

What is Metaphorical Meaning?

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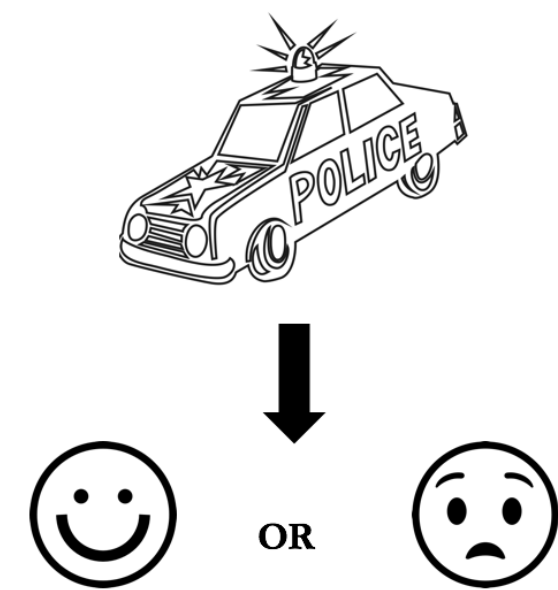


Literal vs Speaker Meaning

Analytic philosophy of language has been largely devoted to the study of literal meaning, or what is said. However, we know that often times we are able to convey something over and above this literal meaning, giving us an implied meaning. For example, we can take the sentence “the cops are around the corner” and interpret this in many ways.

Literal Meaning is what the conventions of the language tell us.

Speaker Meaning is something communicated over and above what is literally said.



The Problem with Metaphors

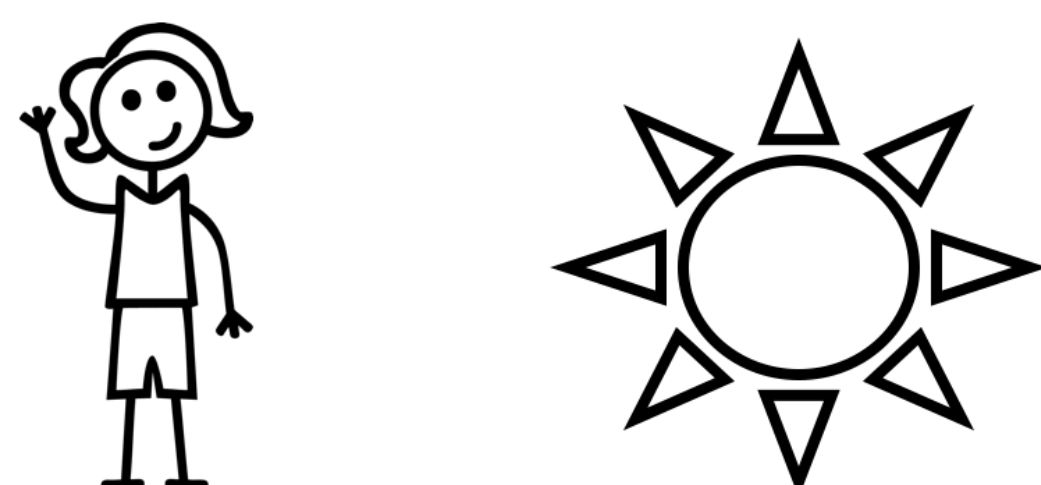
Metaphors pose a problem because they don't fit very well into the literal or speaker meaning category.

Take for example the statement: **“Juliet is the sun.”**

What does the speaker mean to convey when making this statement? It seems obvious that we do not intend the literal meaning. We do not wish to say that “Juliet is a giant ball of gas floating around in outer space.”

We understand that this statement is special, but does it belong in a category under literal meaning, implied meaning, or does it warrant an entirely new category of its own?

Now, we will examine three theories concerning metaphorical meaning and some of the strengths and weaknesses of each. The Comparison View, The Interaction View, and The Pragmatic View.



The Comparison View

The Comparison View holds that metaphors are just an elided simile.

“Juliet is the sun”



“Juliet is **like** the sun”

Benefits

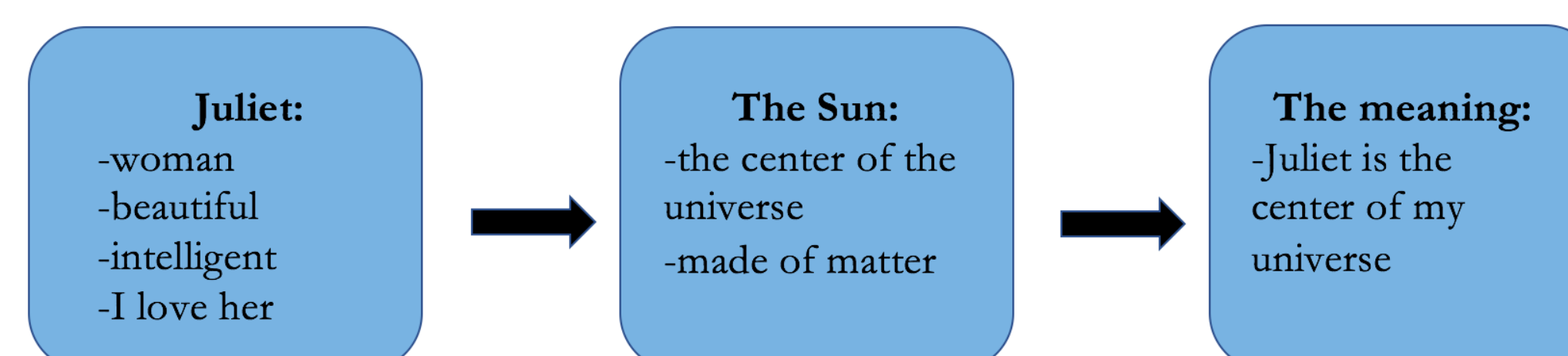
It seems reasonable because we obviously do make some kind of comparison. The view entices us with its simplicity in another manner as well. Instead of having to explain both similes and metaphors, now we only have to explain similes since all metaphors reduce to similes.

