

processing effort as possible. According to [Sperber and Wilson \(1986/1995\)](#), "metaphors are a type of indirectness argument".

Take "My love is a red, red rose" for example, we use familiar, concrete concept "rose" to refer to the unfamiliar, abstract concept "love", and then we can understand "love" with less effort by using this metaphor (than defining it literally). As we can understand "love" more easily and fully, then we can achieve the greatest contextual effect.

Though relevance theory has been employed to explain many linguistic problems, in fact, like any other theory, it also contains some defects, especially some existing problems in applications, which will be mainly reduced to three points as follows: Firstly, the notion of relevance is too general; secondly, relevance theory overemphasizes the creativity of the communicators; thirdly, it treats the communication in a too mechanical way.

Though there are some controversies about relevance theory, this does not diminish the significance of it as a whole. It has proved to be a very powerful theory, which can account for a wide range of linguistic and cognitive problems. But as a new framework, relevance theory needs to be developed in further and test its application value with more linguistic data. It is surely to have a promising future in the field of cognitive pragmatics.

#### 4. Limitations

Some limitations or constraints, which consist of inner and outer weaknesses, on pragmatic interpretations metaphor should be mentioned.

Firstly, its study of metaphor still originates from the point of linguistic view, which does not touch the real nature of metaphor. Metaphor is not a simple phenomenon of language, but a way of conceptualizing our cognition of the world. Metaphor exists not only in the specific discourse but also in the conceptual system, which constructs and determines our way of thinking and our perceiving of the world.

Secondly, one metaphorical utterance may be interpreted variously in a certain circumstance, so, the hearer may infer differently according to how he comprehends the speaker's literal utterance. Observing Searle's principles, sometimes even if we can work out R, we still cannot get a definite utterance meaning of "S is P." For example, in "Juliet is the sun," the property that is attributed to "Juliet" is of a different kind than the properties that apply to "the sun." So since the day Shakespeare produced this controversial metaphor, a wide variety of paraphrases of "Juliet is the sun," have aroused interest in both literal and linguistic aspects. Following the eight principles proposed by Searle, though we can understand S in terms of R similar to P, in what way the speaker and the hearer can reach the same utterance meaning is not explained in his theory.

Thirdly, the traditional distinction of literal-figurative meanings is completely destroyed and severely criticized by conceptual metaphor ([Lakoff and Johnson, 1980](#)). Given that distinction, one might think that one reaches a metaphorical interpretation of a sentence by starting from the literal meaning and applying some algorithmic process to its understanding. There do exist situations in which some rules apply to the understanding of metaphor, but in general this is not how metaphor cognitively works.

However, besides some inner factors of limitations, some outer factors should not be inevitable, cultural, social factors and context influences are the most important ones. Since language develops in social and cultural context, its use is governed by society rather than by the individual. The creation and the use of language depend on the specific culture, which requires study on a language should be put in the cultural context. So, metaphor is not only a linguistic concern, but also a socio-cultural phenomenon.

#### 5. Conclusion

The present study is a comparative study which aims at studying the features and limitations between the three interpretations of metaphor from the perspectives of Speech Act Theory, Conversational Implicature Theory and Relevance Theory. It proves the fact that although the last one, compared with the two former, is a more powerful theory in the metaphor interpretation, it is incomplete and need to be studied and discussed further. In this paper, we focus our attention on two major findings about that.

Firstly, the features of three theories interpretation of metaphor even its similarities and differences from different views of pragmatics. By such a contrastive study, we have found that, all of three interpretations treat metaphor as a kind of speaker's intention and hold the idea that the comprehensive process of metaphorical utterance is a process of inferring. For the same reasons, there are some differences.

Secondly, some inner and outer limitations should be mentioned in the interpretations of metaphor. For the former one, metaphor understanding is a complex process, any single one theory or interpretation could not interpret this linguistic phenomenon effectively and completely, which leads to some weaknesses of pragmatic angle. Simultaneously, as an important part of pragmatic study, outer factors, namely cultural, social and contextual, are significantly essential in the interpretation of metaphor. Metaphor can be identified and brought into full play in different linguistic context. Metaphor is also a part of culture and the reflection of society. So the same metaphor might render different interpretations in different countries with different cultural backgrounds.

To sum up, by such a contrastive study, we can see that the interpretation with Relevance Theory is a creative attempt to study metaphor from cognitive point of view and Relevance Theory has more powerful explanatory force than the Speech Act theory and Grice's theory. However, the appearance of metaphor as the first sign in the phenomena of language, and language originates from human cognitive ability. In this sense, metaphor is also an

# Nature Values Pragmatic Essays In Meta

**RD Boyd**



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