

ABSTRACT

Explanation and Contrast of Metaphor and Irony in a Conceptual Integration Framework

The aim of this dissertation is to contrast the cognitive processes underlying the representations of metaphor and irony. The comparison is made at the conceptual level of organisation in a blending framework (Fauconnier és Turner 1994, 1998, 2002) which investigates the mental space structures of ironic and metaphoric manifestations. The dissertation sees irony and metaphor as modes of thought rather than as figures of speech or rhetorical devices.

Since the most definitive theories of metaphor do not make explicit claims about how metaphor is actually processed, the dissertation aims to propose a blend-based (Fauconnier és Turner 1994, 1998, 2002) representational model. Although it is not intended to provide an established scholarly definition of this mode of thought, a working definition is proposed, which builds upon the processing model that the dissertation develops. Instead of constructing an all-inclusive definition, the dissertation depicts an alternative hybrid (complementary) model of representation which has not been documented in the literature. This account presumes that the understanding of metaphor incorporates two fundamental stages: the initial blending phase amounts essentially to collecting and marshalling information about conceptual packages. If sufficient similarity is found, then, in the second phase, projection takes place from one domain of experience (the source) to another (the target). That is, the metaphor runs a full course. Mapping is unidirectional (from source to target), and only those aspects of the source are carried over to the target that are consistent with it. This whole process normally ends in an emergent structure and figurative meaning.

The model is unique since, although it incorporates ‘conceptual blending’, which is an attribute of some alternative conceptions (e.g., Fauconnier and Turner 1994, 1998, 2002) of representation, in its terminology and structure it remains consistent with the traditional Lakoffian description of metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

The discussion of metaphoric representation on a conceptual level incorporated two experiments. In them linguistic examples which met the parameters of the working definition of metaphor were presented in a questionnaire. Thus the experimental elements (items) had similar structural frameworks. Participants (lay speakers) in the experiments were asked to paraphrase particular linguistic items (key elements) which were presented to them in a conversational setting. Subjects were also instructed to construct converses using the items. The

experiments clearly show that – in accordance with the working definition – the key elements in them have been processed mostly in a figurative manner. Thus, an important criterion of the proposed working definition of metaphor is met: the blend based, alternative representational model of metaphor, which the dissertation offers, is a means of figurative meaning construction. Then the dissertation demonstrates how the hybrid model and the brain presumably work when processing metaphors.

The critical evaluation of the most significant definitions of irony concludes that the most definitive models are unable to explain certain linguistic examples that are considered ironic manifestations in the literature. Therefore, the dissertation considers irony as a phenomenon which is difficult to define in a well-established scholarly definition. Not proposing an umbrella-explanation of irony may eliminate rigid (scholarly) formalisations and distorting generalisations from a discussion of this phenomenon. The dissertation claims that instead of trying to find an all-embracing definition, the analysis of the processing sequence of ironic utterances may be better worth the effort and would yield novel and deeper insights into the very nature of this mode of thought.

Although the dissertation does not aim to propose an all-embracing description of irony, it 1) considers Wittgenstein's (1953) theory of 'family resemblances' and sees examples of irony as members of a group which are related by particular similarity markers, and 2) provides a working definition, which essentially corresponds to the blend-based processing model of irony. This algorithm regards irony as a mode of thought which incorporates projection of incongruent cognitive content from discrepant input conceptual structures into a blended mental space. Resolving the contradiction in the blend leads to emergent implications which most frequently convey some negative evaluation.

In order to test the hybrid model of irony, an empirical study was necessary. In it a questionnaire presented examples of irony most of which were taken from the (semantic and psycholinguistic) literature. These items were mixed with metaphors, which served as distractor elements. The experimental participants were instructed to decide whether they thought the examples were ironic or not. Then the dissertation tested the complementary model of irony using some items which most subjects in the experiment had found ironic.

Both metaphor and irony are explained in the same cognitive semantic framework. A systematic comparison of these modes of thought reveals that although both metaphor and irony incorporate conceptual blending, they work under *different* assumptions.

As a novel proposition in metaphor and irony research, the dissertation, at the level of possibility, relates certain experimental (neurological, psychological and psycholinguistic)

findings from metaphor and irony research to the proposed blending models of these modes of thought. The theoretical assumptions of the dissertation and the experimental results coming from the above-mentioned fields of science will be related in connection with the presumption that metaphor and irony presuppose basically *different* processing mechanisms. Neurological investigations which were conducted among schizophrenic patients show that understanding irony largely depends on the cogniser's ability to 'read' the enunciator's mind. In contrast, the processing of metaphor in schizophrenia is essentially influenced by the comprehender's cognitive-semantic capabilities in the blend. This difference is also buttressed in the interdisciplinary approaches proposed in the dissertation. These are neurolinguistic analyses of metaphoric and ironic representations in schizophrenia. The inferences which are made in these approaches might serve as the theoretical basis for future empirical (especially fMRI) investigations of the 'neural activation pattern' of blending in metaphor and irony.

Some investigations in psychology (e.g., Colston and Gibbs 2002) claim that irony is more time consuming to understand than metaphor. This claim is compatible with the assertions made in the dissertation when contrasting metaphor and irony at the semantic level of analysis.

Finally, the dissertation shows that conceptual integration can be applied to distinguish the reanalysis type of joke from non-reassessment examples of irony. Furthermore, the blend-based examination of a joke shows that not only metaphor and irony but also joke can be considered as a mode of thought. This idea may be seen as a new orientation in the future investigation of humour.

To conclude, the dissertation proposes novel representational models of both metaphor and irony, and shows a new orientation in their research – one which is not theory-driven or definition-centred but which is analytic in nature. Treating metaphor and irony as modes of thought, and comparing them in a cognitive semantic framework show that although the representations of both of these phenomena presuppose a blending phase, their processing mechanisms incorporate idiosyncratic attributes. The dissertation also shows that, at the level of possibility, the blend-based metaphor and irony models which are proposed in the dissertation can be related to empirical findings in neurology, psychology and psycholinguistics.