Drawbacks

Not all metaphors translate so easily
Ex: “When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul/Lends the tongue vows”

The Interaction View

The meanings of the different parts of the sentence interact in a special way, which gives you the overall meaning of the sentence.



Benefits

This view explains the cognitive relevance of metaphors.

In addition, it allows us to make comparisons using things that the speaker and the hearer know are not real.

Ex: “Juliet is a dragon”

Drawbacks

Again, we see that not all metaphors translate so easily. In addition, we encounter a problem with the semantics. With this view, each word means something specific so if you change any of the words, then you are changing the meaning of the entire utterance.

Ex: “Juliet is the sun” or “Lady Capulet is the sun”

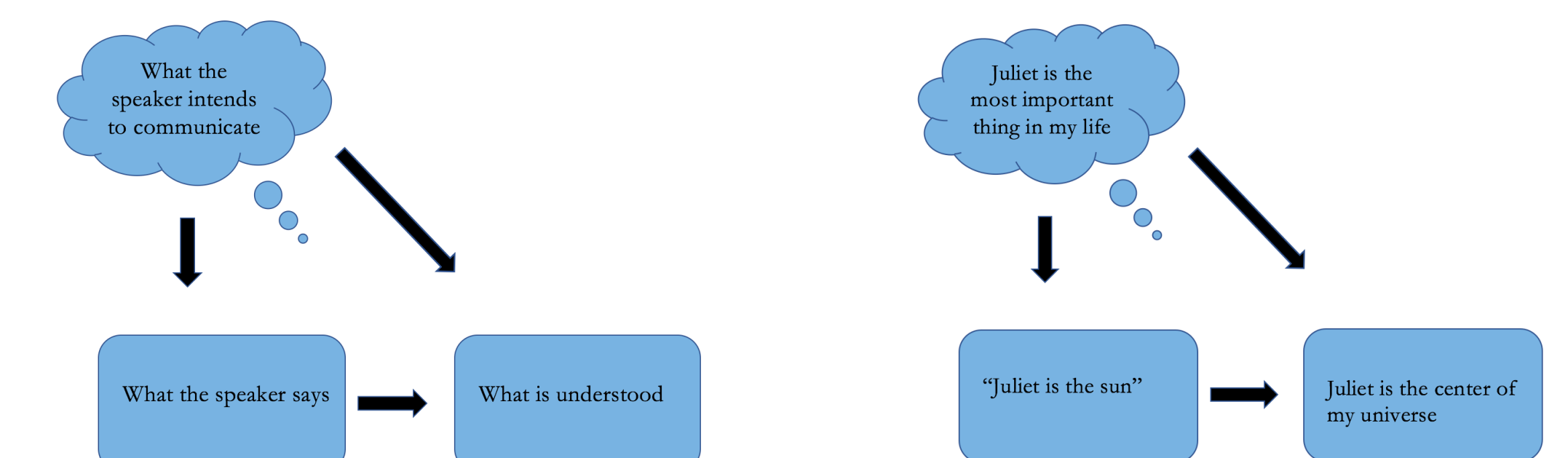
The Pragmatic View

This view is centered on speaker meaning and it consists of a series of steps that the hearer takes in order to understand the metaphor.

Step 1: The hearer decides whether to look for a non-literal interpretation

Step 2: The hearer uses principles to guide them in determining options for what the speaker intends

Step 3: The hearer identifies what it is that the speaker means



Benefits

Since this is centered on speaker meaning, it allows us to explain metaphors more comprehensively.

Ex: “Jill is a philosopher”

Drawbacks

Not all utterances used metaphorically will make the hearer examine it more closely.

Ex: “No man is an island”

In this view, we are saying “A is B” but metaphorically “A is C”. So we hear, “Juliet is the Sun” but we don't have a specific method to finding out what this ‘C’ actually is.

What now?

Is there really any distinct metaphorical meaning, and if there is, how do we reconcile the objections in order to create a well rounded and realistic approach?

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the University of San Diego Ronald E. McNair Scholars program for their financial support and encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr. Ashley Feinsinger for her mentorship and support.

