

METAPHOR AND CONTEXT

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Abstract

In this thesis I argue that the conception of literal meaning adopted by both semantic and pragmatic metaphor theorists, which roughly indicates an adherence to a lexical authority and conventionally accepted grammar, is far too limited in scope to account for what is generally taken to include literal meaning in the *use* of language. Upon closer examination, much of what is generally taken to be ‘literal’ can be shown to exceed the bounds of literalness proposed by both pragmatic and semantic theories of metaphor. In light of this, I contend that literalness, rather than being purely semantic, is thoroughly conditioned by pragmatic processes. The literal meaning of a statement is, therefore, at least partially determined by contextual factors (e.g., what discourse has preceded the given statement or who utters the given statement). Meaning cannot be divorced from the conditions of use.

By putting forward a version of literalness that is sensitive to contextual factors, I also argue that metaphor should, in certain circumstances, be considered literal. The interpretation of metaphors requires as much contextual input as the interpretation of literal statements. If a given interpreter can accurately and directly grasp the meaning of a metaphor, this interpretation will be considered literal. In this sense, the literalness of a metaphor depends heavily on the ability of the interpreter to assess and interpret contextual ingredients. Despite what numerous theorists have suggested, much of what is attributed to metaphorical language can also be attributed to literal language and *vice versa*.

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INTRODUCTION

Most theories of metaphor rely upon a strong distinction between literal and metaphorical language. It seems to be partially a matter of common sense that such a distinction exists. Although the contrast between literal and metaphorical language is allegedly necessary, it is difficult to clearly state what distinguishes them. For example, in the metaphor ‘Janette is a gazelle’ there is no clear indication that gazelle is being used metaphorically. Generally, when a word is used metaphorically it is not followed or prefaced by an explicit metaphor indicator (e.g., ‘Janette is a gazelle [metaphor]’ or “The following sentence is a metaphor: ‘Janette is a gazelle’”) This ambiguity is further compounded by the fact that the metaphorically used term, ‘gazelle’, does not affect the syntax of the sentence in which it occurs differently than if it were a literal term. Finally, the intelligibility of metaphorical statement relies upon a comprehension of the lexical meaning of all terms within the statement, whether they are used literally or metaphorically.

Although many metaphorical statements are literally false, this falsity does not clearly indicate that the utterance is metaphorical. For example, Max Black notes that falsity can “apply equally to such other tropes as oxymoron or hyperbole, so that it would at best certify the presence of some figurative statement, but not necessarily a metaphor” (“More about Metaphor” 34). Furthermore, not all metaphors are necessarily false, but, as Davidson notes, they can also be “trivially true” (“What Metaphors Mean” 480). As Black states, “The negation of any metaphorical statement can itself be a metaphorical statement and hence possibly true if taken literally” (“More about Metaphor” 34).

Regardless of these problems pertaining to metaphor identification, it is assumed that metaphorical statements can lead to instances of insight. It is generally agreed upon that in the

appropriate circumstances, the statement “Janette is a gazelle” should be interpreted to have meaning, or at least, imply meaning, rather than being discarded as an instance of nonsense. The agreement that metaphors are more than nonsense and the problems associated with metaphor identification have led the majority metaphor theorists to assume one of two starting points with which to analyze metaphor.

The first locates metaphor in the domain of semantics. On this view, a metaphor holds two levels of meaning: the literal and the metaphorical. The literal meaning of the words within a metaphorical statement must be extended and organized so that they work together, thus revealing the unparaphrasable metaphorical meaning content. While at the literal level of meaning there is a tension between some or all of the terms, this tension is overcome to produce unique semantic content at the metaphorical level. In this way, the semantic account describes metaphor as a use of language that transcends what is ordinarily considered to be the basis of language (i.e., the literal), but is nonetheless dependent and grounded in the rules of language.

Opposed to the conception of metaphor as a product of semantics is the theory that metaphorical meaning occurs entirely in pragmatic processes. This means that proponents of the pragmatic account deny that there are two levels of meaning within a metaphorical statement. According to this view, only the literal meaning of a metaphor, and not another *metaphorical* meaning added to the literal, can be legitimately considered part of the semantic content of a metaphor. Thus, an interpreter of a sentence is brought to an awareness of its metaphorical status through literal meaning alone. A pragmatic account proposes that an interpreter of the metaphor ‘Janette is a gazelle’ will first become aware of the falsity of the literal meaning, and consequently will move on to more fruitful explanations of the sentence (i.e., metaphorical ones). This explanation does not assert that the sentence has a metaphorical *meaning* within it, but

rather that the sentence has been interpreted metaphorically because its only meaning, the literal one, is implausible as such. Thus, the successful interpretation of a metaphor uses similar pragmatic processes as those employed in the interpretation of conversational implicatures.

Despite their conflicts, both the pragmatic and semantic accounts of metaphor rely on similar understandings of literal meaning. Both accounts propose a distinction between literal and metaphorical meaning. The semantic model puts metaphorical meaning in the interaction of the meaning of the words themselves, whereas the pragmatic model contends that it relies on extra-linguistic factors. Moreover, both accounts treat literal meaning as largely being independent of from pragmatic processes.

In the following chapters I will discuss how both semantic and pragmatic theories attempt to mitigate the problems faced with explaining metaphor. In order to get their views off the ground, semantic and pragmatic theorists assume a strong distinction between literal and metaphorical language. However, upon closer examination of these theories, it is clear that such a distinction cannot be maintained. I will argue that the conception of literal meaning adopted by both semantic and pragmatic metaphor theorists, which roughly indicates an adherence to a lexical authority and conventionally accepted grammar, is far too limited in scope to account for what is generally taken to include literal meaning in the *use* of language. Upon closer examination, much of what is generally taken to be 'literal' can be shown to exceed the bounds of literalness proposed by both pragmatic and semantic theories of metaphor. In light of this, I will contend that literalness, rather than being purely semantic, is thoroughly conditioned by pragmatic processes. The literal meaning of a statement is, therefore, at least partially determined by contextual factors (e.g., what discourse has preceded the given statement or who utters the given statement. Meaning cannot be divorced from the conditions of use.

Following Donald Davidson and François Recanati's theories of literalness, I propose that literal meaning should be defined as the meaning that comes first in the order of interpretation. This revised version of literal meaning takes into account the fact that in deriving a meaningful proposition from any statement interpreters introduce various contextual ingredients in a manner that is not mandated by conventional meanings or the rules of language. Therefore, whatever meaning a given interpreter directly and accurately derives from a statement will be considered to be the legitimate literal meaning of that given statement. For example, if Julian asks Suzan about the weather in Charlottetown and correctly interprets her reply 'It's sunny' to mean 'It's currently sunny in Charlottetown', this interpretation will be considered literal.

By putting forward a version of literalness that is sensitive to contextual factors, I will also argue that metaphor should, in certain circumstances, be considered literal. The interpretation of metaphors requires as much contextual input as the interpretation of literal statements. If a given interpreter can accurately and directly grasp the meaning of a metaphor, this interpretation will be considered literal. In this sense, the literalness of a metaphor depends heavily on the ability of the interpreter to assess and interpret contextual ingredients. Despite what numerous theorists have suggested, much of what is attributed to metaphorical language can also be attributed to literal language and *vice versa*.

I will begin my account of metaphor and literal meaning in chapter one with an analysis of Max Black's semantic theory of metaphor. Black's overall goal is to justify the use and discussion of metaphor in philosophy. In order to support this contention, he argues that good metaphors allow interpreters to access meanings that cannot be attained through the interpretation of literal statements. Moreover, he puts forward the notion that metaphors require a

more complex process of interpretation in order to be understood. Although Black admits that pragmatic factors have a minor role in metaphor interpretation, he emphasizes that metaphors are by and large determined by purely semantic factors. It is the meanings of the words themselves that make a metaphor.

I will demonstrate that Black's separation of literal and metaphorical meaning is flawed and that, at most, his account of metaphor justifies a distinction between statements that require a high level of interpretation and those that require a low level of interpretation. The complex interpretation process that Black attributes solely to metaphor can also be attributed to non-metaphorical statements. Beyond this, I will contend, in opposition to Black, that metaphor cannot be considered a primarily semantic phenomenon, but must be conceived as being highly influenced by pragmatic factors. This pragmatic influence does not only affect metaphorical statements, but all types of language use.

In chapter two, I will investigate the pragmatic side of metaphor theory, as put forward by Davidson. Davidson largely focuses on a negative account of metaphor. His main claim is that metaphors do not have any meaning or sense "in addition to their literal sense or meaning" ("What Metaphors Mean" 473). Implicit in this general claim are two arguments. The first and obvious one is that in the domain of linguistic meaning there is only literal meaning. Concerning this he states, "I depend on the distinction between what words mean and what they are used to do. I think metaphor belongs exclusively to the domain of use" ("What Metaphors Mean" 474). Because it relates only to pragmatic processes, metaphor cannot have literal meaning. The second claim Davidson puts forward is that metaphor holds no cognitive content beyond its literal one. Since metaphorical meaning is entirely determined by pragmatic processes for

Davidson, it cannot convey determinate meanings that can be considered truth-conditional or genuinely explanatory (“What Metaphors Mean” 474).

Although I will argue that Davidson’s move to bring metaphor within the realm of pragmatics is correct, I will suggest that his denial of metaphorical meaning is problematic. By examining later developments in his theory, specifically concerning his notions of literal and first meaning, I want to demonstrate that it is possible to allow metaphor a meaning without relying on the problematic assumptions held by Black (i.e., that metaphor is essentially a semantic phenomenon). My main contention is that if literal meaning involves the inclusion of contextual elements (as Davidson supports in his later theory), then in some cases metaphor can be considered literal. If one grasps a metaphorical meaning directly, without first formulating and evaluating a nonsensical or absurd proposition based on the conventional meaning of the terms of the given statement, then the given metaphorical meaning should be considered to be part of literalness.

In chapter three, I will focus on bolstering the case for both the inclusion of metaphor into literal meaning and the dependence of all types of meaning on contextual factors by examining Recanati’s contextualist theory of literal meaning. Recanati puts forward a version of literal meaning that is similar to Davidson’s notion of first meaning. Unlike Davidson, however, Recanati claims that metaphorical meaning should be considered to be part of literalness. Recanati explains this difference by providing an overview of the different pragmatic processes that condition all types of language use. According to him, the processes that underlie the interpretation of what people generally consider to be literal statements also underlie the interpretation of metaphorical statements. While Recanati’s account of metaphor and literal meaning is generally accurate, it must be granted that in certain circumstances metaphors will be

interpreted non-literally, much like conversational implicatures. Once I have demonstrated the similarity between the interpretation of metaphorical and literal statements, I will discuss the difficulties in establishing a clear criterion for identifying metaphors. Despite these difficulties, I will put forward a qualified definition of metaphor.

Through my inclusion of metaphor into literalness I hope to challenge the distinction between meaning and use. If literal meaning is correctly understood as being dependent upon contextual ingredients, then there is no such thing as a ‘pure’ meaning divested of the conditions of usage. A term gains its meaning by how it is used. Even a thoroughly unconventional usage of a term, such as a metaphor, may lead to successful communication. In some cases, unconventional uses of terms will eventually become conventionalized through widespread use. The conventional meaning of terms found in a given lexicon cannot account for varieties of ways in which these terms can be successfully used to communicate ideas directly. The revision and expansion of lexicons to incorporate popularized and commonplace metaphors, amongst other unconventional phrases, is a testament to this fact.

CHAPTER ONE: BLACK'S SEMANTIC ACCOUNT OF METAPHOR

Black's investigation of metaphor is aimed at legitimizing metaphor as a topic of philosophical discussion and as a tool within philosophy. He is critical of the view in philosophy that "whereof one can speak only metaphorically, thereof one ought not to speak at all" (Black, "Metaphor" 25). More specifically, his account of metaphor is placed in opposition to what he designates as the commonly accepted "substitution and comparison views" (Black, "Metaphor" 38). These views treat metaphor as a superfluous element in language; it is never necessary to use a metaphor. All expressions of meaning can be captured by literal language. In contrast to this Black puts forward an account, what he calls the "interaction view," that gives metaphor a place within language (Black, "Metaphor" 38). The interaction view understands successful metaphors as containing meanings that cannot be fully paraphrased into literal language. For Black, metaphor cannot be ignored by philosophers without a loss of "cognitive content" (Black, "Metaphor" 46).

By putting forward the interaction view of metaphor Black attempts to give certain metaphors a legitimate and meaningful place within all types of discourse. However, he avoids the conclusion that all metaphors meet the criteria of the interaction view ("Metaphor" 45). Consequently, he leaves the possibility open that linguistic phenomena fitting the substitution and comparison views may also justifiably be termed as occurrences of 'metaphor' (Black, "Metaphor" 45). Black even admits that in "trivial cases" of metaphor the " 'substitution' and 'comparison' views sometimes seem nearer the mark than 'interaction' views" ("Metaphor" 45). However, only metaphors that fit the interaction view, in the sense that they hold a cognitive content that cannot be expressed through literal paraphrase, "are of importance in philosophy" (Black, "Metaphor" 45).

In this section I will argue that although Black makes a compelling case for the importance of metaphor in language, including its use within philosophy, his ‘interaction view’ relies on the same assumptions that plague the accounts of metaphor he criticizes. More importantly, I contend that Black’s insistence upon both a semantic approach to metaphorical meaning and a strong distinction between literal and metaphorical meaning is misguided and unhelpful in analyzing metaphor. In order to undertake this criticism, I will first explain Black’s methodology and terminology for analyzing metaphor and I will characterize the substitution and comparison views of metaphor that Black criticizes.

Black adopts and modifies a distinction from I.A. Richards’ theory of metaphor that allows him to treat metaphor as a statement rather than as a single word (Richards, 97). For Black, words that are used metaphorically are termed the “*focus*” while the remaining literally used words of the sentence in which the *focus* occurs are termed the “*frame*” (“Metaphor” 28). Hence, in the metaphor ‘Jim is a pig’ the word ‘pig’ is the focus of the metaphor while the remainder of the sentence, ‘Jim is a’, constitutes the frame. What is important to note about this distinction is that it implies a necessary relation between the metaphorically used terms and the literal ones. Metaphors, like any other statements, rely on the combination and interaction of words. While the metaphor can be separated into parts (i.e., frame and focus), neither of these can be singled out as holding the ‘metaphorical force’ of the entire statement.

The frame and the focus of a metaphor are thus mutually dependent for the expression of a given metaphor. Black notes that in some cases “the presence of one frame can result in the metaphorical use of the complementary word, while the presence of a different frame for the same word fails to result in metaphor” (“Metaphor” 28). However, Black warns, “To call a sentence an instance of metaphor is to say something about its *meaning*, not about orthography,

its phonetic pattern or its grammatical form” (“Metaphor” 28). Essentially, metaphor is an issue of “semantics” and does not belong “to any *physical* inquiry about language” (“Metaphor” 28). Supporting this, Black provides the example that when a metaphor is “translated word for word into any foreign language for which this possible, we shall of course want to say that the translated sentence is the *very same* metaphor” (“Metaphor” 28). So a metaphor is to be understood as the result of the interaction of the meaning of the words, and not due to a grammatical, phonetic or orthographic function of language. Black considers the substitution and comparison views of metaphor inadequate because they do not seriously consider the relation between frame and focus, and the impact of this relation upon the meaning of the words within a metaphorical statement.

The Substitution and Comparison Accounts of Metaphor

The substitution view is characterized as “any view which holds that a metaphorical expression is used in the place of some equivalent *literal* expression” (Black, “Metaphor” 31). A metaphorical statement is thus treated as a mere substitute for a synonymous literal statement. However, this synonymy is unilateral: a literal expression never acts as a substitute for a metaphor. In this sense, “Understanding a metaphor is like deciphering a code or unravelling a riddle” (Black, “Metaphor” 32). The focus term of a metaphorical statement acts as a “clue” to understanding the literal or correct meaning of the statement (Black, “Metaphor” 32). Consequently, the literal paraphrase of a metaphor can be thought of as the solution to the metaphor. When one is confronted with a metaphor, the only reason to interpret it is to grasp the underlying but accurate meaning. The fact that metaphor is conceived of as a detour to the precise meaning of a statement raises the question as to why it is used at all.

Black suggests that proponents of the substitution view explain the use of metaphor in two interrelated ways. Firstly, the use of metaphor can be justified by characterizing it as a type of “catachresis” (Black, “Metaphor” 33). This means that metaphor is “the use of a word in some new sense in order to remedy a gap in the vocabulary; catachresis is the putting of new sense into old words” (Black, “Metaphor” 33). Successful catachrestic uses of metaphor will eventually become standardized and, therefore, literal (Black, “Metaphor” 33). As Black observes, “‘Orange’ may originally have been applied to the color by catachresis; but the word is now applied to the color just as ‘properly’ (and unmetaphorically) as to the fruit” (“Metaphor” 33). A catachrestic metaphor is merely a method for widening the scope of literal language. Beyond what it will literally come to mean, if it does so at all, it has no meaning. Black notes, “It is the fate of catachresis to disappear when it is successful” (“Metaphor” 33).

Secondly, if there is already a suitable literal expression to fill in for a given metaphorical expression, the given metaphor is considered to be merely stylistic (Black, “Metaphor” 34). A stylistic metaphor is one that exists merely to enhance the aesthetic experience of the interpreter without influencing the actual meaning of the given statement. For example, according to this view the metaphorical statement ‘My student is a robot’ is a fanciful rendition of ‘My student is emotionless’. The interpreter of a metaphor is “taken to enjoy problem solving—or to delight in the author’s skill at half-concealing, half-revealing his meaning” (Black, “Metaphor” 34). Therefore, a stylistic metaphor is an unnecessary device for conveying meaning. In fact, apart from cases in which metaphor is in the process of becoming literal (i.e., catachrestic metaphors), metaphor has no meaning apart from the literal one that it corresponds to. Metaphors are parasitic upon literal meaning. According to the substitution view, “if philosophers have

something more important to do than give pleasure to their readers, metaphor can have no serious place in philosophical discussion” (Black “Metaphor” 34).

The second account of metaphor Black criticizes, the comparison view, assumes “that a metaphor consists in the *presentation* of the underlying analogy or similarity” between the focus term and the most salient term in the frame (Black, “Metaphor” 35). Thus, a metaphor is simply “a condensed or elliptical *simile*” (Black, “Metaphor” 35). For example, the statement ‘my student is a robot’ actually means that ‘My student is *like* a robot’ (Black, “Metaphor” 35). For Black, the difference between the substitution view and comparison view is merely that the literal paraphrase of a metaphor in the comparison view is “more elaborate” than it would be if interpreted according to the substitution view. Thus instead of literally meaning ‘My student is emotionless’, the statement ‘My student is a robot’ would literally mean ‘My student is like a robot (in being emotionless)’ (Black, “Metaphor” 36). In this view, the literal meaning of a statement retains the import of the original focus term (e.g., ‘robot’). While according to the substitution view the above statement would be interpreted as being only about my student being emotionless, the comparison view would consider the statement to be about both my student being emotionless *and* robots (Black, “Metaphor” 36).

