authors paraphrasing their

own metaphors. He also notes, though, that such paraphrases are often incomplete, and are presented as incomplete; this leads him to explore the range of tasks that a paraphrase could be aimed at accomplishing, and in particular to distinguish *restating* the metaphor’s meaning from *explaining* the kind of thinking that led the speaker to make his utterance. Reimer argues that the non-propositional perspective or aspectual thought that is produced by a metaphor should itself be considered a part of its meaning; she claims that this comports better with ordinary intuitions about ‘meaning’ and produces a better overall theory of metaphor. Unlike Reimer, I agree with Davidson that because perspectives are non-propositional, they cannot themselves be meanings. However, I also claim that metaphors express speaker meanings, insofar as the speaker of a metaphor commits herself to propositional contents in a way that someone who merely induces a state of seeing-as does not.

If we accept that metaphors can be meaningful, the next question is what sort of meaning they have. Here we can classify most theorists as belonging to one of two broad categories: those who treat metaphor as importantly like literal language, and those who treat it as importantly different. Within the first group, Stern argues that metaphorical meanings are best classified as semantic; while Carston and Wilson, Bezuidenhout, and Leezenberg all argue that metaphors belong to “what is said” – that is, to meaning that is directly and explicitly asserted, even if it is not lexically encoded. Stern argues that we need to posit metaphorical expression types in order to account for the life and eventual death of metaphors: the process by which a specific metaphorical interpretation of an expression can become widely established and eventually lexicalized. Bezuidenhout argues that metaphor sometimes offers the only candidate for what is said. More specifically, when a definite noun phrase is intended metaphorically, she claims, often there is no possibility of securing a referent on a literal interpretation; thus, the metaphorical interpretation provides the only complete proposition that the speaker could have meant. Leezenberg argues that metaphor displays several distinctive properties of what is said, such as not being amenable to cancellation and being available for metalinguistic comment. Within what is said, he distinguishes what the speaker metaphorically *presupposes* from what she *asserts*: she presupposes a thematic dimension of which general kinds of properties are being talked about,

and asserts that the subject possesses a specific property of that general kind. Carston and Wilson defend the Relevance theoretic view that metaphor forms a continuum with literal loose talk and hyperbole against a challenge concerning ‘emergent properties’ – that is, properties that are predicated of the subject by the metaphorical utterance but that are not part of the lexical or encyclopedic entries associated with the expressions uttered. They argue that such properties can in fact be derived inferentially, using the same interpretive resources that are brought to bear in interpreting literal speech.

While those who classify metaphor as belonging to what is said often argue for this position by emphasizing the ways in which metaphor differs from implicature, I argue that metaphor differs in important ways both from implicature and from literal talk, including loose talk. Metaphors differ from implicatures insofar as they commit the speaker to contents with the usual range of illocutionary forces. But they also differ from literal and loose talk, in at least two respects: first, the intuitive classification of an utterance as a metaphor requires a felt *gap* between the literal and intended meaning, such that the former provides a perspective for determining the latter; and second, metaphors preserve a kind of *deniability*, which is similar to but more restricted than that found with implicature, and which is not available for direct and explicit speech. Finally, Guttenplan rejects all these options; he argues that any approach that treats metaphorical meaning as a function of *words* – whether semantic or pragmatic, belonging to what is said, what is implicated, or some other category – is misguided. Instead, he advocates an account on which one object (or kind or event) directly *qualifies* another; on his view, words are relevant to metaphor primarily insofar as they point us toward the relevant qualifying objects, although the words’ distinctive mode of pointing may also make a difference to the metaphor’s interpretation.

