The Semantics of Metaphor
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Chapter I

1. Cf. Chomsky (1972.69, 126f.). In the contrast just drawn we are of course assuming that theoretical requirements like exhaustiveness, consistency, and simplicity are satisfied equally by all the theories involved. We may assume this for our purposes even though frequently there is an inverse correlation between the conceptual richness of one's notion concerning the nature of language and the possibility of developing a valid theory.

2. It should probably be mentioned in this connection that a factor frequently operating as an artifactual constraint on judgments of what aspects of the communicative function ought properly to be attributed to language is the theoretical requirement that any such aspect would have to be analyzed with a view toward incorporating its elements into a linguistic description.

3. Stalnaker (1972.387f.), who speaks of these norms as presuppositions, after distinguishing them from semantic presuppositions, describes them as making up an attitude that one takes toward propositions, this attitude taking the form of assuming as true certain propositions ancillary to and/or associated with the linguistic transaction: “[Pragmatic] presuppositions are propositions implicitly supposed before the relevant linguistic business is transacted.”

4. The characterization of indexicals given above is of course not intended as definitive, in either its description or its enumeration. Indexical expressions have been termed variously indices (Peirce), egocentric particulars (Russell), token-reflexive words (Reichenbach) and, by grammarians, deictics. The latter term is applied particularly to demonstrative pronouns and temporal and locational adverbs, to a lesser extent, to personal pronouns.

5. The fact that yesterday occurs in Cohen’s example is not crucial; his point could have been made as well with “I promise that I was born in Chicago.”

Chapter II

1. Arguments to this effect are presented in Reddy (1969), who points out that sentences that are perfectly well formed semantically may function as metaphors. In some of his examples the sentence functions metaphorically in relation to earlier portions of a discourse, in others in relation to the referents in
the nonlinguistic environment. In both these cases a type of deviance is manifested which is not strictly semantic. Cf. also Kiparsky (1973.238) and van Dijk (1975.186f.).

2. Matthews (1971.424) claims to provide just such a specification. After examining a few deviant expressions (e.g., “The man is a wolf”) and showing how by an analysis of selection restrictions they can be given a metaphoric reading, he concludes, “THE PRESENCE OF A SELECTIONAL RESTRICTION VIOLATION IS THUS A NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT CONDITION FOR THE DISTINGUISHING OF METAPHOR FROM NON-METAPHOR, excepting of course those cases where the utterances are not intended to be meaningful.” The qualifying clause at the end of his assertion is of course enough to repudiate his claim, since it begs the entire question of whether deviance is a sufficient condition for metaphor. Moreover, the question of pragmatic deviance and its relation to metaphor is hardly considered by Matthews. All that Matthews really shows in his paper is that some deviant expressions can be given metaphoric readings in terms of their selectional violations.

3. Had Weinreich been granted the time to work further on his ideas, he no doubt would have solidified the structure of his Semantic Calculator. As it is, what he has left us opens the way to a richer and more satisfactory treatment of deviance than is offered by most other semantic theories.

4. In here using square rather than angled brackets around transfer features, I am following Baumögarten.

5. In a discussion of deviance that is not influenced by considerations of poetic language, Butters (1970) similarly argues for the extension of the semantic component's capacity to deal with certain deviant expressions. Discussing the string

(i) My dog admires John,

Butters suggests that the semantic component should be required to impose on it interpretations such as: (1) “My dog (as if human) admires John” or (2) “My dog admires (as if admiring could be done by nonhumans) John” or (3) “My dog admires (as if admires were causative) John (that is, ‘My dog causes John to admire it’)” (p. 107). Omitting the causative interpretation from consideration, we see that the transfer of features has gone from verb to noun in (1) and from noun to verb in (2). Moreover, the latter shift has not been made dependent on a noun’s having been inserted in a verb position as in Baumögarten’s example (Fig. 2). In this connection see also Todorov (1966.106).

