

Raymond W. Jr. GIBBS. *The Poetics of Mind. Figurative Thought, Language and Understanding*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. ix + 527 pages.

An unprejudiced look at language use leaves little doubt that non-literal speech is all-pervasive. From there, it is natural to question whether such a ubiquitous phenomenon requires special cognitive operations for its production and comprehension, as one is led to believe if one follows traditional assumptions in rhetoric and much of linguistic theory. This commonsensical start to the study of non-literal language use led Gibbs—a psychologist interested in language comprehension and production—to test in the laboratory his intuition that the same interpretive mechanisms might be at work in literal and non-literal uses of language. He found, in line with discoveries by other cognitive scientists and assumptions by some pragmatists, that there was often no evidence that comprehenders arrived at non-literal interpretations via so called literal meaning. Having questioned the primacy of literal language and thought, Gibbs then goes one step further and, following G. Lakoff and associates, turns standard assumptions on their head: figuratively structured concepts are at the heart not only of figurative uses in speech but also of what we call literal language, and are therefore basic to human cognition and language. The assumption that thought and language are inherently literal is therefore challenged and eventually nailed to the coffin by the overwhelming amount of evidence that Gibbs presents. Now, what are these conceptual metaphors that the author claims are central to human cognition and language? The basic idea is that abstract concepts such as time, causation, love, or anger, are represented in the mind as metaphorically structured concepts. For example, TIME IS MONEY is one of the conceptual metaphors for understanding ordinary

talk about time, as in «You're wasting my time», «This gadget will save time», «You're running out of time», etc. The conceptual metaphor TIME IS A PERSON underlies our understanding of expressions such as «Time flies», «Time waits for no man», and so on. There is certainly no shortage of examples of these *conceptual metaphors* in the book.

The book is divided into ten chapters which supply both empirical evidence and theoretical support for the main claim that the mind is constituted by figurative structures, mainly metaphor. The first, introductory chapter, already contains the main thesis and a quick summary of the contents of the rest of the book. Here Gibbs makes explicit his theoretical and methodological stance which, following Lakoff, he calls the *cognitive wager*—maximizes the applicability of general cognitive principles and minimize language specificity—which he opposes to the hypothesis that language constitutes an autonomous system—the *generative wager*.

Chapter two offers a very interesting discussion of the notion of literal meaning, the well known problems of definition and its lack of psychological plausibility vis-à-vis experimental evidence. Chapter three makes an important contribution to the study of figurative language by dismantling a type of confusion that was endemic in the literature, consisting in systematically attributing properties of the late products of interpretation to the early and unconscious process of comprehension. This kind of confusion is typical of mainstream pragmatic approaches to figurative speech as deviant and requiring special interpretive strategies. These two chapters, along with the extensive discussion of the experimental and theoretical literature

throughout the book constitute the main strengths of Gibbs's work.

Chapter four looks for evidence that human experience is organized around basic conceptual metaphors outside language, which he finds in legal and scientific reasoning, in politics, and in different forms of cultural expression, such as myth and art. The communicative and social functions of figurative structures are also discussed. Chapter five provides a thorough review of the literature on metaphor, from Aristotle's substitutive approach to the latest proposals in pragmatics, cognitive science, philosophy of language and literary theory. Although metaphor is central in the book, Gibbs devotes considerable attention to idioms, proverbs and slang in chapter six, interestingly challenging the equation *conventional metaphor = dead metaphor*, and focusing instead on how productive a lot of conventional metaphors are in the language. Chapter seven covers metonymy and synecdoche in language and reasoning, which he claims are put to work in the ordinary derivation of conversational inferences, indirect speech acts, the interpretation of tautologies, the construction and use of prototypes, and the organization of information in memory. He also finds examples of these modes of thinking in just about every field of human experience, from films and picture taking to gestures. Irony and related tropes—oxymora, jocularism, sarcasm, hyperbole, and understatement—are the subject of chapter seven. This time Gibbs does not succeed in integrating language understanding and his wider concerns. He loosely brings in «our capacity to understand situations as ironical» as evidence that irony shapes our mind, but this does little to clarify what processes underlie our ability to deal with ironical utterances. Chapter nine, on children's ability to produce and understand different forms of figurative language and

