

# WHY METAPHORS SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED IMPLICATURES

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The main problem raised in this talk is whether the result of metaphoric interpretation must be involved in what is said or in what is implicated. According to the first position, the speaker means what he metaphorically says. According to the second, the speaker says one thing in order to mean another. A variety of theorists have recently argued against the explanation of metaphor as particularized conversational implicature, but as Camp (forthcoming) has recently argued, their arguments are not conclusive. This has left a space for defending the conception of metaphor as implicature.

In this context, the main aim of this talk appears: to show that for metaphor to be considered as a case of implicature, the notion of implicature should change until a point in which the notion is unrecognisable. What is more, it ends up having the properties that usually are attributed to what is said. Thus, we argue that, in the theoretical explanation of how metaphors work, the result of metaphoric interpretation is more naturally located in what is said.

## 2. DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES AND WHAT IS SAID

Grice said that conversational implicatures, particularized or generalized, have several characteristic features. First, a *conversational implicature* is always cancelable both explicitly and contextually. It is explicitly cancelable if it is admissible to add *but not q* to the form of words the utterance of which putatively implicates that *q* (Grice 1978/1989: 44). It is contextually cancelable if one can find situations in which the utterance of the form of words would simply not carry the implicature (Grice 1978/1989: 44). This property is necessary of all conversational implicatures, but it is not sufficient. There is meaning that is cancelable and does not form a part of an implicature, as in the possibility of using a word or form of words in a loose or relaxed way. Nevertheless,

*what is said* is not cancelable. If we try to cancel explicitly what is said, we make an unintelligible utterance.<sup>1</sup>

Second, conversational implicatures are nondetachable. Two utterances in the same context do not coincide in what is said if they launch different implicatures. It is a necessary condition, except when the implicature depends on the exploitation of a maxim of manner or when there is no alternative way of saying what is said, but it is not sufficient. Nondetachability does not apply to *what is said*, unless we accept that there are cases of dictiveness without formality (Grice 1987/1989: 361). In these cases, what is nonformally said will be nondetachable from the formal part of the utterance. If what is said depends on some contextual information, as in the cases of referential indeterminacy, this said content is nondetachable from the formal part of what is said.

Third, there is independence from the truth conditions of the utterance. An implicature (conventional or conversational) does not fix the truth conditions of the utterance of a sentence because implicatures are not asserted but merely suggested. The truth conditions of an utterance are fixed by what is said. A proposition fixes the truth conditions of an utterance of a sentence if it is absolutely impossible for the utterance to be true without the proposition being true. By contrast, the implicature may be false while the utterance may be true.

	Conversational Implicatures	What is said
Cancelability	+	-
Nondetachability	+	*/not applicable
Utterance truth conditions independence	+	-

### 3. GRICE'S THEORY OF METAPHOR AS PARTICULARIZED CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE

If we go along the gricean approach (Grice 1975, 1978), we should explain the behaviour of (1),

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<sup>1</sup> There are different reasons to think that Grice understood that cancellation must produce an intelligible utterance. One of them is provided in Grice (1989: 39) where he argued that cancellation depends on the possibility of opting out the observation of the Cooperative Principle when it affects the production of the implicature, which is compatible with keeping cooperation in part by means of what is said. Another can be found in Grice (1989: 44) where he affirmed that an implicature is cancellable if it is admissible to add "but not *p*" to the utterance that implicates that *p*. Finally, it is even clearer when he explains why presuppositions are not cancellable. In Grice (1961: 128), it is maintained that presuppositions are not cancellable because if we cancelled them we would run the risk of unintelligibility. The result of cancellation must be admissible, intelligible.

(1) [A asked B what the weather is like today and B utters:] **The sky is crying**

a case of metaphor, as a case of particularized conversational implicature. Resorting to the Gricean distinction between what the speaker literally *says* and what the speaker *implicates*, it could be said that with (1) the speaker literally says *that the sky is crying*, a proposition that involves a categorial falsity, something s/he believes to be false. Thus, the speaker is flouting the first maxim of quality of the Cooperative Principle, “Do not say what you believe to be false”. That the sky is crying, a categorial falsity, cannot be what the speaker means.<sup>2</sup> So, with (1) the speaker has just made as if to say literally *that the sky is crying*. Consequently what the speaker means is only what the speaker implicates, and what s/he implicates depends on the attribution to the sky of some features in respect of which the sky resembles more or less the object that can literally cry. Furthermore, what the speaker implicates metaphorically with (1) is *that it is raining*, reestablishing the situation and making her/his behaviour cooperative. In this way, the interpretation of metaphoric utterances always proceeds in two propositional stages.