6. Cf. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, VIII.6.5, where, speaking of metaphor and its uses, he says: “A noun or a verb is transferred from the place to which it properly belongs to another where there is either no literal term or the transferred is better than the literal.”

7. Although above and elsewhere in the discussion I ascribe the formal machinery necessary for metaphoric construal to the grammar, the question of where in the general linguistic theory that machinery really belongs is by no means clear. Thus ascription of it to the grammar at this stage of the discussion should be regarded as provisional. For further reflections on this question see chapter IV, 4.1.
Chapter III

1. One bar to taking a decided position on this question is the uncertainty regarding a preliminary question, namely, whether the ability to construe deviant expressions is a function of linguistic competence or linguistic performance and whether a theory of language should be a theory of competence or performance or both (for some discussion of this question against the background of linguistic deviance, see Fowler, 1969). One fact that cannot be disputed, however, is that speakers construe deviant expressions; if nothing else, the host of so-called dead metaphors in a language bears ample witness to this fact. Thus there can be no doubt that we are talking about a linguistic capacity. For further discussion see chapter IV, 4.1.

2. No inference regarding the superiority of any one linguistic theory as opposed to another should be drawn from this decision. I believe that the analysis that follows is incorporable equally well no matter what the grammatical format adopted. I have chosen Katz’s notation because it is clear and it provides for selection restrictions.

3. The two types of contextual restriction described above correspond, respectively, to the strict subcategorization and selectional restrictions of Chomsky, 1965.

4. The relevant sense of (7) would be something like “opposed in gender” as between the subject and the predicate, that of (8) “opposed in height attribution” as between the subject noun phrase and predicate. In order to arrive at such results the semantic projection rules must be permitted to do more than simply record the fact that the sentence is contradictory; they must be permitted to give readings, like those given (7) and (8) in this note, where these readings are the senses referred to in the discussion above.

Lewis (1944,245f.), cited in Carnap (1956,60f.), argues that where contradictory (and analytic) sentences are concerned, normal semantic explication in terms of intension (and extension) is inadequate. He declares that “to say that two expressions with the same intension have the same meaning, without qualification, would have the anomalous consequence that any two analytic propositions would then be equipollent, and any two self-contradictory propositions would be equipollent.” Alongside intension, he therefore introduces the notion of analytic meaning. The sentences (7) and (8) would then have the same intension (be equipollent) but would not be equivalent in analytic meaning. Carnap’s way of dealing with the problem would be to say that (7) and (8) have the same intension but are not intensionally isomorphic.

5. It will be noticed that in Katz’s example, (11) above, the contradiction derives from semantic considerations (the same is true for the other examples of contradiction that he gives (p. 181)). Katz does not consider in this context sentences like “It is and is not raining,” which might be regarded as more suitable candidates for contradiction “in its basic logical sense.” If we wished to accommodate sentences like the latter in the general framework of (13–15), we might add another definition, like (13) except that “necessarily” replaces “logically.”

6. The relationship between the markers “(Human)” and “(Mineral)” is here left unspecified, i.e., for the moment treated as being neutral. The types of
relationship that may obtain between these and similar markers is described in
section 4, following. The significance of the square brackets is explained at the
end of section 3.1.

7. For the need to specify negative redundant features, see Chomsky
(1965.110f.).

8. We assume here that after the transfer and consequent deletion of the
homomorphic feature all the other negative redundant features are deleted by
convention.

9. In this and the following references to the examples of section 4.4, I omit
citation of the section.

Chapter IV

1. In general, selection restrictions appear in the readings of verbs and adject­
ives, i.e., predicates. The readings for nouns, on the other hand, consist of
inherent semantic markers, and it is comparison with the latter which determines
whether a particular selection restriction is or is not satisfied.

2. Like our paradigm sentence “The stone died,” most of the examples that
follow will contain a simple predicate, i.e., either an intransitive verb or an
adjective. Using such examples simplifies the discussion while at the same time
allowing for treatment of the essential problems.

