Literal/nonliteral

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[revised version]

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> Since the universe never repeats itself exactly, everytime we speak we metaphorize...
> Speakers not only share the same code but also share the ability to see the same resemblances between
> what their code already designates and what they would like it to designate, and so to make the old forms
> reach out to new meanings. This is how language breaks free of its rigidity.
>
> D. Bolinger, *Aspects of Language*

I

What is the literal meaning of an expression? In a first sense, the literal meaning of a linguistic expression is its *conventional* meaning: the meaning it has in virtue of the conventions which are constitutive of the language. In that sense the literal meaning of the expression is a property of the expression-type; for it is the expression-type which the conventions of the language endow with a particular meaning. Literal meaning, in that sense, I will dub 't-literal meaning' (with 't' standing for 'type'), in order to distinguish the sense just introduced from other possible senses of the phrase 'literal meaning'.

Particular *occurrences* of an expression also possess meaning. First, every occurrence inherits the meaning of the expression-type of which it is an occurrence. Every occurrence of a meaningful expression-type therefore possesses a t-literal meaning. Second, an occurrence also possesses a meaning which depends not merely upon the conventional significance of the expression-type, but also on features of the context of use. That meaning is, by definition, not t-literal. Insofar as it departs from the meaning of the expression-type, it may even be said to be 't-nonliteral'. Yet it need not

be 'nonliteral' in the *ordinary* sense. When we speak of 'nonliteralness', in the ordinary sense, we mean that what is meant departs from t-literal meaning in a fairly specific way. Not any old departure from t-literal meaning adds up to nonliteralness in the ordinary sense.

Consider the following example. Suppose that Paul is thirsty, and I tell you, while pointing to him: "He is thirsty". I thereby say of Paul that he is thirsty. What is thus said is not t-literal because the reference to Paul is something that is achieved by partly contextual means. The demonstrative pronoun 'he', qua expression-type, does not refer to Paul. The semantic conventions of the language do not assign that expression a reference, but merely a rule of use in virtue of which it may, in context, acquire a reference. Since the reference of the expression is not fixed by the semantic conventions of the language, independent of context, it is not part of the t-literal meaning of the sentence. The proposition that Paul is thirsty (at the time of utterance) therefore counts as t-nonliteral, but of course no one wants to say that there is anything 'nonliteral' in the ordinary sense going on in that example (as described so far). The speaker is speaking literally, in the ordinary sense of the word. It may be that he is communicating something nonliterally by his utterance, but that can only be something different from the proposition that Paul is thirsty. If the speaker means that Paul should be offered a drink, *that* aspect of the meaning of his utterance will indeed count as nonliteral in the ordinary sense. The proposition that Paul should be offered a drink is conveyed without being literally expressed.

What is the difference between the proposition that Paul is thirsty and the proposition that he should be offered a drink, in the above example? The former departs from the t-literal meaning of the sentence since it includes something (the reference of 'he') which depends upon the context and not merely upon the conventional significance of the uttered words. Yet it is the words themselves which, in virtue of their conventional significance, make it necessary to appeal to context in order to assign a reference to the demonstrative. It is part of the t-literal meaning of indexical expressions that they should be assigned a reference in context. In interpreting indexical

sentences, we go beyond what the conventions of the language give us, but that step beyond is still governed by the conventions of the language. The rule of use which constitutes the t-literal meaning of indexical expressions is what triggers the search for a contextual value. The departure from t-literal meaning is therefore pre-determined by t-literal meaning. Whenever that is so, I say that the departure is 'minimal'. When the meaning of an utterance only minimally departs from t-literal meaning, that meaning does not count as nonliteral in the ordinary sense. Only nonminimal departures make for nonliteralness in the ordinary sense. That is precisely what we have in the other case — when the speaker says that Paul is thirsty and implies that he should be offered a drink. For there is nothing in the sentence-type 'He is thirsty' that triggers the contextual generation of the implicature that Paul should be offered a drink.

