

# ALL OR NOTHING: A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF HYPERBOLE

Laura Cano Mora  
Universitat de València

**Abstract:** *This paper focuses on hyperbole, a long neglected form of non-literal language despite its pervasiveness in everyday speech. It addresses the production process of exaggeration, since a crucial limitation in figurative language theories is the production and usage of figures of speech, probably due to the intensive research effort on their comprehension. The aim is to analyse hyperbole from a semantic perspective in order to devise a semasiological taxonomy which enables us to understand the nature and uses of the trope. In order to analyse and classify hyperbolic items a corpus of naturally occurring conversations extracted from the British National Corpus was examined. The results suggest that the evaluative and quantitative dimensions are key, defining features which often co-occur and should therefore be present in any definition of this figure of speech. A remarkable preference for negative affect, auxesis and absolute terms when engaging in hyperbole is also observed.*

**Key words:** *figurative language, hyperbole, semantic field, corpus analysis*

“There is no one who does not exaggerate. In conversation, men are encumbered with personality and talk too much”. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

## 1. INTRODUCTION TO NON-LITERAL LANGUAGE

Since antiquity figures of speech have been widely studied within rhetoric, although in contemporary rhetoric their study has been neglected or relegated to literary criticism. However, since the 1980s, there has been a renewed interest in figurative language not only in literary studies, but also in other fields of research. In fact, research on figuration has emerged as a new and distinct discipline, that of figurative language studies. Most of this interest, however, has been directed at explaining how figures of speech are comprehended, given their non literal nature. Since the bulk of studies has almost invariably concentrated on the reception process, in terms of figure understanding, it is not surprising that nowadays a crucial limitation in figurative language theories is the production process of non-literal language. Thus, Turner (1998: 83) correctly argues, “the study of figure, one of the oldest bodies of knowledge in the human sciences, remains in our age still in its infancy”.

Within figurative language studies, metaphor and verbal irony, often considered the master tropes, have received the greatest amount of attention, while the study of other non-literal forms has been overlooked or relegated to an ancilliary position. This is certainly the case of hyperbole or exaggeration, a long neglected trope despite its ubiquity in everyday conversation. This paper concentrates on the production of hyperbole from a semantic perspective, analysing the semantic domains and fields which speakers exaggerate to reach a better understanding of the nature and usage of the trope.

## 2. LITERATURE ON HYPERBOLE: FROM RHETORIC TO PSYCHOLINGUISTICS

Given the intensive research on metaphor and irony, it is not surprising that very little is known about hyperbole. When examined, it has often been in relation to the so-called master tropes or even equated to them. In fact, some researchers seem to equate metaphor with all forms of figuration. For Aristotle, for example, metaphor represents the paradigm trope including, not only what we call metaphor, but also simile, metonymy, personification and hyperbole (Rhetoric 3: 10-11, Poetics 20-22; quoted in Dascal and Gross, 1999: 122). Gibbs (1994: 76) correctly argues that there are forms of figurative language other than metaphorical that have been ignored as a result of this intensive metaphor investigation. However, Gibbs (2000: 12) also regards hyperbole together with sarcasm, understatement, jocularly and rhetorical questions as forms of verbal irony.

Although hyperbole has a long history of study within rhetoric and so persuasive written discourse, the emphasis lay on defining, illustrating and classifying this trope in relation to other figures. Within this frame, definitions generally respond to the etymology of the term in Greek and Latin, which refers to the notions of excess and exaggeration. On the other hand, the assumption that figurative language is ornamental and adds a rich aesthetic import to speaking and writing is pervasive in literary criticism. Thus, hyperbole has traditionally been examined as a creative literary device and is still nowadays almost invariably associated to the production of literary works.

In other disciplines no serious attention has been paid to hyperbole, probably because it has generally been regarded as a classic trope whose study belongs to that of rhetoric. Most of the empirical work on exaggeration involves comparisons of frequency and use in different cultures (Spitzbardt, 1963; Cohen, 1987; Edelman et al., 1989). Apart from these cross cultural studies, most interest in hyperbole has been directed at explaining the cognitive processes involved in understanding (Winner et al., 1987; Gibbs et al., 1993; Colston and O'Brien, 2000b; Leggitt and Gibbs, 2000). Much of this literature can be found in the field of psycholinguistics and subsumed within theories of humour or verbal irony. Psycholinguistic research has also drawn attention to the communicative goals fulfilled by non-literal forms in discourse. Research on the pragmatic functions accomplished by exaggeration is embedded within studies of other figures, especially irony and understatement, to compare how they accomplish the same functions but to different extents or with different degrees of success (Roberts and Kreuz, 1994; Sell et al., 1997; Colston and Keller, 1998; Colston and O'Brien, 2000a; 2000b).