In line with the substitution view, the comparison view assumes that the only meaning a metaphor expresses is the underlying literal meaning that is most clearly expressed by the means of a literal paraphrase. However, if this is the case then it must mean that the similarity that is revealed in the correct interpretation of a metaphor is determined and fixed. If a metaphor expresses a single literal proposition, then the metaphor must also express and emphasize a determined similarity between the two objects being compared. In relation to this Black states, “There is some temptation to think of similarities as ‘objectively given’. If this were so, similes

might be governed by rules as strict as those controlling the statements of physics” (“Metaphor” 37). As Black notes, this assumption is problematic because often times when one makes a metaphor the comparisons and connections created between the focus and the frame seem unlikely to have arisen through the use of literal statement. This leads Black to suggest, pointing towards his own account of metaphor, that “it would be more illuminating in some of these cases to say that the metaphor creates the similarity rather than to say that it formulates some similarity antecedently existing” (“Metaphor” 37).

The Interaction View of Metaphor

The account of metaphor championed by Black, the interaction view, has its roots in I.A. Richards’ analysis of rhetoric. Like Black, Richards is interested in demonstrating how metaphor plays a necessary role in language. In *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, he states, “Our pretence to do without metaphor is never more than a bluff waiting to be called” (Richards 92). Consequently, Richards does not adhere to a substitution or comparison view, but rather contends that metaphor itself holds meaning that cannot be directly equated with a literal paraphrase (Richards 93, 126-128). Reviewing his own understanding of metaphor Richards explains that “when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction” (Richards, in Black, “Metaphor” 38). Transposing Richards’ ideas into his own terminology Black argues that “in the given context the focal word...obtains a new meaning, which is not quite its meaning in literal uses, nor quite the meaning which any literal substitute would have” (“Metaphor” 39). What sets the interaction view apart from the substitution and comparison accounts of metaphor is the idea that, through the interaction of the frame and focus, a metaphorical statement expresses a

meaning, which can neither be captured through a literal interpretation of the metaphorical statement nor through a literal paraphrase of the metaphorical meaning (Black, “Metaphor” 38-39).

In order to establish a more specific understanding of how metaphorical meaning is produced, Black distinguishes between the principal and subsidiary subjects of a metaphor. The subsidiary subject can be associated with what was previously discussed as the focus of a metaphor. The principal subject can be identified as relating to a term in the frame that, within the given metaphorical statement, is strongly determined by the subsidiary subject. Using Black’s example “Man is a wolf,” the term “Man” is the principal subject, while the term “Wolf” is the secondary subsidiary subject (“Metaphor” 39). Black wants to dispel the notion that primary or subsidiary subjects that are associated with specific terms express specific “things” (“Metaphor” 39-40, 44). Referring to the previous metaphor, the term ‘wolf’, which is understood as expressing the subsidiary subject, should not be taken to specifically refer to the animal that is a wolf, but rather to an agglomeration of ideas that is generally and often loosely attributed to wolves (Black, “Metaphor” 40). Black refers to this agglomerate as the “*system of associated commonplaces*” (hereafter, SAC) (“Metaphor” 40, 42).

In order to successfully interpret a metaphor, one must not only know the lexical meaning of the terms, but also their related SAC (Black, “Metaphor” 40).¹ It is important to note that the SAC is not something that is necessarily determined by matters of fact or expert opinion. Often times the lexical or formal understanding of a term is at odds with how a term is generally used, even in literal contexts (Black, “Metaphor” 40). For Black, “literal uses of the word normally commit the speaker to acceptance of a set of standard beliefs...(current platitudes) that are the

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all metaphors discussed will be assumed to be metaphors that fit the interaction view and not those that would fall into the substitution or comparison view.

common possession of the members of some speech community” (Black 40). If a person, even an expert, challenges a standard belief, say by suggesting (in opposition to widely held opinion) that wolves are neither fierce nor dangerous, this does not mean that the given standard belief will necessarily shift. Wolves can still be used to evoke images of fierce and ruthless killing.

Despite Black’s strong association of SAC with some sort of socially established standard belief, he does allow that in certain cases the author of a metaphor can adjust a given system according to their own standards (“Metaphor” 43).² In relation to the metaphor “Man is a wolf,” Black accepts that “a naturalist who really knows wolves may tell us so much about them that *his* description of a man as a wolf diverges quite markedly from the stock uses of that figure” (“Metaphor” 43”). He goes on to state, “Metaphors can be supported by specially constructed systems of implications, as well as by accepted commonplaces; they can be made to measure and need not be reach-me-downs” (“Metaphor” 43). Regardless of their construction or content, the implication and importance of SACs for Black is that they require the interpreter of a metaphor to engage in a creative activity of association that is downplayed or denied in the substitution and comparison views of metaphor.

According to Black, a metaphor works by “applying to the principle subject a system of ‘associated implications’ characteristic of the subsidiary subject” (“Metaphor” 44). For example, in the interpretation of the statement ‘My student is a robot’ certain characteristics pertaining to the SAC of a robot (e.g., made up of circuits and electronics, emotionless, constructed rather than born, programmed instead of taught, not able to act or think creatively) are taken as being relevant to characteristics within the SAC of a student. Specifically, a metaphor “selects,

² The term ‘author’ when applied within the context of metaphor production will refer to both the one who writes and/or speaks a given metaphor. Furthermore, the listener and/or reader of a metaphor will be referred to as an interpreter.

emphasizes, suppresses, and organizes features of the principal subject by implying statements about it that normally apply to the subsidiary subject” (Black, “Metaphor 44-45).

A metaphor does not simply attach characteristics of the subsidiary subject to the primary subject in an *ad hoc* manner. Only characteristics of the primary subject that can “without undue strain be talked about” in terms of the secondary subject’s system of characteristics “will be rendered prominent,” while those characteristics that cannot be easily interpreted in that way “will be pushed into the background” (Black “Metaphor” 41). Relating this to the ‘My student is a robot’ statement, while the robot’s lack of emotion will most likely come into play in the interpreter’s conception of the given student, the fact that some robots are made up of metal or plastic will most likely not. In this sense, Black metaphorically characterizes metaphor as a “filter” and a “screen” through which the ordinary interpretation of a term (i.e., principal subject) is understood differently than is usually implied by its SAC (“Metaphor” 39, 41). Black suggests that “the principle subject is ‘seen through’ the metaphorical expression—or, if we prefer, that the principal subject is ‘projected upon’ the field of the subsidiary subject” (“Metaphor” 41).

The metaphor’s organizational act determines its meaning. Black’s point is not only to say that a given metaphor selects certain characteristics of the primary subject by way of the subsidiary subject, but also to make clear that “it brings forward aspects of [the primary subject]...that might not be seen at all through another medium” (“Metaphor” 42). Metaphorical meaning is, thus, the result of altered meanings of the principal and subsidiary subjects. Both subjects are interpreted differently in a metaphorical context than they would be in a literal context; in a literal context there would be no need for the interaction of subjects, and therefore no extension or alteration in the meaning of terms. A metaphor, at least one abiding by Black’s

interaction model, holds two levels of meaning: the literal and the metaphorical. Both of these levels need to be understood in order for a metaphor to be successfully interpreted.

Black undermines the idea that the interaction view is a disguised form of the comparison view by arguing that “there is, in general, no simple ‘ground’ for the necessary shifts of meaning—no blanket reason why some metaphors work and others fail” (“Metaphor” 45). This poses a problem for the comparative view, because comparative metaphors are supposed to yield an “antecedently existing” meaning that can be adequately paraphrased in literal terms (Black, “Metaphor” 37). Beyond this, Black states that the “use of a ‘subsidiary subject’ to foster insight into a ‘principal subject’ is a distinctive intellectual operation...demanding simultaneous awareness of both subjects, but not reducible to any comparison” (“Metaphor” 46). That is, the extension or shift in meaning as a result of interaction counteracts the notion that a literal paraphrase of a metaphor can be made (e.g., as a disguised simile).

In his article “More on Metaphor,” Black attempts to further clarify this notion by stating, “In discursively comparing one subject *with* another, we sacrifice the distinctive power and effectiveness of a good metaphor. The literal comparison lacks the ambience and suggestiveness and the imposed ‘view’ of the primary subject, upon which a metaphor’s power to illuminate depends” (“More on Metaphor” 31)³. For Black, ‘ambience’ cannot merely be equated with ‘style’, which according to his discussion of the substitution view indicates an aesthetic experience that in no way affects the (literal) meaning of a statement. Furthermore, Black’s high regard for the ‘ambience’ of metaphor also factors into his method of explaining how the literal paraphrase of a metaphor cannot capture the meaning of a metaphor in its entirety.

³ “Primary subject” is equivalent to Black’s earlier “principal subject”.

Regarding the effectiveness of if a literal paraphrase, Black argues that the many relations and interactions that the interpreter of metaphor is made aware of through interpretation cannot be translated into literal terms without a “loss of cognitive content” (“Metaphor 46). Although he admits that “up to a point, we may succeed in stating a number of relevant relations between two subjects” in literal terms, “the set of literal statements so obtained will not have the same power to inform and enlighten as the original” (Black, “Metaphor” 46). He goes on to assert that “a literal paraphrase inevitably says too much—and with the wrong emphasis” (Black, “Metaphor” 46). The cognitive content of a metaphor is therefore strongly associated with its the ambience.

Clarifying the Cognitive Content of Metaphor

The substance of Black’s interaction view depends on how one interprets his notion of cognitive content. There is much debate concerning this point. In his article “Black’s Metaphors,” Martin Warner argues, “The content of an utterance is presumably ‘cognitive’ in so far as it is a possible object of knowledge, and hence capable of being true or false... Thus if two assertions have identical truth conditions, they have the same ‘cognitive content’” (“Black’s Metaphors,” 368). Because the paraphrase of a metaphor does not have the same cognitive content as the metaphor itself, Warner states that, according to Black, they must “have different truth conditions” (“Black’s Metaphors,” 368). This interpretation of cognitive content leads Warner to provide an unconvincing account of how a metaphor could be true while its paraphrase is false (“Black’s Metaphors,” 368). There are numerous reasons why this appraisal of Black is misconceived: the most obvious one being that Black denies that a metaphor’s cognitive content is truth-conditional. However, it is not entirely clear what Black does, in fact, mean by ‘cognitive content’.

In his article “More about Metaphor,” Black argues that while metaphors may not express ‘truths’ as understood within the context of “fact-stating” practices, they nonetheless “can, and sometimes do, generate insight about ‘how things are’ in reality” (39). For Black, the word ‘truth’ is used appropriately “in situations where the prime purpose is to state a ‘fact’, that is, where the fact-stating statement in question is associated with some accepted procedure for verification and confirmation” (“More About Metaphor” 38). Therefore, by suggesting that a metaphor can be true, one implies that metaphor should be subjected to the same scrutiny as any other truth-conditional statement, such as a witness’ courtroom testimony. Black contends that the attempt to fit metaphor into this “domain of language” is “misguided and liable to induce distortion” (“More About Metaphor” 38). He states:

If somebody urges that, “Nixon is an image surrounding a vacuum,” it would be inept to ask soberly whether the speaker *knew* that to be so, or how he came to know it, or how we could check on the allegation, or whether he was saying something consistent with his previous assertion that Nixon was a shopkeeper. Such supplementary moves are never appropriate to any metaphorical statements except those degenerately “decorative” or expendable ones in which the metaphorical focus can be replaced by some literal equivalence (Black, “More About Metaphor” 39).

Black wishes to contend that while an interaction metaphor cannot be said to be ‘true’ or ‘false’ in the aforementioned sense, it “really does say something” about “how things are” (“More About Metaphor” 39). He suggests that metaphor is like other “familiar cognitive devices for *showing* how things are”: maps, graphs, photographs and realistic paintings (“More About Metaphor” 39). Although it may be appropriate and useful to discuss the “ ‘correctness’ and ‘incorrectness’ ” of such devices, it is unhelpful to approach them as “substitutes for bundles of

statement of fact” (“More About Metaphor” 39). Interestingly, most of the examples of the cognitive devices Black provides could be, and often are, admitted as evidence in courtrooms or elsewhere in order to demonstrate the truth or falsity of a claim. Thus, it would seem that although such cognitive devices, including metaphor, cannot be evaluated as true (or false), they can nonetheless maintain a relation with what is true, even in terms of Black’s restricted use of the word.

Black attempts to articulate the relation between metaphor and truth in “How Metaphors Work: A Reply to Donald Davidson” (hereafter, “How Metaphors Work”) by suggesting in a footnote that while metaphors cannot be said to be true, they “can imply truth-claims” (“How Metaphors Work” 134). Elsewhere, in another footnote, Black contends that metaphors “can and usually do have ‘cognitive content’, or do ‘carry a message’, by virtue of implying assertions with truth-value. Much more than the expression of propositional truth is at work in metaphorical discourse” (“How Metaphors Work” 137). Black supports this view by suggesting that it is possible to disagree with a metaphor and, following from this, that “reasons could be offered for and against” the given metaphor (“How Metaphors Work” 137). For example, one might state in response to the statement “This policy is bullet-proof”, that such a metaphor is inappropriate because the given policy cannot withstand public scrutiny. One might also propose a counter metaphor: “This policy is definitely not bullet-proof. It’s made out of tin.”

The metaphor itself cannot be true or false, but the propositions implied by it can be. Black argues that while a metaphor should not be evaluated on the basis of truth it “might be criticized as inept, misleading, obscure, unilluminating, and so forth” (“More About Metaphor” 38-39, “How Metaphors Work” 134). Despite the ability of some metaphors to enhance or highlight aspects of propositions in a way that can create agreement or disagreement (e.g.,

whether or not a policy is strong enough to withstand public scrutiny), a metaphor is not the proposition it implies, like a map is not actually the territory it interprets. A metaphor is, thus, to be at least partially characterized as an interpretation of its entailed propositional content. From this, it seems that Black's understanding of the cognitive content of metaphor is closely related to the process involved in interpreting a metaphor and drawing out its implications. The cognitive content of a metaphor is the interpretation of whatever the metaphor (as a statement) has as its primary subject.

Black further clarifies this notion in "Metaphor" when, explaining what a literal paraphrase of a metaphor lacks, he argues that "the implications, previously left for a suitable reader to educe for himself, with a nice feeling for their relative priorities and degrees of importance, are now presented explicitly as though having equal weight" (Black, "Metaphor" 46). The meaning of a metaphor is not fixed, but is contingent upon how one interprets it, or, put in another way, upon the interpretive conditions of a metaphor.⁴ There are, therefore, numerous possible fruitful interpretations of a metaphor that can fit within overall meaning. As Black suggests, a literal paraphrase makes obvious some of the implied truth-claims of a metaphor, but it cannot recreate the interpretive conditions of the metaphor, which involve a degree of open-endedness supposedly inexpressible through literal language (Black, "How Metaphors Work" 142). Black contends, "A metaphor leaves a good deal to be supplied at the reader's discretion" ("How Metaphors Work" 142). Consequently, a literal paraphrase, without any ambiguity or need for the level of interpretation required by a metaphor, will always lack the cognitive content that a metaphor has: something that he also refers to as "insight" ("Metaphor" 46).

⁴ By interpretive conditions, I mean the conditions that determine whether or not a statement is likely to require a high level of interpretation.

Although Black is clear to state the importance of this insight, in that it can (in some cases) show us how ‘things really are’, he has little to say about why or how it is important independently of its connection with disclosing implied truth-claims. For metaphors to be considered legitimate devices for use in philosophy the process of interpretation (i.e., making the cognitive content or insight of the metaphor explicit) has to be shown to have value in itself. Unfortunately, Black does little beyond comparing the process of interpreting a metaphor with that of interpreting maps, paintings, charts, and musical compositions to assert and explain its value.

In his article “Metaphor and Paraphrase,” James W. Manns partially fills this gap. Manns’ main concern is to oppose the notion that the value of the cognitive content of metaphor depends upon its implied truth-claims (“Metaphor and Paraphrase” 360-361). Manns also suggests that any utterance, including a metaphorical one, can have “cognitive content” and lead to insight by “directing our attention towards a feature or features of our perceived environment,” by “aiding us to cultivate a skill or master a practical obstacle,” and by “altering our way of categorizing the world” (“Metaphor and Paraphrase” 361).

Illustrating this point through an appeal to Ryle’s distinction between ‘knowing how’ and ‘knowing that’, Manns argues, “To be acquainted with a person or a place does not in the least entail that one can or does make true statements about either. And by the same token uttering false statements about them is not sufficient ground to disqualify one’s claims to their acquaintance” (“Metaphor and Paraphrase” 361). Manns’ emphasis on non truth-conditional types of cognitive content is similar to Black’s notion that a metaphor acts as a “filter” to allow a novel or uncommon interpretation of a familiar term. While a metaphor may give an interpreter a better grasp of a phenomenon, it is unnecessary that this grasp involve the ability to make truth

claims about the given phenomenon. Nevertheless, while one may not be required to become aware of the truth-claims implied by a metaphor in order to gain insight from it, these truth-claims are nonetheless implied.

Problems with Black's Semantic Theory of Metaphor

Black's link between the legitimacy of metaphor (i.e., its cognitive content) and the insight gained through the interpretation of a metaphor raises two problems about his theory. Firstly, Black's assumption that literal paraphrases of metaphor lack something that only metaphorical utterances have is based on an impoverished account of how literal paraphrases work. A further discussion of this problem will also undermine Black's strong distinction between literal and metaphorical language. Secondly, although Black claims to be focusing on the semantic meaning of metaphor, the meaning that he eventually attributes to metaphor, which is highly connected to its interpretive conditions seems strongly to depend on pragmatic factors.

As mentioned, Black is adamant that the literal paraphrase of a metaphor cannot capture its cognitive contents and therefore its complete meaning. Having argued that the meaning of metaphor depends on its interpretive conditions (i.e., the fact that a metaphor supports numerous viable interpretations), Black dodges an obvious objection made by numerous theorists, such as Donald Davidson. If one is "clever enough" why can one not "come as close" as one pleases to metaphorical meaning in literal terms (Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean" 481)? For Black, it is obvious that literal language could never capture the nuances and multiple meanings supported by the interpretive conditions of a good metaphor ("Metaphor" 46-47). Although Black may have successfully avoided this first line of argument, his assumptions about what a literal paraphrase is and is supposed to achieve are doubtful. Manns provides a useful assessment of

Black's presuppositions concerning paraphrase. Once this has been taken into account, Davidsons' criticism gains new relevance.

Manns contends that, like most theorists of metaphor, Black assumes that a literal paraphrase "does at least constitute an *attempt* to capture, in literal terms and as fully as possible, the cognitive import of a metaphor" and that its meaning is "transparent," whereas metaphorical meaning is "opaque" ("Metaphor and Paraphrase" 363-364). This contention is easily corroborated by Black's description of paraphrase as an attempt to make all the possible interpretations, including the implied-truth claims of a metaphor, explicit. This is further corroborated by Black's characterization of metaphor as having meanings only attainable through a complex and esoteric process of interpretation (Black, "Metaphor" 46). These assumptions, Manns maintains, are mistaken.

