



Understanding Figurative Language: From Metaphor to Idioms (Oxford Psychology Series)

Sam Glucksberg

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This book examines how people understand utterances that are intended figuratively. Traditionally, figurative language such as metaphors and idioms has been considered derivative from more complex than ostensibly straightforward literal language. Glucksberg argues that figurative language involves the same kinds of linguistic and pragmatic operations that are used for ordinary, literal language. Glucksberg's research in this book is concerned with ordinary language: expressions that are used in daily life, including conversations about everyday matters, newspaper and magazine articles, and the media. Metaphor is the major focus of the book. Idioms, however, are also treated comprehensively, as is the theory of conceptual metaphor in the context of how people understand both conventional and novel figurative expressions. A new theory of metaphor comprehension is put forward, and evaluated with respect to competing theories in linguistics and in psychology. The central tenet of the theory is that ordinary conversational metaphors are used to create new concepts and categories. This process is spontaneous and automatic. Metaphor is special only in the sense that these categories get their names from the best examples of the things they represent, and that these categories get their names from the best examples of those categories. Thus, the literal shark can be a metaphor for any vicious and predatory being, from unscrupulous salespeople to a murderous character in *The Threepenny Opera*. Because the same term, e.g., shark, is used both for its literal referent and for the metaphorical category, as in *My lawyer is a shark*, we call it the dual-reference theory. The theory is then extended to two other domains: idioms and conceptual metaphors. The book presents the first comprehensive account of how people use and understand metaphors in everyday life.

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