Despite the scarce interest in hyperbole, this is a major and recurrent non-literal form within the context of figurative language. Thus, Keuz et al. (1996: 91), after studying eight main forms of non literal language in a literary corpus, offer empirical evidence of this ubiquity by showing that after metaphor, hyperbole was the most common trope and so conclude that "in terms of sheer occurrence hyperbole seems to deserve more notice than it has received to date". Its importance becomes even clearer after an inspection of the co occurrence matrix in that study, since exaggeration was by far the figure that most often interacted with other non-literal forms. It was involved in almost 80% of the cases of co-occurrence, and it interacted with every other type of non-literal language with the exception of its logical opposite, understatement. This finding may account for the scarcity of studies focusing solely on hyperbole rather than merged with other figurative language forms.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Aim

Rather than contrasting figures, this paper focuses on the production of hyperbole as the only object of study, with hyperbole being defined as a form of extremity or excess that either magnifies or minimizes some real state of affairs or fact. The aim is to classify the hyperbolic items present in our data into a semantic taxonomy in order to determine the patterns of exaggeration in discourse and so to provide an insight into the nature and defining features of this figure.

#### 3.2. Corpus description

In order to examine hyperbole, a corpus of naturally-occurring conversations, chosen at random from the British National Corpus (BNC, henceforth), was examined. The BNC can be defined as a collection of samples of contemporary British English, both spoken and written, stored in electronic form, although for the present study only transcribed spoken material was subject to analysis. The focus is on speech, rather than writing, since not a great amount of empirical work exists into spoken hyperbole. Only recently has the study of figurative language been switched to the domain of banal, everyday speech. The bulk of research has been conducted in written language or relies on artificial and elicited data.

The corpus analysed includes a list of 18 conversations selected at random, which together add up to around 52,000 words. The texts examined belong to the five domains in which the BNC spoken sub corpus is organised, namely: educational, business, institutional, leisure and informal, collected in roughly equal numbers.

| BNC domain    | Number of texts | Word length |
|---------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Informal      | 7               | 10,213      |
| Leisure       | 2               | 10,317      |
| Educational   | 4               | 10,799      |
| Business      | 4               | 10,627      |
| Institutional | 1               | 10,234      |
| Total         | 18              | 52,208      |

Table 1. BNC domain, length and number of texts examined

#### 3.3. Items for analysis

Although this is a corpus-based study, the method of data sampling is non-deterministic. The object of study is not a particular hyperbolic word or expression, nor a specific word class or grammatical category. Rather, all instances of exaggeration included in the BNC texts selected for analysis were examined.

As for the criteria for identifying and labelling hyperbole, so that non-exaggerated uses of words or expressions can be excluded, in the literature the theme of identification has been overlooked or restricted to the counterfactuality or non-veridicality<sup>1</sup> cue (i.e. a discrepancy between

<sup>1</sup> To convey the idea of disproportion between the state of affairs depicted in the utterance and the real state of affairs, researchers use a variety of terms: "contrast" (Colston and O'Brien 2000a, 2000b), "incongruity" (Gibbs 1994), "nonveridicality" (Kreuz and Roberts, 1995), "counterfactuality" (Kreuz, 1996, McCarthy and Carter, 2004).

utterance and reality), which presupposes knowledge of the referent situation. Indeed, context plays a central role in hyperbole perception and identification. However, when the referent situation is not explicitly stated or can only be vaguely identified, the context is impoverished or ambiguous and the test of sheer impossibility is not applicable, other criteria are needed to identify and label this figure in corpora. Among the cues that may incline the researcher towards a hyperbolic interpretation of the proposition are the list of features proposed by McCarthy and Carter (2004: 162-3): disjunction with context, shifts in footing<sup>2</sup>, unchallenged counterfactuality, co-creation of impossible worlds, extreme case formulations and intensification, listener take-up, relevant interpretability and syntactic support to underline the amplification.

