

RIFL (2019) Vol. 13, n. 1: 116-132
DOI: 10.4396/09201905

An Inferential Articulation of Metaphorical Assertions

Richmond Kwesi

University of Ghana, Department of Philosophy and Classics
rkwesi@ug.edu.gh

Abstract This paper argues for the view that metaphors are assertions by locating metaphor within our social discursive practices of asserting and inferring. The literal and the metaphorical differ not in the stating of facts nor in the representation of states of affairs but in the kind of inferential involvements they have and the normative score-keeping practices within which the inferential connections are articulated. This inferentialist based account of metaphor is supplemented by insights from accommodation theory. The account is significant for our understanding of both metaphor's figurativeness and cognitive content.

Keywords: Assertion, Metaphor, Presupposition, Accommodation, Inferentialism

Received 11 January 2019; accepted 28 May 2019.

0. Introduction

The inferentialist-based approach to understanding metaphor pursued here is based on Robert Brandom's (1994, 2000) inferential semantic account of discursive practices. Brandom's inferentialism treats assertion from the point of view of the social practices we engage in the game of 'giving and asking for reasons', that is, it treats assertion on the basis of the commitments and entitlements – the basic normative attitudes – that speakers undertake when they make claims. This game of 'giving and asking for reasons' implies that *asserting* and *inferring* are the fundamental kinds of *doings* in our social-linguistic practices. The crucial argument I make is that, fundamentally, the making of metaphorical claims can be understood from this game of 'giving and asking for reasons' – asserting and inferring – and it is on the basis of these things we do in using metaphors that metaphorical claims have propositional contents that can be evaluated for truth. However, Brandom's inferential account in its complexity presents an account of literal meaning and content but metaphors have contents distinct from that possessed by literal utterances. Hence, Brandom's account is modified and complemented with an account of *presuppositional accommodation*. The modification is required to make the normative social practices of 'giving and asking for reasons' suitable for the understanding and appreciation of metaphors. This modification is apt to show that while both the literal and the metaphorical are indistinguishable in terms of what we fundamentally *do* in using literal and metaphorical sentences, they differ mainly in the kind of inferential involvements they have and the normative score-keeping practices within which the inferential connections are articulated. The insight from accommodation theory is to account for both the contextualism associated with

metaphors, and the acceptability of metaphorical moves in the language game despite their literal impropriety. This inferential articulation of metaphor is significant in at least two ways: one, it shows that contrary to Davidson (1979), Rorty (1987), Cooper (1986), Reimer (2001), Lepore & Stone (2010, 2015) and others, metaphors can be regarded as truth-evaluable assertions whose contents are conferred by the socio-linguistic practices we engage in; and two, we gain an understanding of how the two dimensions – the seeing-as phenomenological and the assertional – both belong to the phenomenon of metaphor as has been argued especially by Moran (1989), Gaut (1997), Camp (2006, 2017), and Taylor (2016).

1. Brandom's inferential articulation of linguistic practices

It has been observed that most of our utterances and statements stand for, represent, and are about things and states of affairs in the world. According to Brandom, one explanatory strategy to capture this observation, *representationalism*, is to begin with an understanding of representation, truth and reference, «and on that basis explain the practical proprieties that govern language use and rational action» (Brandom 1994: 69). But Brandom thinks that we cannot have a suitable notion of representation or truth *in advance* of our thinking about the correct use of our linguistic expressions. For Brandom, the representational dimension of propositional content is intelligible only in the context of «*linguistic* social practices of communicating by giving and asking for reasons in the form of claims» (*ivi*: 153). Rather than using the concepts of truth and reference as primitive or basic semantic concepts to the understanding of other semantic concepts like meaning and inference, Brandom provides an account of our linguistic practices that takes asserting and inferring as fundamental and then he explains truth and reference in terms of their expressive and inferential roles. He privileges *inference* over truth and reference by adopting an explanatory strategy that understands the meaning of linguistic expressions and the conferment of propositional content in terms of the role they play in reasoning.

Inference, for Brandom, is a kind of *doing*. So Brandom reverses the order of explanation by starting with an account of what one is *doing* in making a claim and then seeks to elaborate from it an account of what is said and the propositional content of what is said. He understands asserting something as «putting it in a form in which it can both serve as and stand in need of *reasons*: a form in which it can serve as both premise and conclusion in *inferences*» (Brandom 2000: 11). He explains propositional contentfulness in terms of being 'fit to serve both as a premise and as a conclusion' in inferences. Instead of construing *saying* (thinking, believing) *that* such and such in terms of its correspondence to states of affairs in the world, Brandom asks us to understand it «in terms of a distinctive kind of knowing *how* or being able to *do* something» and the relevant sort of doing here is understood by its «inferential articulation» (*ivi*: 17). He explains further:

Saying or thinking *that* things are thus-and-so is undertaking a distinctive kind of *inferentially* articulated commitment: putting it forward as a fit premise for further inferences, that is, *authorizing* its use as such a premise, and undertaking *responsibility* to entitle oneself to that commitment, to vindicate one's authority, under suitable circumstances, paradigmatically by exhibiting it as the conclusion of an inference from other such commitments to which one is or can become entitled (*ivi*: 11).

Brandom is motivated, in part, by finding distinctive features that make human beings sapient beings who have the capacity to engage in discursive or concept-using practices.

That is, he is interested in knowing what is involved in discursive beings undertaking certain commitments by their utterances, how their utterances come to be assessed as appropriate or inappropriate, and how certain consequences and implications follow from their utterances. His answer to the above inquiries is that the linguistic practices humans engage in are norm-governed social practices, the performances of which are subject to normative attitudes of their practitioners and the attribution of normative statuses to the performers of this social linguistic practice. What differentiates discursive beings and their practices from that of non-discursive animals, according to Brandom is «to be the subject of normative *attitudes*, to be capable of acknowledging proprieties and improprieties of conduct, to be able to treat a performance as correct or incorrect» (Brandom 1994: 32).