Let me define: the meaning conveyed by an utterance is 'm-literal' iff it involves only minimal departures from t-literal meaning. (The case in which no departure is involved may count as a limiting case of m-literalness. I doubt that there are such cases, however.) Standard cases of nonliteralness, in the ordinary sense, are cases of m-nonliteralness: they involve *nonminimal* departures from t-literal meaning. Yet, as we shall see, not all cases of m-nonliteralness (i.e. not all cases involving such departures) count as 'nonliteral' in the ordinary sense.

II

More often than not, nonliteral meaning is *secondary* meaning — meaning derived from some more basic, primary meaning which it presupposes. In the above example, the proposition that Paul is thirsty is primary. By asserting that proposition, the speaker indirectly conveys something more: that Paul should be offered a drink.

Conversational implicatures and indirect speech acts obviously have a secondary character. Let us start with conversational implicatures. They are a special case of pragmatic implication. Pragmatic implications are the implications of actions. When I do something, my so doing may imply various things. For example, my taking

an unmbrella implies that I think it will rain. Conversational implicatures are pragmatic implications of *an act of speech*. They fall under the schema: the speaker's saying that p implies that q. Not all implications of an act of speech are implicatures, however. My saying that Frege died in 1940 implies that I am ignorant, but that is not something I *mean* by my utterance. Arguably, a necessary condition for something to count as an implicature is that it be part of what the speaker means by his utterance. For that condition to be satisfied, the speaker must overtly intend the hearer to recognize the pragmatic implication of his utterance, and to recognize it as intended to be recognized. (Other conditions may have to be satisfied for a pragmatic implication of a speech act to count as a genuine conversational implicature, but I will be content with what I have just said.)

Since what is conversationally implicated is implied by the speaker's saying what she says, it immediately follows that conversational implicatures have a secondary character. The speaker implies that q *by saying that p*. In order to derive the implicature, we need the premiss that the speaker has said what he has said; therefore we need to have identified the primary content of his utterance.

The same thing holds, even more obviously, for indirect speech acts. As their name indicates, indirect speech acts are performed 'indirectly', via the performance of another speech act which falls within the illocutionary-act potential of the uttered sentence and is said to be performed directly. For example, I may make a request either directly ('Pass me the salt, please') or indirectly, by asking a question ('Can you reach the salt?') or by making a statement ('I can't reach the salt'). Twenty years ago I suggested that indirect speech acts are nothing but a special case of conversational implicature, where the speaker's intention to perform the indirect speech act is conversationally implicated by his performance of the direct speech act (Recanati 1979, Recanati 1987: 121-126). Be that as it may, everyone agrees that there is much in common between conversational implicatures and indirect speech acts. What they have in common is, in effect, their secondary character: The interpretation of both

conversational implicatures and indirect speech acts involves an inference from the utterance's primary meaning to its derived meaning.

In both conversational implicatures and indirect speech acts, the meaning of the utterance involves something over and above its primary meaning — something whose derivation presupposes the primary meaning. In other cases, like irony, the situation is more complex. Suppose the speaker says 'Paul really is a fine friend', in a situation in which just the opposite is known to be the case. The speaker does not really say, or at least she does not assert, what she 'makes as if to say' (Grice's phrase). Something is lacking here, namely the force of a serious assertion. While in conversational implicature, the speaker asserts something and conveys something more as well, in irony the speaker does *less* than assert what she would normally be asserting by uttering the sentence which she actually utters. What the speaker does in the ironical case is merely to *pretend* to assert the content of her utterance.[1] Still, there is an element of indirectness here, and we can maintain that irony also possesses a secondary character. By pretending to assert something, the speaker conveys something else, just as, in the other types of case, by asserting something the speaker conveys something else. By pretending to say of Paul that he is a fine friend in a situation in which just the opposite is obviously true, the speaker manages to communicate that Paul is everything but a fine friend. She shows, by her utterance, how inappropriate it would be to ascribe to Paul the property of being a fine friend. The utterance has a primary meaning — it expresses the proposition that Paul is a fine friend; and it is by expressing that primary meaning (under the 'pretense' mode, and without the force of a serious assertion) that the speaker is able to convey what she conveys.

