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Joe Wofford
Meredith College

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JOE WOFFORD

Department of English
Meredith College
Raleigh NC 27607
USA
woffordj@meredith.edu

ABSTRACT: This study builds upon the ideas of Classical Pragmatists (Peirce, Dewey, James) and Neo-pragmatists (Popper, Quine, Davidson) to suggest that metaphors can best be understood in terms of what they are used to do. What metaphors do, according to Davidson, is redirect our notice so as to effect new understandings. Davidson's account, thus understood, appears to contradict the conclusions of structuralist accounts in which metaphorical meanings are derived from the supposed cognitive contents of utterances.

KEYWORDS: adherence, cognitive contents, ɪzə constructions, metaphor, principle of charity, radical interpretation, reflex arc concept, secondary meanings, Tarski-type truth statements.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study of metaphor is negative and restricted in its scope. My principal purpose is to test Donald Davidson's claims concerning metaphor, particularly his understanding of metaphor as a purely pragmatic phenomenon that lies wholly outside the scope of structuralist accounts. My focus is highly restricted in that I deal with a particular pattern of metaphors, those which can be stated in the form "A ɪzə B." I employ this phonetic representation in order to avoid assigning the specific grammatical status that "is a" might imply. I believe that ɪzə when it appears in metaphorical utterances merely signals that the entire utterance constitutes a rhetorical–not a logical–claim which the metaphor-maker's interlocutor is expected to resolve by applying Davidson's Principle of Charity. That is, the interlocutor is expected to interpret the utterance in such a way as to make it true. The sense of "true" I have in mind is that which appears in Tarski-type truth formulations as exemplified by the utterance '"Snow is white' is true iff snow is white." In Perelman's term, the metaphor-maker's interlocutor is expected to attain a degree of *adherence* that is sufficient to permit discourse to proceed. When claims such as those which constitute metaphors are confronted,

> the hearers are not bound by exact rules that compel them to recognize certain propositions, [so] the whole structure raised by the speaker has no other basis than […] the adherence of the hearers (Perelman 1969, p. 104).

In other words, validity as logicians employ the term is not an issue. In this paper I limit my examination to a single metaphor, specifically the statement "A paintbrush is a pump," first examined by Donald A. Schön (1983).

2. TENETS OF PHILOSOPHICAL PRAGMATISM: PEIRCE TO DAVIDSON

In order to establish a background for Davidson's views on metaphor, it will be useful to briefly survey relevant statements from the classical and modern Pragmatists whose ideas Davidson's thinking tacitly rely upon. Charles Saunders Peirce, generally considered the father of American Pragmatism, establishes an understanding of the phenomena of belief and truth which informs Davidson's basis for determining that a metaphorical statement is true:

> Doubts, whether arising from mundane or from technical situations differ, then, only in the rigor with which thought is applied to reestablish belief; the method is the same: However the doubt may originate, it stimulates the mind to an activity which may be slight or energetic, calm or turbulent. Images pass rapidly through consciousness, one incessantly melting into another, until at last, when all is over—it may be in a fraction of a second, in an hour, or after long years—we find ourselves decided as to how we should act under such circumstances as those which occasioned our hesitation. In other words, we have attained belief. (Peirce 1958, p. 119).

Elsewhere Peirce usefully defines thought as an activity whose "motive, idea, and function is to produce belief […]" (Peirce 1981, p. 29). Peirce concludes, as Davidson will suggest later, that doubt stimulates us to re-notice the world.

I believe that Davidson follows John Dewey in treating metaphor as a simple stimulus with no complexity beyond its sound sequences or shape on the page. But metaphor, seen as an interpretational event, is at once a stimulus, a response, and a radical-interpretational process: an observational/discursive circuit, whose parts are better viewed as phases of a single, irreducible event. John Dewey, in contrast with both earlier psychologists and mid twentieth-century behaviourists, clarifies the view of stimulus and response that I have in mind. In his 1896 article, "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology," Dewey attacks the idea that sensory stimuli act as discrete entities in a reflexive process involving "rigid distinctions between sensations, thoughts, and acts," proposing that we could more usefully think in terms of "divisions of labor" operating in a relationship he labels "co-ordination" (Dewey 1896, p. 137). The parts of a stimulus/response event such as metaphor, then, interdepend and are thus incapable of independent examination.