Concerning the first of these assumptions, he claims, "The principal purveyors of paraphrase are in reality *making no attempt whatever* at delineating in full the sense of any metaphor" ("Metaphor and Paraphrase" 363, author's emphasis). Rather, the authors of paraphrase are "directing with words our intellectual gaze in a manner which, it is hoped, will enable us to trace out for ourselves the myriad of implications, associations and images that diffuse themselves behind the concentrated focus that is the metaphor" ("Metaphor and Paraphrase" 363).

While it might be argued that, despite Manns' empirical claims, paraphrases exist that attempt to translate cognitive content of metaphor in literal terms, it cannot be maintained that all paraphrase must necessarily do so. The importance of Manns' point is that it articulates the possibility that paraphrase can recreate a process of interpretation similar to the process created by its source metaphor. As Manns asserts, one should judge a paraphrase by "how much it is

capable of directing our minds to grasp the metaphor in itself, in its wholeness” (“Metaphor and Paraphrase” 364). Black’s assessment of paraphrase is thus shown to be myopic: only by discussing the possibilities of literal paraphrase that strongly contrasts with metaphor is it possible to maintain that the interpretive conditions of metaphor are unique. With a wider view of paraphrase the factors that allegedly separate the literal from the metaphorical, as proposed by Black, are exaggerated.

The second assumption made by Black, that literal language is more transparent and less suited to the level of interpretation demanded by metaphor, is already partially unravelled given that a literal paraphrase may elicit a level of interpretation comparable to metaphor. However, Manns notes, “The literal is at times as irredeemably opaque as the metaphorical is accused of being” and, on the other hand, “the metaphorical is at times ‘crystal clear’” (“Metaphor and Paraphrase” 365). Some instances of literal language, for example certain philosophical or scientific texts, require just as much interpretation in order to elucidate a meaning from them as a metaphor would. On the other hand, some metaphors require little interpretation, and are thus comparable to ordinary literal sentences. From this, Manns suggests that as literal language may paraphrase a complex metaphor, so too can a metaphor paraphrase a complex literal statement (“Metaphor and Paraphrase” 365). He states, “It is a matter of indifference whether a paraphrase actualizes itself in literal or metaphorical terms so long as it is helpful in effecting the desired insight into the problematic ‘parent’ utterance” (“Metaphor and Paraphrase” 365).

Although Manns never questions the dichotomy between metaphorical and literal language it is clear that in many respects he brings the literal and metaphorical closer together.⁵ In terms of Black’s theory, at least, what was exclusive to metaphor (its cognitive content) has

⁵ In fact he affirms it by arguing that each of these types of language is characterized by an affinity to different “aspects of human experience” (“Metaphor and Paraphrase” 365).

been shown to be accessible by literal means. While it may not be possible to replicate the entire process of interpretation involved in the comprehension of a metaphor through a literal paraphrase, this problem is not unique to the interpretation of metaphor alone. It might be equally said that any attempt (literal or metaphorical) to recreate the interpretive process of any other utterance (literal or metaphorical) will fail to be an exact replica of the source. It might also be said that any statement may elicit a different interpretative process on different occasions of interpretation. Thus, in terms of providing metaphor with a unique cognitive content, Black's theory is unsuccessful.

However, besides its relevance to the distinction between literal and metaphorical meaning, Black's characterization of the cognitive content of metaphor as being related to interpretive processes brings forward another tension in his theory. That is, although Black describes his theory in numerous instances as a semantic (and not pragmatic) theory of metaphor, his depiction of metaphorical meaning seems to postulate that the meaning of metaphor depends more on pragmatics than semantics. Although he admits that pragmatic issues, such as the context in which an utterance is made, can influence how or whether a metaphorical statement is successful, ultimately "the rules of our language determine that some expressions must count as metaphors" ("Metaphor" 29-30). Elsewhere, as discussed above, he claims "'metaphor' must be classified as a term that belong to 'semantics'" ("Metaphor" 28). For Black, a metaphor is semantic in that it has a meaning that is *determined* by the rules of language and the lexical meanings of words, such as the implications the literal meaning of terms will have for other terms in a given statement (i.e., what Black discusses as the temporary shifts in the meanings of words in a metaphorical statement that can be attributed to their interaction) ("Metaphor" 44-45, "How Metaphors Work" 137-138).

It seems that given his description of the cognitive content of metaphor, Black is not entitled to suggest that his theory is a semantic one. What we describe as the meaning of metaphor is primarily determined by semantic factors, and that metaphorical meaning relies on and alters literal meaning (“Metaphor” 44-45, “How Metaphors Work” 137-138). In Black’s view, in order to get to the meaning of a metaphor one must first interpret the literal meaning of the terms. One is then made aware of the connections and alterations of the literal meaning of the words in the statements implied by the metaphor. If the metaphor is apt and its interpreter is competent, the interpreter might also gain access to some truth-claims implied by the metaphor. As other theorists, such as Davidson, have claimed, Black cannot justify how the shifts in the meaning of the words, which occur after the initial interpretation of the literal statement, can count as the correct or actual semantic meaning of the literal statement and not merely as the pragmatic effects of the literal statement. Davidson claims that to “lodge this meaning [metaphorical meaning] in the metaphor is like explaining why a pill puts you to sleep by saying it has a dormative power” (“What Metaphors Mean” 474).

Black cannot explain how the insight gained through the interpretation of a metaphor is reflected on the original literal contents of statement in a way that the meaning of the sentence itself is altered. In effect, Black has added an unnecessary and confusing step to the process of metaphor interpretation. If metaphor’s cognitive content is so strongly associated with interpretive processes, why bother trying to link it back with the meaning of the words themselves and the rules of language? As will be discussed further in the next chapter, one way to clear up this confusion is by claiming, as Davidson does, that metaphor does not have a meaning (in the semantic sense) “beyond its literal meaning” (“What Metaphors Mean” 474). Although one might gain the insight that Bob is cowardly from the statement ‘Bob is a chicken’,

the statement itself does not mean, in terms of its semantics, anything beyond the literal meaning of the words. Despite this advantage, Davidson's pragmatic theory nonetheless suffers from a similar problem as Black's semantic theory, in that it assumes a strong distinction between the literal and metaphorical. This will be discussed in further detail in chapter two.

Concluding Remarks

Although Black is highly critical of the substitution and comparison views for treating metaphor as an expendable rhetorical device, he has nonetheless assumed most of their distinctions in his own view: that literal language is clear and univocal, and that metaphorical language is ambiguous and yields a multiplicity of interpretations.⁶ It is the strict division between literal and metaphorical language, which Black holds, that makes it possible for the substitution and comparison views to reject metaphor as a legitimate philosophical tool. While for Black this division means that metaphorical language has privileged access to a dimension of meaning, for the substitution and comparison views it suggests that metaphorical language is irrelevant (i.e., metaphor is simply an unnecessary hurdle for interpreters). However, this division between literal and metaphorical language, although perhaps appealing in its simplicity, seems to collapse on closer examination.

In this chapter, I have argued that Black's attempt to describe metaphor as a linguistic device with exclusive access to 'metaphorical' meaning is problematic and, in fact, bolsters the opposite idea that the distinction between literal and metaphorical language is not as rigid as is often supposed. At most, Black has demonstrated that there is a distinction to be made between linguistic statements that require an intense level of interpretation and those that require little

⁶ While the substitution and comparison view affirm this, they also maintain that there is really only one correct meaning to a metaphor—that which corresponds to its literal meaning.

interpretation. Despite these problems, Black's account has established that the effects of metaphor are comparable to the effects of other literal statements and that both of these should be taken as legitimate.

Beyond this, Black has also shown how interpretative factors might undermine the notion that literal language is entirely univocal and transparent. Specifically, once it has been accepted that interpretive conditions can equally determine both metaphorical and literal language, Black's discussion of 'systems of associated commonplaces' (SAC) provides a model with which to analyze linguistic expressions in general, rather than only metaphorical ones. Rather than viewing literal language as a simple function of the rules of language and lexical meaning, Black's understanding of SAC adds a further contextual dimension. Literal language, in this view, is understood as being conditioned by factors such as the background knowledge of the interpreter and the context within which it occurs. In this way literal language cannot be adequately described as entirely univocal or transparent. While Black's discussion of SAC is limited, it nonetheless hints at the overall direction of a Contextualist account of metaphor, which will be further discussed in chapter three.

Throughout the above discussion of Black, I have attempted to make some general claims about metaphor and how metaphors work. I have argued that while Black's semantic account of metaphor provides some insight into how metaphors create effects in their interpreters, it does not succeed in placing the meaning of metaphor in the words that make up a metaphorical statement. The meanings implicated by metaphors seem to be more suited to a pragmatic rather than semantic explanation. Now that the semantic side of things has been explored, I will move onto the pragmatics of metaphor in the next chapter, specifically focusing of Davidson's theory.

CHAPTER TWO: DAVIDSON'S PRAGMATIC ACCOUNT OF METAPHOR

Donald Davidson puts forward an account of metaphor that is, on the surface, diametrically opposed to Max Black's view. Rather than struggling to give metaphor a place in semantics, Davidson locates metaphor wholly in the realm of pragmatics. This account challenges the notion that metaphor can be said to have semantic meaning beyond the literal meaning of its words. Davidson is clearly aware that his proposal is controversial. He states that the idea of a semantic metaphorical meaning "is common to many who have written about metaphor: it is found in the works of literary critics like Richards, Empson, and Winters; philosophers from Aristotle to Max Black; psychologists from Freud and earlier, to Skinner and later; and linguists from Plato to Uriel Weinreich and George Lakoff" ("What Metaphors Mean" 472). Commenting on being included in this list Black states, "Good company, if somewhat mixed" ("How Metaphors Work", 131). Clearly then, Davidson puts himself in the daunting position of correcting an error present in virtually all that has been written about metaphor. In some ways he achieves this task and in others he fails.

My discussion of Davidson will examine two versions of his metaphor theory. The early version is presented in his famous paper "What Metaphors Mean," while the later version is derived by implications and comments he makes in various subsequent papers, especially "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs." While both accounts affirm that metaphor ought to be an issue of pragmatics, they differ in their treatment of literal meaning. In the early version Davidson treats literal meaning as untainted by pragmatics, whereas in the later version he approaches literal meaning as thoroughly conditioned by pragmatics. While these contrasting approaches would seemingly lead to differing treatments of metaphor (i.e., the later version would apparently allow instances of metaphorical meaning to be equated with literal meaning),

Davidson contends in both that metaphor necessarily cannot constitute an instance of literal meaning. Therefore, while Davidson proposes two different notions of what constitutes literal meaning, he awkwardly attempts to maintain a unified understanding of metaphor.

It is my contention that Davidson is not entitled to deny the possibility of metaphorical meaning coinciding with literal meaning. While Davidson is correct in bringing metaphor into the realm of pragmatics, his later attempt to do the same with literal language should affect his understanding of metaphorical meaning. I will therefore argue that, given Davidson's views concerning literal meaning, metaphorical meaning can, given the right contextual circumstances, be considered as literal meaning. This argument is significantly dependent upon Davidson's rejection of the distinction between meaning and use, which I claim necessitates the rejection of the distinction between the literal and much of what is normally considered to be non-literal (including metaphor).

Davidson's Early View

In "What Metaphors Mean," Davidson largely focuses on a negative account of metaphor. His main claim is that metaphors do not have any meaning or sense "in addition to their literal sense or meaning" (Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean" 473). Implicit in this general argument are two claims. The first and obvious one is that in the domain of linguistic meaning there is only literal meaning. Concerning this he states, "I depend on the distinction between what words mean and what they are used to do. I think metaphor belongs exclusively to the domain of use" ("What Metaphors Mean" 474). Because it relates only to pragmatic considerations, metaphor cannot have semantic meaning. The second claim Davidson puts forward is that metaphor holds no cognitive content ("What Metaphors Mean" 482).

In relation to the first claim, this implies that Black is mistaken when he postulates that a metaphor involves “extensions” or “shifts” in the “meaning of words” (Black, “Metaphor” 45). Davidson argues that attributing an added dimension of semantic meaning to metaphor, beyond the literal one, is an unjustifiable assumption. So-called extended meaning could as easily be attributed to the literal domain (Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean” 476). Davidson states, “We should agree that in some ways it makes relatively little difference whether, in a given context, we think a word is being used metaphorically or in a previously unknown, but literal way” (“What Metaphors Mean” 476). Davidson explains this by appeal to a thought experiment involving an English-speaking human, X, teaching a “Saturnian” (i.e., extraterrestrial with no prior experience with the English language) the meaning of the word “floor” ostensibly. Once the Saturnian has an extensional grasp of the meaning of “floor”, it will be insignificant to the Saturnian if at one occasion X uses the word “floor” metaphorically by pointing at something that for the human is literally *not* the floor (Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean” 476).

The Saturnian, in this case, would be at no loss in assuming that this ‘metaphorical’ use of the term floor was, in fact, part of the general meaning of “floor” (i.e., an aspect of the general meaning that the Saturnian had perhaps not yet become accustomed to), and not some *special* or ‘metaphorical’ meaning of it (Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean” 476). Davidson’s point is not to deny that metaphor exists, but rather to argue that metaphor does not rely on some extra-literal semantic meaning. Metaphor is an effect of literal meaning, but it does not derive from the ‘metaphorical’ modification of literal meaning. Another way to put this is to say that when one

grasps the meaning of a metaphor, it is pragmatic factors, rather than semantic ones, that determine this meaning.⁷

Concerning his claim that metaphor holds no cognitive content, Davidson states:

The central error about metaphor is most easily attacked when it takes the form of a theory of metaphorical meaning, but behind that theory, and storable independently, is the thesis that associated with metaphor is a cognitive content that its author wishes to convey and that the interpreter must grasp if he is to get the message. This theory is false, whether or not we call the purported cognitive content a meaning (“What Metaphors Mean” 482).

This assertion denies that metaphor is “a vehicle for conveying ideas, even unusual ones” and, implicit in this, that a metaphorical sentence can have truth-value (Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean” 474). Again, this postulate relies on Davidson’s relegation of metaphor to the domain of use alone. Davidson states, “literal meaning and literal truth conditions” are “instances of genuine explanatory power” because they “can be assigned to words and sentences apart from particular contexts of use” (“What Metaphors Mean” 474). On the other hand, because metaphorical meaning is entirely dependent on pragmatic processes and is thus context dependent, it should not be considered to hold the same capacity for cognitive content as literal meaning.

This does not mean that Davidson rejects that metaphor has value in communication or that it “has a point” (“What Metaphors Mean” 474). His discussion of metaphor is not entirely

⁷ Hereafter, the phrase “metaphorical meaning” will refer to the meaning of a metaphor as elucidated by pragmatic (i.e., non-semantic) processes of interpretation. Due to the interpretive conditions of a metaphor (i.e., the fact that metaphors may require a higher degree of interpretation than everyday statements such as “my cat is on the couch”) there may be numerous potential metaphorical meanings for a single metaphor. For the purposes of my argument, metaphorical meaning will be taken to refer to any or all such meanings in a general fashion.

made up of negative claims. Rather, he affirms that “metaphor is a legitimate device not only in literature, but in science, philosophy and the law: it is effective in praise and abuse, prayer and promotion, description and prescription” (“What Metaphors Mean” 474). However, what makes metaphor *effective* is not that it puts forward cognitive content in the form of a truth-conditional proposition, but rather that it creates effects in its interpreter through its use. As an example of one such possible effect, Davidson argues that metaphors can, like similes, lead an interpreter to look for similarities between two concepts (“What Metaphors Mean” 478). It should be emphasized that, although the comprehension of metaphor requires one to understand the literal meaning of the given metaphorical statement, neither the effectiveness of a metaphor nor the effects that it causes for its interpreter are entirely dependent upon any semantic value. Grasping the literal meaning of a metaphorical statement will not necessarily yield the same effects for different interpreters, or even the same effects for the same interpreter at different times.

The effects that good metaphors cause come about from the “imaginative employment” of the literal meaning of words (“What Metaphors Mean” 474). There is no semantic metaphorical meaning to be harnessed in the words of a metaphorical statement. The only semantic meaning that is available in a linguistic statement is the literal one. Whatever effect is created in the interpreter of a sentence will therefore be exclusively associated to literal meaning and its utilization. If this is the case, then it is obvious that, as Davidson proposes, a metaphor is successful when something in the literal meaning of a statement implies that it ought to be interpreted metaphorically. For Davidson, the existence of a metaphor is usually indicated by a “patent falsehood or an absurd truth” in the literal meaning of a statement (“What Metaphors Mean” 480).

When a person interprets the statement ‘you are my sun’ she realizes that its literal meaning is false: she is not an energy-providing star at the centre of a solar system. From this she moves to a more salient interpretation. She might conceive that, to the speaker of the metaphor, she radiates a kind of energy and that she is the centre of attention, amongst other things. As Davidson states, “Metaphor makes us see one thing as another by making some literal statement that inspires or prompts the insight” (“What Metaphors Mean” 483). It is not that the metaphor itself expresses a meaning or a cognitive content, but rather that the metaphorical statement leads to an interpretation, which, if successful, will lead to the result desired by the speaker. As Davidson states, “Joke or dream or metaphor can, like a picture or a bump on the head, make us appreciate some fact—but not by standing for, or expressing the fact” (“What Metaphors Mean” 482).

The Overlap between Davidson and Black

Davidson’s understanding of metaphor, while not exclusively addressing Black’s interaction theory, has direct relevance to it. His claims about metaphor challenge the view that metaphor holds meaning that can be solely attributed to semantics and that this meaning can be characterized in terms of the given cognitive content that metaphor imparts. Davidson rejects the notion that metaphor involves shifts in the meanings of words by arguing that, semantically speaking, the only meaning available within language is the literal meaning of words and that, consequently, the insight or metaphorical meaning that is arrived at in interpreting a metaphor is

mostly determined by pragmatic factors.⁸ Consequently, a metaphorical interpretation does not have truth-value and, in this sense, it does not yield cognitive content.

While Black and Davidson clearly differ in their view of the importance of semantics and pragmatics in their respective theories (i.e., Black espouses the priority of semantics, whereas Davidson espouses the priority of pragmatics), they hold a similar understanding of the ‘meaning’ or ‘content’ of metaphor. That is, Black’s emphasis on the interpretive conditions of a metaphor, which he misleadingly terms as the cognitive content of a metaphor, has many of the same implications as Davidson’s contention that, although a metaphor does not yield truth-conditional meanings, a good metaphor has effects upon its interpreter. Both Black and Davidson agree that it is the interpretative conditions of a metaphor that imparts the effects of a metaphor. As I argued in Chapter 1, it is Black’s emphasis on interpretative conditions that ultimately undermines his claim that metaphor is primarily a semantic phenomenon. This can be taken as further justification of Davidson’s understanding of metaphor as primarily being pragmatic, and not semantic.