Whenever the meaning conveyed by an utterance is secondary and derived from some antecedent meaning expressed by the utterance, it is 'nonliteral' in the ordinary sense. Let us therefore introduce a third notion alongside t-literalness and m-literalness: that of p-literal meaning, where 'p' stands for 'primary'. An interpretation for an utterance is p-literal just in case it directly results from interpreting the sentence (in

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[1] See Recanati 2000: 48 and the references therein.

context), without being derived from some antecedently determined meaning by an inferential process akin to that which is involved in conversational implicatures, indirect speech acts, etc.[2]

The question I want to raise concerns the relation between p-literalness and m-literalness. We have seen that a meaning is m-literal if it departs from the t-literal meaning of the sentence only minimally. Now we have another notion, that of p-literal meaning. To what extent do they coincide? In the example I used ('He is thirsty'), the proposition that Paul is thirsty was both m-literal and p-literal, in contrast to the other proposition (the implicature), which was neither. How general is this coincidence? More specifically: Is an underived, primary meaning necessarily a meaning that only minimally departs from the t-literal meaning of the sentence? A positive answer to that question tends to be assumed in the literature on this topic, but I think that is a mistake.

III

There are, I hold, meanings that are *primary* yet involve *nonminimal* departures from the conventional meaning of the sentence. Examples abound in the pragmatic literature. Let us start with two conjunctive utterances which have been analysed and discussed many times:

(1) They got married and had many children
(2) The policeman raised his hand and stopped the car

We naturally interpret (1) as depicting a situation in which marriage took place before the coming of the children. Yet, according to Grice, this is not encoded in the meaning of the sentence. Not only is the temporal ordering of the events not part of t-literal meaning; it is not even part of m-literal meaning. Remember how m-literal

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[2] For more on the primary/secondary distinction, see Recanati 1993: 260-266 and Recanati 1995.

meaning was characterized: m-literal meaning is not fully conventional since it involves, or may involve, contextual ingredients (e.g. assignment of values to indexicals), yet it departs from t-literal meaning only minimally, where a 'minimal' departure from t-literal meaning is a departure that is itself governed by the conventions of the language. But the temporal order between the events described by the conjuncts in (1) is not something that the t-literal meaning of the sentence forces an interpreter to specify. There are conjunctive utterances similar in all formal respects to (1) which can be given a quite satisfactory interpretation without specifying that order. Grice concludes that the temporal ordering of the events, though strongly suggested by the order of the conjuncts, is not part of 'what is said' by the utterance. ('What is said' is Grice's term for the m-literal meaning.) The contextual provision of that component of the meaning of the utterance constitutes a 'nonminimal' departure from t-literal meaning.

Example (2) is similar. As Rumelhart pointed out, we naturally interpret the sentence as depicting a scene in which the stopping of the car was caused by the raising of the policeman's hand. Moreover, we interpret the relevant form of causation as involving no direct physical contact between hand and car but rather the mediation of intentional states: the raising of the policeman's hand is understood to have caused the driver (i) to recognize the policeman's intention that she should stop the car and (ii) to stop the car so as to comply with the policeman's request. In other words, we understand (2) as saying that the policeman stopped the car by signalling to the driver that she was to stop. Yet neither the form of causation, nor even the existence of a causal link between hand-raising and car-stopping, is encoded in sentence (2). Nor is the contextual provision of those elements of utterance meaning required in virtue of some aspect of the t-literal meaning of the sentence. Once again we find that the interpretation of the utterance involves nonminimal departures from t-literal meaning.