#### 4. PROBLEMS OF GRICE’S PROPOSAL

This Gricean theory of metaphor has several problems. Among them, we have to highlight the problem of considering metaphor as involving two propositional stages, those concerning the specific proposals on identification and interpretation and the ones related to the features that a metaphor as implicature should have. Although the first problem is merely apparent, the others require some changes in the notion of implicature, as we’ll see.

##### 4.1 *The empirical results and the thesis of two propositional stages*

The proposal that the interpretation of metaphoric utterances proceeds in two propositional stages, nevertheless, has been criticized by cognitive metaphor theorists since the late seventies.<sup>3</sup> According to cognitive metaphor theorists (Gibbs 1983, and Keysar and

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<sup>2</sup> This is a proof that, according to Grice, what is said is part of speaker’s meaning. What is said is the explicit proposition intended by the speaker. “One may distinguish, within the total signification, between what is said (in a favored sense) and what is implicated of an utterance (...) though in a given case one of these elements may be lacking. For example, nothing may be said, though there is something which a speaker makes as if to say” (Grice 1978/1989:41)

<sup>3</sup> Theorists of cognitive metaphor such as Ortony, Schallert, Reynolds and Antos (1978), Clark (1979), Gibbs

Glucksberg 1992), some psychological experiments show the equivalence of processing times for the interpretation of literal and metaphoric utterances, under the assumption that the processing effort is directly proportional to the processing time. Thus, they reject implicature theory of metaphor in which an additional process is involved.

The implicature theorist has two lines of defence. The implicature theorist, as Recanati (1995) said, can defend his position saying that the result of equivalence of processing times depends, in most of the cases, on choosing examples of conventional metaphors, but nothing is proved about novel metaphors that need processing the literal proposition first. In addition, in our opinion, the assumption that the processing effort is always directly proportional to the processing times is erroneous. However, nowadays the implicature theorist does not need this strategy because, according to some recent empirical evidence, the processing times for the interpretation of literal and metaphoric utterances of the same sentence are not equal.

These strategies, nevertheless, do not validate the implicature theory but the more general thesis of the asymmetric dependence of the metaphoric meaning on literal meaning, the thesis that the meaning conveyed by an expression is “metaphorical” only if it is derived from some literal meaning which must be processed for the former to be accessed.

This thesis can be articulated in different ways (Recanati 1995): one of them results in the conception of metaphor as implicature, and the other as a conceptual mechanism whose results intervene in what is said.

Thus, the problem posed by theorists of cognitive metaphor with respect to implicature theory of metaphor does not seem to touch this conception. Let us consider the problems related with the identification criterion.

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(1983, 1984, 1986a, 1986b, 1992), Gildea and Glucksberg (1983), Inhoff, Lima and Carroll (1984), Keysar and Glucksberg (1992) have made some experiments in which the results, such as they interpret them, are incompatible with the explanation of metaphor as implicature. The idea is that metaphoric utterances should be included in “what is said” because its comprehension is *direct*, in the sense of coming first in the order of interpretation. This proposal has also been defended by contextualists, such as Bezuidenhout (2001), Recanati (2004), etc. although they argue for it invoking sub-personal processing.

## 4.2 Identification criterion

If we argue that in metaphors the speaker is Flouting the first maxim of quality of the Cooperative Principle, “Do not say what you believe to be false”, because s/he makes a categorial falsity, we cannot explain how metaphoric utterances are identified.

The first problem with this criterion is shown by Recanati (1987). If with (1) the speaker *has just made as if to say* that the sky is crying, what is literally said is only evoked, thus the maxims are not really violated and it is not necessary to suppose that the speaker has implicated anything in order to maintain the Cooperative Principle.

This criticism, however, is not conclusive. When the speaker makes as if to say *p*, *he does not say anything* and flouts an “alleged” maxim of quantity related to the amount of information: “Make your contribution informative”<sup>4</sup>, maxim that is repaired by the implicature.

Nevertheless, metaphors cannot be identified with this complex identification criterion because first of all, not all metaphors present this mode of flouting the alleged maxim of quantity. In (2)

- (2) [A is at home. Her only daughter, who is a two-year-old girl, is playing with a woolen ball on the mat. B, a good friend of A, enters the room, asks A where her daughter is, and, A answers:] **My cat is on the mat**

there is no categorial falsity, at best, there is a simple false proposition. If we widen the criterion to any type of falsity and not just of a categorial type, all implicatures depending on the flouting of this maxim must be classified in the same way, even cases such as (3)

- (3) [Kent tells his son who is crying because of a minor cut:] **You are not going to die**

Second, there are non-metaphoric utterances that present this way of flouting the alleged maxim of quantity, for example the metonymy in (4),

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<sup>4</sup> We say “alleged” because, strictly speaking, Grice’s maxims of quantity make reference to the conversational contribution being as informative as necessary. But it is always supposed that there is some contribution, that is, that something is said. This is related to Grice’s idea that “False information is not an inferior kind of information; it just is not information” (1987/89: 371).