For the purposes of semantic categorisation, hyperbolic items rather than utterances, which may consist of several exaggerated elements, were examined. By hyperbolic item I mean the minimal unit of sense or meaning, whether a word, phrase or expression, which per se, given the appropriate context, conveys an idea of excess or extremity. In turn, different hyperbolic items may co-occur within a single utterance and form hyperbolic clusters (e.g. lots of people have got nothing to do). Overstated items may also modify or be modified by other hyperbolic elements. This type of construction often responds to the following syntactic pattern: adverb + adjective/noun (e.g. totally illegible, absolutely another world), or adjective + noun (e.g. total mess, sheer hell). The number of apparently hyperbolic items in our data, that is, where the overall context leans towards a hyperbolic interpretation, amounts to 343.

### 3.4. Procedure

Although no semantic repertoire of exaggeration has been published to date, some attempts have been made at classifying English adverbs of degree semantically, some of which are hyperbolic (Spitzbardt, 1965; Bolinger, 1972), and which are useful for establishing a taxonomy of hyperbole from a semantic perspective. Since hyperbole is a pragmatic category that can be realised in any word class or lexico-grammatical configuration (Norrick, 1982: 170), our corpus of hyperbolic elements not only consists of adverbs but includes all grammatical categories: nouns, adjectives, verbs (major word classes), prepositions, numerical expressions, quantifiers (minor word classes) and lexico-grammatical strategies such as the superlative degree, idioms, similes, whole clauses, polysyndeton and complex modification.

As in Spitzbardt (1965: 355), our typology is divided into two main dimensions: the predominantly objective-gradational and subjective-emotional sphere, here called predominantly quantitative and evaluative dimension, respectively. The former upscales or downscales a quantity or magnitude in excess. The latter involves a subjective evaluation which clearly shows the speaker's emotions and attitudes, whether positive or negative, towards the objective fact being assessed.

In practice, however, this division poses problems because some items share features from both dimensions. This overlapping can be clearly seen in examples, such as an awful lot of money, a hell of a lot, where there is a certain move from the field of evaluation to the field of quantification, but keeping their negative connotations. Similarly, the hyperbolic items referring to the quantitative dimension often assume positive or negative connotations in context. This overlapping is succinctly explained by Brekle (1963: 31) in claiming that in a semantic analysis of words objective-logical components are fused with emotional elements. Within the total content of a linguistic sign, says Brekle, both the category of objective conditions and that of connotative conditions are closely united. For this reason I will talk about predominance of one or the other dimension, rather than absoluteness when classifying hyperbolic items into semantic fields.

<sup>2</sup> Goffman (1979: 4-5) defines footing as "participants' alignment, or set, or stance, or posture", and shifts in footing as "a change in the alignment we take up for ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance. A change in footing is another way of talking about a change in our frame of events".

Once identified in our data, hyperbolic items were classified into major semantic fields, organised around an idea or several related ideas, and which in turn fall into different semantic subfields. Semantic fields, according to Nida (1975: 174), consist of “a group of meanings (by no means restricted to those reflected in single words) which share certain semantic components” or, following Spitzbardt (1965: 355), “certain groupings of words whose lexical unity is determined by criteria of synonymy or semantic neighbourhood”. As the possibility of complete synonymy is doubtful, hyperbolic items will be analysed according to principles of semantic analogy rather than pure synonymy. The classification in the semasiological field proves difficult because as Spitzbardt (1965: 354) notes, “in semantics the classificatory boundaries are overlapping to an inconveniently large extent”. It goes without saying that classificatory overlappings are to be expected in our analysis too. For example, wonderful, from French *wundor*: wonder + -ful ≈ exciting wonder (Webster, 1993: 2630), can be listed under the semantic field of positive evaluation or, attending to its etymology, under the field of singularity/impact.

#### 4. RESULTS: TOWARDS A SEMANTIC CATALOGUE OF HYPERBOLE

In terms of categorization, the division into semantic fields, both for the evaluative and quantitative dimension, is threefold: positive, negative evaluation and impact/singularity for the evaluative component and purity, quantity/measure and magnitude for the quantitative realm.

