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978-1-107-40203-4 – Figurative Language, Genre and Register

Alice Deignan Jeannette Littlemore and Elena Semino Carol A. Chapelle Susan Hunston

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# Figurative Language, Genre and Register

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For: Tim, John and Rory  
Dan, Joe and Oscar  
Jonathan, Emily and Natalie

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## *Series editors' preface*

It is by now well known that figurative language, including metaphor and metonymy, is pervasive in everyday language, so much so that we tend to notice it only when it is novel or unfamiliar to us. Novelty comes about when a speaker coins a new metaphor, but unfamiliarity may occur because a metaphor that is common in a particular discourse community is not found outside that community. This book explores a number of case studies to reveal the extent to which specific groups use figurative language that outsiders may find strange or puzzling, and the role this language plays in contributing to group cohesion.

The book covers a range of discourse communities and discourse situations, both spoken and written: popular science texts, lectures in an academic setting, talk on the touchline of a children's football match, talk among staff at a children's nursery, patients' descriptions of pain, and simplified literary texts. The chapter on descriptions of pain extends the modality to artwork produced by pain sufferers. In each case there is an 'insider' group (for example, academic experts, adult coaches of the football team, nursery staff) and 'outsiders' (for example, students, boys being coached in football, and new members of staff). The studies in this book focus on the texts produced in each case, identifying and classifying instances of figurative language, but they also investigate in detail the responses of the 'outsider' group to the figurative language. For example, they discuss how the density of metaphor at key points in an academic lecture may lead to students' misunderstanding of how information is to be interpreted and evaluated, or how the young football players and their coaches create different understandings of the metaphors used to describe individual players. The authors of the book make a unique contribution in relating the study of figurative language specifically to discourse communities and specifically to genre and register.

This book demonstrates the practical value of the close study of figurative language. The study of a simplified literary text demonstrates both the mechanisms and the consequences of reducing linguistic

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complexity in texts. The chapter on popular science demonstrates how a public understanding of key concepts such as environmental change is influenced by the language used to talk about it. The study of students listening to lectures leads to precise implications for how small changes in the presentation of information might enhance their comprehension. Such useful findings stem from an approach that contributes to the academic study of figurative language, and reinterprets it in relation to concepts of genre and register. At the same time, the study extends beyond academic considerations and into the workplace, the classroom, and popular consciousness.

*Figurative Language, Genre and Register* is written with clarity by three researchers with real insight and passion for their subject. It will appeal to those for whom this is a new topic as well as to experts in metaphor and metonymy. It is a very welcome addition to the series.

Carol A. Chapelle and Susan Hunston

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Conventions

Speech transcription conventions

|                  |                                                                                            |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| [ ]              | paralinguistic utterance (e.g. laughing)                                                   |
| !                | exclamation or animated intonation                                                         |
| ...              | pause                                                                                      |
| ?                | words spoken with clear rising intonation are followed by a question mark “?”              |
| ,                | words spoken with slightly rising intonation are followed by a comma “,”                   |
| .                | words spoken with falling intonation are followed by a full stop “.”                       |
| l                | overlapping utterance                                                                      |
| /water/          | words between slashes show uncertain transcription                                         |
| /?/              | inaudible                                                                                  |
| O:h              | a colon (:) following a vowel indicates a lengthened vowel sound                           |
| ↑                | a step up in pitch                                                                         |
| ↓                | a step down in pitch                                                                       |
| CAPITAL LETTERS  | capital letters are used when a speaker gives extra emphasis to a syllable, word or phrase |
| <b>bold text</b> | bold text is used when the words are accompanied by a gesture                              |
| ^                | use of gesture between words                                                               |

xvi      *Conventions*

Gesture annotation conventions

|    |            |
|----|------------|
| LH | left hand  |
| RH | right hand |

Conventions used for indicating different types of figurative language

|                    |                                      |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| solid underlining  | metaphorically used word             |
| dotted underlining | metonymically used word              |
| dashed underlining | open-class word included in a simile |