Davidson's markedly negative program with regard to metaphor appears to follow from Karl Popper's understanding that induction cannot be relied upon as the basis of predictive theories. Popper's entire project for improving scientific understanding rests on his claim that "empirical generalizations, though not verifiable, are falsifiable" and that "scientific laws are testable in spite of being unprovable: they can be tested by systematic attempts to refute them" (Magee 1973, p. 15).

3. THE BASIS OF DAVIDSON'S PRAGMATIC CLAIMS FOR METAPHOR INTERPRETATION

Central to Davidson's claims concerning the workings of metaphor is his claim for the anomalism of the mental which argues against the possibility of mental laws. The meanings which audiences might derive from utterances are potentially unlimited. It follows, then, that the possible meanings of metaphors cannot be calculated by analyzing the semantic features or cognitive contents of the terms which comprise metaphorical utterances. His rejection of the idea of mental laws springs from Quine's observations about the indeterminacy of translation. The idea of a single correct translation of a sentence, Quine explains, comes from "an uncritical mentalistic theory of ideas [by which] each sentence and its admissible translations express an identical idea" (Quine 1960, p. 74). This idea that interpretations are indeterminate provides tacit underpinning for Davidson's treatment of metaphor.

4. ANCIENT, STRUCTURALIST, AND COGNITIVE ACCOUNTS OF METAPHOR

Aristotle defines metaphor as "the act of giving a thing a name that belongs to something else" and Diomedes as "the transferring of things and words from their proper signification to an improper similitude for the sake of beauty, necessity, polish, or emphasis" (qtd. in Perelman 1966, p. 1086). Aristotle suggests that information is somehow transferred from one word to another, and Diomedes suggests that words in metaphors are used improperly but justifiably. Right away, Aristotle's definition presents problems. First of all, we are bound to notice that Aristotle's definition permits all words to be seen as metaphors. Dictionaries define words in terms of other words, and a definition must take the form of a claim that A is a B. If all words are in this broad sense metaphors, then metaphors are necessarily quite ordinary and cannot, as Aristotle suggests, be apart from ordinary language. We are left with the paradox that all language is metaphorical; hence no language is metaphorical. Whenever we are confronted with a paradox, I believe, we have a problem not with reality, but with our language—with our logocentric *understanding* of reality.

Traditional linguistics, specifically semantics, will see a word in terms of its semantic features. The word "boy," for instance, carries labels such as +male, -female, +human, -adult, -infant, and so on. If we were attempting, for instance, to translate the metaphor "The old man is a boy again," we could consider the respective semantic features of "boy" and of "old man" in a purely mechanical way yet remain unable to make sense of the metaphorical statement. But we do somehow make sense of such metaphors.

Cognitive accounts of metaphor rely on computations of the "cognitive contents" of metaphorical utterances. Such accounts will often see the cognitive contents of words as residing in ill-defined structures and as possessing powers of motion. Consider, for instance, Lakoff and Johnson's claim that "the fundamental role of metaphor is to project inference patterns from the source domain to the target domain" (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, p 128). But our problem remains: How do "inference patterns" project from one domain to another? And how do we decide what domains our words fall under?

