

Today

- HW5
- Next reading presentation: Friday, March 4th (R25)
- Figurative language: metonymy

Figurative language

- So far we've looked at how people understand "literal" language.
- But what about this stuff?
 - *Sparkly hat over there wants his check.*
 - *The highway zigzags up through the mountains.*
 - *The Indian economy is roaring back to life.*

Question: why do we care about figurative language?

Metonymy

1. *Shakespeare is on the top shelf. (producer for product)*
2. *The wings took off from the runway. (part for whole or synecdoche)*
3. *Hussein invaded Iraq. (controller for controlled)*
4. *The planes are on strike. (object used for user)*
5. *That blasphemous woman had to answer to the convent. (place for institution)*
6. *A lot of Americans protested during Vietnam. (place for event)*

Question: other examples of metonymy?

How do we understand figurative language?

- Some accounts
 - *Literal-first model*: First you access literal meanings, and then figurative ones.
 - *Figurative first-model*: First you access figurative meanings, then literal ones.
 - *Parallel model*: You access both literal and figurative meanings at the same time.

Question: are there other possibilities?

Consider

- a. These two businessmen tried to purchase the convent at the end of last April, which upset quite a lot of people, (literal context-familiar metonymic; LC-FM)
- b. That blasphemous woman had to answer to the convent at the end of last March, but did not get a lot of support. (metonymic context-familiar metonymic; MC-FM)
- c. These two businessmen tried to purchase the stadium at the end of last April, which upset quite a lot of people, (literal context-no familiar metonymic; LC-NM)
- d. That blasphemous woman had to answer to the stadium at the end of last March, but did not get a lot of support. (metonymic context-no familiar metonymic; MC-NM)

Measure

- Reading time (using eye-tracking)
 - People should spend longer on words they're having more difficulty processing (this is a measure of immediate difficulty)
 - Later, they should regress more to parts that they're still struggling with (a measure of continuing difficulty)

Results

- People only spend more time reading (and rereading) a metonymic word when the metonymy is unfamiliar
 - *That blasphemous woman had to answer to the stadium at the end of last March, but did not get a lot of support*
- This appears to support a parallel model

Parallel models

- But what exactly is activated in parallel?
 - Fully specified account: people activate multiple, specific senses simultaneously
 - Underspecified account: people activate a single, underspecified sense, and only disambiguate when they have to, or when they have disambiguating information
- The authors argue that their data are most compatible with an underspecified account

Discussion questions

- What would it mean to activate an underspecified sense of 'stadium' or 'convent'?
- How could we tell which it is?
- Is it possible that context influences whether processing is parallel or literal- or figurative-first? How?