Go Figure 2013:
“Understanding Figures of Speech”

WORKSHOP BOOKLET
20-21 June 2013
Malet Street, Senate House, South Block
Room G22/26 (Ground Floor)
Institute of Philosophy, School of Advanced Study
University of London, UK
WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

Figurative understanding is a topic that interests philosophers, linguists, psychologists and AI-researchers alike. The interest in this topic lies in the challenges that figurative meanings raise for standard propositional models, in particular for the semantics/pragmatics distinction, and the semantics of propositional attitudes. Today, the discipline has flourished. A lot has been written on the question of how we understand figures of speech such as metaphor, metonymy, and irony, and whether the type of meaning involved is a matter of 'saying' or rather of 'implicating'. Research on these topics continues to be the focus of a large community of philosophers, linguists, and increasingly of AI-researchers.

This workshop aims to provide a forum for discussion and to reflect, via the contributed talks and informal discussions, on the state of art of the discipline, and encourage new thinking about less well explored topics such as the embedding of figurative aspects within propositional attitudes, the complications raised by the lack of clear borderlines between different figures, the epistemic value of various figures in literature and the attitudes.

WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Day 1: 20 June 2013

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<td>Introduction and Welcome</td>
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<td>Mitchell Green: Learning from Metaphors</td>
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<td>11:00</td>
<td>Anne Bezuidenhout: Categories and Analogies: Comments on Hofstadter &amp; Sander</td>
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<td>12:15</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<td>13:00</td>
<td>Stephen Schiffer: Figures of Speech</td>
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<td>14:15</td>
<td>Ofra Magidor: Category Mistakes and Figurative Language</td>
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<td>15:30</td>
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<td>15:45</td>
<td>Emma Borg: Figurative Meaning and the Semantics/Pragmatics Divide</td>
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<td>17:00</td>
<td>John Barnden: Metaphorical Attitudes</td>
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<td>18:15</td>
<td>Reflective Summary of Day 1: Guy Longworth</td>
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<td>18:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>20:00</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
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Day 2: 21 June 2013

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<tr>
<td>09:30</td>
<td>Late registration and Coffee</td>
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<td>09:45</td>
<td>Laurence Horn: Lie-Toe-Tease: Double Negatives and Unexcluded Middles</td>
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<td>Catherine Wearing: Hyperbole and Other Figures</td>
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<td>Deirdre Wilson: Figurative Utterances and Speaker’s Meaning</td>
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<td>Stephen Neale: Speaker’s Meaning and Figurative Utterances</td>
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<td>15:45</td>
<td>Stephen Barker: The Said and the Unsaid Meets Figuration</td>
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<td>Reflective Summary of Day 2: Robyn Carston</td>
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<td>18:30</td>
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<td>20:00</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Mitchell Green – University of Virginia
Learning from Metaphors
A default view of the epistemic value of figurative discourse might take it to be capable of producing belief, but not knowledge save by accident or in relatively unimportant ways. By contrast with literal language, which many see as capable of producing knowledge, we might thus follow Locke in seeing metaphor as “a perfect cheat.” I will challenge this view by offering ways in which a metaphor can enable addressees to learn how some situation or object feels to the speaker. This approach will invoke the somatic marker hypothesis sensu Damasio, and will emphasize knowing how over knowing that. In addition, it will show how metaphorical discourse can powerfully facilitate empathy.

Anne Bezuidenhout – University of South Carolina
Categories and Analogies: Comments on Hofstadter & Sander (2013)
Two of the principal theses that Hofstadter & Sander argue for are that analogies and categories are two sides of the same coin and that thinking and language use are fundamentally analogical. I argue that categories are presupposed in analogy-making and thus cannot be analogies. Moreover, to see all language use as analogical is problematic when one considers the use of constructions that arguably have procedural meaning as opposed to conceptual meaning.