Still, I maintain that the meanings thus conveyed by (1) and (2) are p-literal. In conversational implicatures, indirect speech acts, irony etc., there is something which is said (or which the speaker 'makes as if to say'), and something else that is implied by

saying what is said. This distinction between two separate components, one dependent upon the other, is actually part of the meaning of the utterance: whoever understand the utterance realizes that something is said and something else is implied by saying it. For example, if I am asked whether I talked to Freddy, and I reply

I don't talk to crooks

a normal hearer will understand me as saying that I don't talk to crooks and thereby implying that I did not talk to Freddy. (Someone who does not understand that does not understand the utterance.) Moreover, as Grice insisted, the understander will grasp the inferential connection between what is said (or the saying of it) and what is implied. (In this particular case, the connection involves the premiss: 'Freddy is a crook'.) Faced with (1) and (2), however, an interpreter does not construct an m-literal interpretation — an interpretation that differs only minimally from t-literal meaning — and use it to infer the m-nonliteral elements. The m-nonliteral interpretations are arrived at directly, as a result of the interaction of the t-literal meaning of the words (and constructions), salient features of the speech situation, expectations created by the discourse, schemata stored in memory and evoked by the words, etc. There is no inference here, or at least no inference of which the interpreters themselves are aware.[3]

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[3] Grice and his followers treat the temporal suggestion in (1) as a conversational implicature, despite the fact that it lacks the indirect or secondary character of standard conversational implicatures. I find this treatment misleading (Recanati 1993, ch. 13), but if we insist on using the notion of conversational implicature here we must at least draw a distinction between different sorts of conversational implicature. Grice himself ventured in that direction. He distinguished between 'generalized' and 'particularized' conversational implicatures, i.e. between implicatures which arise 'by default', without any particular context or special scenario being necessary, and those which require such specific contexts. In contrast to particularized conversational implicatures, generalized implicatures are often said to be "hard to distinguish from the *semantic* content of

Consider a third (and last) example:

(3)   You are not going to die

Kent Bach, to whom it is due, imagines a child crying because of a minor cut and her mother uttering (3) in response. What is meant is: 'You're not going to die from that cut'. But m-literally, Bach points out, the utterance expresses the proposition that the kid will not die *tout court*. The extra element contextually provided (the implicit reference to the cut) is not a component of m-literal meaning: it is not triggered by

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linguistic expressions, because such implicatures [are] routinely associated with linguistic expressions in all ordinary contexts" (Levinson 1983: 127). Generalized implicatures are unconsciously and automatically generated and interpreted; they belong to the 'micropragmatic' rather than to the 'macropragmatic' level, in Robin Campbell's typology:

A macropragmatic process is one constituted by a sequence of explicit inferences governed by principles of rational cooperation. A micropragmatic process develops as a cryptic [= unconscious] and heuristic procedure which partially replaces some macropragmatic process and which defaults to it in the event of breakdown. (Campbell 1981: 101)

Whether or not the notion of generalized conversational implicature can be made to work (see e.g. Levinson 2000 for a sustained defense), what matters for us is only the distinction between cases in which *the language users themselves* are aware that the meaning conveyed by the utterance involves two distinct components, one literal and the other not, and cases like (1) in which it is *the theorist* who establishes that some aspect of conveyed meaning (the temporal ordering of the events) is not literal. That distinction is crucial. As I shall emphasize in section IV, for an interpretation to count as nonliteral in the ordinary sense, *it must be felt as such by a normal understander.*

anything in the sentence, nor is it necessary for the utterance to express a complete proposition. On the other hand, that element is not 'inferred' on the basis of m-literal meaning: the hearer does not construct the m-literal interpretation, realize that the utterance, thus interpreted, would violate Grice's maxim of quality by entailing something blatantly false (that the child is immortal), and infer what the speaker's actually means; rather, she directly understands the mother's utterance as characterizing the situation created by the cut (Recanati 1999). Once again, the conveyed meaning turns out to be m-nonliteral, but p-literal nonetheless.