3. The notation “(...)” is understood to stand for Null or any number of
semantic markers that may occur in the reading of a lexical item. It thus plays the
role that late capital letters play in the statement of transformations. Coming
where it does in the representation it comprehends low-level, more specific
semantic features. Features at this level, while they obviously figure in the
semantic interpretation of a reading, may be largely dispensed with for our
present purposes.

4. In the above account I make certain assumptions about the semantic de­
development of tremble for which there may be no direct historical or lexicographi­
cal evidence. It is my sense of the development that originally tremble (or its
etymon) was predicable only of humans and animals (where even its use with the
latter may have been secondary). If, on the other hand, the historical facts should
be such as to impugn the claims made above for tremble (in fact, the Oxford English
Dictionary gives among its earliest citations for tremble one in which it is predicated
of the earth), that would have little bearing on the validity of the principle
developed here. There is no doubt that verbs widen their distribution, that in
this process they may co-occur with nouns whose semantic markers are such as
do not fall within the range of the verb’s selection restriction, and that with
continued use in the new construction a new selection restriction is added to the
reading of the verb.

5. It is necessary to bear in mind the difference between disjunction as it
applies to the alternants in a selection restriction (where it is exclusive) and
disjunction as it figures in a PS (inclusive). It might be advisable to use the term
“alternation” for the former. In any case, we are here talking of the former
condition.
Chapter V

1. The theory is embodied in the six transformations presented in chapter III, 4.3.1, and the six construal rules given in chapter IV, 2.1–2.2 In what follows I shall refer to this body of statements as (T).

2. There may be a sense in which the meaning of “general” is more comprehensive than that of “generic,” but I do not think that any substantive difference will materialize in the conclusions arrived at in using the two terms interchangeably.

3. heofenes gim, “heaven’s gem or jewel,” = sun; merehengest, “seahorse” = ship. Kennings in Germanic take the form either of compounds or of nouns with determinative genitives, but the same analysis applies to both types. For a good discussion of kennings, see Brodeur (1969), particularly pp. 247–253.

4. Black (1962.39f.) makes this point by saying that in construing “Man is a wolf” metaphorically it is not enough to know the standard dictionary meaning of “wolf,” that, in addition, it is necessary to know “the system of associated commonplaces”; see also Guenthner (1975.199f.).

5. I.e., it is not what Frege called the associated idea, a subjective factor that varies with individuals.

6. In the following I discuss the problem against the background of Katz (1972), but see also Leech (1969.85–89); cf. also Chomsky (1972.67n.).

7. There may appear to be a circularity here, but it is only apparent. In the preceding discussion the question concerned the status of certain types of information of which it could not be said definitely whether they were semantic or factual in nature; we may at the same time speak of (T) as a semantic theory inasmuch as the features that enter into its construction are clearly semantic.

8. An analysis rather similar to the above is given by Boeckh (1968.63), except that metonymy rather than synecdoche is seen as the mediating process: “When a word, by virtue of its fundamental meaning, is used to signify a definite object, it can also signify noteworthy characteristics of this object, since the object is viewed one-sidedly as to these characteristics. This is metonymy. ‘Mars’ may stand for ‘war.’ In this usage the action is indicated of which he is the personification; it does not refer to the god as a being. If now one finds in another object the concept which he denotes by metonymy, this latter can be expressed by the former. This is metaphor. As the lion passes for a very brave animal, one can view him exclusively for this attribute; and as bravery occurs also in man, a hero can be called a lion.”

9. The equivocation appearing here between an entity’s name standing for a member of a class and standing for the class itself could be eliminated, if at all, only by going into much more detail than is required for this description. The same problem arises, it may be remarked, in the account given by Dubois, et al. (1970); see p. 100.