Stephen Schiffer – New York University
Figures of Speech
The Gricean model of figures of speech, a variant of which is Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson’s relevance-theoretic account of metaphor, holds that, subject to certain qualifications, figures of speech are linguistic devices used to perform propositional speech acts, i.e. acts of speaker-meaning, the alluded-to qualifications pertaining to refinements tacked on to the generic Gricean account of speaker-meaning to explain such things as the “open-endedness” or “unparaphrasability” of metaphors and other figures of speech. Radically opposed to the Gricean model is the Davidsonian model of figures of speech. According to this model, the Gricean model badly misunderstands the essential nature of figures of speech because its proponents have been distracted by the incidental use of figurative language to communicate propositions that could in principle have been conveyed in the literal use of language. On the Davidsonian model, the essential nature of figures of speech is best discerned in their use in the literary arts, where they are used not to perform propositional speech acts, as the Gricean model would have it, but as devices for producing non-propositional, imaginative-affective states that couldn’t exist apart from the very words used to produce those states. For the Davidsonian, we come closer to understanding figures of speech by assimilating them to jokes rather than to ways of performing acts of speaker-meaning. In my talk I shall suggest that, for most figures of speech, not only is the Davidson model closer to the truth than the Gricean model but that it could have taken its non-cognitivist account of figures of speech even farther away from the use of language to perform propositional speech acts.
Ofra Magidor – University of Oxford

**Category Mistakes and Figurative Language**

Category mistakes are sentences such as 'Green ideas sleep furiously' or 'The number two is blue'. Such sentences strike most speakers as highly infelicitous, and thus a popular view in both philosophy and linguistics maintains that category mistakes are meaningless or at the very least fail to express a content. However, this popular view has substantial implications to theories of figurative language. Many forms of figurative language such as metaphor, fictional discourse, and metonymy often involve category mistakes. In the first part of the talk, I will argue that the popular view rules out many otherwise plausible theories for the semantics of such figurative devises. In the second half, I will briefly present some arguments against the popular view, or in other words in favour of the claim that category mistakes are both meaningful and express (literal) contents. The upshot is that a wide range of theories for figurative language are left open.

Emma Borg – University of Reading

**Figurative Meaning and the Semantics/Pragmatics Divide**

This paper aims to explore the nature of the figurative/non-figurative divide: is it a division in kind or merely a division on a scale, with some interpretations clustering ‘closer’ and others clustering ‘further away’ from the literal meaning? Recent approaches to linguistic meaning (e.g. semantic minimalism, contextualism) might seem to predict different answers to this question and I will explore the extent to which this is the case. Furthermore, we might be concerned with the use of the metaphorical notion of ‘closeness’ within the scale-model: can it be replaced with any non-metaphorical notion, and if not, is this problematic? Finally, it seems that issues here are tightly bound up with questions about who has the responsibility for determining communicated content (speakers vs. hearers). One attractive suggestion is that speakers and hearers in some way negotiate shared meaning (including shared figurative meaning). I will discuss what ‘negotiating meaning’ might amount to, and ask what exactly 'sharing figurative meaning' might mean.

John Barnden – University of Birmingham

**Metaphorical Attitudes**

I address the problem that has been noted by Stephen Schiffer and others that often arises with attempts to provide theories of propositional attitudes (PAs) and the meaning of PA reports. The problem is that theories are in danger of imputing to ordinary people, e.g. when understanding a PA report, an understanding of abstruse technical matters (about PAs) that are aspects of non-commonsensical notions used in the theory. The non-commonsensical nature of such aspects makes it overwhelmingly unlikely that ordinary people would have an understanding of them. While it may turn out to be possible to devise a PA theory that is along existing lines but that avoids the danger in question, this strategy is likely to involve elaborate devices for hiding theoretical abstruseness from contemplation by ordinary people. In response, I suggest a different strategy, inspired by the claim in Cognitive Linguistics that people often conceive of mental states, along with many other abstract matters, with the help of metaphor. I suggest that PA theory should positively impute to ordinary agents thoughts about each other that are framed from the outset in terms of commonsensical metaphor, rather than adopting the negative strategy of massaging abstruse theories into commonsensically acceptable form. Particular effects of this view include (a) a multiplicity of ways in which the believing (or hoping, wanting, ...) in general may be
viewed in acts of propositional attitude report understanding, and (b) metaphor-relativity in the distinctions between different styles of interpretation such as de-re and de-dicto.