5. DONALD DAVIDSON: WHAT METAPHORS DO

Please keep in mind that I am not refuting any of what Aristotle or Lakoff and Johnson have to say about what metaphors are. I insist only that neither account explains how we actually make sense of metaphors—how we *interpret* them and understand what they do. As theories of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson's accounts can result in confusion and mischief. I will claim that Donald Davidson's pragmatic account of metaphor in the article "What Metaphors Mean" answers the "how" question. Davidson proposes that "metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretations, mean, and nothing more" (Davidson 1984b, p. 30). Davidson argues that understanding a metaphor involves what words are used to *do;* and what metaphors do is direct our notice in situations. In contrast with Max Black and most theoreticians from Aristotle onward, Davidson rebels at the idea that the words in a metaphor have a secondary—or figurative—sense in addition to their ordinary meanings. We do not translate metaphors in search of some hidden meaning, but we *interpret* them just as we would any other sort of utterances. Further, we interpret metaphors "radically," without need either for translation manuals of for a metalanguage. In our interpretations of metaphors we employ a strategy which Davidson labels "radical interpretation," a term which does not appear in his article on metaphor, but which he explains in length in an article titled "Radical Interpretation."

One of the implications of radical interpretation is that our actual attempts to make sense of others' utterances rely as much on our understanding of the situation surrounding the discourse as on the overt meanings of the words. Implicit in Davidson, and moreover in the entire Pragmatic tradition from the Sophists and Peirce to James, Meade, Dewey, and Quine, is a rejection of the idea that any utterances, outside of closed mathematical and logical statements, can be labelled "true" or "false" in any absolute sense. Metaphors in particular cannot usefully be considered as true or false, but are better evaluated in terms of their usefulness or success. The purpose of rhetorical claims and of statements made in discourse is not to *prove* statements true, but to obtain the *adherence* of audiences. I believe that the Sophists had observed the place of adherence in rhetoric, but in modern times Chaim Perelman, both in *The New Rhetoric* and in *The Realm of Rhetoric* sees the goal of gaining an audience's adherence as distinguishing rhetoric from formal proof (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969 pp. 5-6., 104-5; Perelman 1986, p. 1088). By Perelman's measure, metaphor seems to belong solely to rhetoric.

To the disappointment of metaphysicists and logicians, Davidson does not offer a theory of metaphor. Indeed, he suggests there can be none. Philosophical Pragmatism generally is suspicious of the predictive powers of theories, and in keeping with this tradition, Davidson devotes his treatment of metaphor to the refutation of various accounts of metaphor. Following Popper, Davidson relies on the fact that a single counterexample forces the revision or abolishment of empirical statements. Davidson's work suggests that understanding the situations in which utterances occur is key to interpretation. And it is this ordinary human capacity for inferring the situations of discourse that distinguishes interpretation from translation. To phrase the matter tersely, let me say that translation is about strings of words while interpretation concerns situated discourse.

6. LAKOFF AND JOHNSON'S "ARGUMENT IS WAR" METAPHOR: A CRITIQUE

To make what I am trying to say more clear, let me offer an example of the type of mischief that an analysis of a metaphor can lead to when actual situations of discourse are either misunderstood or ignored—when only the semantic features or the supposed cognitive contents of words are considered. Lakoff and Johnson, in their pioneering work, *Metaphors We Live By*, provide an analysis of the metaphor "Argument is War." They assert that this metaphor is "reflected in everyday language by a wide variety of expressions," among which they list "Your claims are *indefensible*," "He *attacked* every *weak point* in my argument," "His criticisms were right *on target*," "I *demolished* his argument," "I've never *won* an argument with him," and "He *shot down* all my arguments." But note that their list fails to include such central and markedly non-bellicose concepts as the role of establishing "common ground." No doubt, we desire to win our arguments, and some arguments can become heated, even physically hostile. But Lakoff and Johnson's treatment applies only to a narrow subset of argument, the spontaneous type that arises between feuding spouses, between coaches and umpires, or between traffic cops and speeders, all of which would better be categorizes as instances of petty verbal assault. I believe Lakoff and Johnson are guilty of unwitting equivocation. They fail to observe that the emergence of militance in discourse marks the failure of argument, an exit from rational discourse. Where Lakoff and Johnson go astray, I believe, is in failing to recognize that the type of argument with which Rhetoric is concerned arises less impulsively and under less hostile circumstances. Most arguments, including Lakoff and Johnson's argument for conceptual metaphors and the one I am making here, seek not to achieve the defeat of ones audience, but instead to secure the audience's adherence. In most instances of argument, ranging from radio and television commercials to requests for raises and promotions, we do not, as Lakoff and Johnson claim, "see the person we are arguing with as an opponent," but instead as a prospective ally. Again, as Perelman would have it, we seek our interlocutors' adherence, not their humiliation or defeat. Lakoff and Johnson's failure to fully examine the situations in which most arguments—not spats—actually occur leads them to claim that the "'Argument is war'" metaphor is one that we live by in this culture." Even though we may utilize the jargon of warfare, our language doe not, as Lakoff and Johnson insist, "structure the actions we perform in arguing" Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 5). In any case, our rhetoric is not principally structured by metaphors but by our aims and by the particular situations in which rhetors find themselves. Our aims may be self-serving or altruistic, but that's another matter. As the Sophists understood, argument is kairotic.

