Pragmatic Subjectivity in Metaphors and Similes

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This presentation aims...

- to give a novel (but old & familiar) perspective of **subjectivity** that will give a cognitively reasonable account of the comprehension process of metaphors and similes
- to develop Cognitive Linguistics by adopting **pragmatic view of communication** toward establishing Cognitive Pragmatics
Subjectivity in Cognitive Linguistics

- Subjectivity in language is...
  - mainly studied in the view of subjectification (Langacker 1991) or grammaticalization (Traugott 1988, 1995), which has been embedded or entrenched in language prior to its actual use of a present speaker/writer.
  - However, we often use the term in everyday life to point out that someone’s judgement belongs to his own mind and does not shared by others.

➡ Why different?
  ➡ semantic/syntactic view vs. pragmatic view
1. In non-pragmatic view, an utterance or a message alone is given to a hearer/reader.
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3. The salient factors in speech event are the speaker/writer and his speech act other than an utterance/message.
1. In non-pragmatic view, an utterance or a message alone is given to a hearer/reader.

2. However, an utterance or a message never stands alone without its speech event (i.e. context).

3. The salient factors in speech event are the speaker/writer and his speech act other than an utterance/message.

4. In canonical comprehension process, the utterance/message is profiled, but sometimes the speaker/writer gets foregrounded.

-> Pragmatic subjectivity
Interpreters (hearer/reader) can assess a given speech event to be canonical or deviant in view of linguistic communication.

linguistic communicative assessment (LCA)

1) construal assessment
2) grounding assessment (cf. Clark & Brennan 1987)
3) speech act assessment

Each assessment is based on ICMs (Lakoff 1987), which should be used as resources of language comprehension by interpreters.
Construal assessment

- The ICM of construal assessment
  - *The construal of an event by a speaker should be in accord with that by a hearer.*
  
  - canonical state
    - A: (Walking in a park together) It’s raining.
    - B: yeah.
  
  - deviant state
    - B: No, it’s drizzling.

  ➡ The hearer attributes the deviation to the speaker or the hearer’s belief or usage.
The ICM of grounding (i.e. constructing common ground) assessment

- a) The information that a speaker intends to convey should be informative enough to a hearer.
- b) (a) should be achieved through the shared information between a speaker and a hearer.

- deviant state

  A: (Walking in a park together) It’s raining.
  B: So what?

  The hearer considers A’s utterance to be not informative and may infer that A has what to follow the utterance (e.g. “I left my umbrella at home”).
Speech act assessment

- The ICM of speech act assessment
  - *The type of speech act (locution/illocution/perlocution) should be in accord with the one which is evoked or allowed by its immediate context and a hearer’s expectation.*

- deviant state
  - A: You are so rude!
  - B: Thank you (-> illocution-level deviation)

→ The hearer considers B’s speech act to be deviant and may infer that A has *ironical/humorous* intent.
The characteristics of LCA

- Those three types of assessment are **not discrete**.
  - E.g. **Referential deviation** (calling an object/person X ‘Y’, while it/he should be called ‘X’ in canonical state) can be detected through **either construal assessment or (locution level) speech-act assessment**.

- **Construal assessment** and **grounding assessment** usually work in the **opposite** direction to each other.
  - E.g. “It’s raining” utterance.

→ ∴ LCA motivates interpreters to make a pragmatic inference.
Similes and Metaphors

- What’s the difference between similes and metaphors? (“X is like Y” vs “X is Y”)
  - common features: two domains are compared
    - source domain: Y, target domain: X
  - different features: explicitness of resemblance
    - similes: explicit
    - metaphors: implicit

⇒ More detailed analyses are possible in view of LCA.
Pragmatic subjectivity in metaphors

A typical ’X is Y’ metaphor

John is a teddy bear.
Pragmatic subjectivity in metaphors

A typical 'X is Y' metaphor

John is a teddy bear.

based on mutual knowledge
-> canonical [grounding assessment]

X referent
Pragmatic subjectivity in metaphors

A typical 'X is Y' metaphor

John is a teddy bear.

based on mutual knowledge
-> canonical [grounding assessment]

X referent

based on conventional belief
-> canonical [grounding assessment]

cuddly and lovable connotation

John

ing a teddy bear.
Pragmatic subjectivity in metaphors

A typical ’X is Y’ metaphor

John is a teddy bear.

based on mutual knowledge

\[ \text{canonical} \] [grounding assessment]

When John looks cuddly and lovable to the hearer,

\[ \text{canonical} \] [construal assessment]

based on conventional belief

\[ \text{canonical} \] [grounding assessment]

\[ X \]

\[ \text{cuddly and lovable} \]

\[ \text{referent} \]

\[ \text{connotation} \]
Pragmatic subjectivity in metaphors

A typical ‘X is Y’ metaphor

John is a teddy bear.

based on mutual knowledge
-> canonical [grounding assessment]

When John looks cuddly and lovable to the hearer,
-> canonical [construal assessment]

low pragmatic subjectivity
Pragmatic subjectivity in metaphors

A typical ’X is Y’ metaphor

John is a teddy bear.

based on mutual knowledge
-> canonical [grounding assessment]

based on conventional belief
-> canonical [grounding assessment]
Pragmatic subjectivity in metaphors

A typical ‘X is Y’ metaphor

John is a teddy bear.

based on mutual knowledge
-> canonical [grounding assessment]

cuddly and lovable

referent

based on conventional belief
-> canonical [grounding assessment]

connotation

If John does not look cuddly and lovable at all to the hearer,
-> deviant [construal assessment]
Pragmatic subjectivity in metaphors

A typical ’X is Y’ metaphor

John is a teddy bear.

based on mutual knowledge
-> *canonical* [grounding assessment]

based on conventional belief
-> *canonical* [grounding assessment]

The hearer will revise John’s assumptions or teddy bear’s connotations (=*updating the world knowledge*), or will conclude that John tells a lie or want to specify the speaker’s intention.