Chapter VI

1. General terms differ from singular terms in that where the latter refer to objects the former refer to concepts (according to Frege). Thus general terms
are predicative in nature. They differ from singular terms in taking the indefinite article, taking the plural, and in other respects. They may of course occur in subject position. If so, they may make up part of a singular term, i.e., when accompanied by appropriate modifiers. On the other hand, when in subject position they occur as an unaccompanied plural or are preceded by a quantifier, they retain their predicative nature. Conversely, if a singular term appears after is, viz., “That dog is Fido,” is is equational not copulative, hence Fido is not functioning as (part of) a predicate (cf. Frege, 1970b.43ff.).

2. In a footnote the editor indicates that the word “moly” designates in Homer a magical plant with white blossoms and a black root which Odysseus received from Hermes as a protection against Circe. As to its type, “moly” is probably best considered a mass term; as such it can function as either a singular or a general term and thus can be used predicatively; cf. Quine (1960.97f.).

3. General terms can also appear in contradictory predicates, e.g., “round square.”

4. In the same category as “moly” are such words as “unicorn,” “griffin,” “centaur,” and the like. These are all general terms, and while they can be made to function as definite singulars through modification, they are in themselves predicative in nature. Frege instances “moly” as a concept word. As such it denotes a concept, and of the latter Frege says (1970b.43), “The concept (as I use the word) is predicative.” In a footnote he adds, “It is, in fact, the reference of a grammatical predicate.”

5. Although the applicability of die in (1) is problematic, its status as a predicate is of course different from that of phlogisticate, since it is clear that there are objects that fall under the concept of dying.

6. Frege’s writings are dotted with remarks about poetic and fictional language. The burden of those remarks is that poetic language differs radically from a scientific or formal language: it contains names which have only a sense (no reference), thus “Pegasus,” “Odysseus,” etc. and thereby sentences that express thoughts but have no truth value. For a discussion of Frege’s views on poetic language, see Gabriel (1970).

7. “Sentence” refers here of course to simple declarative sentences.

8. Frege, in the course of drawing a distinction between the laws of geometry and arithmetic, such that those of the former are shown to be synthetic, those of the latter analytic, makes the following comment (1960.20): “Empirical propositions hold good of what is physically or psychologically actual, the truths of geometry govern all that is spatially intuitable, whether actual or product of our fancy. The wildest visions of delirium, the boldest inventions of legend and poetry, where animals speak and stars stand still, where men are turned to stone and trees turn into men, where the drowning haul themselves up out of swamps by their own topknots—all these remain, so long as they remain intuitable, still subject to the axioms of geometry....” To be sure, Frege’s primary concern in this passage is to demonstrate the ineluctability of geometric laws. At the same time, however, he seems to admit that absurd states of affairs are conceivable under those laws. (Frege continues, “Conceptual thought alone can after a fashion shake off this yoke, when it assumes, say, a space of four dimensions or
positive curvature.” By “conceptual thought” Frege here means the exercise of reason. For conception in our sense of the term, Frege in the passage above uses the word “fancy.”

9. This is essentially the approach taken in Loewenberg (1975).

10. There are at least two ways in which to construe the notion “possible world.” The first, which is the customary one, is as states of affairs other than the one(s) immediately existing but that could obtain in the actual world. On this view my not writing with a pencil at this very moment (my reading a book instead, say) would constitute another possible world. This approach to possible worlds is under the constraint that all possible states of affairs must be constituted by objects and activities that exist or can exist in this, the actual world (cf. Hintikka, 1969.90). The other construction is one which places no such constraints on the notion. It is one which admits as possible states of affairs such as may be constituted by objects like unicorns and angels as well as activities or states like chairs sleeping, virtue being a woman, men made of stone, and so on. In the first type of possible worlds the different possibilities are functions of our knowledge and experience, in the second, of our imagination. (The word “conceive” as I use it is equivocal between these two functions.) It is not clear to what extent the second construction of possible worlds has any authoritative status. I see no bar in principle, however, to developing linguistic models reflecting such a construction, along lines similar to those that have been followed for the modalities of necessity, belief, and so on.