Nor do we in actual practice seek absolute victories. The politician whose party in the past has received twenty per cent of the labour vote will consider himself wildly successful if his rhetorical effort increases his share of that bloc to thirty per cent. Similarly, a criminal defence attorney in the United States needs to sway only one-twelfth of a jury. And we can be sure that neither the politician nor the lawyer views his audience as an alien army who must be defeated.

Why, then, all the militaristic terms which Lakoff and Johnson correctly observe? Even though these terms do not, as Lakoff and Johnson insist, "structure the actions we perform in arguing," we do utilize such terms to *describe* arguments. Our adoption of these terms might result partly from the fact that our earliest exposure to the term

"argument" comes from witnessing everyday disputes between our parents, events in which emotions run high, or on the playgrounds, where wars of words precede actual fist-flinging and rock-throwing. In addition, our understanding of argument might be skewed by exposure to formal debates by forensic teams, zero-sum activities with single winners and single losers. And certainly we must admit that Socratic dialectical exchanges are seen frequently to result in a single thoroughly humiliated loser. As well, the conclusions of enthymemes and syllogisms are fixed and absolute, perhaps leading us to hope for similar absoluteness and fixedness from our everyday or highly formal rhetorical endeavours. In sum, argument is concerned less with winning and more with winning over.

7. DAVIDSON'S PRINCIPLE OF CHARITY: METAPHORS AS INSTANCES OF ORDINARY-LANGUAGE

In the article "What Metaphors Mean" Davidson first denies that metaphor is in any way apart from ordinary language. Metaphors mean what they mean in the same ways that all other words mean what they mean. When confronting a metaphor, then, we do not begin with the literal meaning of the two terms of the metaphor—in the present case "paintbrush" and "pump"—and then proceed to determine some secondary or figurative meaning. Instead, we rely entirely on the utterance's most ordinary meaning. In fact, we would have no such non-literal meanings available to us, and even our ultimate determination that the statement is a metaphor is an afterthought, one that is possible only subsequent to successful interpretation and thus insignificant to our understanding of the utterance.

All successful interpretation requires our application of what Davidson calls the Principle of Charity which requires us initially to presume that the speaker is rational and truthful. An early version of the Principle of Charity requires interpreters to [a]ssign truth conditions to alien sentences that [would] make native speakers [of the same sentences] right when plausibly possible" (Davidson 1984a, p. 184).Our initial response to difficult sentences, then, must be to presume them to be rational and ordinary. We do not begin interpretation by adjusting the possible meanings of words or sentences, but instead we adjust our view of the situation in which the utterance occurs. There is thus no place or need for a literal/non-literal distinction. In other words, we are not evaluating the so-called cognitive contents of words, but we are instead determining the situation of the utterance's use. In the case of metaphors, it is our already completed understanding of the utterance that permits us even to recognize that a metaphor has occurred. In sum, Charity is the default condition for all interpretations, but its operation is more obvious to us in our dealings with metaphors. In "What Metaphors Mean," Davidson observes that metaphors operate by directing our notice. He also observes that what a metaphor might cause us to notice is unlimited (1984b, p. 33). If the referents of the metaphor are potentially endless, then, what we notice cannot be contained either in the cognitive contents of an utterance or in a bounded set of semantic features of the respective terms of the metaphor.