Positive evaluation, which conveys the speaker’s approval, admiration or praise, comprises the following semantic fields:

- Idea of life, heaven: revived, reviving, vital, paradise.
- Idea of perfection, magnificence: ideal, excellent, great, wonderful.
- Idea of splendour, beauty: lovely, gorgeous, precious, brilliant.

Note here that although the repertoire for the field of positive evaluation is limited, these hyperbolic items occur quite frequently in the data examined (as shown in Table 2), thus suggesting that they have become conventionalised forms to express *kind* or *gentle* hyperbole.

The semantic fields falling under the heading of negative evaluation, which expresses disapproval, criticism or condemnation, are clearly not only more numerous but also varied.

- Idea of chaos, disorder: mess, mess up, illegible.
- Idea of shrillness, pungency: scream, squeal.
- Idea of badness, evil: worst, wicked, relentless, obnoxious.
- Idea of frightfulness: horrible, terribly, terrible, an awful (lot of).
- Idea of violence, destruction: disaster, a recipe for disaster, disgrace, devastated, ruin, erupted, blasting away, thrown on the scrap heap.
- Idea of sorrow or pain: pathetic, sickening, starve, starving, freezing, can’t breathe, drained, (give me a) headache.
- Idea of deadliness, hell: killing, dead, limbo, hell, a hell of.

- Idea of physical or psychic abandonment, loss of control: desperately, frantically, gets on your nerves, get out of me head, crazily, went haywire, mental health problems, in fits, crack me up, living on drugs, asleep, can't resist.

Between the positive and negative evaluation categories is the semantic field of impact or singularity, which conveys the notion of specialty, notability and astonishment while simultaneously assuming either positive or negative connotations. Compare for example a smashing defeat vs. a smashing performance.

- Idea of impact, singularity: smashing, amazed, astonish, shock, shocked, thrilled, unbelievable, couldn't believe, extraordinary, another world, impressive.

As far as the quantitative framework is concerned, under the semantic field of purity come the following semantic subfields:

- Idea of completeness, absoluteness: completely, absolute, absolutely, total, totally, entirely, full, fully, whole, sheer, pure.
- Idea of universality, non-exceptionality: all, always, everywhere, throughout the world, everybody, everybody else, every one, every, everything, anything.
- Idea of non-existence, nullity: no, no one, no one else, nobody, nothing, nothing else, not any, not anything, never, not at all.
- Idea of veracity: literally, beyond any doubt, definitely.

The quantity/measure semantic field, which involves numbers and words which have become more or less standardised as units of measure, is divided into four subfields:

- Time measure: period units: ten times, a second, a minute, ten minutes, an hour, the evening, two days, the weekend, a week, six months, months and months and months, ages, ages and ages and ages.
- Length/linear measures: two inches, an inch.
- Other numerical expressions: two thousand, four thousand, not half as much, half a million, one and a half million, three hundred million.
- Quantity words: idea of accumulation: a load, loads of, a pile of, compost heap, lots.

McCarthy and Carter (2004: 170) have shown that "overall numerical expressions and expressions of accumulation and quantity seem to generate very rich hyperboles". They have found that amount/quantity words, in particular words denoting accumulation of things, such as masses of, stacks of, heaps of, loads of, tons of and piles of, are very productive strategies in the creation of hyperbole. Only piles of is used to any significant extent non-hyperbolically in their data, to refer to objects placed on top of each other; the remaining words are used almost exclusively metaphorically and for overstatement, with the exception of a couple of examples of loads, which refer to cargo loads.

The semantic field of magnitude, which consists of natural language forms, as opposed to numerical expressions, is divided into two subfields moving around the notions of greatness and smallness as reflected in different proportions or dimensions, such as size, duration, distance, etc.

Idea of greatness: mammoth, dinosaurs, like a horse's nose bag, riding jodhpurs, great big, massive, vast, huge, enormous (amount of), tremendous (amount of), immensely (size); moustache, beard, mushrooming, rolling in, coining money (superabundance); day in, day out, forever, lifelong, like a lifetime (duration); most, the most, utmost, infinitely, extremely (degree, limit); remotely (distance).