The sociality of the discursive practice lies in the normative statuses – the undertaking and attributing of commitments and their attendant undertaking of responsibility for those commitments – and normative attitudes – acknowledging the propriety or impropriety of performances – while the linguistic nature of the practice lies in the institution of the speech act of assertion – the making of claims that can stand for, and be in need of, reasons. The making of claims, asserting, is intimately connected to the practice of inferring in such a way that for Brandom, «asserting cannot be understood apart from inferring» (*ivi*: 158); for the making of a claim is connected to the consequences that follow from that claim and the way in which that claim can be used as a reason for another claim. The inferential involvements of a claim or the network of inferential connections that a claim has to other claims, the propriety of the speaker's commitment to the claim and the appropriateness of the inferences one can make from that claim to others, suffice to determine the semantic content of that claim. The appropriateness of the inferences largely depends on, and is often determined by, the normative statuses and attitudes, the commitments and entitlements of the performers in a conversation.

Brandom understands the linguistic practices of asserting and inferring and the institution of normative attitudes and statuses within the framework of a game which is governed by rules and where certain moves or performances of the game players are deemed appropriate or inappropriate. In this game, the conversationalists are players and score-keepers who undertake commitments in virtue of their own moves, and attribute commitments to other players on the basis of the appropriateness of their moves too. A move in this game authorizes other moves by the speaker and licenses others to make other moves or attribute commitments to the speaker. The speaker's move can be challenged, and when it is challenged, the speaker undertakes the responsibility to provide reasons to justify and vindicate his assertion, or she could retract the assertion if the circumstance demands it. The correctness and appropriateness of moves in the game determine the kind of normative attitudes that score-keepers adopt to the performances of players in the game.

Brandom's inferentialist account of the semantic content of sentences, in a nutshell, is a pragmatic account that treats the uses of language in terms of a social normative practice where the making of assertions and the inferential involvements of assertions are basic and principal to the understanding of language use. These practices are situated within a framework where the making of assertions involves the undertaking of commitments, the attribution of commitments to others, the licensing of others to make certain inferences from the assertion, and the responsibility to justify one's assertions when challenged.

2. The case for metaphorical assertions

A metaphor is often characterized as a figurative expression used to make someone see one thing in terms of another thing. According to Lamarque and Olsen, a metaphor, by its essence, is not to «*state that something is the case*» but rather, its constitutive aim is «to invite or encourage a hearer to think of, conceive of, reflect on, or imagine one thing (state of affairs, idea, etc.) in terms associated with some other thing (state of affairs, etc.) often of a quite different logical type» (Lamarque & Olsen 1994: 360). Building on Davidson's (1979) thesis that metaphors have no propositional contents, Lepore and Stone contend that «interlocutors use their metaphorical discourse not to assert and deny propositions but to develop imagery and to pursue a shared understanding» (Lepore & Stone 2010: 177). As mere invitations to explore comparisons, metaphors are thought not to be in the business of making claims or assertions that can be evaluated for truth.

However, metaphors go beyond mere invitations and the experience of comparing two things (Kwesi, 2018). Speakers and hearers of metaphors *do more* than what inviters and invitees do; the practices they engage in with metaphors go beyond the intention to issue invitations and the undertaking of thinking of one thing as another thing. A plausible explanation for this something more, other than, and in addition to invitations and undertakings, is that the issue of truth is at play. It is because speakers often make assertions by their utterances of metaphors that they exhibit certain commitments like endorsing and justifying metaphors. We will consider examples from Shakespeare to illustrate these points.

Example 1:

Menenius: The senators of Rome are this good belly,
And you the mutinous members; for, examine
Their counsels and their cares; digest things rightly
Touching the weal o' the common; you shall find
No public benefit which you receive
But it proceeds or comes from them to you,
And no way from yourselves. – What do you think,
You, the great toe of this assembly?
First citizen: I the great toe? why the great toe?
Menenius: For that, being one o' the lowest, basest, poorest,
Of this most wise rebellion, thou go'st foremost:
Thou rascal, that art worst in blood to run,
Lead'st first to win some vantage.
But make you ready your stiff bats and clubs:
Rome and her rats are at the point of battle;
The one side must have bale.
[*Coriolanus*, Act 1 Scene 1]

This example illustrates the kinds of commitments that speakers of metaphors bring to bear in the use of metaphors. What Menenius is doing in the second speech is to justify why the First Citizen is the great toe of the assembly. Menenius makes a claim in the first speech, his audience demands an explanation or justification for the claim, and Menenius in the second speech, explains the claim, or elaborates on the claim, or justifies the claim. Surely, if speakers do not intend to say or describe something, if they do not intend to state that such-and such is the case, then they will not be committed to endorsing, justifying, and withdrawing their metaphors.

Example 2:

King Henry: A speaker is but a prater, a rhyme is but a ballad, a good leg will fall, a straight back will stoop, a black beard will turn white, a curled pate will grow bald, a fair face will wither, a full eye will wax hollow, but a good heart, Kate, is the sun and the moon, or rather the sun and not the moon, for it shines bright and never changes but keeps his course truly. If thou would have such a one, take me.

[*The Life of Henry the Fifth*, Act 5 Sc 2]

King Henry is wooing Katharine. In one sentence he says that a good heart is both the sun and the moon, he then withdraws or retracts it, and says later that a good heart is the sun and not the moon. Withdrawal or retraction is possible when what is retracted or withdrawn is considered as a claim or an assertion. King Henry's withdrawal of his initial metaphorical utterance is independent of his intention to invite Katharine to explore certain comparisons.