One of the reasons we find so much disagreement about the status of metaphor within an overall theory of language is that different theorists rely on quite different criteria for classification. In particular, Relevance theorists like Wilson and Carston, along with other linguistically- and psychologically-oriented theorists like Bezuidenhout, Glanzberg, and Petersen *et al*, tend to be most concerned with the actual cognitive processes that produce metaphorical interpretations. By contrast,

theorists of a more traditional philosophical bent, such as Reimer, Stern, Hills and myself, tend to be more concerned with preserving and systematizing folk intuitions. Leezenberg challenges this philosophical reliance on folk intuition by drawing attention to the ways in which those intuitions are themselves the product of social, cultural, and political factors; in their place, he advocates a combination of more objective linguistic tests and a genealogy of the particular social practices that constitute metaphor as we currently understand it.

Another reason we find so much disagreement is that different theorists are interested in accounting for different aspects of metaphor. Two aspects in particular stand out. First, theorists diverge in the linguistic provenance of the metaphors they aim to explain. For instance, Wilson and Carston, and Bezuidenhout focus on metaphors drawn from ordinary conversation, while Hills and I are more interested in ‘poetic’ metaphor. Because metaphors from these different sources tend to display different patterns of behavior, they can make different kinds of theories appear more or less plausible. In particular, ordinary conversational metaphors can often be interpreted without a rich specification of the context of utterance, and tend to have relatively focused and determinate conditions of satisfaction. By contrast, ‘poetic’ metaphors – metaphors that, even if they are not specifically literary, are highly resonant and open-ended – tend to be more deeply dependent on their particular context of utterance. Some theorists, including Glanzberg and Petersen *et al*, employ examples from both ends of the spectrum; and Stern argues that we need to posit metaphorical expression types precisely in order to account for the fact that metaphors can make the transition from being highly resonant and context-specific to having an established conversational use.

Second, theorists diverge in which linguistic constructions they take as their focus. Most of our contributors tend to concentrate on sentences of the form “*a is F*”, where *a* is a name or other noun phrase that is interpreted literally and denotes the subject under discussion, and *F* is a predicate that is interpreted metaphorically. From these specific examples, they then draw general conclusions about how metaphor works across the board. In contrast to this trend, Bezuidenhout focuses on definite noun phrases, as discussed above; while Petersen *et al* focus specifically on synaesthetic adjective-noun compounds, such

as “bright sound” or “sweet silence”. They argue that an analysis in terms of *frames* – roughly, recursive mental structures that encode the attributes associated with a concept or expression – is able to predict both which compounds can be interpreted metaphorically, and how the compound will be interpreted; more specifically, they argue that adjectives which encode *scalar* as opposed to *quality* features, such as ‘pale’ as opposed to ‘yellow’, are more likely to generate metaphorically interpretable compounds.

While both Bezuidenhout and Petersen *et al* focus on specific sorts of metaphorical expressions, Glanzberg asks a prior question: what sorts of expressions can be interpreted metaphorically at all? His answer is that expressions belonging to the major lexical categories – nouns, verbs, and adjectives – can, but that determiners (such as ‘all’ and ‘some’) and other functional expressions cannot. He proposes that the linguistic system sends only a restricted range of information to the cognitive system responsible for metaphorical interpretation: it excludes functional categories, but includes both ‘idiosyncratic’ substantive lexical information, like the particular meaning of ‘die’, and also aspectual structure, such as the fact that ‘die’ refers to an accomplishment, with stages and an endpoint, rather than a state.

My hope is that the papers collected here will provide both a model and a springboard for further research into metaphor. We are most likely to gain traction in the general, long-standing philosophical debates about metaphor, and to develop more constrained and predictive theories of metaphorical interpretation, if we attend closely to specific constraints on metaphorical interpretation and examine metaphor *in vivo*, as it functions within specific contexts and changes across contexts.

I know my fellow authors join me in offering very warm thanks to Sandra Lapointe and Jurgis Skilters for their tireless work in organizing the conference, and to Ernie Lepore for providing the impetus for the conference and helping to bring the invited participants together. We would also like to extend our thanks to Rector Marcis Auzins of the University of Latvia for providing such a warm welcome and for offering, among many other resources, the use of the University’s lovely lecture hall; to the Latvian Minister of Culture, Helena Demakova, for a heartfelt and insightful opening address as well as for the Ministry’s invaluable

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