- (4) [In a restaurant, looking at the customer of the ham sandwich, a waitress tells another:] **The ham sandwich is waiting for his check**

in which the speaker says that the ham sandwich is waiting for his check, a categorial falsity, and thus nothing is said but made as if it were said.

Third, not all metaphors can fix a literal content, and so the speaker cannot make as if to say something literally in all non-literal utterances. The speaker of (1) does not make as if to say any proposition at all because (1) cannot be interpreted literally as far as our linguistic competence is concerned. “To cry” is the type of action that requires an animate subject with eyes, and the sky does not fulfil this requirement. (1) cannot fix a literal proposition or some truth conditions of it under the mode of presentation imposed merely by the linguistic meaning of the sentence. Since (1) cannot fix a literal content because of the categorial falsity, it cannot be a literally false utterance. A categorial falsity is opposed to well-formedness and not to true propositions.

If this is so, in order to detect (1) as a metaphor, the identification criteria cannot depend on processing a literal proposition and to detect (2) as a metaphor, we must admit that there are pragmatic categorial falsities that are not involved in (3). Kittay’s Incongruity Principle (1987) satisfies these two demands, but it needs something else to exclude (4) as a case of metaphor. This is achieved by means of our conceptual contrast (Romero and Soria 2005). According to us, metaphors are identified because in them there is both a contextual abnormality and a conceptual contrast.

The details of these proposals are not relevant in the present discussion. The point of our interest is that once metaphoric identification criteria do not depend on processing the literal proposition, these would be compatible not only with the proposal that metaphor is an implicature, as Kittay argued, but also with the idea that metaphor involves a meaning that forms a part of what is said.

### ***4.3 Implicature production***

With respect to implicature production, the first problem we are considering is posed by Recanati. Recanati (1987) posed the question of how it is possible to determine what the speaker implicates from (1) if there is no proposition that reconciles the utterance with the apparently flouted conversational maxim. In the cases of metaphor, it is not possible to calculate the implicature from what is said.

This criticism, however, is not conclusive. Indeed, we can say that the implicature must not

be calculated from *p* because this could not be the proposition intended by the speaker as he believes it to be false. The solution would be to calculate the implicature resorting to, among other things, the conventional meaning of the words used, together with the identity of any references that may be involved (Grice 1975/1989: 31). Its production, Grice would say (1975/1989: 34), depends on the resemblance between what we are speaking about and what we are attributing to it.

This subpropositional interpretation of asymmetric dependence that non-literal meaning has on literal meaning implies, according to Recanati (1995: 208) that the metaphorical content intervenes in what is said. This proposal is backed by examples in which we must compute the non-literal interpretation in order to compute what is said. In (2), part of 'My cat' is used non-literally. If we understand that in this expression there is a relation between the cat and the speaker, we must determine what the relation is if we want to obtain the intended proposition. But first we have to determine the reference of these descriptions. To know what the cat refers to, we have to construct its metaphoric meaning and then it is possible to saturate the relation between the metaphoric cat and the speaker. The metaphoric process is previous to the one of saturation, and the latter is a process that intervenes in what is said.

This argument would not be conclusive for the implicature theorist. The implicature theorist could explain example (2) arguing that what the speaker makes as if to say is that the only cat of the speaker (whatever the relation between them) is on the only mat of his house. What causes the requirement of the non-literal interpretation to be previous to saturation is the referential use of the definite description included in (2), but this referential use must be understood as a case of implicature. Recanati's argument depends on the defence of the referential use of the definite description in what is said, an argument which the theorists of metaphor as implicature do not have to commit themselves with.

Subpropositional processes of interpretation, that generate non-conventional meanings, are compatible with their result being an implicature. The implicature may be calculated from the conventional meaning of constituents together with contextual information as Grice (1975/1989), Sperber and Wilson (1986) and Kittay (1987) say.

However, if it is calculated from the meaning of words why are they implicata and not explicit propositions? The reason why metaphoric meanings calculated from the meaning of words form part of implicature cannot be that the process of interpretation is inferential, because there are other cases involving inferential processes required to obtain what is said, for instance those required to

eliminate referential indeterminacy.<sup>5</sup>

What makes an explicit proposition different from an implicature, as Grice taught us, is that the former has been asserted and so our utterance cannot be true if the explicit proposition is not, while the latter is independent because it is not asserted but merely suggested.

If metaphoric propositions are implicatures, metaphoric utterances do not express propositions by means of which they are evaluated as they are cases of making as if to say. They would not fix any truth conditions that should fit or not with the world.

#### ***4.4 Features of metaphoric implicatures***

Now, let's see the features that the elaborated content for metaphoric utterance has. If metaphoric propositions are implicatures, these propositions must be cancelable, nondetachable, and their truth conditions must be independent of the truth of the utterance.