Like Black, Davidson’s commitment to metaphorical meaning as determined by pragmatics leads him to contend that metaphors cannot be adequately paraphrased in literal terms (“What Metaphors Mean” 482-483). Whereas Black claims that the richness of the interpretative conditions of a metaphor cannot be recreated by a literal paraphrase, Davidson argues that a literal paraphrase cannot fully capture the effects of a metaphor because “there is no limit to what a metaphor calls to our attention... When we try to say what a metaphor ‘means’, we soon realize there is no end to what we want to mention” (“What Metaphors Mean” 482). However, Davidson’s understanding of paraphrase is more nuanced than Black’s by allowing the

⁸ Excluding the necessity of being able to interpret the meaning of the literal terms of the given metaphorical statement.

possibility that a paraphrase can be more than an attempt to decode the “hidden message” of a metaphor (“What Metaphors Mean” 483).

He suggests that the “legitimate function of the so-called paraphrase is to makes the lazy or ignorant reader have a vision like that of the skilled critic” (“What Metaphors Mean” 483).

That is, through a legitimate paraphrase the “critic tries to make his own art easier or more transparent in some respects than the original, but at the same time he tries to reproduce in others some of the effects the original had on him” (Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean” 483).

Davidson’s point, however, is that a metaphor’s effects can never be fully recreated through any type of paraphrase, metaphorical or literal, because their variations are potentially infinite due to their reliance upon pragmatic factors (“What Metaphors Mean” 482-483). Although Davidson does not venture further in this direction, it is possible to imagine that a critic might use familiar metaphors in her paraphrase in order to generate some of the potential effects of a more esoteric metaphor.⁹ In fact, in light of his understanding of literal meaning, it seems necessary that a legitimate paraphrase of metaphor must rely on non-literal or creative uses of language.

For Davidson, any attempt to paraphrase a metaphor in a purely literal fashion has little chance of success. Literal meaning is conceived of as a type of meaning that “can be assigned to words and sentences apart from particular contexts of use” (Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean” 474). Because any attempt to provide metaphorical meaning with a literal substitute implies that the effects of a metaphor be pared down to fit the qualifications of literal meaning, the literal version of metaphorical meaning is one in which there is a strong limit to what is brought to mind in its interpretation. According to Davidson, a good metaphor yields limitless interpretation (“What Metaphors Mean” 482-483). In contrast, literal meaning’s functionality is determined by

⁹ This version of paraphrase is similar to that proposed by James W. Manns, which is discussed in chapter 1 (Manns 361).

its ability to yield a relatively fixed meaning that is independent of use (“What Metaphors Mean” 474).¹⁰ Therefore, in order to produce a paraphrase that generates effects that are similar to those of the intended metaphor, one must employ types of language that fall into the domain of use (i.e., non-literal uses of language).¹¹ It would then seem that, in order to achieve the standard of legitimacy put forward by Davidson, the paraphrase of a non-literal meaning must always be undertaken by resorting to non-literal means.

Although this version of paraphrase may seem plausible in some respects, it is clear that in it Davidson relies upon the same problematic distinction between literal and metaphorical meaning held by Black. The strong division that Davidson adopts between the literal and the metaphorical, which is mirrored in his distinction between meaning and use, allows him to affirm (like Black) that metaphors create effects for its interpreters in a way that literal meaning cannot. This leads to the implication that a literal paraphrase cannot fully account for the meaning implicated by the metaphor. I contend that Davidson is not entitled to make such a claim.

Literal and metaphorical uses of language could, in certain cases, have similar interpretative conditions. The aim of this argument is to demonstrate that what was assumed to be exclusive to metaphor (i.e., the potential to elicit esoteric processes of interpretation) was, in fact, a general attribute of all language use, including language use that remained solely at the level of literal meaning. Because of the links that I have established between Black’s conception of metaphorical content and Davidson’s pragmatic view of metaphorical meaning, this argument also applies to Davidson.

¹⁰ As mentioned above, Davidson locates metaphor in the domain of use and designates literal meaning and literal truth-conditions as exclusively belonging to the domain of meaning (“What Metaphors Mean” 474).

¹¹ Davidson includes metaphor production, assertion, hinting, lying, promising, and criticizing in the category of language that relies primarily on use. These are also all considered non-literal uses of language (“What Metaphors Mean” 480).

This move might seem initially dubious because Davidson defines literal meaning and literal truth conditions as being insensitive to contexts of use (“What Metaphors Mean” 474). In doing so, Davidson seems to guard against the notion that, given knowledge of the relevant literal meanings of terms, one could interpret the meaning of a literal statement as being anything but transparent. In this sense, apart from the direct comprehension of the given statement, it has little pragmatic effect upon its interpreter. In contrast, when one successfully interprets a metaphor one might, amongst numerous other possibilities, be led to look for similarities between two concepts or one might be directed to investigate a certain aspect of a given phenomenon. The implication of Davidson’s characterization of literal meaning seems to be that when one correctly interprets a literal statement one directly grasps its content, including its truth-value, without any intermediary steps.

If Davidson’s assessment of literal meaning is correct, then it seems that literal statements (interpreted literally) are not shaped by the interpretive factors that condition metaphors and other non-literal uses of language. The purpose of my argument in chapter 1, however, is to demonstrate that such conceptions of literal meaning are, in fact, problematic. Some literal statements can yield similar pragmatic effects as metaphors. While there may be some literal statements, such as “there is a cat on the mat” that seem to abide by Davidson’s constrained version of literal meaning, it seems that most of what is considered to be literal language, like much of philosophy or science, tends to be context-sensitive in some way and, furthermore, tends to create effects similar to those produced by metaphors. As an example of how even a typical literal statement might generate interpretive effects due to its context sensitivity, imagine a case in which two students haphazardly meet on campus.

Student A: Are you busy?

Student B: I have to write an essay.

While the statement uttered by student B seems to fit Davidson's criteria of literalness, this is not in fact the case. That is, in order for this statement to make sense within the context, Student A has to infer that Student B has to write an essay in the near future and not in twenty years. The process leading to this inference is not implied by the literal meanings of the terms, and therefore cannot be considered as part of the literal meaning of the statement in Davidson's sense. Whereas Davidson's limited conception of literal meaning might be suited to deal with formal semantics, it obviously flies in the face of what most would view as literal meaning within the use of language. The simple inference that Student B has to write an essay in the near future, which is dependent upon the context of Student B's utterance, fits what is ordinarily understood as literal meaning in terms of language use.¹² If it did not, then most of sentences used by the average person would have to be considered non-literal.

However one approaches Davidson's conception of literal meaning, it remains problematic. On the one hand, if one assumes that Davidson is dealing with language use, his conception of literal meaning is shown to be too limited to manage literal meaning as it seems to ordinarily in language use. On the other hand, assuming the possibility that Davidson is concerned with the issue of formal semantics (a much more suitable area for his version of literal meaning), then the issue of metaphor is irrelevant, owing to the fact that he locates metaphor solely in the "domain of use," which is not a concern for formal languages ("What Metaphors Mean" 474).

¹² The question of whether other implications of the given statement, such as the implication that Student B implies that he is busy, should be included into literal meaning will be addressed in chapter 3. The point is that at least some pragmatic effects need to be allowed into the 'domain of meaning', in order for a conception of literal meaning to be compatible with language use.

In order for literal meaning to be relevant to language use, it has to be allowed that it can yield similar interpretative effects as those caused by metaphor. However, if this is the case, then both the distinction between literal and metaphorical language and the distinction between meaning and use become blurred. What separates metaphor from literal language for both Davidson and Black is that metaphor has effects on its interpreters beyond the minimal ones caused by the interpretation of the literal meaning of terms and the rules of language. With this separation shown to be dubious, the most Davidson and Black can legitimately distinguish between are statements that require a high degree of interpretation and those that require a low degree of interpretation.

What Davidson's discussion of metaphor provides that Black's does not is an analysis of the importance of pragmatics in any account of metaphor. While Davidson's version of literal meaning is dubious, his argument that many uses of language rely heavily on non-semantic factors provides an apt characterization of why the meaning of metaphor is so difficult, if not impossible, to explain. His refusal to postulate any necessary types of effects in relation to metaphor indicates his awareness of the dependence of any such effects upon the contextual situation in which a metaphor is interpreted. The effects of metaphor are contingent upon the contexts in which they arise. My point, however, is that this contingency permeates all types of language in various ways, and not simply metaphor and other non-literal instance of language use.

Davidson's Later View: First Meaning and the Order of Interpretation

In "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," an article that was published eight years after "What Metaphors Mean," Davidson puts forward an updated conception of literal meaning that

takes into account some of the contextual factors that I argue affect all language. He comes to this conception of literal meaning by examining instances of language use in which meaning is successfully conveyed despite the fact that the interpreter does not previously know or have any experience with the words used to express this meaning (“Nice Derangement” 588). Davidson argues that “our ability to perceive a well-formed sentence when the actual utterance was incomplete or grammatically garbled, our ability to interpret words we have never heard before, to correct slips of the tongue, or to cope with new idiolects” challenge “standard descriptions of linguistic competence (including descriptions for which I am responsible)” (“Nice Derangement” 588).

Davidson focuses on malapropisms as prime examples of expressions that “are not covered by prior learning,” but which are nevertheless successfully interpreted to have literal meaning (“Nice Derangement” 588). For example, assuming that a linguistic interpreter is competent and is familiar with the relevant information, it is likely that she will interpret the statement ‘There are three main tenants of vegetarianism’ as meaning ‘There are three main tenets of vegetarianism’ on her “first hearing” (Davidson, “Nice Derangement” 588). For Davidson, this means that the literal meaning of the parent utterance is ‘There are three main tenets of vegetarianism’. In gleaning this meaning from the erroneous parent statement the interpreter cannot fully rely on the lexical meanings of the words of the statement or on the established rules of language, but must rather appeal to various extra-linguistic factors, such as the context in which the utterance was made and who uttered it (“Nice Derangement” 591). Such instances of language use indicate that literal meaning is not “*governed by learned conventions or regularities,*” but is rather dependent upon various contextual factors (“Nice Derangement”

587, 594). Therefore, it is Davidson's aim to "pry apart what is literal in language from what is conventional or established" ("Nice Derangement" 586).

For Davidson, the traditional understanding of literal meaning, which treats literal meaning as being contextually insensitive, relies on three assumptions concerning human communication and linguistic competence ("Nice Derangement" 587). The first assumption is that literal meaning is "systematic," which implies that an interpreter is able to acquire meaning from linguistic statements "on the basis of the semantic properties of the parts, or words, in the utterance, and the structure of the utterance" ("Nice Derangement" 587). The second is that literal meaning is "shared" in the sense that interlocutors must have an overlapping understanding of meaning in order to comprehend each other. And the third is that literal meaning is conventional in that it requires interlocutors to possess a conventional and shared system of meaning prior to instances of communication ("Nice Derangement" 587).¹³

While Davidson affirms the first two assumptions of the traditional conception of literal meaning, he believes that the third cannot be maintained in light of the possibility that meaning can be derived from non-conventional uses of language, such as malapropism ("Nice Derangement" 589). Despite his rejection of the traditional picture of literal language, Davidson does not deny the possibility that there are instances of communication in which it *seems* that meaning is conventionally determined ("Nice Derangement" 586). For example, when an English audience watches a movie in which every statement uttered fits the known rules of language and every word is found in the English dictionary, it seems absurd to deny that literal meaning is the result of convention. However, Davidson believes that, if one seriously takes into

¹³ Hereafter, the term communication will refer to all instances of linguistic communication (i.e., verbal and written). While Davidson generally writes about communication in terms of speech, he acknowledges that his theory of first meaning also applies to written communication ("Locating Literary Language" 173, 177, "James Joyce" 143, 152).

account language use and curbs one's desire to convert natural language into a formal system, the idea of traditional literal meaning is highly implausible. Davidson's point is not that we do not have conventions, but rather that these conventions are neither necessary nor apt to explain literal meaning in language use. It is Davidson's aim to provide an explanation of literal meaning that can account for the existence of the multitudes of different linguistic utterances that are generally taken to have meaning, including malapropisms.

In order to distance his discussion from the traditional notion of meaning, which he once held, Davidson terms his updated version of literal meaning "first meaning" ("Nice Derangement" 586). Highlighting the contextual character of first meaning he states, "The concept [first meaning] applies to words and sentences as uttered by a particular speaker on a particular occasion" ("Nice Derangement" 585). He states that first meaning is "first in the order of interpretation" (Davidson, "Nice Derangement" 585). By stating this, Davidson is not suggesting that an interpreter may legitimately designate any arbitrary thought that comes into his mind while interpreting a statement the first meaning of the given statement. Rather, the interpreter must correlate first meaning with what he can determine about the author's intention.¹⁴ This process of correlation requires that the interpreter appeal to various contextual factors that may affect or explain the author's intention. An interpretation is therefore successful when the first meaning assumed by the interpreter coincides with the first meaning intended by the author ("Nice Derangement" 587). A successful interpretation implies that interlocutors, for the time of the interpretive event, share a systematic knowledge of the first meaning of the given statement.

¹⁴ Like in Chapter 1, the term 'author' refers to both producers of written and verbal statements.

Some critics have argued that the fact that interlocutors can share an understanding of first meaning is evidence for a conventional system of literal meaning. Along these lines, Karen Green claims, “Speakers need to acquire a knowledge of a sufficient portion of this public entity [conventional system of literal meaning] to be counted as speakers of the language, and in order to be ascribed intentions to express precise beliefs” (Green 253). If two people with different non-conventionally grounded systems of literal meaning encounter each other it seems that linguistic communication is doomed to failure because they are speaking two different languages. One interlocutor means ‘dog’ by ‘dog’, while the other means ‘building’ by ‘dog’.

To neutralize this objection, Davidson brings forward his notion of “*prior theory*” and “*passing theory*” (“Nice Derangement” 592). Davidson’s contention is that every interlocutor has an individual theory of linguistic practices at work prior to and during linguistic communication (“Nice Derangement” 591). He does not mean that language users have a conscious, clear and principled understanding of their own linguistic practices, but rather that they operate in linguistic communication in such a way that it is possible to attribute a theory to their linguistic practices. In communication interlocutors rely on their formerly acquired knowledge of linguistic practices in order to convey or grasp meaning (“Nice Derangement” 592). Interlocutors come to situations of communication with a prepared understanding of how communication is to be undertaken. This prepared understanding is what Davidson refers to as one’s “*prior theory*” (“Nice Derangement” 592). It should be emphasized that prior theories are not based on a conventionally determined understanding of communication, but are rather characterized by the individual interlocutor’s previous linguistic experience, which may include communication according to a conventional scheme of meaning.

When communicating, interlocutors cannot solely rely upon their prior theories if they desire to relay and acquire accurate meaningful sentences. This is owing to the fact that each individual interlocutor potentially has a prior theory that is different from those held by all other interlocutors (“Nice Derangement” 593). Consequently, as interlocutors communicate they must each construct a passing theory that acts as a compromise position between differing prior theories (“Nice Derangement” 592). It is upon this compromise that shared first meaning can arise. In order to form a passing theory, each interlocutor, whether they are the author or interpreter of an utterance, must make an attempt to infer as best as they can the prior theories of their fellow interlocutors (“Nice Derangement” 591).

Davidson contends that one comes to an adequate understanding of their interlocutor’s prior theory by assessing various contextual factors that are pertinent to the given communicative instance. In communication “the interpreter’s theory has been adjusted to the evidence so far available to him: knowledge of the character, dress, role, sex of the speaker, and whatever else has been gained by observing the speaker’s behaviour” (Davidson, “Nice Derangement” 591). Although this statement is directed at the interpreter, the assessment of contextual factors applies equally to the author’s ability to communicate the meaning he intends to convey (“Nice Derangement” 591-592). Davidson states:

The speaker wants to be understood, so he intends to speak in such a way that he be interpreted in a certain way. In order to judge how he will be interpreted, he forms, or uses, a picture of the interpreter’s readiness to interpret along certain lines. Central to this picture is what the speaker believes is the starting theory of interpretation the interpreter has for him...it is an important part of what he has to go on if he wants to be understood (“Nice Derangement” 591).

For successful communication to occur, both authors and interpreters must adapt their prior theories according to relevant contextual factors. While the author adjusts her theory in a way that, to her knowledge, best conveys her intended meaning, the interpreter adjusts his theory in a way that, to his knowledge, will best capture the intended meaning of the author. Because every person has an idiosyncratic prior theory, neither author nor interpreter will necessarily permanently adopt within their own prior theories the adjustments required to communicate successfully in one particular situation. Because these modifications are essentially temporary and determined by contingent contextual factors, Davidson collectively refers to them as an interlocutor's "passing theory" ("Nice Derangement" 592).

As an example of how prior theory and passing theory might function, take the case in which an author's prior theory makes the statement 'To all intensive porpoises, this sentence is a horrible plague on words' mean 'To all intents and purposes, this sentence is a horrible play on words'. Let it be assumed that in this particular situation the interpreter's prior theory does not coincide with the author's. Rather, according to the interpreter's prior theory 'To all intensive porpoises, this sentences is a horrible plague on words' means "'To all intensive porpoises, this sentences is a horrible plague on words'".

For the author's intended meaning to be successfully conveyed to the interpreter both participants have to adjust their prior theories for optimal communication. In this case, however, the author will be assumed to be incompetent, and therefore her intended meaning 'To all intents and purposes, this sentence is a horrible play on words' will be conveyed in the way as it was originally formulated in her prior theory. Assuming that the interpreter is competent, which might involve the ability to detect the author's incompetence, he will adjust his prior theory to fit the circumstances. Therefore, according to the interpreter's passing theory 'To all intensive

porpoises, this sentence is a horrible plague on words' will mean 'To all intents and purposes, this sentence is a horrible play on words'.

In the above example the intended meaning of the author was successfully conveyed primarily due to the adaptive skills of the interpreter. However, one can imagine cases in which the opposite was true. Moreover, it is possible that in many situations both the author and interpreter demonstrate a competence at adjusting their prior theories. In contrast, communication can fail when there is an inadequate adjustment of prior theories on the part of the author and/or the interpreter. Davidson's contention is that successful communication and the development of an adequate passing theory is more reliant upon interlocutors' abilities to adjust prior theories than the content of the prior theories themselves (e.g., conventional systems of meaning).

Davidson's discussion of prior and passing theories denies the claim, put forward by Karen Green and others, that successful communication necessarily relies on a systematic, shared, and prepared framework of literal meaning. When interlocutors share meaning it is due to the adjustments that they have made to form suitable passing theories and not to the fact that each interlocutor came to the discussion with a prepared and conventionally established version of literal language. That being said, it is obvious that if one lived in a community in which everyone was exposed to a similar conventional version of literal language, there would be a great deal of overlap in prior theories. Successful communication in such a community would, in most cases, be greatly facilitated by this overlap. Davidson obviously admits this possibility (it is the situation that most humans find themselves in), but rejects both the notion that conventional literal language is necessary for shared meaning and the notion that most communication relies solely on conventional literal language ("Nice Derangement" 586, 594-595).