11. The preceding argument may appear to be strained. If it in fact should seem unconvincing, we should notice that the state of affairs purportedly described by Ryle’s example “Saturday is in bed” is one that would rank very high on a scale measuring conceptual extravagance. But the point that I am trying to make against him can be made just as well using deviant utterances that express states of affairs which are less outlandish conceptually. For our purposes it is necessary only to show that states of affairs which according to Ryle would be “absurd” can be entertained in some conceptual modality, and I think this has been shown. Cf. in this connection Hume (1963.16f.): “Nothing, at first view, may seem more unbounded than the thought of man, which not only escapes all human power and authority, but is not even restrained within the limits of nature and reality. To form monsters, and join incongruous shapes and appearances, costs the imagination no more trouble than to conceive the most natural and familiar objects. And while the body is confined to one planet, along which it creeps with pain and difficulty; the thought can in an instant transport us into the most distant regions of the universe; or even beyond the universe, into the unbounded chaos, where nature is supposed to lie in total confusion. What was never seen, or heard of, may yet be conceived; nor is any thing beyond the power of thought, except what implies an absolute contradiction.” Hume goes on to assert that these conceptions of the imagination amount to “no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses of experience.” Thus, “When we think of a golden mountain, we only join two consistent ideas, gold, and mountain, with which we were formerly acquainted.” This condition limiting the power of imagination is of
course one that we observe also in our approach. On p. 50 Hume writes, “Nothing is more free than the imagination of man; and though it cannot exceed that original stock of ideas furnished by the internal and external senses, it has unlimited power of mixing, compounding, separating, and dividing these ideas, in all the varieties of fiction and vision.” Following this statement, Hume asks what then is the difference between fiction and belief, and answers that it consists in some sentiment or feeling attached to the latter and not to the former. Our own question against this background is whether and how such fictions can be believable (see 5.1 below).

12. Cf. Wittgenstein (1972.10): “If we imagine the facts otherwise than as they are, certain language-games lose some of their importance, while others become important. And in this way there is an alteration—a gradual one—in the use of the vocabulary of a language.”

13. Of course, in adducing the above-listed possibilities, one can never be sure of the literal/metaphoric status of these various conceptions, i.e., one cannot be certain in particular instances whether aggrammatization has been completed or is still in progress. That the situation is in general as described above, however, seems quite unproblematic.


15. The conception of speech acts, upon which some of the following discussion is based, derives primarily from the work of Austin (1962; see also Searle, 1970). To repeat part of what has already been presented in chapter I, 2.1.1, Austin’s full scheme comprises locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act is simply any act of uttering words that conform to the syntactic rules of the language and that have a meaning. If we communicate at all we are committing locutionary acts. However, in saying what we say may also be, and usually are, performing an illocutionary act as well. Thus the standard grammatical categories of declarative, interrogative, and imperative sentences are all so named for the particular illocutionary acts that they perform. They are, in the first place, well-formed sentences, hence locutionary acts. In addition, however, they perform the various illocutions of asserting, questioning, and requesting or commanding. But besides these staple types of traditional grammar, it is now possible, following Austin, to speak of the illocutionary acts of warning, of beseeching, of promising, and hosts of other types of acts that we habitually perform in using language. Finally, Austin speaks also of the perlocutionary act, the effect, that is, on the reader or listener of the illocutionary force of the utterance. Thus, if I utter a warning, you may become alarmed; if I threaten you, you may become frightened; if I compliment you, you may be pleased; and so on. As we see, the illocutionary act is that performed by the speaker, the perlocutionary act is that performed upon the reader or listener. Austin put it that the illocutionary act is the act that we perform in saying what we say, the perlocutionary act by saying what we say. It is also convenient to speak of the perlocutionary effect of the illocutionary act.

The illocutionary force of an utterance is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the corresponding act to take place; necessary also is the satisfaction of a number of “felicity” conditions.