- Idea of smallness: a flea on a dog's back, little tiny, tiny, minuscule, box room (size); next to (distance), instantly (duration); don't move (motion).

The following tables show the taxonomy of semantic fields and subfields in terms of occurrences and percentages in our data.

| Semantic fields/subfields        | Occurrences | Percentages |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>EVALUATIVE REALM</b>          | 133         | 38.7%       |
| <b>Positive evaluation</b>       | 40          | 11.6%       |
| life, heaven                     | 8           | 2.3%        |
| perfection, magnificence         | 19          | 5.5%        |
| splendour, beauty                | 13          | 3.7%        |
| <b>Impact, singularity</b>       | 17          | 4.9%        |
| <b>Negative evaluation</b>       | 76          | 22.1%       |
| chaos, disorder                  | 9           | 2.6%        |
| shrillness, pungency             | 3           | 0.8%        |
| badness, evil                    | 4           | 1.1%        |
| frightfulness                    | 15          | 4.3%        |
| violence, destruction            | 9           | 2.6%        |
| sorrow, pain                     | 13          | 3.7%        |
| deadliness, hell                 | 7           | 2.0%        |
| physical or psychic control loss | 16          | 4.6%        |

Table 2. Distribution of items over semantic fields and subfields within the evaluative sphere.

| Semantic fields/subfields        | Occurrences | Percentages |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>QUANTITATIVE REALM</b>        | 210         | 61.2%       |
| <b>Purity</b>                    | 115         | 33.5%       |
| completeness, absoluteness       | 21          | 6.1%        |
| universality, non-exceptionality | 54          | 15.7%       |
| non-existence, nullity           | 37          | 10.7%       |
| veracity                         | 3           | 0.8%        |
| <b>Number, quantity, measure</b> | 50          | 14.5%       |
| time measure: period units       | 27          | 7.8%        |
| long/linear measures             | 2           | 0.5%        |
| numerical expressions            | 6           | 1.7%        |
| quantity words: accumulation     | 15          | 4.3%        |
| <b>Magnitude</b>                 | 45          | 13.1%       |
| greatness                        | 37          | 10.7%       |
| smallness                        | 8           | 2.3%        |

Table 3. Distribution of items over semantic fields and subfields in the quantitative sphere.

As shown in the table, items from the quantitative or gradational dimension, representing 61.2% of hyperboles in our data, clearly prevail over the evaluative realm (38.7%). This does not mean, however, that this figure is used more often to quantify rather than to assess or evaluate, since quantities, numbers and magnitudes often acquire, in context, an element of evaluation. For example, if I say *My bag weighs a ton*, it is clear that I am overstating the heaviness of my bag, but there is also an implicit complaint in my utterance. Within the evaluative domain, negative hyperbolic items predominate (22.1%), especially those referring to the ideas of abandonment, frightfulness and sorrow or pain. They are not only more numerous but also cover a wider range of semantic subfields. This is consistent with Roberts and Kreuz's (1994) finding that exaggeration is more frequently used to convey negative emotions than positive affect.

Although references to the element of quantification predominate in most definitions, the evaluative component in exaggeration deserves special attention. Whether positively or negatively, hyperbole is a powerful tool for subjective evaluation. Although this aspect is latent in definitions and clearly manifest in overstated examples, it has only been treated explicitly by a few researchers (Gracián, 1969; Mayoral, 1994). Thus, overstatement may respond either to an exalting-condemning or else maximising-minimising aim.

[...] tampoco parece que sea del todo posible pensar en una dimensión estrictamente cuantitativa: "engrandecedora/empequeñecedora" de la realidad representada, que no vaya asociada a un tiempo a una actitud valorativa: "enaltecedora o degradadora" o, lo que es lo mismo, "laudatoria o vituperadora", de dicha realidad por parte del yo textual. (Mayoral, 1994: 243)