Although an author may use conventional literal language to convey meanings, first meaning is not bound to such conventions. Furthermore, Davidson's emphasis on the contextual basis of meaning precludes the possibility of having a communicative intention that is purely conventionally determined. In relation to this implication, it might be objected that certain statements in certain situations seem to hold meaning in and of themselves (i.e., they do not require an appeal to contextual factors). For example, in order to understand the meaning of the statement 'There is a cat on the mat' it seems that an interpreter only requires knowledge of the conventional meanings of the involved terms and that no adjustment of the prior theory is necessary, assuming that both the author and interpreter are employing the relevant conventional meanings in the same way. However, because the author and the interpreter have no way of knowing each other's prior theory prior to communication, there is at the very least a minimal amount of assessment to be made on the part of both interlocutors.

To this last remark it might be further objected that there exist situations in which the author and the interpreter know each other well enough to grasp, prior to communication, that they both generally speak in a fashion that abides by conventions of the English language (i.e., the relevant lexicon and grammatical rules). If this is the case then it seems that an assessment of prior theory is unnecessary and that the meaning of the statement is derived entirely from the domain of convention. Therefore, the argument might be made that while some meanings are context dependent, there are nonetheless those that stand-alone; it is these latter meanings that legitimately constitute literal meaning.

There are two problems with this conclusion. Firstly, there is the problem of determining how conventional literal meaning was originally established and continues to change. It is undeniable that pragmatic processes are involved in the formation of any shared system of

meaning. Furthermore, it seems equally undeniable that such processes are involved when conventional systems are modified (e.g., when lexicons adapt their contents to technological progress). Assuming that interpreters and authors rely upon convention to the maximum possible extent in certain cases of communication, it nevertheless seems necessary that they be capable of adapting to possible conventional anomalies or modifications if the circumstances arise (e.g., in the case of someone accidentally saying ‘handburger’ instead of ‘hamburger’ or in the case of a new word permanently being added to conventional linguistic practices).

The second problem with the claim that some meanings are insensitive to context due to their adherence to convention is that it maintains a strict and incoherent division between meaning and use. The problem with this division is discussed above in relation to Davidson’s early position concerning literal meaning. The difference between statements that seem insensitive to context and those that are context dependent is a difference in degree and not a difference in kind. More specifically, all statements are subject to contextual factors to varying degrees. Statements like ‘there is a cat on a mat’ depend less on contextual factors in most situations than statements like ‘There is a strange creature over there’.

Davidson clearly supports the claim that all language is context-dependent when he states that there is no “boundary between knowing a language and knowing the world” (“Nice Derangement” 594). Because of this, Davidson argues that, even in cases in which all interlocutors are aware that their communicative partners have prior theories comparable to their own, contextual factors are at work (“Nice Derangement” 594, 592). Although these people may have overlapped in their prior theories, such as in the case that both share the same general conventional language, other elements will most often not overlap and will not be known to both people prior to communication (“Nice Derangement” 593). Therefore, all communication

involves adjustments to one's own prior theory. As Davidson states, "We inhibit our higher vocabulary, or encourage it, depending on the most general considerations, and we cannot fail to have premonitions as to which of the proper names we know are apt to be correctly understood" ("Nice Derangement" 593). While a successful communication may come more easily in some cases, it nevertheless depends on the formation of an adequate passing theory, which cannot be conventionally determined ("Nice Derangement" 594).

First Meaning and the Interpretation of Metaphor

Without the possibility of making a strict distinction between meaning and use, the distinction between literal and non-literal also becomes blurred. If literal meaning is properly conceived of as first meaning, then what is non-literal cannot be defined by merely stating that it involves pragmatic processes. Rather, what is literal is designated as the meaning that comes first in the order of interpretation when the interpreter has successfully interpreted the author's intended meaning. For Davidson, this implies that numerous statements that do not count as having a conventionally determined literal meaning (e.g. malapropisms) have first meaning. This seemingly indicates that some metaphors can be understood as having a first meaning that is not based upon conventional literal meaning. Furthermore, it seems plausible to assume that Davidson's rejection of the claim that conventional literal meaning is necessarily first meaning, which strongly determines his early view of metaphor, leads to a strong reconsideration of his overall understanding of metaphor. However, this is not entirely the case.

Although successful communication relies on at least one author and one interpreter, the first meaning of a statement is dependent upon the author's intention "to speak words that will be assigned a certain meaning by an interpreter" (Davidson "Locating Literary Language" 173).

However, beyond the intention of having a specific meaning linked to a specific utterance, Davidson identifies two other types of intention that an author must hold when making a statement (“Locating Literary Language” 170-171). Firstly, all statements are intended by the author to be taken by the interpreter as having a certain “force” (“Locating Literary Language” 171). The force of a statement is meant to indicate whether a given statement is to be taken as “an assertion, or command, a joke or question, a pledge or insult” (“Locating Literary Language” 171). Moreover, it will significantly affect how an interpreter responds to an author. For example, whether one interprets the statement ‘Fire!’ (which in this context has ‘there is a fire’ as its first meaning) as an assertion or a joke will lead to very different results.

Secondly, there are also intentions that Davidson categorizes as “ulterior” because they are not necessarily made explicit by a grasp of first meaning and they “in principle could be achieved by non-linguistic means” (“Locating Literary Language” 171). For example, when an author states that ‘this country needs change’ her ulterior intention might be that she wants her audience to perceive her as a good political candidate. In some cases these ulterior intentions will be deliberately made explicit by the author, while in other cases such intentions will be deliberately dissimulated. While a salesperson may state ‘this seems like the perfect car for you’, he will usually dissimulate his ulterior intention of wanting to make a profit. Davidson’s underlying point is that all language is used for one reason or another, whether it is for direct material gains or personal entertainment. He states, “Using language is not a game: it is never an end in itself” (“Locating Literary Language” 171).

In outlining these two other types of intention, which will henceforth be collectively described as secondary meanings, Davidson provides first meaning with a boundary. In this sense, first meaning is restricted so that it applies only the “strictly semantic intentions” of the

author, and not the subsequent implications of such intentions (“Locating Literary Language” 171, 173). The purpose of first meaning is that it allows Davidson the possibility of treating statements as having meanings that are contextually determined without having to include every contextually related element associated with the statement (e.g., ulterior intentions or even intentions of force) into these meanings (“Locating Literary Language” 174). It should not be construed that first meaning is based upon a merely stipulative distinction. First meaning is the necessary starting point for linguistic inquiry. Davidson states, “First meaning is first in two related aspects: it comes first in the order of the speaker’s or writer’s semantic intentions, and it is the necessary basis for all further investigations into what words, as used on an occasion, mean” (“Locating Literary Language” 173).

According to Davidson’s revised understanding of literal meaning, a metaphor cannot count as a first meaning because its metaphorical meaning (i.e., its effects) does not come first in the order of interpretation (“Locating Literary Language” 173). He argues that in coming to understand the metaphorical statement “the eye of heaven” one must first grasp “the ordinary meanings” of the terms before one can move to assess that “eye of heaven” actually refers to the sun (“Locating Literary Language” 173). Davidson contends, “We may wish to use the word ‘meaning’ for both the first meaning and what the metaphor carries us to, but only the first meaning has a systematic place in the language of the author” (“Locating Literary Language” 173). Clarifying the status of metaphorical meaning, Davidson states, “In my essay ‘What Metaphors Mean’... I was foolishly stubborn about the word meaning when all I cared about was the primacy of first meaning” (“Locating Literary Language” 173, fn 7). Davidson therefore supports the notion of metaphorical meaning as long as it is clear that it is secondary. Metaphor interpretation is necessarily, by Davidson’s definition, at least a two-step process.

Davidson admits that other linguistic phenomena, such as malapropisms, deviate from ‘ordinary meaning’ and are considered as being part of the first meaning of a statement. Because malapropisms are “sheer invention,” an interpreter cannot facilitate his interpretation of such statements by “looking in the dictionary” (Davidson, “James Joyce” 143). Rather, to understand a malapropism, one must directly “grasp what she [the author] intends” (“James Joyce” 143). Therefore, the lack of available conventionally based linguistic resources determines how a statement can directly express first meaning (i.e., whether or not first meaning will coincide with conventional meaning). This seems to fit with Davidson’s characterization of metaphor as “wholly dependent on the usual meanings of words, however fresh and astonishing the thought it is used to express” (“James Joyce” 143).

It is obvious that, although Davidson concedes that metaphor can be said to hold secondary meaning, his early approach to metaphor is largely intact. When one is faced with a metaphor, Davidson contends, it is necessary that one must first resort to a conventionally based understanding of literal meaning. Only then can one move to more fruitful interpretations of the metaphorical meaning of the given statement. In terms of prior/passing theories, a metaphorical meaning necessarily cannot factor into the passing theory that leads to successful communication. The only meaning related to the metaphor that is shared by the passing theories of interlocutors is the conventional meaning of the terms of the statement.

Problems with Davidson’s Revised Conception of Metaphor

Despite challenging the coherence of traditional meaning and conceiving of first meaning as being significantly dependent on the author’s intentions and other contextual factors, Davidson nonetheless problematically relies on a distinction between literal meaning (as

conventionally determined) and non-literal meaning to explain his account of metaphor. Green has noticed this tension, and argues that one can either accept the account of literal meaning presented in “What Metaphors Mean,” in which case metaphors are conceived of as thoroughly non-literal, or one can accept the account of literal/first meaning presented in “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs,” in which case metaphors can be incorporated to the literal (Green 241). One cannot accept both. While Green picks the former option, I contend that the latter one is more accurate: metaphorical meaning can be considered, given the right circumstances, as part of first meaning. That is, metaphorical meaning can be the meaning that is first grasped in the order of interpretation.

Davidson’s view that the comprehension of metaphor depends on the comprehension of the conventionally established understandings of the given terms, while the comprehension of malapropism does not, is problematic. It seems that malapropisms, at least intelligible ones, *do*, in fact, depend on the ordinary meanings of the terms in a comparable manner as metaphors. Although some malapropisms might not rely on the use of any conventional meaning, only an author who is either totally incompetent or uninterested in successful communication would utter such statements. In his discussion of James Joyce, Davidson acknowledges some implications of this fact. He states, “Joyce’s way of resolving the tension between invention and tradition is in a way obvious; like any writer he must depend on the knowledge his readers are able to bring to his writings” (“James Joyce” 152).

The successful communication of a malapropism, whether intentional or not, depends on the ability of both author and interpreter to adjust their prior theories. This adjustment can only take place provided that the author has given enough clues of his own prior theory for the interpreter. An author, like Joyce, who commits malapropisms intentionally will purposely leave

indications and hints as to what their first meaning consists of. For example, Davidson discusses how Joyce often uses similarity in sound to ensure the success of a malapropism (“James Joyce” 152).

While an author who unintentionally utters a malapropism exhibits a certain degree of incompetence, such an utterance does not forfeit all interpretive clues. An author with any degree of competence will at least attempt to adjust her prior theory so that it fits with what she thinks is the prior theory of her interpreter (Davidson, “Nice Derangement” 591-592). For example, if the given author thinks that the interpreter is part of a community that speaks English she will try to tailor her statements to fit the English language, as she knows it. Even if her statement ends up being ‘no test for the bleary’ there is a likely chance, given that the interpreter is appropriately competent, that successful communication will ensue. Due to the high degree of indeterminacy in communication, there is no absolute way to guarantee successful communication (“Nice Derangement” 592). However, as Davidson acknowledges, malapropisms depend on clues, most often including ones based upon conventional language, in order to be intelligible (“James Joyce” 152).

Davidson’s standard example of how first meaning can deviate from conventional meaning is malapropism. Because malapropism is in many instances dependent upon conventional meaning in order to be intelligible this seemingly has significant implications for his treatment of metaphor. Namely, this indicates that metaphor’s reliance upon conventional meaning should not affect whether or not its meaning can be given the status of first meaning, given the right circumstances. It should be noted that this claim ought not to be construed as implicitly reaffirming adherence to conventional meaning for communication. As discussed above and in Chapter 1, such an adherence implies that literal meaning is to be taken as being

insensitive to contextual factors. First meaning/literal meaning, although partially relying on conventional meanings to facilitate communication, does not require strict adherence to them. As Davidson demonstrated, a properly conceived version of literal meaning must necessarily allow contextual factors to determine, at varying degrees, the meaning of statements.

Concluding Remarks

Davidson's early analysis of metaphor, while reliant upon the same troublesome distinctions that plague Black's account, demonstrates the importance of the role that pragmatic factors play in the interpretation of metaphor. Although Black's understanding of metaphor implies Davidson's conclusion, he obfuscates this fact by locating metaphor primarily in the realm of semantics. Because Davidson rejects the semantic route in explaining metaphor, he avoids making Black's unjustifiable claim that metaphor leads to changes in the meanings of the words at the semantic level. Rather, Davidson suggests that, due to the high degree of contextual sensitivity involved in metaphor, it is difficult to postulate any necessary effects caused by all metaphors.

Davidson's later conception of metaphor does not greatly differ from his early one. However, in his later view he employs an updated conception of literal meaning that acknowledges the contextual dependence of all language use. With this change, Davidson's theory of literal meaning sheds any likeness that it once had to Black's conception. In doing this, Davidson's new problem becomes to explain how meaningful communication can occur, given that meaning is contextually sensitive. This leads Davidson to posit prior and passing theories. Successful communication is now seen as hinging on the abilities of interlocutors to adjust their idiosyncratic linguistic practices to fit the given situation. This picture of communication enables

Davidson to treat instances of language that do not fit a conventional schema as nevertheless holding meaning. In this sense, Davidson brings his theory of communication in line with language use.

Despite these positive points, Davidson's account of metaphor is also problematic in both of its forms. Regarding his early account, his conception of literal meaning, like Black, is too constrained. Although he approaches metaphor with an updated version of literal meaning in his later account, he nonetheless maintains a strong distinction between metaphorical and literal meaning. This latter treatment of metaphor, however, is inconsistent with his understanding of literal meaning as first meaning. If one approaches, as Davidson suggests, the division between meaning and use as illusory, then metaphorical meaning should, in some cases, accord with first meaning. This implies that when one interprets a metaphor, one does not necessarily first notice the blatant falsity of the literal terms and only then move on to a more salient interpretation. Rather, in some cases, given the right interpretive clues and adjustments, one can come to metaphorical meaning first in the order of interpretation. Therefore, metaphor can be considered a legitimate candidate for literal meaning. This approach to metaphor is sometimes termed as a direct expression or a contextualist view of metaphor.

The contextualist view of metaphor is based on its characterization of literal meaning, which in many ways resembles Davidson's understanding of first meaning. Like Davidson, contextualists approach literal meaning as something that is necessarily determined by contextual/pragmatic factors. In relation to this, François Recanati, a proponent of contextualism, contends that "the contrast between what the speaker means and what she literally says is illusory, and the notion of 'what the sentence says' incoherent" (*Literal Meaning* 4). However, unlike Davidson, contextualists approach metaphor as being, in some cases, part of literal

meaning. They come to this view by closely analyzing the various contextually determined aspects of what is normally considered to be literal meaning and, consequently, establishing that in many cases metaphor interpretation is similar to literal interpretation. This analysis and its implications will be discussed in chapter three.

In chapter one I argued for the necessity of treating metaphorical meaning as being determined by pragmatic factors. In this chapter I have demonstrated that literal meaning is also conditioned by such factors. Moreover, in opposition to Davidson, I contend that the fact that literal meaning is contextually sensitive allows for metaphorical meaning to be considered, in certain cases, as literal meaning. Having argued for the possibility of the inclusion of metaphorical meaning into literal meaning, it will be necessary to examine in closer detail how this is, in fact, the case. I will undertake this line of inquiry in the next chapter by analyzing some of the arguments put forward by Recanati.

CHAPTER THREE: CONTEXTUALISM AND METAPHOR

If metaphorical meaning is to be considered a legitimate candidate for literal meaning, it must be demonstrated that metaphorical meaning can be interpreted much in the same way as other generally accepted instances of literal meaning. More specifically, it must be shown that metaphorical meaning can be grasped first in the order of interpretation. François Recanati, a self-proclaimed adherent of contextualism, argues that literal meaning is context sensitive. In order for a statement to have meaning, interpreters (and authors) must necessarily appeal to pragmatic factors. Consequently, the distinction between literal and non-literal meaning does not rest upon whether or not a statement relies on contextual factors. Rather, Recanati contends that literal meaning requires a one-step process of interpretation (i.e., literal meaning arrives first in the order of interpretation) whereas non-literal meaning requires a two-step process of interpretation (i.e., non-literal meaning is grasped by an inferential process subsequent to the initial interpretation of the literal meaning of a statement). Although this approach to literal meaning bears a strong resemblance to Davidson's conception of first meaning, Recanati argues that metaphors *can* be comprehended according to a one-step process of interpretation, and can therefore be considered to be legitimate candidates for literal meaning.

In order to arrive at this conclusion, Recanati provides a useful analysis of some of the pragmatic processes that guide the interpretation of statements. While he demonstrates that in some cases the inclusion of contextual elements is required by the rules of language, he argues that in most instances the incorporation of contextual elements is not "linguistically mandated" (Recanati 23). In most cases of communication, it is contextual factors that determine how statements will be interpreted. In this sense, Recanati argues that interpretation is highly determined by "world knowledge" (Recanati 37).

Despite arguing for the importance of contextual factors in the generation of literal meaning, Recanati does not seriously consider the possibility that metaphor may be non-literal. While I am sympathetic to Recanati's inclusion of metaphor in literal meaning, I contend that there are situations in which metaphor can be taken as non-literal. I will demonstrate that all types of meaning may legitimately be considered as either literal or non-literal, depending on the given circumstances of interpretation. In this sense, the classification of statements according to the categories of literal and non-literal is based upon probability rather than necessity.

Recanati's Conception of Literal Meaning and the Place of Metaphor

Recanati examines two versions of literal meaning before introducing his own. The first corresponds to what Davidson identifies as conventional meaning. Recanati states, "Literal meaning is a property of the expression-type; for it is the expression which the conventions of a language endow with a particular meaning" (Recanati 68). He terms this version of literal meaning "*t*-literal meaning" (*t* stands for type). According to this view, any meaning that relies on contextual factors qualifies as non-literal (i.e., *t*-non-literal meaning). Recanati argues that most statements that are considered "*t*-non-literal" are nonetheless literal in the "ordinary sense" (68-69). For example, according to the *t*-literal view of meaning the statement 'He wants to try that video-game', which relies on various contextual elements (e.g., who is 'he'?), would have to be considered non-literal. However, it seems that this statement is ordinarily understood as being an expression of literal meaning. For Recanati, the criterion of context insensitivity for literal meaning is too limited to account for literal meaning in language use. He states, "When we speak of 'non-literalness', in the ordinary sense, we mean that what is meant departs from *t*-

literal meaning in a fairly specific way. Not any old departure from *t*-literal meaning adds up to non-literalness in the ordinary sense” (Recanati 69).