Laurence Horn – Yale University

Lie-Toe-Tease: Double Negatives and Unexcluded Middles

With such stock examples as “no mean feat”, “no small problem”, or “not bad at all”, litotes—“a figure of speech in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of the contrary” (OED)—has had some tough reviews. For Pope and Swift (“Scriblerus” 1727), litotes is “the peculiar talent of Ladies, Whisperers, and Backbiters”; for Orwell (1946), it is a means to affect “an appearance of profundity” that we can deport from English “by memorizing this sentence: A not unblack dog was chasing a not unsmall rabbit across a not ungreen field.” But such ridicule is not without equivocation over when litotes, or “logical” (non-concordial) double negation, is or is not semantically redundant. When the negation of a logical contrary yields an unexcluded middle, it contributes to expressive power: someone who is not unhappy may not be happy either, and an occurrence may not be infrequent without being frequent. But if something is not inconceivable, what can it be but conceivable? Why does Crashaw’s “not impossible she” survive rhetorically while Orwell’s “not unsmall rabbit” is doomed? And how is being “not not friends” with someone distinct from being friends with them, if \(\neg\neg p\) reduces to \(p\)? The key is recognizing in litotes a corollary of MaxContrary, the tendency for contradictory (wide-scope) sentential negation \(\neg p\) to strengthen whenever possible to a contrary \(\neg\neg p\), as when the formally contradictory Fr. "Il ne faut pas partir" (lit. = 'It is not necessary to leave') is conventionalized as expressing a contrary ('one must not-leave'). Just as the Law of Excluded Middle can apply where it "shouldn't", resulting in pragmatically presupposed disjunctions between semantic contraries, reading "\(p \lor \neg p\)" as an instance of "\(p \lor \neg\neg p\)" (cf. Bartsch 1973), the Law of Double Negation can fail to apply where it "should", as when "not impossible" is functionally weaker than "possible" or when someone who doesn’t not-love her dog doesn’t necessarily love him either. When \([\neg\neg p]\) amounts to \(\neg\neg\neg p\), i.e. the negation of a virtual contrary, rather than to \(\neg p\), the “middle” between \(p\) and not-\(p\) is no longer excluded, and Frege’s (1919) dictum that “Wrapping up a thought in double negation does not alter its truth value” is rendered not unimpeachable.

Catherine Wearing – Wellesley College

Hyperbole and Other Figures

How does hyperbole achieve its effect? Relevance theorists have made a case for grouping hyperbole with metaphor as an instance of loose talk, but most other theorists have tended (often without argument) to classify hyperbole together with irony. My goal in this talk is to look at hyperbole in relation to three other figures, metaphor, irony, and hyperbole’s apparent twin, understatement, in order to get clearer about why hyperbole should pull us in these two directions. I will suggest that, even while significant continuities between hyperbole and metaphor argue for placing them together, an important discontinuity between the two grounds the inclination to classify hyperbole with irony instead.
Deirdre Wilson – University College London

**Figurative Utterances and Speaker’s Meaning**

Lepore & Stone (2010) extend traditional Davidsonian scepticism about metaphorical meaning into the Gricean framework, arguing that metaphorical uses of language do not convey Gricean speaker’s meanings, and do not fall within the scope of Gricean theories of communication, In this paper, written jointly with Dan Sperber, I will argue (a) that it is important to distinguish Grice’s theory of speaker’s meaning from broadly Gricean theories of communication such as relevance theory, and (b) that the type of non-paraphrasable effects seen as characteristic of poetic metaphors are pervasive in language use, so that excluding them from the scope of theories of communication radically distorts the domain.