<div align="center">IV</div>

In the sort of case I have just discussed (the policeman example, etc.), the interpretation of the utterance goes well beyond what the conventions of the language dictate. The conventional meaning of the sentence is not only 'completed' from the bottom up by assigning contextual values to indexicals and other free variables, it is also *enriched* in a top-down manner by appealing to background assumptions and world-knowledge. That process of enrichment yields an output that is not m-literal, yet there is nothing nonliteral in the ordinary sense in that output. Nonliteral interpretations (in the ordinary sense) are 'special', by definition, but there is nothing special about the interpretations of utterances like (2). Utterance interpretation, *in general,* proceeds by matching the linguistic meaning of the sentence to the particular situation or sort of situation the speaker intends to talk about. The output of this matching process typically is a richer meaning, as (2) clearly illustrates: a number of features which are not linguistically encoded are nonetheless incorporated into the described scene as a result of top down pressures.

In contrast, there *is* something special about the interpretation of p-nonliteral utterances; it is a two-step procedure instead of being a one-step procedure. The interpreter first determines the utterance's primary meaning, then infers some additional meaning. This two-step process (which may be short-circuited or conventionalized — a

complication which I shall ignore) does not take place all the time: it takes place only when the speaker conveys something indirectly. But the process of enrichment in virtue of which what the speaker means by an utterance goes beyond the conventional significance of his words is universal: there is no utterance, however explicit, whose interpretation does not involve adjusting the conventional meanings of words to the particulars of the situation talked about. Communication would be impossible if things were not so.

The 'special' character of nonliteral communication is not the whole story, however. Even if there were something special about m-nonliteralness — if, say, most uses of words were m-literal — a use of words would still not count as nonliteral in the ordinary sense merely in virtue of the fact that it is m-nonliteral. A use of words counts as nonliteral in the ordinary sense only if there is something special about that use *that is, or can be, perceived by the language users themselves*. That is so because nonliteralness is a feature of the interpretation of utterances, and the interpretation of utterances is something that is bound to be available to the language users who do the interpreting. Now m-nonliteralness per se is not transparent to the language users. The speaker and hearer need not be aware that in their understanding of the uttered words they are going beyond what the conventions of the language dictate. It is not part of their competence to reflect upon the complex cognitive processes through which the meaning of an utterance gets built up from a number of distinct sources. On the other hand, we have seen that whenever a meaning is accessed via an inference from a primary meaning, as in (genuine) conversational implicatures, the language users themselves are aware of the distinction between the two layers of meaning as well as of the connection between them. In other words, p-nonliteralness is transparent to the language users; hence it counts as nonliteralness in the ordinary sense. (This transparency is not a contingent property of p-nonliteralness. It is definitive of p-nonliteralness that the sort of inference at issue is conducted at the 'personal', rather than 'sub-personal', level and is therefore available to the language users.)

To sum up, for something to count as nonliteral in the ordinary sense it must not only go beyond the conventional significance of the uttered words (m-nonliteralness), but it must be felt as such: the language users must be aware that the conveyed meaning exceeds the conventional significance of the words. That condition I dub the 'transparency condition'. It is satisfied whenever the conveyed meaning has a secondary character, as in conversational implicatures and indirect speech acts.

<div align="center">V</div>

Is secondariness a necessary, or merely a sufficient condition of transparency? If it is necessary, then only p-nonliteral instances of m-nonliteral meaning (conversational implicatures, indirect speech acts, etc.) will count as nonliteral in the ordinary sense. If it is merely sufficient, then presumably there will be p-literal instances of m-nonliteral meaning which will count as nonliteral in the ordinary sense, because the transparency condition has been satisfied through something other than indirectness. I see no reason to deny that there are such instances.