Example 3:

Ely: But there's a saying very old and true:

"If that you will France win,

Then with Scotland first begin".

For once the eagle England being in prey,

To her unguarded nest the weasel Scot

Comes sneaking and so sucks her princely eggs,

Playing the mouse in absence of the cat,

To 'tame and havoc more than she can eat.

Exeter: It follows, then, the cat must stay at home.

Yet that is but a crushed necessity,

Since we have locks to safeguard necessities

And pretty traps to catch the petty thieves.

[*The Life of Henry*, Act 1 Scene 2]

This example illustrates that the hearer can do more than just think of, conceive of, or imagine one thing in terms of another thing. The hearer, like Exeter, can draw certain conclusions and make inferences from the speaker's metaphorical utterances. The hearer can only do these things if he or she construes the utterances of the speaker to be making truth-evaluable claims.

What these examples establish are that:

a) there are certain commitments that bind speakers when they speak metaphorically, and these commitments cannot be accounted for satisfactorily when the invitational norm is thought to constitute the making of metaphors. Invitations do not naturally come with certain commitments like endorsing and justifying – these commitments naturally go with the issuance of claims and assertions.

b) The things speakers do with metaphors are not incompatible with their inviting others to do certain things; but they are also not derived from, nor dependent on, their aims to invite hearers to do certain things. Hearers recognize that speakers of metaphors intend to make assertions or claims by their use of metaphors and hence, their responses and reactions to metaphors – that they can question, endorse, deny metaphorical attributions – suggest that metaphorical utterances are no different from literal utterances as far as their being claims are concerned.¹

¹ Indeed many accounts such as that of Carston (2002), Recanati (2004) and those based on relevance theory such as that of Wilson & Carston (2006) subsume metaphor under a general category of 'loose talk' and argue that there are no special cognitive and interpretive differences between the literal and the

How do we explain these points from the point of view of an inferential approach to metaphors?

3. An inferential articulation of metaphors

I shall argue below that Brandom's account of the propositional content of sentences and the making of assertions as sketched above, complemented by insights from *presuppositional accommodation*, is appropriate for treating metaphorical utterances as being propositionally contentful, and for taking metaphorical claims as assertions that can be evaluated for truth. In other words, an inferentialist account of the use of language provides us with a theoretical framework within which metaphors count as assertions and can be appraised for truth. Inferentialism does not necessarily give priority of place to literal content and literal assertion. Brandom's account helps us to understand our social, normative and linguistic practices in using language – both literal and metaphorical uses of language. In focusing on what we are *doing* in making claims or saying something, his account is neutral as to whether what we are saying is literal or metaphorical. That is, the distinctive and basic kinds of doing – asserting and inferring – that Brandom identifies are not peculiar to literal uses of language. As the examples above show, in both literal and figurative uses of language, we engage in the drawing of inferences: we put forth claims that can serve as, and stand in need of reasons. In both literal and metaphorical uses of language, we can justify the claims we put forth, and we can challenge the claims that other interlocutors put forward in our conversational practices. Similarly, in asserting metaphorical and literal statements, we undertake certain commitments and license others to make inferences from those claims.

So, inferring here is the common denominator in our linguistic practices of making literal and metaphorical claims. This implies that the propositional content of our claims will have to be inferentially articulated, since what can serve as, and stand in need of, reasons must be propositionally contentful. The basic argument here, therefore, is this:

- P1 – Putting forward a claim is putting forward something that can serve as a reason and stand in need of reasons.
- P2 – What can serve as, and stand in need of reasons, is propositionally contentful
- C: Hence, putting forward a claim is putting forward something that is propositionally contentful.

What is important about this argument is that it is neutral to whether the claims put forward are literal or metaphorical. It shows that there is what we can term as the *principle of uniformity* in terms of the basic kind of doing with respect to literal and metaphorical uses of language. This principle indicates that *asserting* and *inferring* are neither specific to, nor distinctive of, literal uses of language. And since, on an inferentialist account, these pragmatic practices confer semantic contentfulness on sentences, literal and metaphorical sentences come to have propositional contents in fundamentally the same way. In addition, this uniformity principle nullifies the bifurcation between descriptive and non-descriptive uses of language and the explanatory work that the distinction is supposed to achieve. For, since inferentialism

metaphorical. While these pragmatic accounts focus on the comprehension and interpretation of metaphorical utterances, the account pursued here provides a motivation for why metaphorical utterances can be regarded as claims and assertions in the first place. And the thought is that, they are claims in just the same way as literal utterances are regarded as claims.

considers inferring, rather than truth and reference, as basic and primary, descriptive contentfulness is not a useful determinant for understanding our uses of language.

Despite the sameness of the fundamental action we do in using literal and metaphorical sentences, it can be argued that the game of giving and asking for reasons is suitable for only literal sentences. For the rule-governed nature of the game, the undertaking and attributing of commitments and the score-keeping by players, the propriety of the moves in the game and how such moves are assessed, and the consequences of the moves in the game and how they are determined – all these make sense within a literal understanding of the discursive practices of sapient beings. But I think that there is a possibility of *extending* the details of Brandom's account to include uses of metaphorical sentences, and hence, saving the uniformity principle. This possibility is what I will explore below.

The explanation pursued here is to treat *metaphorically speaking* (or *speaking metaphorically*) as a presupposition marker when it is explicitly used to prefix an assertion or as tacitly presupposed when a speaker asserts a sentence that is identified as a metaphor. This presupposition is pragmatic in the sense used by Stalnaker (1973, 1974, 2002) and Soames (1982), in that it is speakers and not sentences that presuppose anything. However, this *metaphorically speaking* presupposition is not a proposition that is already accepted as part of the common ground of a conversation; and it is not a proposition that is a consequence of a (metaphorical) sentence, the truth or falsity of which affects the semantic value of the sentence. It is a presupposition in the sense of signalling how the assertion is to be understood and interpreted, and therefore, the inferential involvement of the assertion is contingent on acceptance of the presupposition. The *metaphorically speaking* presupposition, in its non-explicit form, marks a ternary relation between the sentence, the context in which it is used, and the speaker's intention in using the sentence. In saying that 'Richard is a lion', for instance, a speaker presupposes that he is *speaking metaphorically* when he is cooperating in the discourse and obeying the Gricean rules of conversation and that the context and the circumstances of the utterance makes it appropriate for construing the utterance metaphorically.

