

Discussion

In three experiments:

Readers perceived story characters as knowing each other better when characters used metaphorical referential descriptions.

This is consistent with the *Principle of Inference* (Kreuz, 1996): speakers may be more likely to use figurative language when they can be reasonably certain that it will be understood as intended (i.e., when commonality is greater).

- readers could attribute a similar principle to story characters, assuming that non-literal utterances will most likely be used between individuals who know each other relatively well.
- sensitivity to how language provides information about interpersonal relationships

Moreover, the mere use of a metaphor was sufficient to motivate higher judgments of intimacy, even without evidence of understanding by the addressee.

Results may also be an instantiation of *projected co-presence* (Gerrig, Brennan, & Ohaeri, 2001):

- taking characters' utterances as evidence for what they consider common ground between them

So, when a character used a metaphorical reference like *gem* with an addressee, readers may have been more likely to assume that the referent ("good idea") was part of the characters' shared knowledge.

- ∴ increased intimacy ratings

In sum:

- readers' judgments show an awareness of the capacity of metaphor to "cultivate intimacy"
- highlights the importance of considering the interpersonal consequences of figurative language use

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Metaphor and the Attribution of Intimacy

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Introduction

Cohen (1979), in an essay entitled *Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy*, suggested that an important function of metaphor is the "achievement of intimacy," by which "the maker and the appreciator of metaphor are drawn closer to one another" (pp. 7-8).

Various researchers have noted this "cultivation of intimacy" function of figurative language:

- metaphors frequently require assumptions by speakers about the *common ground* they share with addressees (Gibbs, 1994)
- by making these assumptions explicit, metaphors can reinforce feelings of commonality between speakers and addressees (Gerrig & Gibbs, 1988; Gibbs & Gerrig, 1989)

Supporting evidence comes from work on *verbal irony*:

- individuals report using verbal irony more with addressees with whom they share greater common ground (Kreuz, 1996)
- ironic statements seen as more appropriate when speakers and addressees share more common ground (Kreuz et al., 1999)
- ironic statements read faster when speakers and addressees share more common ground (Kreuz & Link, 2002)
- irony typically associated with humor and jocularity in conversations between friends (Gibbs, 2000)
- ironic statements made to intimates seen as more humorous and teasing (Pexman & Zvaigzne, 2004)

These findings have shown that different relationships can influence how people process figurative language.

BUT, is it possible to show that figurative language use has an influence upon the relationships attributed to individuals?

That is, can metaphor foster attributions of greater intimacy between speakers and addressees?

Goals

- To extend prior work by examining the "achievement of intimacy" in the context of *metaphor* (specifically, *referential metaphor*: Gibbs, 1990)
- To examine whether readers are sensitive to the interpersonal functions of figurative language
- To begin investigating the text characteristics that may influence attributions of character intimacy:
 - is the mere use of a metaphor sufficient to carry with it the presumption of intimacy?
 - or does the perception of intimacy depend upon metaphoric referring expressions being explicitly ratified by an addressee?

Methods

- 20 stories, based on Onishi & Murphy (1993)
- conversation between two characters with ambiguous prior relationship
- utterance with literal or metaphoric referring expression
- Experiments 1-3 manipulated nature of addressee's reply

Example Stories

Andy approached his supervisor with a suggestion to improve efficiency. His supervisor was impressed and said, "That's an excellent plan. I'll bring it up at the next managers' meeting."

Later that week, Andy was at Starbucks talking with Darci.

Metaphor version

Andy said, "The boss liked my latest gem."

Literal version

Andy said, "The boss liked my latest idea."

Reply indicating comprehension, Experiment 1 2 & 3

Darci replied, "Maybe you'll get a raise."

Reply indicating non-comprehension, Experiment 3

Darci replied, "I'm sorry, what?"

Joseette's clock failed to ring on time, so she overslept. She did not arrive at work until after 10 a.m., and was late for an important meeting.

After work she was at a local restaurant for happy hour. She was telling Bob about her morning.

Metaphor version

Joseette said, "First of all, my rooster didn't work."

Literal version

Joseette said, "First of all, my alarm didn't work."

Reply indicating comprehension, Experiment 1 2 & 3

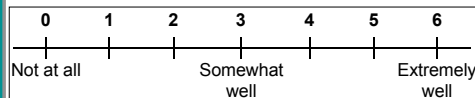
"Maybe you need a new one," said Bob.

Reply indicating non-comprehension, Experiment 3

"I'm afraid I don't follow," said Bob.

- participants read booklets with 20 experimental and 10 filler stories
- for each story, judged the intimacy of story characters using the following scale:

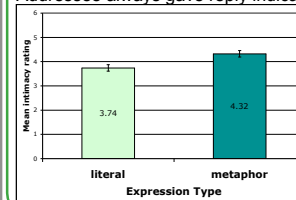
How well do Joseette and Bob know each other?



Results

Experiment 1

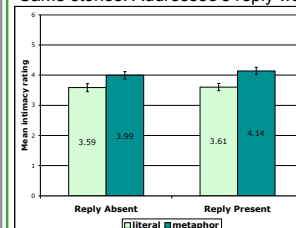
Literal vs. metaphoric stories
Addressee always gave reply indicating comprehension



Result: (N=20)
Metaphoric referring expressions led to higher ratings of character intimacy.

Experiment 2

Is explicit acknowledgement from addressee necessary?
Same stories: Addressee's reply was present or absent



Result: (N=36)
Absence of reply didn't affect the impact of expression type.

Readers also provided confidence ratings (7-pt scale):

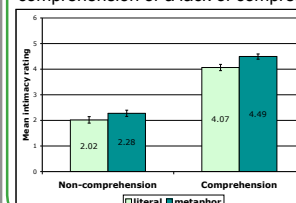
More confident when replies present than absent (4.31 vs. 4.14)

More confident when stories contained metaphors than literal statements (4.33 vs. 4.12)

Experiment 3

What if addressee provides evidence that reference is not understood?

Same stories: Addressee's reply indicated either comprehension or a lack of comprehension



Result: (N=24)
Intimacy ratings much lower when addressee failed to understand the reference.

Even so, metaphors still led to higher ratings.