

## **Metonymy-guided discourse inferencing. A qualitative study**

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Cognitive-linguistic research on metonymy has argued cogently that conceptual metonymies guide or facilitate discourse-pragmatic inferencing, together with contextual factors and general pragmatic principles (see *inter alia* Barcelona 2003, 2005, 2007; Panther & Thornburg 2003, 2018; Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera 2014). Metonymy is thus a crucial factor guaranteeing discourse coherence. Barcelona (in preparation) includes a detailed study of the metonymies guiding the pragmatic inferences claimed to be invited by the reading of a small fragment (19 lines) of the only scene in Act 1 of O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*. In the study, I propose a number of such inferences and a number of metonymies that seem to guide them. A very simple example: I suggest that one of the inferences that might be invited to some readers by the penultimate line of the stage direction for that scene (*Tyrone's arm is around his wife's waist as they appear from the back parlor. Entering the living room he gives her a playful hug*) is that Tyrone loves / likes his wife. The metonymies that, I suggest, might jointly guide that inference are (1) MEMBER (PUTTING ONE'S ARM AROUND ONE'S BELOVED) FOR CATEGORY (LOVING BEHAVIOR) + (2) EFFECT OF EMOTION (PUTTING ONE'S ARM AROUND ONE'S BELOVED) FOR EMOTIONAL CAUSE (LOVE). The analysis of the fragment, though internally consistent, is based on my own close reading of the text. It is thus necessary to investigate whether or not native speakers of English derive at least some of the inferences I propose, and whether or not they are guided by those or by other metonymies. In this presentation I will describe in detail the qualitative study I conducted to this end. After reading the fragment, a questionnaire was anonymously answered by nine volunteer American undergraduate college students, all female native speakers of English, with no training in linguistics and who had never read or watched the play before. The questionnaire included this question on the last two lines of the stage direction: "What does the first sentence suggest to you about Tyrone's affective relationship with Mary?" Then the subjects were asked to give their reasons for their reply and to state their agreement or disagreement with an additional set of interpretations of the same passage. The results of the study seem to confirm some of the inferences proposed in Barcelona (in preparation) and to suggest

that, whether or not the respondents derive the same or different inferences, they do so in part on the basis of metonymic reasoning. For example, the prevalent reply to the above question was that Tyrone and Mary have a good relationship and the reason given was their behavior (physically touching each other, including Tyrone's arm around Mary's waist). The further interpretations of that sentence chosen by most respondents were that Tyrone seemed to love and/or like his wife. The responses to the questionnaire on more complex inferences based on the fragment and the limitations of the study will be discussed in the presentation.

**Keywords:** metonymy; pragmatic inferencing; qualitative research; reading comprehension.

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