I shall adapt Soames' (1982) definition of 'utterance presupposition' in explaining this distinctive kind of presupposition of *speaking metaphorically*. The presupposition of *speaking metaphorically* can be captured in this way:

- An utterance **U** presupposes that the speaker **S** is *speaking metaphorically* at **t** iff one can reasonably infer from **U** that **S** accepts that he is speaking metaphorically and regards it as uncontroversial, either because
- a. **S** thinks that the conversational context at **t** makes it appropriate to construe **U** only as a metaphor, or because
 - b. **S** thinks that the audience is prepared to add the presupposition, without objection, to the context against which **U** is evaluated.²

Consider a simple conversation between two people about their head of department, Schneider:

Tom: What do you think of this new head of department?

Dick: Schneider is a fox

² This definition itself is not distinctive of *metaphorically speaking*. Indeed, it captures the general mode of *figuratively speaking*, and as such can be extended to other figures of speech like irony and metonymy. What will set metaphor apart from these other figures will be the kind of inferential connections speaking metaphorically warrant.

Tom: Well, I think he is more of a serpent
Dick: Either way, he is treacherous.

Dick's initial utterance presupposes that he is speaking metaphorically and this presupposition seems uncontroversial from the context in which he is talking about his head of department. In this case, the fact that the conversation is about a human being, coupled with the obvious literal falsity of his assertion, make it appropriate to construe his assertion as a metaphor. The conversational context in this case determines that the utterance be construed as a metaphor in virtue of the speaker's intention to speak metaphorically and his interlocutor recognizing that he is speaking metaphorically. Tom's recognition of Dick's speaking metaphorically informs his own use of a related metaphor. The presupposition is sustained by Tom's recognition that Dick is cooperating in the conversational discourse and expects that his utterance will be construed metaphorically.

What is the purpose of this presupposition marker (i.e. *metaphorically speaking*) in the score-keeping game of giving and asking for reasons? Among the moves the linguistic game-player can make is the asserting of a metaphorical claim. In making this move, the speaker presupposes that he is speaking metaphorically in the sense explained above. The metaphorical claim itself usually will be literally inappropriate – it could be literally false, semantically anomalous, pragmatically a misfire, a category mistake, and so on – but the *recognition* of the presupposition (tacitly or explicitly expressed)³ and the contextual parameters within which the utterance is made leads to both the *acceptability* and *appropriateness* of the move. Understanding the three key words italicized in the preceding sentence – *recognition* of the presupposition marker, the *appropriateness* and *acceptability* of the metaphorical utterance – and the relationship that exist among the three, will shed light on the inferential articulation of metaphors within this Brandomian framework.

A speaker's metaphorical utterance comes with what we have called the presupposition of speaking metaphorically. The speaker, in the first place, relies on his/her hearer's capacity to acknowledge this presupposition behind his utterance, and in the second place, the speaker expects his/her hearer to recognize the presuppositional intent of his/her utterance. Hornsby (1994) and Hornsby & Langton (1998) have characterized a phenomenon that exists between users of language whereby the speaker and hearer depend on a 'mutual capacity for uptake' as users of language and a reliance on a 'minimal receptiveness' of users in their role as hearers, as *reciprocity*. According to Hornsby and Langton, «people who share a language have the capacity not simply to understand one another's words, but also to grasp what illocutionary acts others might be trying to make» (Hornsby & Langton 1998: 25) and that in a successful linguistic exchange «a speaker tries to do an illocutionary thing; a hearer recognizing that the speaker is trying to do that thing is then sufficient for the speaker to actually do it» (Hornsby & Langton 1998: 25). Reciprocity then allows that language users exploit the capacity of others recognizing their illocutionary intent, like staking a claim, and the capacity to acknowledge and receive the communicative intentions of others. One

³ When the speaker does not explicitly indicate that she is speaking metaphorically, usually, the features of the sentence such as literal falsity or absurdity in addition to the context in which the sentence is uttered can lead the hearer to recognize that the speaker was speaking metaphorically. This does not mean that metaphors are necessarily identified as being literally false or semantically anomalous – the case of twice-true metaphors present counter-examples to the view that metaphors are literally false. The identification of a sentence as a metaphor is different from the essence or constitution of a metaphor. Literal falsity is an identificational, rather than essential, feature of metaphor.

implication of this view is that the staking of a claim is not necessarily achieved by convention or by its adherence to certain rules but by the audience's awareness of the speaker's intention.

The notion of reciprocity is apt here in grounding the linguistic moves that speakers make which come with the metaphorical presuppositions. The recognition of the presupposition marker on the part of the hearer and the speaker's expectation that the hearer recognizes his/her presuppositions is dependent on this mutual capacity for uptake and receptiveness. Reciprocity then suffices for regarding the metaphorical utterances of the game-players as the making of claims, for their status as claims, depends on whether the game players take them to be so. That is, by means of reciprocity, the move of a game-player (when it is a metaphor) is successfully recorded as the making of a claim by other game-players and score-keepers – and this is not because the move is in accordance with the rules of the game *per se* but because it arises from the point of view that speakers *do something* with their words and utterances.