Reference:


Stephen Neale – Cuny, New York

**Speaker’s Meaning and Figurative Utterances**

I’m on board with Deirdre and Dan, but I’ll try to sink Deirdre’s paper and then let her keelhaul me publicly.

Stephen Barker – University of Nottingham

**The Said and the Unsaid Meets Figuration**

This paper explores a speech-act based analysis of metaphor and irony by way of a distinction between speech-acts of saying as opposed to speech-acts of indicating, that is, conveyance of content but not through saying. Sayings, when thought of as grounded in the speaker’s doxastic states, are truth-apt, whereas indications are never truth-apt. Conventional implicature is my model for indicated (unsaid) content, though the category of unsaid extends beyond that phenomenon. I give some general arguments for why we should embrace the said/unsaid (indicated) distinction. I analyse the distinction between said/unsaid in terms of a distinction between those speech acts whose purpose is to ‘defend’ mental states as opposed to those whose purpose is merely to manifest mental states. I then use this framework to sketch a two-tiered analysis of metaphor and sarcasm. Both involve using a sentence S to say something (literal), where it is indicated that the saying is doxastically ungrounded—the speaker lacks the state M that attends literal assertion of M, but metaphor involves the defense of a state related M—whereas sarcasm is a mere indication of a disparaging attitude towards speech-acts of defending of M (assertions of S).

Mihaela Popa – University of Birmingham


The semantics-pragmatics distinction is concerned with distinguishing what speakers say (assert) from what they implicate by an utterance. This idea can be summarised using two theses: *truth-conditional compositionality of utterances* (TCC) and the *insensitivity of said-content to implicated-content* (Insensitivity). A class of embedded implicatures called embedded ironic utterances challenges this distinction, as they require said-content to depend on implicature, violating Insensitivity and threatening TCC. Embedded irony cannot be explained away as said-content, nor as a modified version of Gricean implicature. Instead I show how to solve the problem by abandoning Insensitivity and drawing on the theory of speech-acts. I argue that both unembedded and embedded irony involve, as a core speech-act, what Barker (2004) calls a ‘proto-act.’ That’s an act in which a speaker ‘advertises’ ironic-speech-act
intentions, but which is neutral as to whether the speaker has the intentions, or communicates her possession of them. In unembedded irony, the speaker has the intentions she signals, whereas in embedded irony she lacks them. This framework also explains the said/implicated distinction as a distinction between speech-acts whose purpose is to ‘defend’ mental states and speech-acts whose purpose is to manifest mental states without ‘defending’ them. Irony falls within the non-defensive speech-acts and embeds therefore as a form of implicated meaning. The result is to retain the distinction between said and implicated-content, while allowing said-content to depend on the implicatures of component speech-acts. This abandons Insensitivity and replaces TCC with a modified version based on compositionality of speech-acts.

A booklet containing abstract for all presentations can be accessed online and downloaded here: http://events.cs.bham.ac.uk/go-figure/booklet.html

**WI-FI PASSWORD**

The Wi-Fi passwords to use for the 'UoL Conferences' are in the following.

- Day 1: 20 June 2013: ristte
- Day 2: 21 June 2013: iemohe

**LOCATION MAP**

*Workshop Venue*

- Senate House, South Block
- Institute of Philosophy
- School of Advanced Study
- University of London
- Malet Street
- London
- WC1E 7HU
INFORMATION

All activities relating to the workshop will be take place in the Institute of Philosophy, School of Advanced Study, University of London, United Kingdom.
Dinner for the day 1 and day 2 will be held in separate locations, as maps and instructions are below.