17. Cf. in connection with this section Mack (1975.248): “Much metaphorizing occurs within discourse which indicates a truth-suspending mode, by such verbs as imagine, believe, dream, suppose, etc. and certain uses of if. But others appear as direct statements, yet they function very much like weak commands, suggestions to see or feel in a certain way, as both locutionary and illocutionary acts. It is as if a speaker were saying, ‘I urge you to see it thus,’ ‘I suggest you see it thus,’ ‘I create it thus,’ ‘I assert it thus’; or ‘see it this way, feel it this way, understand me.’”

18. In fact, from (20) it would be possible to deduce as corollaries a set of maxims that would apply to the poetic transaction and which would function much as Grice’s Cooperative Principle (cf. chapter I, 2.3) does for conversational exchange.

19. In his introduction to Frege (1964.xviii, xxvi), Furth points out that one of the main purposes for which Frege worked out the sense/reference distinction in “Über Sinn und Bedeutung” (1892, one year before the publication of the first volume of Grundgesetze) was to enable him to put considerations of the thus segregated sense aside in his work on formal languages, wherein practically the whole of the development proceeds in terms of reference. Additionally, and for related reasons, oblique contexts do not appear in Grundgesetze (see xxiv).

20. Cf. for a similar statement, cited from volume 2, section 56 of the Grundgesetze, the editor’s introduction (Frege, 1971a.xxvff.).

21. Goodman (1968.68ff.), in discussing the application of predicates normally used of humans in the description of a particular painting, says that “sad” would be metaphorically true, “gay” metaphorically false (both would be literally false). Goodman gives no criterion, however, for metaphoric truth. For him the tests for metaphoric truth simply suffer from the same type of vagueness and indeterminacy as do those for literal truth (pp. 78ff.). Even if Goodman’s discussion of metaphoric truth had provided more substance for the notion, however, it would still not bear too closely on our concerns, since his approach to the problem is diametrically opposed to ours.

Chapter VII

1. In this discussion I refer for brevity’s sake to the “nonconstrual conclusion.” This phrase refers to the case where there is no linguistic construal. There is, however, in this case also a type of construal; it is of the sort that later in the discussion I term “phenomenalistic.”

2. The sentence (20) of chapter VI would thus not be appropriate as a higher sentence for such poems—unless the sense of imagine in it could be weakened and made nonper performative, as e.g., in the sentence “I imagine that I can meet you there” (equivalent to “I can meet you there, I imagine”), where no act of imagining is performed. Alternatively, one could postulate for such poems a higher sentence with a verb like “fancy” or “see” instead of imagine.

In light of the preceding remarks the question could be raised how one is to know whether the sentence implicitly at the head of a poem is (20) or something
else, one of those suggested above, for example. Taking up that question would lead us into an entire other area of investigation, one involving, among other things, the problem of poetic genres. In any case, however, I do not regard examination of that question to be essential in the context of the present work.

3. The difference in the order of elements as they appear in Figs. 9 and 10 derives from the fact that Fig. 9 is arranged so that the terms between which relations obtain (intension) or construal is effected are placed at the corners of the figure, whereas Fig. 10 represents the actual sequence of relations and processes.

4. For some exploratory efforts to construct such a semantics, see van Dijk (1975) and Guenthner (1975).

5. Not everyone would agree with this—essentially the Austinian—view. Thus Lewis (1972.209ff.) takes the position that sentences containing performative verbs in the normal form are true, that if someone says

(i) I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow,

not only has a bet been made but the statement made by (i) is true. Now to assign the value True to performatory statements would be trivial if they could not sometimes be false. Lewis attempts to show that they can in fact be false. His demonstration, however, depends on the nonsatisfaction not of truth- but of felicity-conditions, thus making just the point which was the basis for Austin's denial that performatory statements can have a truth value. For additional criticism of Lewis's analysis, see Lakoff (1975.256ff.).

6. The foregoing conditions can be amplified and made more precise by recurring to the complete set of felicity conditions for the successful performance of a speech act, but for our purposes the two conditions mentioned suffice; see Austin (1962). For discussion of the felicity conditions as they apply to poetry and literature in general, see Ohmann (1971, 1973).