The second version of literal meaning that Recanati discusses allows that literal meaning “departs from the conventional meaning of the sentence (and incorporates contextual elements) *only when this is necessary to ‘complete’ the meaning of the sentence and make it propositional*” (7). Certain terms in a statement may, according to the rules of language, require the input of contextual factors in order to be rendered meaningful; only when such terms have been provided with the required contextual elements can the given statement, within which these terms are located, be considered meaningful (69). For example, the literal meaning of the sentence “He wants a turn on that video-game” rests upon determining, through reference to extra- or intra-linguistic contextual elements, the content of the indexical ‘he’. Statements of this kind appeal to more than *t*-literal meaning, but nonetheless rely on *t*-literalness. Recanati states, “In interpreting indexical sentences, we go beyond what the conventions of the language give us, but *that step beyond is still governed by the conventions of the language*” (Recanati 69). In this sense, “the departure from *t*-literal meaning is therefore predetermined by *t*-literal meaning” (Recanati 69). Since literal meaning in this view involves “minimal departures from *t*-literal meaning,” Recanati refers to it as “*m*-literal meaning” (*m* stands for minimal) (70).

According to *m*-literal meaning, what qualifies as non-literal (i.e., non-*m*-literal meaning) is anything that involves a departure from conventional meaning that is non-minimal (i.e., a departure that is not governed by the rules of the given language) (Recanati 69-70). For example, Sarah says to Jen, ‘This café is crowded’, with the intention of implying that they should leave the café. Because there is no convention in language determining that the statement ‘This café is crowded’ means ‘Let’s leave this café’, the implication cannot be considered as part of *m*-literal

meaning. Rather, the *m*-literal meaning of the given statement involves only the rules of language, the meanings of the given words and the relevant contextual elements designated by the rules of language. While Recanati affirms that conversational implicatures ought to be considered instances of non-literalness, he contends that, like *t*-literalness, *m*-literal meaning cannot cope with literal meaning in language use (69-70). He argues, “Not all cases of *m*-non-literalness...count as ‘non-literal’ in the ordinary sense” (Recanati 70).

Recanati uses the statement ‘They got married and had many children’ as representing an instance in which the meaning of the statement is *m*-non-literal, but should nonetheless be considered as literal (72). He suggests that most interlocutors would interpret this sentence “as depicting a situation in which marriage took place before the coming of children” (Recanati 72). The given sentence is interpreted as ‘They got married and (then) had many children’. However this meaning cannot be attributed to *t*- or *m*-literalness. The ‘then’ implied by the statement is “not something that the *t*-literal meaning of the sentence forces an interpreter to specify” (Recanati 72). In order to accommodate such instances of literal meaning, Recanati introduces his own version of literal meaning, which he terms “*p*-literal meaning” (*p* stands for primary) (Recanati 71-72).

P-literal meaning is roughly equivalent to Davidson’s notion of first meaning. It is the meaning that comes first in the order of interpretation. In this sense, the comprehension of *p*-literal meaning is characterized as whatever meaning is arrived at by a “one-step procedure” of “sense modulation” (Recanati 74). For Recanati, sense modulation is a process undertaken by interpreters *during* the interpretation of a statement in which the words of a given statement are adjusted according to various contextual factors (131, 133). This process can be likened to Davidson’s notion of interlocutors adjusting their prior theories to achieve successful

communication. As an example of sense modulation, Recanati states that, depending on the contextual situation, the statement ‘Cut the grass’ can be either modulated as meaning that one should mow the grass with the lawn mower or that one should actually cut the grass into strips (133). The point of sense modulation is that in interpreting statements one does not first interpret *t*-literal or *m*-literal meaning and only then move on to fit the statement’s meaning with the contextual situation. Rather, contextual elements are brought into play during the initial stage of interpretation.

What qualifies as non-literal according to *p*-literalness (i.e., *p*-non-literalness) is whatever meaning that requires a “two-step procedure” in order to be grasped (Recanati 74). *P*-non-literal meaning is grasped by first undertaking the process of sense modulation, which provides the *p*-literal meaning of the statement, and then moving on to secondary inferential processes, which provide the non-literal meaning of the statement (Recanati 71-72). Recanati’s standard example for *p*-non-literalness is conversational implicature. For example, Janette says to James, ‘We haven’t eaten in a while’, implying that they should eat sooner rather than later. In order for James to successfully comprehend the implication of the given statement he first has to grasp the *p*-literal meaning of the statement, which is roughly ‘We have not eaten recently’ and then move on to assess other contextual elements. The implicated meaning interpreted by the latter step is *p*-non-literal because it involves an inferential process, whereas the meaning interpreted by the first step is *p*-literal because it involves sense modulation.

In order for a meaning to be *p*-non-literal, interpreters must be consciously aware of the two-step process conditioning a given meaning. Both sense modulation and inference involve contextual input in order to generate meaning. However, whereas inference applies contextual factors to an already established *p*-literal meaning, modulation appeals to contextual factors to

generate *p*-literal meaning. Only if an interpreter consciously makes an inference based upon a statement that has generated *p*-literal meaning can the meaning derived from the given inference be considered *p*-non-literal. While Davidson argues that metaphor necessarily involves this conscious two-step process and should therefore be considered non-literal, Recanati denies this claim.

In order for a meaning to be considered non-literal in the ordinary sense it must satisfy what Recanati refers to as the “transparency condition” (75). The transparency condition is satisfied whenever interpreters are “aware that the conveyed meaning exceeds the conventional significance of the words” (Recanati 75). Recanati states, “A use of words counts as non-literal in the ordinary sense only if there is something special about that use *that is, or can be, perceived by the language users themselves*” (75). Therefore, the conscious two-step process involved in interpreting *p*-non-literal meaning implies that *p*-non-literalness is genuinely non-literal. However, the two-step process of interpretation involved in *p*-non-literalness is not the only manner in which the transparency condition can be satisfied. The “secondariness” of *p*-non-literalness is merely a sufficient, rather than necessary, condition of transparency (Recanati 75-76). As will be discussed below, Recanati argues that there are, in fact, some cases of *p*-literalness that hold a genuine non-literal character.

Recanati argues that metaphor is a legitimate candidate for *p*-literal meaning (76). He states, “An ordinary hearer readily understands what is said by such an utterance [a metaphor], without going through a two-step procedure involving the prior computation of the ‘literal’ meaning of the utterance (whatever that may be) and a secondary inference to the actual meaning” (Recanati, 76). While metaphors may rightfully be considered *p*-non-literal and *m*-non-literal, these versions of non-literalness are not adequate to describe all occurrences of *p*-

non-literal meaning in language use. That is, if metaphorical meaning is necessarily denied the possibility of fulfilling the requirements for *p*-literal meaning, then numerous other statements that are normally considered to be *p*-literal will also have to be reassessed as being *p*-non-literal.

Recanati, in line with Davidson, contends that conceptions of literalness based on a conventionally determined notion of literal meaning (i.e., *t*- and *m*-literalness) cannot capture the context sensitivity of language. He argues that words “express meanings that are richer than (or otherwise different from) what the conventions of language dictate” (Recanati 81). Further, Recanati’s acknowledgement of the context-sensitivity of meaning leads him, like Davidson, to challenge the distinction between knowing the world and knowing language. Recanati argues, “The conventional meaning of the sentence is not only ‘completed’ from the bottom up by assigning contextual values to indexicals and other free variables, it is also *enriched* in a top-down manner by appealing to background assumptions and world-knowledge” (Recanati, 74). Without the contextual input brought into literal meaning by *p*-literalness language becomes disassociated from the world within which language is used. Recanati contends, “If we abstract from those top-down [contextual] factors, what we get—the utterance’s *m*-literal meaning—no longer corresponds to the intuitive truth-conditions which the language users themselves associate with their own utterances” (82).

Beyond their obviously contradictory appraisals of the place of metaphor, Recanati and Davidson seem to differ in their understanding of conventional meaning. One may wonder whether Recanati’s conception of *p*-literal meaning is incompatible with Davidson’s conception of first meaning. As discussed in Chapter 2, Davidson argues that prepared/conventional meanings are unnecessary in order for successful communication to occur. While it is often the case that conventions are at play in successful communication, these are frequently flouted

without impeding the interpretation of intended meaning. Rather than emphasizing the fact that most people who communicate with one another share similar conventions, Davidson emphasizes the ability of people to overcome significant discrepancies in convention. Despite this, he never denies the role of conventional meaning in communication.

In contrast to Davidson's approach, Recanati's theory of literal meaning begins from the assumption that communication is governed by convention at varying degrees. Consequently, rather than discussing malapropisms, Recanati focuses on instances of communication in which the use of language more closely adheres to linguistic conventions (e.g., 'The policeman raised his hand and stopped the car') (Recanati 72). Furthermore, Recanati seems to indicate that successful communication hinges on the interpreter's knowledge of the rules of language and conventional meanings. That is, in order to grasp the *p*-literal meaning of a statement one must also have an awareness of *t*- and *m*-literalness (Recanati 71-72, 74).

Despite these seemingly important differences, Davidson and Recanati's understandings of literal meaning are nonetheless compatible. Davidson's understanding of first meaning allows that conventional meaning can be part of successful communication. In fact, often times it greatly facilitates communication. As argued in Chapter 2, what Davidson does not allow is that conventional meaning is a necessary condition for successful communication. Recanati's claim that *p*-literalness relies on convention should be construed in a similar manner. He is not contending that if one flouts convention, communication fails entirely. Rather, he seems to be affirming the common sense notion that the more one flouts convention the more likely communication will face barriers. Of course, given competent interpreters, these barriers are surmountable for the most part. If *p*-literalness were entirely dependent on conventional meaning, then it would be identical to *m*-literalness; the contextual input brought in by *p*-

literalness would have to be construed as being, like *m*-literalness, “*still governed by the conventions of language*” (Recanati 69). Recanati denies this by arguing that *p*-literal meaning involves contextual factors that go beyond (while not being governed) by the rules of language (72).

In Chapter 2, I argued that in order to keep Davidson’s conception of metaphor consistent with his conception of first meaning it is necessary to allow that metaphorical meaning can, in certain cases, be considered as first meaning. With this modification made to Davidson’s theory, the place of metaphor in first meaning can be loosely equated with the place Recanati gives metaphor in *p*-literal meaning. Because Davidson did not include metaphor in first meaning he did not discuss how metaphor might be likened to other instances of first meaning that seem to fit a more conventional notion of literal meaning. In contrast, Recanati’s provides an analysis of the various pragmatic processes that condition literal meaning, including metaphor.

Primary Pragmatic Processes

Pragmatic processes are the means whereby contextual factors are introduced into a statement to generate meaning. Recanati divides these processes according to the aforementioned distinction between sense modulation and inference, which itself mirrors the distinction between *p*-literal and *p*-non-literal meaning. Primary pragmatic processes take place during modulation in order to generate a meaningful statement. In this sense they are pre-propositional. Secondary pragmatic processes are those that take place once a meaningful statement has been generated. Recanati states that these latter processes are “post-propositional” because “they cannot take place unless some proposition *p* is considered as having been expressed, for they proceed by inferentially deriving some further proposition *q* (the implicature) from the fact that *p* has been

expressed” (23). Because metaphor is generally an instance of literal meaning, it is primary rather than secondary pragmatic processes that condition its interpretation (Recanati 26, 76).

Primary pragmatic processes can be further divided into two general categories. There are primary processes that are generated by the rules of language and are therefore considered to be “*mandatory*” (Recanati 7, 23). Recanati loosely refers to the collection of these processes as “saturation” (7). He explains that saturation takes place “whenever the meaning of a sentence includes something like a ‘slot’ requiring completion or a ‘free variable’ requiring contextual instantiation” (Recanati 7). For example, according to the rules of language indexical statements demand saturation. That is, the statement ‘It’s green’ requires that the term ‘it’ be filled out with contextual information (e.g., in this case ‘it’ might refer to a traffic signal). Beyond indexical statements, Recanati also includes genitives, nominal compounds, and parametric predicates as instances of language that require saturation. *M*-literalness only recognizes the legitimacy of contextual input provided by saturation. However, in order to adequately deal with language use, Recanati argues that, beyond saturation, there is another level of primary pragmatic processes that needs to be taken into account.

Recanati terms the second type of primary pragmatic processes as “optional” (23). By ‘optional’, Recanati does not mean that they are unnecessary for the generation of meaning, but rather they are not implied by the rules of language. Unlike saturation, Recanati argues that optional pragmatic processes function in a “top-down” fashion. That is, they lead to the inclusion of contextual elements into meaning by relying on “world-knowledge” rather than on the rules of language. In doing so, optional pragmatic processes can be said to modify *t*-literal meaning so that it adequately fits particular communicative contexts. Recanati identifies three general types of optional pragmatic processes: free enrichment, semantic transfer, and loosening.

Free enrichment involves “making the interpretation of some expression in the sentence contextually more specific” (Recanati 24). For example, Julian asks Aaron, ‘What did you do today?’ and Aaron replies, ‘I studied for an exam’. In order for Aaron’s answer to be meaningful in terms of the given situation, it will be contextually enriched by Julian to mean ‘I studied for an exam <today>’. If Julian interpreted Aaron’s statement merely according to the *m*-literal meaning the given statement would generate the perplexing meaning that ‘<At some point before making this statement> I studied for an exam’.

Free enrichment does not only apply to issues of specifying the time and location of an utterance; it involves the specification of all word usage. Recanati examines the statement ‘Mary took out her key and opened the door’. He argues, “We naturally understand the second conjunct as meaning that Mary opened the door with the key mentioned in the first conjunct; yet this is not explicitly articulated in the sentence” (24). Recanati’s point is not that the given statement will necessarily be interpreted according to the explanation he has given. Rather Recanati’s aim is to demonstrate that in order for communication to be successful the meaning of the statement must be adjusted according to the context in which it occurs. There are plausible scenarios in which Mary might take out her key to examine it while opening an unlocked door and thus, given the right contextual factors, there are plausible reasons to interpret the given statement in a manner that will suit such cases.

Semantic transfer is the optional pragmatic process whereby a property is contextually attributed to a term that is indirectly associated to the *t*-literal meaning of the given term (Recanati 26). For example, in some cases, an author might successfully communicate the proposition that ‘My bike needs repairs’ by stating ‘My wheels need repairs’ (assuming that it is not the bicycle’s wheels that need repair). Recanati argues that the contextually attributed

property must bear a “systematic relation” to the term to which it is being attributed (26).

However, this does not necessarily mean that the contextually attributed property must be included within the *t*-literal meaning of the given term. Although semantic transfer may take the form of a synecdoche (i.e., when a part is figuratively used to represent a whole), it may also take the form of an association between a property and a term that are only loosely and contingently linked. Recanati gives the example of the statement ‘I am parked out back’ being used to express the proposition ‘My car is parked out back’ (Recanati 26). There is no *t*-literal meaning that necessarily associates ‘I’ with a car. Beyond this, there is no necessary conceptual association between a person ‘I’ and cars. The association is rather contingent upon contextual factors.

The third optional pragmatic process Recanati discusses is loosening, which he describes as the “converse of enrichment” (26). Loosening is a process in which “the condition of application packed into the concept literally expressed by a predicate is contextually dropped so that the application of the predicate is widened” (26). As an example, Recanati discusses the statement ‘The ATM swallowed my credit card’ (26). He states, “There can be no real swallowing on the part of an ATM, since ATMs are not living organisms with the right bodily equipment for swallowing” (26). Despite the divergence between the use of ‘swallow’ in the context of this statement and the *t*-literal meaning of ‘swallow’, interpreters can make adequate sense of the statement. Recanati contends that “by relaxing the conditions of application for ‘swallow’, we construct an ad hoc concept with wider application” (26). Through loosening, interpreters emphasize and select contextually salient elements from the *m*-literal meaning of the statement (e.g., the aspect of intake involved in swallowing). Elements within the *m*-literal statement that are problematic or irrelevant in the context of the utterance will be disregarded.

Recanati and other contextualists, such as Anne Bezuidenhout, locate the interpretation of metaphor in loosening (Recanati 76-77, Bezuidenhout 171). For example, in the statement ‘I am going to war against the insurgents in my garden’, which in the given context is supposed to mean ‘I am going to weed the garden’, certain notions associated with the terms ‘war’ and ‘insurgents’ will have to be ignored while others will have to be made more prominent. While the notion of military weapons might be dropped from ‘war’, the notion of a struggle against something, in this case weeds, might be made more prominent. The requirement of being human might be disregarded in the interpretation of ‘insurgents’. These changes are not undertaken due to semantic conditions, but rather pragmatic ones. That is, assuming that James is living in a war-zone and that there is potential for his house to come under attack, the statement ‘I am going to war against the insurgents in my garden’ may mean just that. On the other hand, if James does not live in a war zone and utters the given statement while rummaging for gardening tools, the most salient interpretation might be to assume that he means that he plans to do some weeding.

It should be noted that loosening is also involved in the interpretation of statements that are not usually considered to be metaphorical. As an example of this, Bezuidenhout discusses the statement ‘It is silent here’ (168). She explains that the term ‘silent’ “as applied to a state or condition of the world as opposed to a person, encodes the idea of a state in which nothing is audible” (Bezuidenhout 168). However, depending on the context in which the statement occurs, the meaning of ‘silent’ may vary. For example, upon entering a house Suzanne says to Jeremy, ‘It is silent here’, meaning ‘It is silent in the house in the sense that I can’t hear anyone making noises’. While they both hear sounds coming from various places within the house (e.g., a running tap, a fan, or the hum of a muted television), they cannot hear any sounds made by humans (e.g. speech or movement noises). In this case, Jeremy may correctly interpret ‘silent’ as

a term that specifically addresses ‘human noises’ rather than ‘house noises’. Whether undertaken in the interpretation of a metaphor or a ‘strict’ literal statement, loosening gives linguistic terms the necessary malleability to adapt to the circumstances of language use.

Concerns with Primary Pragmatic Processes

By putting forward the various categories of primary pragmatic processes, Recanati opens himself to the objection that such processes do not, in fact, exist as they have been explained or that other types of processes are potentially at work in the interpretation of statements. Along similar lines, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Davidson argues that no necessary effects can be attributed to pragmatic processes (“What Metaphors Mean” 481-483). Although Recanati acknowledges these problems, they neither pose a threat to his conception of *p*-literal meaning nor to his contextualist account of metaphor (Recanati 27, 35). The purpose of Recanati’s account of optional pragmatic processes is to demonstrate that the inclusion of contextual factors in interpretation does not normally affect whether a statement is to be considered literal or non-literal. The distinctions between free enrichment, loosening, and semantic transfer can be blurred and questioned (Recanati 27, 35). However, as long as they are not touted as being complete they can nonetheless be useful in analyzing the contextual sensitivity of language use. That is, regardless of the accuracy of Recanati’s distinctions between various pragmatics processes, he nonetheless puts to rest the possibility that meaning is generated by *t*- or *m*-literalness alone.