Reciprocity alone, however, does not entail the *acceptability* of an utterance as a metaphor: it needs to be supplemented by a process of presupposition *accommodation* to account for the appropriateness and acceptability of metaphorical utterances in the game. Accommodation, originally understood in relation to presuppositions refers to the process or mechanism by which an utterance that requires a presupposition to be acceptable, and where the presupposition was not part of the common ground of the conversation before the utterance, that presupposition “comes into existence” (Lewis, 1979: 340) at the time of the utterance. That is, if the conversation requires that the presupposition of an utterance is added to the conversational score for the utterance to be acceptable, that presupposition is accommodated and added to the conversational score. As a mechanism a hearer adopts to update the score of the conversation, accommodation does not only imply that a hearer adjusts the context of the conversation to receive the current utterance of the speaker but that the hearer also makes a «tacit extension» (Karttunen 1974: 191) of the conversational context by his/her acquiescence of the presupposition. By tacitly extending the context to accommodate the speaker's presupposition, the hearer adopts a strategy that makes the utterance of the speaker true and acceptable (Richard, 2004, 2008). The hearer updates the conversation and the conversational score by adding the presuppositional information to the shared common ground of the conversational context. The process of accommodation, therefore, guarantees the appropriateness of the speaker's utterance, for in deciding to acquiesce to the speaker's presuppositional suggestion, the hearer comes to regard the speaker's utterance as an appropriate move in the game.

Roberts (2004: 511) identified two necessary conditions of presuppositional accommodation, the satisfaction of which makes hearers accommodate, rather than object to, the speaker's presuppositions:

- a) **Retrievability:** what the hearer is to accommodate is easily inferable, so that it is perfectly clear what is presupposed, and it is both salient and relevant to the immediate context, and
- b) **Plausibility:** the accommodated material leads to an interpretation that is reasonable and unobjectionable in the context

In this distinctive kind of presupposition – *metaphorically speaking* – that comes with the speaker's making of a metaphor, the process of accommodation ensures both the acceptability and appropriateness of the metaphor. How so? When a metaphorical utterance is made, an initial and perhaps, unreflective, reaction one can make is to see the utterance as inappropriate – a wrong move in the conversational game. However, by

the hearer's recognition of the cooperative attitude of the speaker and the hearer's recognition of the illocutionary intent of the speaker by means of reciprocity, the hearer sets about to adjust the context and the conversation to admit the metaphorical utterance. The acceptance of the metaphorical utterance, in turn, comes about by inferring from the context that the speaker was speaking metaphorically. The hearer then goes through the process of accommodation by accepting and adding the presupposition to the conversational score and then updating the conversation to make the metaphorical utterance of the speaker acceptable and appropriate. The initial impropriety and awkwardness that seemingly greeted the metaphorical utterance goes away; for, through accommodation, the metaphorical assertion becomes an appropriate move in the game. Roberts' first condition of Retrievability is satisfied by the recognition of the presupposition marker made possible by the context and the mutual capacity of language users to recognize and be receptive to the illocutionary intent of speakers. The second condition, Plausibility, is satisfied by the fact that it is only by the accommodation of the presupposition that the meaning and interpretation of the metaphor become contextually relevant and appropriate.

Accommodation also determines the kind of meaning we give to the metaphor and the inferential involvements of the metaphor. It sets the inferential propriety and aptness of a metaphor which accounts for the metaphor's acceptability. Accommodating a presupposition associated with an utterance and updating the conversational score to include the utterance implies that one *understands* the utterance. A speaker's preference for uttering a metaphor in a conversation – when he/she could have chosen to speak literally for the same effect – is borne out of the expectation that his/her hearer will understand his/her utterance as metaphorical. And it is a linguistic fact that users of a language do understand both the hackneyed and novel metaphors they use in their linguistic exchanges. But what is it to understand an utterance – a metaphorical utterance for that matter?

Understanding a metaphor may involve seeing one thing (Schneider) as another thing (a fox). This is the *phenomenological* or *figurative dimension* to metaphor. Explicitly qualifying one's assertion that one is speaking metaphorically or implicitly presupposing that one is speaking metaphorically means that the assertion should not be construed in terms of the normal signification of the words of the assertion. Recognizing the presupposition and accepting the metaphorical utterance is the way in which accommodation embraces the phenomenological dimension of the metaphor. Understanding a metaphor, however, goes beyond the experiential seeing-*as*; it involves, among others, the ability to reason with the metaphor, the ability to use the metaphor in other contexts, the ability to draw inferences from the metaphor, and the ability to use the metaphor as a premise or conclusion of an argument (Macagno & Zavatta 2014; Oswald & Rihs 2014; Wagemans 2016; Ervas, Gola & Rossi 2018): this is the *assertional* dimension of a metaphor. This is the sense of putting forward a metaphorical claim in the form that is fit to serve as, and stand in need of reasons. In other words, this is the dimension of the dual mode of asserting-and-inferring that is associated with metaphors. By accommodating a metaphor, the hearer reflects his/her understanding of the metaphor, where this understanding consists of both the phenomenological and assertional dimensions of a metaphor. The relationship between the two dimensions is such that the phenomenological dimension which accounts for the presupposition of metaphorically speaking determines the kind of inferential involvement of the metaphor, and hence, it determines the assertional dimension of the metaphor. The correctness and appropriateness of the inferential involvements of a metaphor are set and constrained by the phenomenological dimension of the metaphor through the process of accommodation.