If John does not look cuddly and lovable at all to the hearer,
-> *deviant* [construal assessment]

John

cuddly and lovable

X

referent

connotation
Pragmatic subjectivity in metaphors

A typical ’X is Y’ metaphor

John is a teddy bear.

Based on mutual knowledge
-> **canonical** [grounding assessment]

Based on conventional belief
-> **canonical** [grounding assessment]

**X**

Referent

**cuddly and lovable**

Connotation

If John does not look cuddly and lovable at all to the hearer,
-> **deviant** [construal assessment]

The hearer will revise John’s assumptions or teddy bear’s connotations (=**updating the world knowledge**), or will conclude that John tells a lie or want to specify the speaker’s intention.

High pragmatic subjectivity
Pragmatic subjectivity in metaphors

John is the *teddiest* bear.

Based on mutual knowledge
- $\rightarrow$ **canonical** [grounding assessment]

When John looks very cuddly and lovable to the hearer,
- $\rightarrow$ **canonical** [construal assessment]
Pragmatic subjectivity in metaphors

John is the *teddiest* bear.

based on mutual knowledge

-> *canonical* [grounding assessment]

When John looks very cuddly and lovable to the hearer,

-> *canonical* [construal assessment]

very cuddly and lovable

referent

connotation

not based on mutual linguistic knowledge
(i.e. ‘teddy’ is not an adjective)

-> *deviant* [grounding/speech act assessment]
Pragmatic subjectivity in metaphors

John is the **teddiest** bear.

Based on mutual knowledge,

- > **canonical** [grounding assessment]

When John looks very cuddly and lovable to the hearer,

- > **canonical** [construal assessment]

The hearer will assume the speaker subjectively extends the metaphor.

- > **humor effect**

not based on mutual linguistic knowledge (i.e. ‘teddy’ is not an adjective)

- > **deviant** [grounding/speech act assessment]
Pragmatic subjectivity in metaphors

John is the **teddiest** bear.

- **Based on mutual knowledge**
  - → **canonical** [grounding assessment]

- **When John looks very cuddly and lovable to the hearer,**
  - → **canonical** [construal assessment]

- **The hearer will assume the speaker subjectively extends the metaphor.**
  - → **humor effect**

- **Not based on mutual linguistic knowledge**
  - (i.e. ‘teddy’ is not an adjective)
  - → **deviant** [grounding/speech act assessment]

- **High pragmatic subjectivity**
Pragmatic subjectivity in similes

- ‘Heuristic recognition’ in similes
  - It is not that similes are based on the resemblance, but that some resemblance is set up through similes. (Sato 1978: 64)
  - In Langackerian terms, A is like B profiles the resemblance, while A is B profiles the properties predicated. (Croft and Cruise 2004: 212-213)

Similes tend to be deviant in construal assessment.
- The resemblance is not shared between a speaker and a hearer before a simile expressed.
Pragmatic subjectivity in similes

- Prototypical similes are pragmatically subjective.
  - In ‘X is like Y’ similes, a large part of them are followed by their explanations of similarities discovered by the speakers. (cf. Roncero et al. 2005)

- Ex. similes in movie lines
  1. My momma always said, 'life is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you're gonna get' (Forrest Gump, 1994)
  2. Men are like gum anyway -- after you chew they lose their flavor. (Ally McBeal, 1997)
  3. Bart, a woman is like a beer. They look good, they smell good, and you'd step over your own mother just to get one! (The Simpsons, 1989)
Metaphors and similes from LCA

- Prototypical metaphors: low pragmatic subjectivity
  - Novel metaphors extended from prototype get highly pragmatically subjective. [grounding/speech act assessment]

- Prototypical similes: high pragmatic subjectivity
  - Explanations frequently follow similes. [grounding assessment]
  - Conventional similes (e.g. like hell) get less pragmatically subjective.

- Referential deviation of LCA causes pragmatic subjectivity to both metaphors and similes.
Conclusion

- Pragmatic subjectivity is...
  - the subjectivity that is discovered by interpreters through *linguistic communicative assessment*.
  - the subjectivity under which *the speaker is foregrounded in the speech event*.
    - as a subject of construal/a subject of grounding/a subject of speech act
- Metaphors and similes can be reanalyzed from LCA.
  - Further examinations should be needed especially to analyze *‘generic vs specific’ reference of target*.
  - Corpus analysis and experimental research will help LCA’s effect.
References

Thank you for your attention.