Recanati’s discussion of primary pragmatic processes shows that metaphorical meaning can in certain cases be included in *p*-literal meaning. He provides examples of how contextual factors need to be assessed in order to understand both metaphorical and literal statements. The

usefulness of Recanati's account is that it shows the similarity between the processes that may be involved in interpreting statements such as 'It is silent in here' or 'They got married and had children' and those involved in interpreting statements such as 'I am going to war against the insurgents in my garden' or 'The ATM swallowed my bank card'. Although this similarity is enhanced by Recanati's account of primary pragmatic processes (especially optional ones), it does not entirely depend on it.

A further concern with primary pragmatic processes is that Recanati's discussion implies that these processes only apply to situations in which communication is heavily guided by conventional meaning. For example, loosening relies entirely on an interpreter's knowledge of the *m*-literal meaning of a statement. One cannot modulate the statement 'Life is war' if one is not familiar with at least some of the conventional meanings of all words involved.

Consequently, it seems as if Recanati's account cannot accommodate instances of language use in which conventional meaning is flouted to a high degree. For example, statements such as 'The opus is on him' do not fit in any of the primary pragmatic processes. Does this imply that they require a two-step process of interpretation, and are therefore to be necessarily considered as instances of non-literal meaning? As I argued in Chapter 2, Davidson's discussion of prior/passing theories demonstrates that this cannot be the case.

The difference between a one-step (first meaning) and two-step process (non-literal meaning) of interpretation depends on more than the interlocutors' awareness of conventional meaning. While Davidson admits that convention can be, and often is, highly involved in the interpretation of some statements, successful communication depends entirely on the competence of author and interpreter to adequately adjust their prior theories. This adjustment extends to factors beyond conventional notions of meaning. As Davidson contends, an interlocutor's prior

theory must be “adjusted to the evidence so far available to him: knowledge of the character, dress, role, sex of the speaker, and whatever else has been gained by observing the speaker’s behaviour, linguistic or otherwise” (“Nice Derangement” 591). For example, the first meaning of the statement ‘They trampled over me’ might be affected by whether or not it is uttered by a poet at a poetry reading. Therefore, given the right circumstances, statements that depart from convention can still be considered as *p*-literal.

Nevertheless, the notion of prior/passing theories does not undermine the utility of Recanati’s analysis. As was discussed above, although Recanati seems to focus entirely on cases in which conventional meaning plays an important role, his account does not preclude the possibility of instances of literal meaning that depart significantly from convention. His analysis applies only to a specific range on the spectrum of communication. Once the meaning of a statement departs from convention to a certain degree, Recanati’s terms no longer have applicability. In such instances, it seems that wider considerations of context sensitivity, such as those suggested by Davidson, have to be brought in. In this sense, Davidson’s conception of prior/passing theories encompasses the entire spectrum of communication, including the range of cases covered by Recanati’s analysis. Where a certain degree of communicative predictability is provisionally guaranteed by the pervasiveness of convention, Recanati’s terms have use. However, in instances where such predictability is lost or cannot be ascertained, an appeal to Davidson’s more general picture of communication seems appropriate.

A Schema-Based Account of Metaphor

While it is clear that optional pragmatic processes play a role in interpretation, it is not entirely evident why these processes enter interpretation during modulation. It seems conceivable

that modulation may simply entail the formulation of an *m*-literal proposition. Consequently, any optional pragmatic processes could only be introduced after the formulation and assessment of an *m*-literal proposition. Given that interpretation within a conventional setting relies on the interpreter's knowledge of the *t*-literal meaning of the terms and the associated mandatory pragmatic processes, it seems that an interpreter would have to access the *t*-literal meaning of terms before loosening them. This would mean that metaphor could not legitimately be considered as *p*-literal. To deal with this issue, Recanati introduces the notion of "schema," which he borrows from David E. Rumelhart (Recanati, 36-37).

Like Recanati, Rumelhart contends that most metaphors are interpreted in much the same way as what are normally considered to be literal statements (Rumelhart 73, 76). Moreover, in line with Recanati, Rumelhart argues that contextual ingredients (including "any knowledge available to the listener") "play a central role in determining what interpretations are possible for a given utterance" (Rumelhart 76). Rather than first combining the various lexemes of a statement and then adjusting the given *t*-literal meaning to the given situation, an interpreter "actively" imposes whatever contextual knowledge seems relevant upon the given statement during the initial interpretation. In this sense, Rumelhart argues, "The supposition that conveyed meanings are ever identical to *literal meanings* (where literal meanings are assumed to be those given by a compositional semantic theory) [i.e., *t*-literal meanings] is surely suspect" (78).

Rumelhart uses schemata to explain his conception of the interpretation process. 'Schema' refers to "an abstract representation of a generalized concept or situation" that is related to a specific term, phrase, sentence or discourse (Rumelhart 77, 79). Roughly, the schema of a given term is a system of associated ideas invoked by the given term that are available to the interpreter in a particular communicative situation (Rumelhart 77). It is important to note that

while a term or concept may generate a similar schema for an interpreter in radically different communicative situations, the schema invoked by the given term is largely dependent on contextual information and the knowledge of the interpreter. For example, in some circumstances the schema generated by the term ‘bad’ may relate to morality whereas in other contexts the schema generated may relate to the decomposition of food. Moreover, in some situations the interpreter may lack the appropriate knowledge and/or competence required to distinguish between these two uses of ‘bad’.

Although Rumelhart contends that *t*-literal meaning is not enough to account for meaning conveyed in communication (*p*-literal meaning), this does not mean that *t*-literal meanings do not influence interpretation and the formation of schemata. When someone interprets the term ‘book’ she accesses a schema that involves whatever information she has come to associate with books. Assuming that she can correctly interpret this term (given that the term is being used in a way that related to its *t*-literal meaning), her ‘book’ schema must include information that at least partially coincides with the *t*-literal meaning of the term. Although there are situations in which contextual information alone may provide the entire content of a schema to ensure successful communication, it is often the case that authors and interpreters are informed by similar conventions (relating to the rules of language and the meaning of terms).¹⁵ In these latter cases of communication, there is an overlap in the schemata of the interpreter and author that facilitates successful interpretation.

¹⁵ If an interpreter does not know the *t*-literal meaning of the term ‘book’, but is faced with the statement ‘This is a great book’ uttered by someone presenting a book to the interpreter, it is possible that the interpreter correctly interpret the meaning of the statement, provided that she has the required competence to decipher the various contextual clues provided to her (e.g., the author of the statement is holding the book and pointing at it).

For both Recanati and Rumelhart, the guiding principle in schema-based interpretation is the interpreter's "tendency to prefer coherent interpretations (with a high degree of fit between the various semantic values)" (Recanati 36-37). In order to arrive at a meaningful proposition from the interpretation of a statement, the interpreter must attempt to generate an overarching schema for the given statement (i.e., statement-schema), which incorporates the statement's various sub-schemata (i.e., schemata related to individual terms or phrases contained within the given statement) and relevant contextual information (Recanati 36-37). Rumelhart explains,

The process of comprehension is identical to the process of selecting and verifying conceptual schemata to account for the [communicative] situation (including its linguistic components) to be understood. Having selected and verified that some configuration of schemata offers a sufficient account for the situation, it is said to be understood... A schema is said to 'account for a situation' whenever the situation can be taken as an instance of the general class of concepts represented by the schema (Rumelhart 77).

The interpretative process put forward in a schema-based account of interpretation is as follows: when an interpreter begins the interpretation of a statement she must select an appropriate schema given the various contextual information that is available to her. Because this initial schema is accessed prior to the availability of all linguistic information in the given statement, it partially guides the remaining interpretation, unless it is later discarded or modified. As the interpreter continues her interpretation, new linguistic information is introduced, which leads to the availability of new schemata. Antecedent schemata in the given statement and the available contextual information partially determine these new schemata. In some cases,

antecedent schemata accessed by the interpreter will remain appropriate for the entire interpretation and will therefore be easily incorporated into the statement-schema.

However, in other cases, the introduction of new schemata may lead to tension with one, some or all of the antecedent schemata. In such cases, the interpreter will have to adjust or discard one, some or all of the accessed schemata in the statement (Recanati 37, Rumelhart 78-80). For example, in interpreting the metonymic statement ‘The ham sandwich has left without paying’, which is uttered in order to designate a person who ordered the ham sandwich and has left without paying, the interpreter may initially invoke a schema relating to the ham sandwich as solely a food item: <slices of bread, ham, condiments, edible, etc...>. ¹⁶ However, upon interpreting the predicate ‘has left without paying’, which requires in most circumstances that its related subject (‘The ham sandwich’) have the agency necessary to leave without paying, the interpreter will adjust the ‘ham sandwich’ schema accordingly (Recanati 31-32). The overall sentence-schema will therefore introduce and prioritize the property of <the person who ordered the ham sandwich> in the statement’s sub-schema of ‘the ham sandwich’.

The above example illustrates what Recanati and Rumelhart refer to as “partial schematicity” (Recanati 77, Rumelhart 82). Partial schematicity occurs when a statement-schema is formed despite a lack of coherence between significant elements of its sub-statement schemata. For example, if the statement ‘The ham sandwich has left without paying’ is taken to mean ‘The person who ordered ham sandwich has left without paying’ then significant elements of the ‘ham sandwich’ schema (e.g., being inanimate, not having agency) will be at odds with the schemata associated with ‘has left without paying’. In some cases, this statement may not be successfully interpreted directly or at all, due to the tension between the various sub-statement

¹⁶ This example is taken from Recanati (31).

schemata. However, in other cases, contextual information may provide cues to modify the ‘ham sandwich’ schema so that it may include the ‘person who ordered the ham sandwich’ (e.g., if the author of the given statement is a manager at a restaurant and the interpreter is a waiter).

A statement is considered to be fully schematic when all the significant elements of the sub-statement schemata can be accounted for in the statement schema (Recanati 77, Rumelhart 82). In its most obvious cases, full schematicity occurs when *t*-literal meaning closely parallels *p*-literal meaning (e.g., ‘There is a cat on the mat’). However, there are also numerous cases of full schematicity in which *p*-literal meaning significantly diverges from *t*-literal meaning. Take the statement ‘It is foggy’, which is successfully interpreted by an interpreter as ‘It is foggy <here today>’ (i.e., the interpreter enriches the schema in order to make it contextually relevant). The schema associated with ‘It is foggy’ is fully compatible with the schema of ‘being foggy here today’. That is, one can ascribe a place and time to the event of ‘being foggy’ without undermining the significant elements of the ‘It is foggy’ schema <indicating the presence of fog, restricted visibility, being humid, etc...>.

One potential problem with the full and partial schematicity distinction is that it relies on the seemingly obscure notion of conflict between the ‘significant elements’ of sub-statement schemata.¹⁷ That is, the characterization of a schema as an abstract representation of a term or phrase that is dependent upon any knowledge available to interpreter ostensibly indicates that the content of schema may vary drastically given a different contextual situation (not to mention a different interpreter). Given this, the significant elements of a schema would also vary given different contextual situations and interlocutors. Consequently, the notion full schematicity is

¹⁷ Rumelhart refers to the ‘significant elements’ of schemata as their “primary characteristics” (82).

apparently implausible. However, I contend that this issue can be resolved by appealing to the appositeness of *t*-literal meaning in the formation of schemata in most communicative situations.

Schemata incorporate various elements, only some of which coincide with *t*-literal meaning. Despite this, interpreters generally assume that authors are informed by *t*-literal meaning to varying degrees.¹⁸ There are at least two reasons why interpreters hold this assumption. Firstly, authors by and large use terms that sound like terms that have a conventional basis. Secondly, authors use such terms in a way that generally follows the conventional rules of language (e.g., a given author uses the term ‘he’ as if it were a pronoun rather than a verb). While authors can and often do go against these interpretive assumptions, they for the most part use terms in a fashion that at least loosely parallels their *t*-literal meanings. Given this, interpreters have reason to treat the characteristics of a given schema that are pertinent to the *t*-literal meaning of its ‘parent-term’ as more significant than those that may have been linked to the given schema unconventionally (e.g., the apple’s characteristic of being edible is generally more relevant to interpretation than a particular interpreters’ association of apples with painful childhood memories).¹⁹ Therefore, the significant elements of a schema are those that are associated with the *t*-literal meaning of the schema’s parent-term.

Partial schematicity is not secondary to full schematicity. That is to say, in cases in which a statement can be easily taken as either fully schematic or partially schematic, it is not necessarily the case that the fully schematic interpretation takes precedence. Schematicity is partially guided by contextual factors as well as the relation between significant elements of sub-statement schemata. The driving force of interpretation is the search for coherence between

¹⁸ In Chapter Two, I argued that even the successful interpretation of malapropism requires an assumption that *t*-literal meaning is guiding the author to some degree.

¹⁹ By ‘parent-term’ I am referring to the term that leads to the activation of a given schema.

schemata and contextual elements. For example, although the statement ‘Sachin is not a hawk’ could be taken to mean that ‘Sachin is not a diurnal bird of prey’ (i.e., a fully schematic interpretation), in particular situations a partially schematic interpretation of this statement might allow for more coherence between sub-statement schemata and contextual factors (e.g., the statement is uttered in the midst of a discussion of foreign policy).

For both Recanati and Rumelhart metaphor is an instance of partial schematicity (Recanati 76-77, Rumelhart 82).²⁰ In his analysis of the statement ‘Encyclopedias are gold mines’ Rumelhart contends, “It is the unevenness of account—certain primary features of the gold mine schema fit and others not at all—that leads to the metaphorical flavour of the statement” (Rumelhart 82). However, not all metaphors involve the same level of unevenness. Recanati explains that when significant elements of a sub-statement schema are at odds with the sentence-schema “they remain somewhat active and may generate a feeling of discrepancy between the evoked schema and the sense constructed by (partially) applying the schema to the situation at hand. That feeling, and the conflict which underlies it, comes in degrees” (Recanati 77). Metaphors that involve less tension between sub-statement schemata will be interpreted with interpreters remaining unaware of the divergence between *t*- and *p*- literal meaning. On the other hand, “the more noticeable the conflict [between sub-statement schemata], the more transparent the departure from *t*-literal meaning will be to language users” (Recanati 77). In a contentious move, Recanati states that both of these types of metaphor are *p*-literal (77-78).

Concerns with the Directness of Metaphor Interpretation

²⁰ Recanati considers any instance of loosening (what he also terms “sense extension”) to be an instance of partial schematicity. Metaphor is a paradigmatic example of partial schematicity. Conversely, Recanati views any instance of free enrichment to be an instance of full schematicity (76-77).

Elisabeth Camp, a critic of Recanati's view of metaphor, has argued that if an interpreter is aware that a metaphorical statement departs from *t*-literal meaning, the given metaphor should be considered *p*-non-literal (Camp 289-290).²¹ Moreover, she contends that the only metaphors that can legitimately be considered *p*-literal (one-step process of interpretation) are those that are "highly routinized" (Camp 290). In this sense, the only metaphors that can be considered *p*-literal are those that are or will be part of *t*-literal meaning (e.g., 'It's been a hard day'). For Camp, all metaphors that are truly metaphorical (in the sense that they are not commonplace or routinized) will be considered *p*-non-literal. Therefore, Camp's claim is that Recanati's inclusion of metaphor into *p*-literalness is both unjustified and trivial.

At first glance, Recanati's account seems to partially substantiate Camp's objection. Recall Recanati's transparency condition, which states that a statement is to be considered non-literal in the ordinary sense if interpreters are aware of the divergence between *m*- and *p*-literal meaning. According to this, high-tension metaphors should be considered non-literal in the ordinary sense (hereafter, 'non-literal in the ordinary sense' will be referred to as 'non-literal'). This seems to lend support to the notion that high-tension metaphors should be also viewed as *p*-non-literal. In line with this, Camp equates an interpreter's awareness of a divergence between *t* and *p*-literal meaning with a two-step process of interpretation (Camp 289-290).

However, Recanati argues that there are cases in which statements (including metaphorical ones) can be both *p*-literal and non-literal (according to the transparency condition) (76). He states, "Beyond a certain threshold, cases of sense extension [i.e., loosening] will therefore count as special and non-literal in the ordinary sense, despite their *p*-literal character.

²¹ Although Camp agrees with the general process involved in the determination of *p*-literalness suggested by Recanati, she argues that metaphorical meaning is almost exclusively the result of a two-step process of interpretation (300, 307).

They will count as *figurative* uses of language” (Recanati 77). According to Recanati, low-tension metaphors are *p*-literal and literal, whereas high-tension metaphors are *p*-literal and non-literal. Despite their non-literalness high-tension metaphors are interpreted directly. What separates *p*-literal meanings that are non-literal (e.g., metaphor) from *p*-non-literal meanings (e.g., conversational implicature) is that the former do not require a two-step process of interpretation to be grasped. Although both of these types of non-literalness satisfy the transparency condition, they do so in different ways (Recanati 76).

Recanati further explains the difference between non-literal *p*-literal meaning and *p*-non-literal meanings by appealing to what he terms “internal duality” and “external duality.” The duality felt by interpreters when interpreting non-literal *p*-literal statements is internal in the sense that it is “internal to the *output* of the (primary) interpretation process” (Recanati 79). That is to say, interpreters are aware of a duality between *m*- and *p*-literal meaning during modulation. In contrast, external duality relates to the duality experienced by an interpreter between an already interpreted *p*-literal meaning and an implied secondary meaning. Furthermore, unlike *p*-literal meaning, *p*-non-literal meaning requires an “*inferential link* between the primary and secondary meanings” (Recanati 81). While there is duality in non-literal *p*-literal meaning, Recanati contends there is no inferential link between *m*- and *p*-literal meanings.

Camp’s claim that only ‘highly routinized’ (low-tension) metaphors can be considered as part of *p*-literal meaning is inaccurate. Recanati’s use of schema-based account of interpretation allows him to postulate that while certain metaphors may be difficult to comprehend, they will nonetheless be interpreted *p*-literally. Like other uses of language, metaphor comes in various degrees of complexity. As long as this complexity does not involve an inferential leap from a primary to a secondary meaning, then metaphor can be considered *p*-literal.

It might be objected that Recanati's contention that metaphors (including high tension ones) are directly interpreted is unjustified. Why not simply assume, as many others have, that metaphor functions like conversational implicature? To such objections Recanati can appeal to his analysis of the various pragmatic process in all language use. Beyond this, Recanati can also appeal to his schema-based account of interpretation. As discussed earlier, interpretation is propelled by the interpreter's search for coherence between sub-statement schemata and contextual ingredients. An interpreter will therefore tend to avoid generating a sentence-schema that does not cohere with the given situation. For example, if Sachin utters 'He's a bull' to Camille in the context of a boxing match, Camille will most likely not establish 'He's a bull <as in 'he' is actually the animal 'bull'>' as the *p*-literal meaning of the statement. Rather, without entertaining a *m*-literal proposition, Camille will search for ways that the 'bull'-schema might be appropriate, given the circumstances.