The paradigm case of nonliteral meaning is metaphor. Now metaphor, in its most central varieties, I count as p-literal. For example, if I say that the ATM swallowed my credit card, I speak metaphorically; there can be no real 'swallowing' on the part of an ATM, but merely something that resembles swallowing. Still, an ordinary hearer readily understands what is said by such an utterance, without going through a two-step procedure involving the prior computation of the 'literal' meaning of the utterance (whatever that may be) and a secondary inference to the actual meaning. Knowing the linguistic meaning of 'swallow', and knowing what sometimes happens with ATMs, the hearer unreflectively constructs the sense in which the ATM can be said to 'swallow' the card by adjusting the meaning of the word to the situation talked about. This is not very different from what goes on when the meaning of words is enriched so as to fit the specific situation of discourse, as in the policeman example from section III. In both cases, as Langacker persuasively argued, the situation talked

about is 'categorized' by means of the words which are used to describe it. In enrichment the situation talked about is a straightforward instantiation of the schema encoded in the words, which schema therefore gets 'elaborated' through its application to the situation. That defines what Langacker calls full schematicity: "the target is compatible with the sanctioning unit [= the word, with its conventional meaning], and is therefore judged by a speaker to be an unproblematic instantiation of the category it defines" (Langacker 1987: 68). In contrast, partial schematicity occurs when "there is some conflict between the specifications of the sanctioning and target structures, so that the former can be construed as schematic for the latter only with a certain degree of strain" (Langacker 1987: 69):

> Because partial schematicity involves conflicting specifications, the sanctioning and target structures cannot merge into a single, consistent conceptualization; in a categorizing judgement of the form [[SS ---> TS]], the discrepancy between SS and TS keeps them at least partially distinct. The result is a bipartite conceptualization including what we recognize as a literal sense (SS) and a figurative sense (TS). On the other hand, nothing prevents the sanctioning and target structures from merging into a unified conceptualization when there is full consistency between their specifications. In the schematic relationship [[SS ---> TS]], SS is in effect 'swallowed up' by TS, since all of the specifications of the former are implicit in the latter, which simply carries them down to a greater level of precision. (Langacker 1987: 92-93)

The picture that emerges is this. As words are applied, in context, to specific situations, their meaning is adjusted. (See the quotation from Bolinger at the beginning of this paper.) Depending on whether the conventional meaning is fully or only partially schematic for the situation talked about, ajdustment will take one of two forms: sense elaboration, or sense extension. In sense elaboration (enrichment) the meaning carried by the words is made more specific through the interaction with contextual factors. In

sense extension, those dimensions of meaning which stand in conflict to the specifications of the target are filtered out, but they remain somewhat active and may generate a feeling of discrepancy between the evoked schema and the sense constructed by (partially) applying the schema to the situation at hand. That feeling, like the conflict which underlies it, comes in degrees. Hence there is a continuum between ordinary cases of sense extension that we don't even perceive (the ATM swallowing the credit card) and more dramatic cases of metaphor whose nonliteral character cannot be ignored. The more noticeable the conflict, the more transparent the departure from t-literal meaning will be to the language users. Beyond a certain threshold, cases of sense extension will therefore count as special and nonliteral in the ordinary sense, despite their p-literal character. They will count as *figurative* uses of language (Fig. 1).
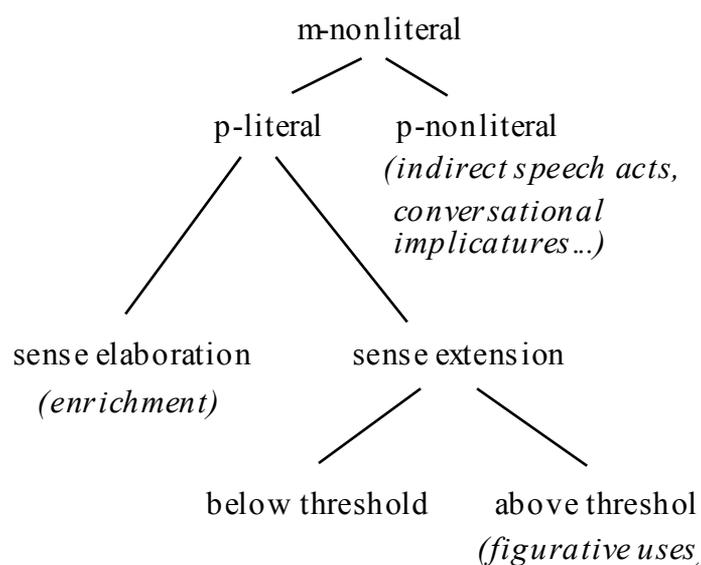