8. DONALD A. SCHÖN: "A PAINTBRUSH IS A PUMP."

I look next at a distinctly Pragmatic analysis of a metaphorical utterance, one which seems to support Davidson's views. I borrow the target metaphor from an article in which Donald A. Schön examines the metaphor "A paintbrush is a pump." Before considering Schön's account, however, we should consider an actual paint brush and pump. The pump that I supply as an archetypical instance of a pump is, more specifically, a baby's ear syringe. As we consider the two items, we may at the same time consider the claim that a paintbrush is a pump. Moreover, following Davidson, we should consider the claim in its most literal sense. We might also reflect on standard dictionary definitions, which probably would describe a paintbrush as a tool consisting of a bundle of organic or synthetic bristles, held in place by a ferrule and mounted on a wooden or plastic handle. Perhaps the dictionary definition would inform us that a paintbrush is used to apply paint to surfaces. Certainly we will notice that our ear syringe possesses neither a handle, nor bristles, nor a ferrule, and we would find it quite difficult to paint a wall with the syringe. What we lack at this stage is knowledge of the situation of the metaphor's use. If Davidson is correct, *translation* of the metaphorical statement via a metalanguage or translation manual will be impossible, but *interpretation* will proceed straightforwardly once we understand the situation in which the metaphorical utterance occurs.

Now I would like to employ Schön's account of the paintbrush metaphor as a thought experiment to test Davidson's principal claims for metaphor: that the terms of a metaphor retain their most ordinary meanings, that we make metaphors true by considering the situations of their use, that metaphors work by directing our notice, and that what metaphors might cause us to notice is not limited by either the intentions of the metaphor-maker or by the semantic features of the metaphor's respective terms. In sum, we will examine the metaphor "A paintbrush is a pump" in order to determine if *renoticing* paintbrushes and pumps is involved in our interpretation or, conversely, if what we are attending to is instead the figurative or secondary meanings of the words "paintbrush" and "pump." If the latter is the case, Davidson is wrong, and most of the theorists from Aristotle to Max Black and Lakoff and Johnson are correct.

Schön describes the efforts of a team of product development experts who were attempting to improve the performance of a paintbrush manufactured from synthetic bristles. The synthetic brush had failed to perform as effectively as the traditional natural-bristle brush. The team had even given the synthetic brush split ends like the natural bristles, but to no avail. Then, "someone observed, "You know, a paintbrush is a kind of a pump!" He pointed out that when a paintbrush is pressed against a surface, paint is made to flow through the 'channels' formed by the bristles" when the brush is bent. The design experts noticed, also' another phenomenon that appeared to confirm the idea that a paintbrush moves paint by pumping it. Sometimes a painter will drag a brush across a surface, yet the paint will not flow evenly from the tips of the bristles, resulting in a smeared glob. But by vibrating the brush in this circumstance, the painter will cause the paint to flow evenly. The design expert speculated that vibrating the brush resulted in a pumping action in the channels, thus facilitating the movement of the paint (Schön 1983, p. 184).

The design experts then applied the implications of the brush metaphor to their observations of the performance of both synthetic and natural bristle brushes. The noticed

that the bristles of natural brushes, when pressed against surfaces, formed gradual curves, leaving the channels unconstricted, whereas synthetic bristles bent more sharply, thus constricting the flow of paint. Further experimentation, in which the synthetic bristles were varied in terms of bristle-density and diameter, indeed resulted in a brush that produced a smooth flow of paint.