The role of accommodation in grounding both the assertional and phenomenological dimensions of metaphor stems from the idea of accommodation as the making of a tacit extension to the context of conversation or as the adjusting of the extension of a term in order to make an utterance acceptable and true. Richard (2004, 2008) used the notions of accommodation and ‘contextual negotiation’ to argue for the truth relativity of expressions whose meanings depend on the context in which they are used. Richard explained that it is the processes of accommodation and negotiation that accounts for why a sentence like ‘Mary is rich’ expresses a claim whose truth is relative. The significant insight from Richard here is that in making an assertion that ‘Mary is rich’ one is simultaneously inviting others to conceptualize the way in which Mary ‘counts as’ being rich. Mary may count as rich in the pool of university professors but not rich in the pool of billionaires like Bill Gates. A similar insight is what obtains in the making of metaphorical assertions which corresponds to the phenomenological and assertional dimensions. In saying that Schneider is a fox, Dick is making a claim and simultaneously inviting Tom to think of the way in which Schneider counts as a fox. By accommodating the claim, Tom recognizes that Dick was speaking metaphorically by means of the invitation to think of Schneider as a fox, and also that Dick was making an assertion whose content will be given by its inferential role.

Once the presupposition of *metaphorically speaking* is accommodated and the conversational context and score are updated to make the metaphorical claim appropriate and acceptable, the inferential involvement of the metaphorical claim and the propriety of the inferences from the metaphorical claim can be given. The deductive and material inferences we can make from a literal claim are constrained by the rule-governed nature of literal claims and the compositional analysis that is brought to bear on the understanding of the inferential involvements of literal claims. For instance, from the claim that ‘Schneider is a fox’ we can logically infer that ‘Schneider is an animal’ and the propriety of this inference depends on the compositional meaning of the claim and the rules that govern the making of deductive and inductive inferences.

A metaphorical claim, however, is not fettered by compositionality (Kwesi, 2019) and its appropriateness is not dependent on the literal rules of the game. The making of the claim, the acceptability of the claim, and the appropriateness or otherwise of that claim depends on the existence of the metaphorical presupposition marker, the phenomenon of reciprocity and the process of accommodation, all of which are sensitive to the contextual parameters in which the claim is made. The inferences that can be made from the metaphor and the propriety of those inferences depend on what counts as Schneider being a fox. For instance, while ‘Schneider is crafty’ is a consequence of her being a fox in the context of the conversation, ‘Schneider is hairy’ is not. In other words, in seeing Schneider as a fox we can infer that she is crafty but the consequence that she is hairy is not plausible when one sees her as a fox in the context of discussing Schneider.

Tom’s recognition of the presupposition of Dick’s claim and his illocutionary intent of making an appropriate claim, coupled with his accommodating and updating the context, influences his own use of the metaphorical claim that Schneider is, rather, a serpent. When Dick finally asserts that either way Schneider is treacherous, he does not nullify their so taking their earlier assertions as metaphors; he rather shifts the conversational context back to the literal way of talking, and he expects that Tom will adjust the conversation accordingly.⁴

⁴ What makes a particular inference good or bad, what makes a good inference good and a bad inference bad, and the rules governing the making of such inferences will require a more comprehensive framework, one that is beyond the current scope of this paper.

The undertaking of certain normative commitments and the attribution of commitments to others that participants engage in by means of their assertions are social practices that are relevant and appropriate in the making of metaphorical claims as well as literal claims. The admission or acceptance of metaphorical claims in the game of giving and asking for reasons as explored above implies that the dual statuses of commitments and entitlements that characterize social practices and the playing of games are applicable when the assertions game players make are metaphorical ones. Similarly, the determination of the semantic content of assertions by means of their inferential roles in reasoning is no different when the assertions are metaphorical ones. How the literal differs from the metaphorical is not because the metaphorical is not fit to be instituted in the game of giving and asking for reasons, but that players of this game adopt a different mechanism in determining the propriety of the moves in the game, the propriety of the inferential involvements of those moves, and the ways in which the conversational contexts and scores are adjusted and updated.

4. Implications and merits of the inferential articulation of metaphors

The kind of explanatory strategy pursued here is a *non-reductive, uniform*, and inferentialist-based approach to understanding metaphor. It is non-reductive in the sense that it does not explain and evaluate the metaphorical in terms of the literal; it is uniform because it does not provide a *sui generis* kind of ‘metaphorical truth’ or ‘metaphorical assertion’; it is an inferentialist-based approach in treating metaphor from a pragmatically articulated point of view by understanding the questions of truth, content, and assertion, in relation to metaphor, in terms of what we *do* in using metaphors. For Brandom, instead of starting with a metaphysical account of truth such as the correspondence theory and using that to account for beliefs and assertions which are construed to be representations that can be true, he offers an approach of understanding truth ascriptions in terms of the act of calling something true. In other words, the emphasis is on a pragmatic construal of truth, the act of calling something true, rather than the descriptive content of what is associated with what is called true; this is to say that in calling something true one is praising or endorsing it rather than describing it.

Taking a claim to be true, then, is undertaking a sort of ‘normative stance or attitude’ towards that claim, that is endorsing it or committing oneself to it. Endorsing a claim or committing oneself to it, according to Brandom, is understood «in terms of the role the endorsed claim plays in practical inference, both in first-person deliberation and in third-person appraisal» (1988: 77). Truth, on Brandom’s view, is seen not as a property independent of our attitudes but it is understood in terms of ‘taking-true’ or ‘treating-as-true’. He writes that «in calling something true one is *doing* something, rather than, or in addition to, *saying* something. Instead of asking what property it is that we are describing a belief or claim as having when we say that it is true, [we] ask about the practical significance of the act we are performing in attributing that property» (1988: 77). Undertaking a normative stance or commitment towards a claim, we have seen, is understood as putting it forward as fit to serve as, and stand for, the premise and conclusion of an argument. Hence, the ascription of truth to the literal and the metaphorical occur in fundamentally the same way.