The fact that the quantitative dimension predominates may explain why references to the element of "quantification", rather than its evaluative nature, prevail in most definitions of hyperbole. In particular, the overwhelming presence of items in the purity domain, which represent 33.5% of hyperbolic items in our data and whereby hyperbole is expressed in terms of all or nothing, is remarkable. This appears to suggest a preference for absolute terms, such as do not admit of



variation or exception, when exaggerating. It seems that along the continuum of slight, moderate and extreme forms of exaggeration that Colston and Keller (1998: 502) distinguish speakers prefer going to extremes. It also appears that speakers tend to upscale rather than downscale quantities, as shown by the percentages for the semantic subfields of greatness/smallness and universality/nullity. This result may help explain why people tend to associate and equate hyperbole with amplification (auxesis) but rarely with reduction or attenuation (meiosis). Indeed, little has been said about meiosis in the literature on hyperbole, and if dealt with at all, it is often equated with or mistaken for understatement. The bulk of definitions and illustrations of this figure focus solely on the upscaling or magnifying dimension, and so overlook that hyperbole may also downscale or minimise reality.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Since the reception process of figures of speech, in terms of listener's comprehension, has been widely studied, this paper has addressed, in naturalistic rather than elicited data, the production of hyperbole from a semantic perspective, analysing the semantic fields which speakers tend to overstate. This is in line with studies supporting the idea that the study of psychological factors should be complemented by research on the creation and usage of non-literal language forms.

Although the list of hyperbolic items extracted from the BNC conversations needs to be viewed cautiously, as a sampling rather than a catalogue, since hyperbole is a creative act and as McCarthy and Carter (2004: 150) note "the possibilities for linguistic creativity are infinite", the recurrence of certain semantic realms and fields suggests significant aspects of this figurative language form which have often been overlooked. In this sense, the dual nature of hyperbole needs to be emphasised. Although, references to the element of quantification are pervasive in the literature on the subject, the nature of hyperbole is twofold. It falls into a quantitative and evaluative realm. The former upscales or downscales a quantity or magnitude in excess. The latter involves the speaker's subjective evaluation of an objective fact. In turn, these realms fall into two categories depending on the extreme of the scale the hyperbolic item points to: exaggerated amplification (auxesis) or diminution (meiosis), and exaggerated praise or criticism for the quantitative and evaluative dimension, respectively.

Rather than emphasising one or the other as has generally been done in the literature on the subject, these aspects, which define the nature and usage of this non-literal language form, should be brought together under a working definition of the trope. Thus, hyperbole can be defined as a figure of speech whereby the quantity or value, whether positive or negative, of an objective fact is subjectively inflated or deflated in varying degrees but always to excess.

Despite the prevalence of the quantitative over the evaluative realm in our data, exaggeration should be viewed as a general evaluative resource, since as Falk (1990: 46) succinctly explains "an overstatement has in it an element of subjective evaluation of an objective fact". Thus, Katz (1996: 3-4) notes that hyperbole is "employed to convey the speaker's beliefs or feelings about the topic". More recently, McCarthy and Cater (2004: 150), after analysing a corpus of naturally-occurring hyperboles in authentic speech, have highlighted that exaggerations are "creative intensifications for evaluative or affective purposes". The importance of evaluation is explained by the fact that what determines the evaluative force of utterances is not only the positive or negative import of overstated items. In this sense, Carter and McCarthy (1997: 29) claim that often "the precise attitude expressed can only be identified in the particular context". This explains why the trope is essentially an evaluative tool because often quantification is put at the service of assessment.

In presenting hyperbole as an affective figure, this paper runs contrary to traditional beliefs that figures of speech are not conceptually useful but meant, as Pollio et al. (1990: 142) condemn, to “beautify prosaic ideas”. Rather than embellishments of ordinary literal language with little cognitive value of their own, hyperboles should be viewed as powerful communicative and conceptual tools. This adheres to a prevailing view among figurative language researchers: figures provide part of the figurative foundation for everyday thought (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 1994; Turner, 1998; Arduini, 2000).