Although Recanati does not entertain the possibility of a *p*-non-literal metaphor, I contend that that in some cases metaphorical meaning will be secondary rather than primary. While any metaphor can be interpreted directly, there is always the potential for misinterpretation. In some cases, metaphors will be interpreted much in the same way as conversational implicatures. An interpreter's failure to account for some relevant contextual elements may result in the given interpreter settling for a contextually incoherent interpretation. Although the incoherent interpretation may be adopted, in certain cases the interpreter may move on to a more contextually salient interpretation. In such cases, the interpreted metaphorical meaning is *p*-non-literal. Therefore, depending on the circumstances, metaphors can be interpreted either as *p*-literal or *p*-non-literal.

This picture of metaphor coheres well with the notion of prior/passing theory adjustment. For example, James says ‘I am going to war against the insurgents in my garden’ to Camille with the intention of meaning ‘I am going to remove the weeds in my garden’. For the purpose of this example it will be assumed that both interlocutors have reasons to believe that they share a basic notion of conventional meaning. If Camille is a good interpreter, she will realize during modulation that James is not speaking strictly according to *m*-literalness, and will adjust her prior theory accordingly. The meaning generated by this type of interpretation is *p*-literal. On the other hand, if Camille misses an interpretive clue, she might take the sentence meaning to be aligned with *m*-literalness and therefore inadequately adjust her prior theory. Once she interprets the statement in this way she will hopefully realize that it does not apply well to the given situation and consequently (through inferential processes) move on to a more contextually salient meaning. This latter type of interpretation generates *p*-non-literal meaning.

Metaphor Identification

My view that metaphor can be either *p*-literal or *p*-non-literal seems to raise difficulties concerning the identification of metaphors. Namely, regardless of whether metaphor is interpreted *p*-literally or *p*-non-literally, the processes undertaken in interpreting metaphor can be likened to processes governing non-metaphorical uses of language (e.g., free-enrichment, loosening and inferential processing). Therefore, in terms of how metaphor is interpreted, there is very little that sets it apart from the interpretation of non-metaphorical statements. Despite this, I contend that it is possible to set out a loose definition of what a metaphor is, regardless of whether it is interpreted *p*-literally or *p*-non-literally.

Rumelhart contends that the key to differentiating metaphorical statements from other types of statements lies not in the processes governing their interpretation, but in their schematic “outcomes” (82). Metaphorical utterances, regardless of how they are interpreted, are always instances of partial schematicity (Rumelhart 82). Although the criterion of partial schematicity is somewhat successful in that it sets metaphor apart from statements that are fully schematic (i.e., cases of free enrichment), it does not set metaphor apart from other cases of loosening (e.g., hyperbole), which are also partially schematic. As Recanati notes, “There is a continuum between ordinary cases of sense-extension [loosening] that we don’t even perceive and more dramatic cases of metaphor” (77).

It is possible to distinguish metaphor from other instances of partial schematicity by examining the general content of metaphors. Generally, a metaphorical statement involves using at least one schema that does not fully cohere with the metaphor-schema, given the communicative context (e.g., ‘There is the wind’s face’). The same can be said for hyperbole (e.g., ‘I’ve been writing for a century’). Despite this surface similarity, there is a difference between the ‘incoherent’ schemata of hyperboles and the incoherent schemata of metaphors. In hyperbole the incoherent schemata are generally closely associated by convention to the other remaining coherent schemata (e.g., the notion of writing for a period of time is closely linked with a specific interval of time, however exaggerated that interval is). Conversely, in metaphor the incoherent schemata are generally only loosely associated with the remaining coherent schemata (e.g., there seems to be little conventional association between the wind and the possession of a face). Roughly, whereas hyperboles deal with at least two closely related schemata that are nevertheless partially schematic (e.g., time), metaphors deal with at least two schemata that are generally disassociated from one another (e.g., wind and possessing a face).

Along similar lines, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explain, “*The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*” (5).

There is a lingering problem with my suggestion that metaphors can be identified as instances of partial schematicity that involve interpreting one schema in terms of another disassociated schema. While high-tension (i.e., figurative) metaphors clearly exhibit the requisite disassociation, some low-tension metaphors display a lesser degree of this disassociation. For example, take the low-tension metaphor ‘Sachin is a pig’, which is intended to mean ‘Sachin is a glutton’.²² While this metaphor seems to involve two schemata that bear no systematic relation to one another (i.e., the realm of ‘Sachin’ features and the realm of ‘pig’ features), ‘pig’ is nevertheless (through conventionalization) recognized as a schema that is relevant to and often associated with humans. Therefore, it is not always the case that metaphors involve clearly disassociated schemata.

While many metaphors involve disassociated schemata, others involve schemata that, although potentially disassociated, are linked through a process of conventionalization (e.g., over time and use ‘pig’ is linked with ‘human’). Past a certain threshold of conventionalization, these latter statements lose their status as metaphors and their relevant associations become included in *t*-literal meaning. For example, while the notion of non-architectural things having ‘pinnacles’ may have been taken as a metaphor in the past, in many current contexts the statement ‘This is the pinnacle of my career’ will not be considered metaphorical in any sense. Thus, it might be said that all metaphors are partially schematic (i.e., cases of loosening) and *usually* involve interpreting one schema in terms of another disassociated schema.

²² I am not contending that ‘Sachin is a pig’ is necessarily a low-tension metaphor. In some cases, it is possible that someone may be unfamiliar with the conventionalized associations between pigs and people and, therefore interpret the given metaphor as exhibiting a high degree of tension.

Concluding Remarks

Although Recanati admits that the *t*-literal and *m*-literal versions of literalness may be useful to the “semanticist,” he argues that they are inadequate to cope with language use (Recanati 81). He views literal meaning as being necessarily influenced by contextual factors. While some statements may seem to be entirely aligned with *m*-literal meaning, this alignment is the result of contingent contextual elements and does not reveal a necessary relation between convention and meaning. In place of *t*- and *m*-literal meaning, Recanati puts forward *p*-literal meaning. Like Davidson’s notion of first meaning, *p*-literalness defines literal meaning as the meaning arrived at first in the order of interpretation. Any meaning that is secondary, in that it requires a two-step process of interpretation, is considered to be non-literal. Thus, although Recanati modifies the literal/non-literal framework, like Davidson he nonetheless maintains this distinction.

Davidson argues that metaphorical meaning is necessarily secondary. In contrast, Recanati maintains that metaphor is part of literal meaning. Recanati demonstrates this through an appeal to the primary pragmatic processes that condition interpretation. Some of these pragmatic processes, such as saturation, are mandated by the rules of language. In this sense, contextual ingredients are brought into the meaning of a statement on the basis of intra-linguistic cues (e.g., indexical expressions). However, other processes, such as free enrichment, semantic transfer and loosening, are undertaken without reference to such cues. In these cases, the inclusion of contextual ingredients relies entirely on the ability of interlocutors to adapt their prior theories to the given communicative situation. Recanati locates metaphor in these latter types of primary pragmatic processes. Although Recanati’s conception of primary pragmatic

processes is only useful in communicative situations that are largely guided by convention, it does not preclude situations in which communication significantly departs from convention. In these latter cases, the inclusion of contextual factors can be explained by an appeal to Davidson's notion of prior/passing theories.

Some theorists, such as Elisabeth Camp, grant the validity of Recanati's modified division of literal/non-literal (i.e., *p*-literal/*p*-non-literal), but argue that what is generally considered to be metaphorical falls into Recanati's category of *p*-non-literal (i.e., meanings requiring a two-step process of interpretation). Therefore, in terms of bringing metaphor into the folds of literalness, Camp contends that Recanati's theory misses the mark. This contention, however, is incorrect. Through his discussion of schema, Recanati demonstrates that, given the right circumstances, complex and unroutinized metaphors can also be interpreted directly. That is, he allows that interlocutors can significantly and consciously adapt their interpretations to relevant contextual factors without generating instances of *p*-non-literal meaning. As long as this adjustment process is undertaken during modulation (i.e., without recourse to inferential processes) the meaning it generates is considered *p*-literal.

To draw out the full implications of Recanati's contextualism it must be granted that any meaning may count as either *p*-literal or *p*-non-literal. Although implied meanings generally seem to fall under the category of *p*-non-literalness, this is a matter of probability rather than necessity. There is no type of meaning that is guaranteed to be *p*-non-literal. Given the right circumstances, it is even possible to interpret meanings that are normally implied as being first in the order of interpretation. Along the same lines, while Recanati argues that metaphors are instances of *p*-literal meaning, it is possible that an interpreter may initially incorrectly interpret a

metaphor and only arrive at the intended metaphorical meaning indirectly. In such cases, the given metaphor would be considered *p*-non-literal.

Due to the variety of ways metaphor can be interpreted (i.e., a metaphor can be *p*-literal, non-literal *p*-literal and *p*-non-literal) it is difficult to identify a characteristic common to all metaphor. Beyond this, the processes guiding metaphor interpretation are similar, if not identical, to the processes guiding other types of non-metaphorical communication. The interpretation of metaphor, like the interpretation of other types of language use, is dependent upon the ability of interpreters to interpret a multitude of contextual cues. There is nothing in the statement ‘Sachin is a pig’ that necessarily makes it a metaphor. Despite these issues, metaphor can be loosely defined as an instance of partial schematicity that *usually* involves interpreting one schema in terms of another schema to which it bears no obvious or systematic relation.

CONCLUSION

My contextualist account of metaphor manages to overcome some of the problems with both Black's semantic theory of metaphor and Davidson's pragmatic theory of metaphor. While Black correctly champions the notion that metaphor has a meaning beyond its conventional meaning, he problematically argues that metaphor is determined by the "rules of language," thereby ignoring the importance of pragmatic factors. While Davidson accurately demonstrates the influence of contextual factors in determining meaning, thereby justifying his notion of first meaning, he nonetheless maintains that metaphorical meaning can only be secondary. A contextualist theory of metaphor allows that metaphor can have meaning, in the primary sense, without putting forward the mistaken view that metaphor is primarily governed by semantics. Strictly speaking, according to my contextualist account there is no use of language that is entirely governed by semantics. Pragmatic factors are a constant influence upon meaning.

Throughout the preceding chapters, I have demonstrated that the interpretation of literal statements is similar to the interpretation of metaphorical statements. Contrary to Black and Davidson's theories of metaphor, I argue that the characteristics often attributed to metaphor can easily be shown to pertain to literal language. This argument hinges on the notion that literal meaning in language use goes beyond the traditional view that literalness is determined by an adherence to a given lexicon and related grammar. As put forward by Davidson and Recanati, literal meaning in language use is best articulated as the meaning that comes first in the order of interpretation. While *p*-literal meaning often follows conventional meaning (*m*-literal meaning), it also incorporates contextual ingredients in a top-down fashion that is not mandated by conventional meaning and grammar (hereafter, conventional meaning and grammar will be referred to as 'conventional meaning'). For example, in order to successfully interpret the

commonplace statement ‘I’ll finish my essay’ as ‘I’ll finish my essay (tomorrow)’ the interpreter must go beyond conventional meaning to gather relevant contextual clues, such as the fact that the given statement may have taken place in a conversation concerning an essay that was due ‘tomorrow’.

Once an enriched conception of literal language use is adopted (*p*-literal meaning), it is possible to include metaphorical meaning in literalness. Unlike the traditional view of literal meaning, literalness as *p*-literalness depends more on the ability of interlocutors to manage contextual information than on the fidelity of the meaning of a given statement to its conventional meaning. Consequently, if interpreters are able to adequately coordinate a metaphorical statement with relevant contextual factors during interpretation, the given metaphorical meaning can be considered *p*-literal. As Davidson and Recanati demonstrate, contextual information brought into the interpretative process can range from previous statements involved in the given discourse to information about the author’s tone of voice. There are no set criteria for what contextual ingredients are brought into interpretation, apart from that of relevance to the given communicative situation. Both metaphorical and more conventional uses of language depend on extra-conventional contextual information in order to be meaningful.

In opposition to my view that metaphor and other types of language are used and interpreted in much the same way, some theorists argue that metaphor can generate interpretations that are unique in that they are inaccessible by other types of language. For example, Davidson and Black suggest that metaphor has a necessary open-ended quality that distinguishes it from other uses of language. Along these lines Davidson states, “There is no limit to what a metaphor calls to our attention. When we try to say what a metaphor ‘means’, we soon realize there is no end to what we want to mention” (“What Metaphors Mean” 482). As was

discussed in chapters one and two, both Davidson and Black defend the open-endedness of metaphor by appealing to the notion that literal paraphrases cannot adequately capture the contents of metaphorical meaning. As Black states, “The literal paraphrase inevitably says too much and with the wrong emphasis” (Metaphor” 46). If metaphor is necessarily undetermined and non-figurative language is generally more determinate, it may be possible to salvage the strong distinction between literal and metaphorical uses of language. However, this account of metaphor and paraphrase is erroneous.

As was underlined in chapter one, a paraphrase of a metaphor is not only the effort to draw out all the possible implications of a given metaphor in terms that adhere as closely as possible to conventional meaning. In some cases, paraphrases may recreate the interpretive process involved in the interpretation of a given metaphor (Manns 363-364). All meaning is context dependent and, therefore, all types of language-use can generate various levels of interpretive effects. Consequently, paraphrasing a statement that adheres more closely to conventional meaning than figurative language (hereafter, this will be referred to as a ‘conventional statement’) may be as difficult, in some cases, as paraphrasing a metaphor (Manns 365). In relation to this Joseph Stern states, “The ability to articulate explicitly in a (literal) paraphrase what one knows when one understands a use of language is not to be expected even for literal language in general. On the pain of enforcing a double standard, we should not demand more of metaphor” (194).

Metaphor is not necessarily open-ended, but can, given the right circumstances, elicit a determinate meaning. As Davidson contends, successful communication depends on the ability of an author to convey his intended meaning to the interpreter. From this, it can be assumed that in some cases an author intends to convey something determinate rather than open-ended by

using a metaphor. Supporting this assessment, Merrie Bergmann contends, “The fact that metaphors ‘generate’ further and further readings does not, however, conflict with the claim that an author *can* successfully use a metaphor to convey a fairly specific cognitive content” (230-231). In some cases a metaphor may be intended by an author to be taken as open-ended whereas in other cases a metaphor may be used to mean something very specific. Bergmann explains, “A person who uses a metaphor to make an assertion typically does not intend to assert *everything* that we can ‘read into’ the metaphor. Nor does the audience typically attribute all of those readings to the author” (231). Bergmann concludes that the “grain of truth” in the claim that metaphor is invariably undetermined is that “without knowing the context in which a metaphor occurs and who its author is, it is impossible to state conclusively what the metaphor ‘means’ without drawing out all that it *could* mean. And here the process does seem endless” (231).

It should not be assumed that contextual factors condition meaning only by making it more specific according to the given context. Contextual factors can also play a role in making meaning undetermined. For example, an author at a poetry reading may intend her metaphorical statements to be taken as expressing undetermined rather than determinate meanings. Bergmann states, “The poetic context invites us to dwell, to go beyond the *immediately* salient” (245). The very fact that the author is making statements on stage at a poetry reading may be enough for an interpreter to assume that an undetermined interpretation is in order. Contextual ingredients can be used either to determine or undetermine metaphor. As Bergmann notes, “The poetic metaphor does not differ from the street variety in kind, for both do their work through salient characteristics. The difference lies in the practice rather than in the principle, in the ways we allow or disallow the immediate context to determine salience and hence interpretations” (245).

All types of language whether conventional or metaphorical can be undetermined. Open-endedness is not a unique characteristic of metaphor. Without the appropriate contextual background any statement can generate a multitude of interpretations. Interpreted out of context, the statement ‘The cat is on the mat’ could be taken to mean that ‘The feline animal is on the portion of protective fabric on the floor’ or ‘The cat-like person is resting’, amongst innumerable other possibilities. Both metaphorical and conventional statements gain meaning by being related to a given context that the interpreter can assess. Contextual ingredients can either determine or undetermine the meaning of any statement.

The only significant difference between commonplace conventional statements and difficult or poetic metaphors is that the former statements generally seem to generate an easy fit with contextual ingredients (e.g., ‘That book can be found in aisle three’) whereas poetic metaphors may require more effort to align with contextual ingredients (e.g., “listen to your fridge, the old/armless weeping willow of the kitchen”).²³ Because of the relative ease with which conventional statements can be coordinated with contextual ingredients, interpreters generally do not assess the multiple potential interpretations of such statement. In fact, the authors of such statements generally intend to convey specific propositions that will not be greatly benefited by multiple interpretations. At the other end of the spectrum, poetic metaphors are often designed by authors to be difficult to coordinate with contextual ingredients in order to encourage interpreters to assess the various possible interpretations of the given metaphor.²⁴

While both conventional and poetic statements can generate open-ended interpretations interpreters must search for contextual clues to assess whether or not such an open-ended reading is appropriate given the circumstances of interpretation.

²³ The example of the poetic metaphor is taken from Don McKay’s poem “Fridge Nocturne”

²⁴ This is not to say that authors never mean anything specific with difficult metaphors.

The ubiquitous influence of contextual factors in the use of language challenges the distinction between meaning and use. Meanings are necessarily determined by the conditions in which they are used. If an interpreter appeals exclusively to conventional meaning in interpretation and refrains from including any *optional* contextual ingredients (i.e., ingredients that are not included by virtue of the rules of language), he will be faced with one instance of miscommunication after another. Only the most basic statements coupled with the most basic contextual circumstances might lead such an interpreter to an accurate interpretation (e.g., where ‘This is a human hand’ is stated in the context of an actual human hand). Moreover, any accuracy in interpretation that such an interpreter achieves is due to chance rather than his own efforts. It is a matter of chance that a statement’s meaning adheres closely enough to the conditions of conventional meaning. In order to have a greater possibility of successfully grasping an author’s intention, interpreters must be aware of the circumstances involved in the use of a given statement. They must actively incorporate various contextual elements into their interpretation so that an otherwise extraneous statement may hold some relevance.

As with other uses of language, the literalness of a given metaphor depends on the ability of the interpreter interpreting it. As no statement is necessarily metaphorical regardless of context, no metaphor will necessarily be interpreted literally (or non-literally). Some interpreters have the requisite competence to directly interpret complex metaphors, while others do not. Often times when interlocutors communicate there is no advanced warning as to what degree a statement’s meaning is aligned with conventional meaning. The misinterpretation of some contextual cue can easily lead one to mistakenly interpret a metaphor according to its conventional meaning.

Communication is thoroughly conditioned by contingent contextual elements. Despite this, communication cannot be considered an arbitrary process. Meaning is not generated haphazardly. Rather, in order for successful communication to occur interlocutors must undergo a process of interpretative adjustment. They must gather as much relevant information from the communicative context, including information about their fellow communicators. While this interpretive process resists rigorous formalization, it can nevertheless be maintained that both an awareness of contextual factors and the ability to adjust according to such factors is required in order for successful communication to occur. One cannot simply happen upon a meaning.

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