The emphasis on the uniformity principle is not to deny that the metaphorical is in an important sense dependent on the literal. But we need to be clearer on what the dependency relation entails and what the primacy of the literal involves. The primacy of the literal is in respect of the production and interpretation of metaphor: words do not acquire mystical meanings when they are used in metaphors; and the literal meanings of the words aid in the interpretation of the metaphor – indeed the interpretation of the

metaphor is often done using literal language. But the primacy of the literal should not be extended to the appraisal of the metaphor: we get nowhere by insisting that metaphors are literally false, absurd or inconsistent; we will simply be appraising metaphor in literal terms. The fact that A depends, or is parasitic, on B does not entail that A should be reduced to B: dependency does not entail reduction. The dependency relation that exists between the literal and the metaphorical should be understood as a *dependency-for*. So, the question to be asked is that the metaphorical depends on the literal for what? A plausible answer is that the metaphorical depends on the literal for its explication, interpretation, paraphrasing. This means that the literal has a *communicative priority* over the metaphorical, and this communicative priority does not extend over to the evaluation of metaphor.

To understand metaphor *qua* metaphor, to understand metaphor in relation to truth and assertion, however, we must begin with our practices of using language in general, and our use of metaphors in particular, and then account for the notions of truth and assertion in terms of our linguistic practices. The virtue of the approach pursued here is that it does not reduce and explain metaphor in literal terms; it does not begin with a set standard to evaluate metaphor; and most importantly, it explains content, truth and assertion, without a prior demarcation of, and which is oblivious to the differences between, the literal and the metaphorical.

An inferential articulation of the basic kind of doing in using metaphor provides us with a comprehensive account of the roles of the interlocutors and the linguistic expression in our communicative practices. There is what the speaker does, what the hearer does, and what the linguistic expression itself effects in hearers: these three-doings, each independently necessary but jointly sufficient for our understanding of the doings associated with metaphor. An account that focuses on what the metaphor brings about – nudging us to see something, directing our attention to see certain similarities, provoking certain thoughts in us – is focusing on but one of the three-doings, and as such, an adequate and satisfactory account cannot be propounded from that. The Davidsonian account is guilty of this one-sided approach to the use of metaphor. An invitational account is primarily focused on what the speaker does, and so are other accounts that focus on the intentions of the speaker. Similarly, the focus on the acquisition of beliefs and the effects of metaphor on the part of the hearer is inadequate in itself to give a comprehensive account of metaphor. But from an inferentially articulated kind of doing in terms of commitments and entitlements, we get a basic and comprehensive picture of what we do in using metaphors. By putting forward a metaphorical claim the speaker undertakes a commitment by endorsing the claim as fit for a premise or conclusion in reasoning. Whether the speaker, in undertaking such a commitment *thereby* invites, encourages, suggests or proposes something to the hearer is explainable in terms of the inferences that the speaker licenses and the hearer is entitled to draw. That the speaker can endorse a claim, and provide justification or warrant for the claim when it is challenged, stems from the fact that the claim put forward is fit to serve as the premise or conclusion of an argument. Understood this way, the hearer of a metaphor is not just a passive recipient of an invitation; the call to action, the directive to observe something, and the promise of seeing one thing as another thing, are rooted in the practical ability of the hearer to determine whether the claim put forward by the speaker is appropriate to serve as the premise or conclusion in reasoning. The interpretation the hearer can offer to the metaphorical statement is sensitive to the inferential relations that she can derive from both the linguistic and the non-linguistic context of the claim put forward.

Moran (1989), Camp (2006, 2015), Taylor (2016) and others have argued that in addition to a seeing-as framing-effect dimension to metaphor, there is a propositional or

an assertion dimension to metaphor. Carston (2010), Indurkha (2016) and others have models for the comprehension of the two dimensions to metaphor. The two dimensions are meant to explain metaphor's figurativeness and cognitive content. But what is the nature and relationship between the two dimensions? It is tempting, as Camp (2006) for instance does, to explain the assertional dimension in terms of speaker-meaning or some form of Gricean implicatures. The approach pursued here differs from the others in the literature by locating the two dimensions within a broader theoretical framework of what pertains in our general practices of using metaphors. The intentions of the speaker, or speaker-meaning in general, does not explain the assertional dimension to metaphor; rather the significance of speaker-meaning and the intentions of the speaker are understood and explainable in terms of the basic things interlocutors do – their commitments and entitlements – in the game of 'giving and asking for reasons'. What makes a metaphor an assertion, and what provides a metaphor with its truth-evaluable content, is determined by its inferential role in our discursive practices. Similarly, the models of comprehension and the cognitive processes hearers go through in their understanding of metaphor that account for both dimensions take as their starting point the contextual and pragmatic features associated with metaphor. The approach pursued here augments such models in showing that the mechanisms for the production and cognition of metaphorical and literal sentences proceed on the same lines – primarily because we engage in the same practices in our use of literal and metaphorical sentences – but the inferential approach explains the differences between the literal and the metaphorical in terms of their inferential roles.

5. Conclusion

Brandom's inferentialism – which subjects semantics to pragmatics by explaining the semantic contentfulness of assertions by their practical role in reasoning – offers a suitable avenue for understanding the making of metaphorical claims. In that, metaphorical claims are contentful in virtue of the role they play as appropriate premises and conclusions in reasoning and argumentation. The propriety of metaphorical claims and the propriety of the roles they play in reasoning are determined by the phenomenon of reciprocity and the accommodative processes that conversational participants go through in adjusting the conversational context to satisfy the presuppositional requirement that participants are speaking metaphorically. Brandom's inferentialist deontic-score-keeping framework in which he characterizes assertion and inferring, is therefore extended to cover metaphorical claims by incorporating the notion of metaphorically speaking as a presupposition marker, Hornsby's notion of reciprocity, and presuppositional accommodation. In view of this extension, we show the plausibility of the *uniformity principle* that indicates that literal and metaphorical contentfulness are determined in the same way – by what we do in reasoning – asserting and inferring. One implication of this view is that metaphorical claims can be 'treated as' or 'taken to be' true claims in the sense in which Brandom treats the ascription of truth to assertions. From this inferential articulation of metaphors, we gain an understanding of the relationship between the seeing-as phenomenological and assertional dimensions of metaphors.