situations shows that this capacity is there from the beginning, provided the experimental tasks do not make unreasonable demands on the children and take into consideration the knowledge they have of specific domains. Again, Gibbs's review of the developmental literature is extensive and up-to date. The book closes with a chapter devoted to «implications and future directions' in which he summarizes the main topics discussed in the book, warns that a lot of work remains to be done, especially on those cognitive and linguistic processes which are genuinely not metaphorical, renews his commitment to the «cognitive wager»—this time against linguistic determinism à la Whorf—and dwells briefly on the delimitation problems for the different figures of speech, mostly metaphor and metonymy.

The book reads wonderfully and has a lot to recommend it, but there remain important reservations concerning its theoretical underpinnings. It makes one suspicious that the writer is so uncritical of the notion of metaphor, for example, but finds literal meaning an idealization impossible to define, when the two notions ought to have a similar fate insofar as their definitions have always been interdependent. Surely, what we normally understand as metaphor involves a degree of idealization, and one would have liked to see that discussed as well. Also, there are problems with Gibbs's broad definition of metaphor as the mapping of one conceptual domain as the source (e.g., *magic*) on to a target conceptual domain (e.g., *love*), giving us expressions such as «She cast a spell on me» or «The magic is gone». Since he does not give us any insight into how either domain is represented, there is no motivation for saying that one is the source for conceptualizing the other. And so one wonders what makes *magic* the source domain for understanding *love* rather than the other way round.

Besides, in spite of his insistence on the importance of looking at on-line processing when studying language, he offers nothing in the way of a theory of utterance interpretation which could accommodate his intuitions. *Mapping* seems to be all there is to it but it is not clear what kind of operation this is and, in fact, it is probably one more instance of the confusion between the processes involved in comprehension and the products of inter-

pretation, which the author had warned us against. On the whole, though, Gibbs has a lot to offer to all those interested in language understanding and naturally, to those working in pragmatics.

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Michael MCCARTHY. *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. x + 213 pages.

Teachers following a communicative approach to the teaching of English as a foreign language are naturally very much concerned with how language is used in real-life situations in both speech and writing and endeavor to bear this in mind when they are involved in the development of materials and their exploitation in the classroom. Because discourse analysis is «... fundamentally concerned with the relationship between language and the contexts of its use» (page 10), a book aimed at introducing this area of linguistics to practicing teachers is to be welcomed. I think it is true to say that discourse analysis has for too long been restricted to a subject slot on an MA course in Applied Linguistics and thus seen by many practitioners as a nebulous theory far removed from the day-to-day routine of classroom teaching and learning.

The author has been involved in publishing materials for ELT both in an advisory role and more directly as a writer, especially in the field of vocabulary teaching and learning (see references). As a result, he treats language teachers with respect, recognizing that they use their experience of what works and what does not work in their classrooms when trying to take on board any new developments

in the field of applied linguistic theory and research. A lot of teachers' attitudes and beliefs concerning language teaching and learning are based on instinct. What McCarthy would argue is that instinct is not enough and that what teachers also need is to be reasonably well-informed as to the numerous insights that research into discourse has thrown up over recent years: the organization of texts beyond the sentence level, the regular patterns found in conversational exchanges in a variety of different situations, the role of intonation in communication, and the way the underlying rules of discourse and their realizations in language differ from culture to culture.

In Chapter 1, McCarthy introduces the concept of discourse, pointing out the lack of a one-to-one correspondence between grammatical form and communicative function and that the latter depends on the context of language use. We are led quickly through Sinclair and Coulthard's model of spoken interaction based on classroom exchanges between teachers and pupils and its limitations in more informal contexts. We are then briefly introduced to what ethnomethodologists have contributed in the study of adjacency pairs (two types of turn in a