Next we will consider Schön's metaphor in the light of Davidson's claims. First, Davidson has said that the words that comprise a metaphor mean whatever they mean in their most ordinary, literal senses. Do the words "paintbrush" and "pump" mean differently from what they meant before our determination that the utterance is metaphorical? Do the words now possess secondary or figurative or special meanings? Still, we do sense a cognitive difference that has resulted from our exposure to the metaphorical utterance. That difference we experience, however, is not in the meanings of the terms of the metaphor but in our *understanding* of how paintbrushes work. As Davidson might insist, what we notice in the present example, about paintbrushes and about painting, has increased, certainly, and has also intensified. This intensification and enlargement of our understanding, it seems clear, results from the metaphor's capacity to refine and direct our notice. Assuredly, our new understanding does not come from any type of interaction between the terms of the metaphor. Our enhanced understanding has resulted from our charitable efforts to discover the conditions of the metaphor's use.

Now to Davidson's remaining claim concerning metaphors, that what a metaphor may cause us to notice is potentially unlimited. By implication, what we notice in the presence of a metaphor may outreach the metaphor-maker's intentions. To both illustrate and confirm Davidson's claim that what we notice is unrestricted, I will describe a few of my own observations. First, I have noticed that when painting overhead, for instance at the top of a wall where it meets the ceiling, the paint ceases to flow because of the downward pull of gravity. But by vibrating the brush, I can cause the paint to flow to the tips of the bristles—to overcome the earthward pull of gravity. This phenomenon can be explained only by the fact that the movement of the bristles pumps the paint upward, just as the contractions of the veins in our legs pump blood back to our hearts. In addition, I have noticed more acutely how a paintbrush is constructed. The rows of bristles in a paintbrush are not evenly spaced. The bristles are denser toward the outside of the brush, and the center of the brush is hollow. An inserted plug at the base of the brush separates the bristles to form a cup-like pocket—a cavity at the center of the brush in which the bulk of the paint is contained. When we press the brush against a surface, the volume of the cavity shrinks, and the increased pressure in the cavity forces the paint to the area of lowest pressure at the tips of the bristles. So, besides the pumping action that occurs in the cavities formed among the bristles, a secondary pumping action occurs in the cavity between the concentrations of bristles. This last fact relates to an additional observation: Paintbrush bristles, whether synthetic or natural, do not absorb paint; instead, they repel it. Otherwise neither the channels formed among the bristles nor the cavity formed within the perimeter of the brush's head would contain the paint so as to facilitate the pumping action. Also, if the bristles absorbed the paint, less paint would be available to be pumped to the tip of the brush. The function of a paintbrush, as understood in the light of the paintbrush metaphor is to contain and subsequently release paint. If I am correct, none of these last three observations, though certainly warranted by the paintbrush metaphor, seems to have been intended by the metaphor's maker. Davidson's assertion that what we

might notice in the presence of a metaphor is unlimited seems to be affirmed, at least for this case.

9. CONCLUSION

By way of summary, I make a few claims for metaphor which the work of this study seems to support:

1. A metaphor makes a claim; it is radically argumentative. Its purpose is to achieve adherence.

2. Metaphorical utterances operate as a non-complex verbal stimuli; therefore they cannot possibly possess cognitive content. What they cause us to notice, however, may be quite complex and indeterminate.

3. Metaphors begin their work by arousing doubt in an addressee; they disrupt his commonsense assumptions.

4. In response to this irritation of doubt, the addressee re-notices her cumulative experience of the world (which may include her experiences with the conventional referents of the utterance).

5. The addressee will, at least tentatively, hold the truthfulness-in-the-situation of her interlocutor fixed. Recall that charity is a necessary precondition for, and definitional of, communication.

6. The addressee will attempt to solve for meaning-in-the-situation and not for meaning of the linguistic string in isolation

7. If the attempt succeeds, adherence to the claim made by the metaphor will emerge.

If the process I have outlined is correct, then metaphor is a radical (non-complex) rhetorical entity—a verbal stimulus—that works by (1) interjection of doubt, (2) inducement to re-notice, (3) alteration of meaning as a consequence of re-noticing, and (4) establishment of a new belief in the mind of the radical interpretor: a willingness to respond in a new way.

<div align="right">Link to commentary</div>

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