References

Brandom, Robert (1988), «Pragmatism, phenomenalism, and truth talk», in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 12, n. 1, pp. 75-93.

Brandom, Robert (1994), *Making it explicit: Reasoning, representing and discursive commitments*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Brandom, Robert (2000), *Articulating reasons: An introduction to inferentialism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Camp, Elizabeth (2006), «Metaphor and that certain je ne sais quoi», in *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 129, pp. 1-25.

Camp, Elizabeth (2017), «Why metaphors make good insults: perspectives, presupposition, and pragmatics», in *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 174, n. 1, pp. 47-64.

Carston, Robyn (2002), *Thoughts and utterances: The pragmatics of explicit communication*, Blackwell, Oxford.

Carston, Robyn (2010), «Metaphor: Ad hoc concepts, literal meaning and mental images», in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 110, pp. 297-323.

Cooper, David (1986), *Metaphor*, Basil Blackwell, New York.

Davidson, Donald (1979), *What metaphors mean*, in S. Sacks, ed., *On metaphor*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 29-45.

Ervas, Francesca, Gola, Elisabetta & Rossi, Maria Grazia (2018), *Argumentation as a bridge between metaphor and reasoning*, in S. Oswald, T. Herman, & J. Jacquin, eds., *Argumentation and language: Linguistic, cognitive and discursive explorations*, Springer, Berlin, pp. 153-170.

Gaut, Berys (1997), «Metaphor and the understanding of art», in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series*, vol. 97, pp. 223-241.

Hornsby, Jennifer (1994), *Illocution and its significance*, in S. L. Tsohatzidis, ed., *Foundations of speech act theory: Philosophical and linguistic perspectives*, Routledge, London, pp. 187-207.

Hornsby, Jennifer, & Langton, Rae (1998), *Free speech and illocution*, in *Legal Theory*, vol. 4, pp. 21-37.

Indurkha, Bipin (2016), *Towards a model of metaphorical understanding*, in E. Gola & F. Ervas, eds., *Metaphor and Communication*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 123-146.

Karttunen, Lauri (1974), «Presuppositions and linguistic context», in *Theoretical Linguistics*, vol. 1, pp. 181-194.

Kwesi, Richmond (2018), *Metaphor, truth, and representation*, in P. Stalmaszczyk, ed. *Objects of Inquiry in Philosophy of Language and Linguistics*, Peter Lang, Berlin, pp. 117-146.

Kwesi, Richmond (2019 *forthcoming*), «Semantic meaning and content: The intractability of metaphor», in *Studia Semiotyczne*.

Lamarque, Peter, & Olsen, Stein (1994), *Truth, fiction, and literature: A philosophical perspective*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Lepore, Ernie & Stone, Matthew (2010), «Against metaphorical meaning», in *Topoi*, vol. 29, pp. 165-180.

Lepore, Ernie & Stone, Matthew (2015), *Imagination and convention: Distinguishing grammar and inference in language*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Lewis, David (1979), «Scorekeeping in a language game», in *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, vol. 8, pp. 339-359.

Macagno, Fabrizio & Zavatta, Benedetta (2014), «Reconstructing metaphorical meaning», in *Argumentation*, vol. 28, n. 4, pp. 453-488.

Moran, Richard (1989), «Seeing and believing: Metaphor, image and force», in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 16, n. 1, pp. 87-112.

Oswald, Steve & Rihs, Alain (2014), «Metaphor as argument: rhetorical and epistemic advantages of extended metaphors», in *Argumentation*, vol. 28, n. 2, pp. 133-159.

Recanati, Francois (2004), *Literal Meaning*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Reimer, Marga (2001), *Davidson on metaphor*, in P.A. French & H.K. Wettstein, eds., *Midwest studies in philosophy*, 25, *Figurative language*, Blackwell, Boston (Mass), Oxford (UK), pp. 142-55.

Richard, Mark (2004), «Contextualism and relativism», in *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, vol. 119, n. 1, pp. 215-242.

Richard, Mark (2008), *When truth gives out*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Roberts, Craige (2004), *Pronouns and definites*, in M. Reimer & A. Bezuidenhout, eds., *Descriptions and beyond*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 503-543.

Rorty, Richard (1987), «Unfamiliar noises I: Hesse and Davidson on metaphor», in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 61, pp. 283-311.

Soames, Soames (1982), «How presuppositions are inherited: A solution to the projection problem», in *Linguistic Inquiry*, vol. 13, n. 3, pp. 483-545.

Stalnaker, Robert (1973), «Presuppositions», in *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, vol. 2, n. 4, pp. 447-457.

Stalnaker, Robert (1974), *Pragmatic presuppositions*, in M. Munitz & P. Unger, eds., *Semantics and Philosophy*, New York University Press, New York, pp. 197-214.

Stalnaker, Robert (1978), *Assertion*, in P. Cole & J. Morgan, eds., *Syntax and Semantics*, Academic Press, New York.

Stalnaker, Robert (2002), «Common ground», in *Linguistics and Philosophy*, vol. 25, n. 5, pp. 701-721.

Taylor, Charles (2016), *The language animal: The full shape of the human linguistic capacity*, Harvard University Press.

Wagemans, Jean H. M. (2016), «Analyzing metaphor in argumentative discourse», in *RIFL – Rivista Italiana di Filosofia del Linguaggio*, vol. 102, pp. 79-94.

Wilson, Deirdre & Carston Robyn (2006), «Metaphor, relevance and the ‘emergent property’ issue», in *Mind & Language*, vol. 21, n. 3, pp. 404-433.