Figure 1

Irony and nonserious uses of language are another type of case in which, I think, the transparency condition is satisfied through something other than indirectness. To be sure, irony possesses a secondary character (§2): By pretending to say of Paul that he is a fine friend in a situation in which just the opposite is obviously true, the speaker

manages to communicate that Paul is everything but a fine friend. She shows, by her utterance, how inappropriate it would be to ascribe to Paul the property of being a fine friend. But let us put aside what is thus implied by saying something ironically — let us concentrate on the *primary* meaning of the ironical utterance. In order to understand the utterance at the primary level one must recognize that the act of asserting that Paul is a fine friend is staged or simulated rather than actually performed. And that means that one must discern two 'layers' within the primary meaning of the utterance: the surface speech act wich the speaker pretends to perform, and the ironical act of staging the performance of that speech act (Clark 1996: 353-4). This layering, internal to the primary meaning of the utterance, characterizes 'staged communicative acts', a large family which includes not only irony but also "sarcasm, teasing, overstatement, understatement, rhetorical questions, and their relatives" (Clark 1996: 369). Insofar as the duality of layers is internal to the (primary) meaning of the utterance and is recognized by whoever understands it, the transparency condition is eo ipso satisfied: the utterance is intuitively recognized as special, as exhibiting a duality which is absent from standard ('serious') uses of language. That duality, characteristic of staged communicative acts, is a third type of duality, distinct both from the 'two-step procedure' at work in the recovery of secondary meanings, and from the 'bipartite conceptualization' induced by metaphorical discrepancy. (Of course, nothing prevents a single utterance from exhibiting the three types of duality, in various patterns of interaction.)

VI

In this article I have attempted to establish that the literal/nonliteral distinction covers two quite different things:

• For the semanticist, the literal meaning of an expression is the semantic value which the conventions of the language assign to that expression ('with respect to context', if

the expression is indexical). Whenever the meaning which the expression actually conveys departs from that literal meaning, it is said to be 'nonliteral'.

• In the ordinary sense of the term, nonliteral meaning contrasts with normal meaning. Nonliteral meaning is special,   it involves a form of deviance or departure from the norm; a form of deviance or departure which must be transparent to the language users.

Both distinctions are legitimate. We need both the distinction between conventional meaning and conveyed meaning, and that between normal meaning and the special meanings assigned to words when the speaker speaks figuratively or nonseriously or conveys something indirectly. But it is all too easy to confuse the two distinctions, which should be kept separate. Indeed I think it is because the two distinctions have been confused that the same terms have been used for both distinctions.

The culprit here is the tacit, but very widespread, assumption that the m-literal meaning of words is what, in context, they normally express. In semantics (as opposed to psychology), departures from m-literal meaning tend to be treated as special, on the pattern of figurative language, nonserious speech or indirect communication. I think that assumption is mistaken. In context, words *systematically* express meanings that are richer than what the conventions of the language dictate. Contrary to what formal semanticists tend to assume, the (intuitive) truth-conditions of our utterances are not compositionally determined by the meanings of words and their syntactic arrangement, in a strict bottom-up manner. They are shaped by contextual expectations and world-knowledge to a very large extent. That is true of all utterances, however 'literal' they are (in the ordinary sense). If we abstract from those top-down factors, what we get — the utterance's m-literal meaning — no longer corresponds to the intuitive truth-conditions which the language users themselves associate with their own utterances. In other words, there is a gap between the deliverances of semantic theory and the intuitive content of utterances. That gap is bridged by pragmatic processes which take place normally and do not generate 'nonliteral meanings', except in special cases.

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