## 6. REFERENCES

- Arduini, S. (2000). *Prolegómenos a una teoría general de las figuras*. Murcia: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Murcia.
- Bolinger, D. (1972). *Degree Words*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Brekke, H.E. (1963). *Semantische Analyse von Wertadjektiven als Determinanten persönlicher Substantive in William Caxtons Prologen und Epilogen*. Tübingen: Laupp.
- Carter, R.A. and McCarthy, M.J. (1997). *Exploring Spoken English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cohen, R. (1987). “Problems of intercultural communication in Egyptian-American diplomatic relations”, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 11: 29-47.
- Colston, H.L. and Keller, S.B. (1998). “You’ll Never Believe This: Irony and Hyperbole in Expressing Surprise”, *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 27: 499-513.
- Colston, H.L. and O’Brien, J. (2000a). “Contrast and pragmatics in figurative language: Anything understatement can do, irony can do better”, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32: 1557-1583.
- Colston, H.L. and O’Brien, J. (2000b). “Contrast of Kind Versus Contrast of Magnitude: The Pragmatic Accomplishments of Irony and Hyperbole”, *Discourse Processes*, 30: 179-199.
- Dascal, M. and Gross, A.G. (1999). “The Marriage of Pragmatics and Rhetoric”, *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 32: 107-130.
- Edelman, R.J. et al. (1989). “Self-reported expression of embarrassment in five European cultures”, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 20: 357-371.
- Falk, L. (1990). “Between Emphasis and Exaggeration: Verbal Emphasis in the English of Cape Breton Island”, in J. Black (ed.) *Papers from the Fourteenth Annual Meeting of the Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association*. St John’s Memorial: University of Newfoundland: 39-49.
- Gibbs, R.W. (1994). *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language and understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibbs, R.W. (2000). “Irony in Talk among Friends”, *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, 15: 5-27.
- Gibbs, R.W. et al. (1993). “Literal Meaning and Figurative Language”, *Discourse Processes*, 16: 387-403.
- Goffman, E. (1979). “Footing”, *Semiotica*, 25: 1-29.
- Gracián, B. (1969). *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*. Madrid: Castalia.
- Katz, A.N. (1996). “On Interpreting Statements as Metaphor or Irony: Contextual Heuristics and Cognitive Consequences”, in J.S. Mio and A.N. Katz (eds.) *Metaphor: Implications and applications*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: 1-22.
- Kreuz, R.J. (1996). “The use of verbal irony: Cues and constraints”, in J.S. Mio and A.N. Katz (eds.) *Metaphor: Implications and applications*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: 23-38.
- Kreuz, R.J. and Roberts, R.M. (1995). “Two cues for verbal irony: Hyperbole and the ironic tone of voice”, *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, 10: 21-31.
- Kreuz, R.J. et al. (1996). “Figurative Language Occurrence and Co-occurrence in Contemporary Literature”, in R.J. Kreuz and M.S. MacNealy (eds.) *Empirical Approaches to Literature and Aesthetics*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation: 83-97.

- Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Leggitt, J.S. and Gibbs, R.W. (2000). "Emotional Reactions to Verbal Irony." *Discourse Processes*, 29: 1-24.
- Mayoral, J.A. (1994). *Figuras retóricas*. Madrid: Editorial Síntesis.
- McCarthy, M.J. and Carter, R.A. (2004). "'There's millions of them': hyperbole in everyday conversation." *Journal of Pragmatics*, 36: 149-184.
- Nida, E.A. (1975). *Componential Analysis of Meaning: An Introduction to Semantic Structures*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Norrick, N.R. (1982). "On the semantics of overstatement," in K. Detering et al. (eds.) *Akten des 16 Linguistischen Kolloquiums Kiel, 1981, Band II: Sprache erkennen und verstehen*. Tübingen: Niemeyer: 168-176.
- Pollio, H.R. et al. (1990). "Figurative language and cognitive psychology," *Language and Cognitive Processes*, 5: 141-167.
- Roberts, R.M. and Kreuz, R.J. (1994). "Why do people use figurative language?," *Psychological Science*, 5: 159-163.
- Sell, M.A. et al. (1997). "Parents' Use of Nonliteral Language with Preschool Children," *Discourse Processes*, 23: 99-118.
- Spitzbardt, H. (1963). "Overstatement and understatement in British and American English," *Philologica Pragensia*, 6: 277-286.
- Spitzbardt, H. (1965). "English adverbs of degree and their semantic fields," *Philologica Pragensia*, 8: 349-359.
- Turner, M. (1998). "Figure," in A.N. Katz (ed.) *Figurative Language and Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 44-87.
- Webster's Third New International Dictionary Unabridged*. (1993). Cologne: Könemann.
- Winner, E. et al. (1987). "Making sense of literal and nonliteral falsehood." *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, 2: 13-32.