But, metaphoric implicatures are not cancelable. The metaphoric implicature of (1) is not cancelable because (5)

(5) [A asks B what the weather is like today and B utters:] **The sky is crying although it is not raining**

is not an admissible and intelligible utterance. Cancellation depends on the possibility of not having to follow the Cooperative principle on the level of what is suggested, which is compatible with going on cooperating by means of what is said.<sup>6</sup> The problem of cancelling the metaphoric implicature is that we cannot cooperate by means of what is said because the metaphoric utterance is a case of making as if to say. Metaphoric utterances are not cancelable because to deny what is suggested with them makes the speaker non cooperative at all levels. (5) is unintelligible because nothing is asserted nor suggested. There is no situation in which the right interpretation of the normal utterance (1) should not count on its implicature.

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<sup>5</sup> The difference between the proposition as an explicature or as an implicature cannot be settled resorting to the processes of interpretation that are involved in one or the other since, as can be appreciated in the literature, the limits of processes depend on prejudices. Thus, the inference that characterizes metaphor is said to form a part of what is implicated everything that is said is literally said. The opposite is also said and thus it is argued that the inferential process that characterizes metaphor forms a part of what is said.

<sup>6</sup> The same would happen with the explanation of the utterance (3) from the implicature view. The utterance of "You are not going to die, although you are going to die from that cut" is unintelligible and with its first part we



The metaphoric implicature must be nondetachable, that is, there is no way to make as if to say, in the same context, that *the sky is crying* without making the implicature mentioned. However, since metaphor detection does not require elaborating a literal content from which implicature is nondetachable, this nondetachability can be understood as a nondetachability from the formal part of the utterance that represents the contextual abnormality and conceptual contrast, the type of detachability that the cases of dictivity without formality have. The nondetachability of metaphoric propositional content is compatible with the proposal that this content is not an implicature, but a case of dictiveness without formality.

Finally, if the truth or falsity of *that it is raining* does not affect the evaluation of (1), the utterance has not truth conditions by means of which it is evaluated. Thus, the truth value of (1) does not seem to be independent of the truth value of the proposition that the implicature theorist would say that merely suggests. If it is not raining the utterance (1) is false. With metaphor, these propositions are asserted and not merely suggested.

## 5. THE METAPHORIC PROPOSITION AS A TYPE OF CONTENT OF WHAT IS SAID

To consider metaphor as an implicature we should be ready to accept

- (i) A new way of violating a maxim of cooperative principle, characterized by not requiring the processing of the literal proposition.
- (ii) The fact that to work out a particularized conversational implicature, the hearer will rely, among other things, on the conventional meanings of the words uttered together with the identity of any references that may be involved.

But still an important problem remains: squeezing metaphor into implicature entails dispossession of the features that are considered essential to the original notion of implicature.

	Conversational Implicatures	Metaphoric contents	What is said
Cancelability	+	-	-
Nondetachability	+	+/*	*/not applicable
Utterance truth conditions independence	+	-	-

If the content is not cancelable and its truth value serves to evaluate the utterance, the

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cannot signify anything.

features of this propositional content are identical to these features of what is said as it can be seen in the table. Besides, the nondetachability of metaphoric content can be understood either as nondetachability of what I make as if to say or as nondetachability from the formal part of its conventional meaning, that is, can be understood as an implicated content or as a said content. Taking into account that metaphoric content coincides with what is said in the other two features, we'd better consider that nondetachability affects metaphoric content in the second sense if we want to classify metaphoric contents within any of the two notions involved in this debate. The only possibility is to consider it as what is said.

Metaphoric utterances fix truth conditions under the mode of presentation imposed by the metaphoric provisional meaning of the sentence constituents by means of which they are evaluated.<sup>7</sup>

In this sense, when we argue for the notion of what is metaphorically said, we challenge the proposal that what is said is always literally said. But this was already suspected by Grice himself when he claimed that there are cases of dictiveness without formality. What is non-conventionally signified can also be said.

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<sup>7</sup> Metaphoric contents are elaborated with an inferential process that acts upon the meaning of constituents. We argue that a process of interpretation, when operating on the linguistic meanings of the sentence constituents, characteristically produces contents included in the explicit proposition, which is the speaker's intended proposition. The input of particularized implicatures is content (either propositional or subpropositional), and not linguistic meaning. Particularized implicatures are propositions that are not recovered from linguistic meaning but from content and context. By contrast, the input of metaphor is linguistic meaning. In metaphoric interpretation we get an explicit proposition which includes sub-propositional metaphoric provisional contents, a proposition that fixes the truth conditions of the metaphoric utterance under the mode of presentation imposed by the metaphoric provisional meaning of the sentence constituents.

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