Hotel

![Map of Hotel Location]

23 Mecklenburgh Square,
London
WC1N 2AD
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7837 8831
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7837 9321
Email: reservations@goodenough.ac.uk
Website: http://www.club.goodenough.ac.uk

Dinner

Day 1 Dinner: 20 June 2013: 8pm

![Map of Dinner Location]

Busaba Eathai
22 Store Street
London
WC1E 7DF
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7299 7900
**Day 2 Dinner: 21 June 2013: 8pm**

**TAS**
22 Bloomsbury Street
London
City of London, Greater London
WC1B 3QJ
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7637 4555

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**SPONSORS**

**The Institute of Philosophy**

The Institute of Philosophy is an Institute of the University of London’s School of Advanced Study. Founded in 2005, the IP was made possible by a generous private donation and matching funding from the University of London.

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**The British Society of Aesthetics (BSA)**

The British Society of Aesthetics (BSA) aims to promote study, research and discussion of the fine arts and related types of experience from a philosophical, psychological, sociological, historical, critical and educational standpoint. The Society’s activities include publication of the British Journal of Aesthetics, a newsletter, an annual conference, regional conferences, lecture series, grants to support research in aesthetics, and an essay prize.

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**The Analysis Trust**

The Analysis Committee is responsible for appointing and advising the Editor and for the general policy of the Analysis journal, and oversees the Analysis Trust.
The Mind Association

The Mind Association supports and promotes research excellence in philosophy. It is responsible for the management and financial support of the quarterly journal, Mind. For a statement of the journal’s review practices see MIND Review Practices The Association also supports philosophical research in two main other ways: by offering conference grants to help fund high quality, open conferences and workshops in any area of philosophy; and by funding research fellowships. From 2010 the fellowships offered comprise: up to three six-month research fellowships; and a 12-month fellowship, the Mind Senior Research Fellowship. In the academic year following the tenure of their fellowship, the Mind Senior Fellow gives a public lecture hosted by their home institution. Membership of the Association is open to any individual subscriber. In addition to receiving Mind, members may attend the national philosophical conference (the Joint Session) organised with the Aristotelian Society and held each year in July at one of the British universities. The AGM of the Mind Association takes place at this conference and members are entitled to vote at this. A list of members is published each year in the January issue of Mind.

The Leverhulme Trust

The Leverhulme Trust was established in 1925 under the Will of the First Viscount Leverhulme with the instruction that its resources should be used to support “scholarships for the purposes of research and education.” Since that time, the Trust has provided funding for research projects, fellowships, studentships, bursaries and prizes; it operates across all the academic disciplines, the ambition being to support talented individuals as they realise their personal vision in research and professional training. With annual funding of some £60 million, the Trust is amongst the largest all-subject providers of research funding in the UK.

The Aristotelian Society

The Aristotelian Society, founded in 1880, meets fortnightly in London to hear and discuss talks given by leading philosophers. On April 19th 1880 at 17 Bloomsbury Square a group of five men met to discuss the establishment of a new student organisation for the serious discussion of philosophy. Far from a gathering of professional academic philosophers, the group included a British Socialist activist, a Shakespeare scholar and importantly a young chemist – Dr. Alfred Senier – whose original idea it had been, along with some of his students, to set up a philosophical society. It was decided that the group would meet fortnightly on Monday evenings, and the minutes record the group’s aim of reaching a size of about 20 members, a number which was ‘to include ladies’. The stated aim of The Society was ‘the systematic study of philosophy; 1st, as to its historical development; 2nd, as to its methods and problems’. As befits its beginnings, however, the activities of The Society have been marked from its earliest days by a distinctive tone of openness and inclusivity reaching beyond the limits of academic philosophy.
The University of Birmingham was established by Queen Victoria by Royal Charter in 1900 and was the UK’s first civic or 'redbrick' university. The first phase of building work on the campus was completed in 1909 under the auspices of the esteemed architect Sir Aston Webb. We celebrated the centenary of those buildings in July 2009.

GO FIGURE ORGANISERS

This workshop is part of the Leverhulme-funded project "Metaphor and Metonymy: addressing a debate and a neglected problem" led by John Barnden in the School of Computer Science, University of Birmingham.

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