Mind the Gap:

Expressing affect with hyperbole and hyperbolic compounds

Hyperbole is traditionally understood as exaggeration. Instead, in this paper, we shall define it not just in terms of its form, but in terms of its effects and its purpose. Specifically, we characterize its form as a shift of magnitude along a scale of measurement. In terms of its effect, it uses this magnitude shift to make the target property more salient. The purpose of hyperbole is to express with colour and force that the target property is either greater or lesser than expected or desired. This purpose is well suited to hyperbolic expression. This because hyperbole naturally draws a contrast between two points: how things are versus how they were expected to be. We also consider compound figures involving hyperbole. When it combines with other figures hyperbole operates by magnifying the specific effects of the figure it operates on. We shall see that sometimes hyperbole works as an input for irony; and at other times it builds on a metaphor to increase the effects of that metaphor.

Keywords: hyperbole, shift in salience, affect expression, metaphor, irony, hyperbolic compounds.

1 Hyperbole and Exaggeration

Humans have a tendency to exaggerate. Not all exaggeration is hyperbole. Sometimes the exaggeration is merely error. Sometimes the purpose of exaggeration is to deceive. A speaker may be aware of this deception, or may also seek to convince himself. On yet other occasions the purpose of the exaggeration is not to deceive, but to convey a point in an emphatic manner.

In hyperbole, the speaker inflates some aspect of reality, but is transparent about this inflation. Consider the following five utterances made by fans of Taylor Swift. The background to these utterances were that these people visited her house:[1]

(1) "We were asked to go into the living room and sit down you do not know how much I was sweating during that moment, I was like da fuq is gonna happen my poor heart could not keep up, then all of the sudden she just pops up out of nowhere she appeared out of thin air like David Copperfield and *we all died like for real."*

(2) *"*So she says she will be playing her album for us let me tell you the noise that came out of my mouth was not human *I legit almost told mama swift to call me an ambulance cause I wasn't going to make it."*

(3) "So then we took a little break to stretch our legs and she was passing around rice krispie treats and cookies and I was talking to her Mom for a little and then I walked back in and she was like 'hey babe thanks for coming, do you want a treat'. *And I was*

[1] These are read out on Graham Norton Show: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jLWyenqY5Y

like I would but I think I'm dead."

(4) "Mid-sentence she stopped talking and pointed to Amanda and said, 'Amanda! I'm so glad that you're here!' *Amanda died. Right there. Died."*

(5) "Guys just wait for the one she did with Imogen Heap cause damn. That one slayed everyone to heaven and back while listening to the song *I literally had to plan my funeral arrangements cause I wasn't going to make it"*.

This is hyperbole. In order to convey the extent of their thrill, the fans use terms from a vocabulary of trauma and death. This is part of a colorful package blending a mix of extreme experiences. As Graham Norton says, "it's borderline confusing whether they had a good time or not". Clearly, they did not have just a good time; they had a fantastic time. How do they convey that? Certainly, they have no intention to be taken literally. And even if some of the expressions are to be taken metaphorically (say, to mean a terrible experience), this is not what they are primarily concerned to get across.[2] To the contrary, the metaphorical effects must be reversed, and then intensified. They do that primarily by overstating the gap between two points: how things are versus how they were expected to be, in order to show how much more the former exceeded the latter. Thus, the target property becomes much more salient. The result is an entertaining way of both conveying an affective state of the speaker and making the target property more salient.

[2] Since the metaphors are dead metaphors, we forego here the details of what happens in a hyperbolic metaphor compound (more in section 5).

2 What's in hyperbole?

It is commonly agreed that hyperbolic speakers overtly signal that they *say more than they mean*, or they *say less than they mean*, and want hearers to recognize this. As Carston & Wearing (2015, p.85) note, hyperbole requires that there is *more*, or *less,* of a property *F* than was wanted or expected. This involves an evaluation based on an exaggeration relative to a *relevant scale* for measuring some property, quality, or quantity.

Walton (2017) and Carston & Wearing (2015) have recently made proposals as to how hyperbolic exaggeration is achieved. Walton offers a precise mechanism of scaling up the distance between what is said and what is meant, but leaves out the characteristic evaluation and affect that hyperbolic speakers typically express. Carston & Wearing (2015) appreciate this evaluative role of hyperbole, but are primarily concerned with characterizing whether the mechanism underpinning hyperbole is more akin to metaphor or irony. Instead, in this paper, we shall build on their insights to show that hyperbole uses a shift in magnitude to make the target property more salient. The purpose of hyperbole is to express with colour and force that the target property is either greater or lesser than expected or desired. How is this achieved?

A key idea for Walton is that to convey how large a quantity is, is to exaggerate how small it is, and to convey how small a quantity is, is to exaggerate how big it is. This involves a particular direction of movement relativized to a relevant scale for measuring the target property. He distinguishes between "*explicit content*" as the content presented, and "*assertive content*" as the content the speaker means to indicate.[3] He argues that, in overstating, the speaker is representing a quantity as being either larger or smaller than what they assert it to be. To appreciate how much bigger or how much smaller that quantity is, Walton introduces a further notion of "*salient contrast*". This amounts to what the speaker is especially concerned to deny in a context. This enables to scale up the difference between what is said and what is meant, by measuring the distance from each to the salient contract. What's characteristic of hyperbole, he argues, is that in the assumed conversational context the distance between what the speaker says and what she means to deny is greater than that between what she means to assert and what she means to deny. He considers the following scenario: I'm looking out of the window, and upon seeing a dozen policemen I say to my companion:

(6) There are *hundreds* of cops out there.

Walton says that what's fundamental of hyperbole is that the speaker exaggerates the gap between what she means to assert and the salient contrast. She exaggerates how many cops there are in order to convey that there are significantly more than normal—i.e. there are *quite a few*.

Why is it much more natural to think that the speaker is overstating how *large* the number of cops is, rather than how *few* there are? Walton's answer is that it's more natural to assume that what's of interest here is the *large* number of cops, rather than how few there are, so what the speaker is keen to get across is their abundance. To emphasize this, the speaker exaggerates how large the number of cops is, not how small it is, thus

[3] The question of whether the hyperbolic content is asserted or implicated requires more attention than we can give here, so we continue using Walton's terminology.

conveying that there are *quite a few* cops, *rather than fewer*. What's key here is establishing a contrast between what the speaker means to convey and what she means to deny ("that there are fewer than quite a few" (Walton 2017). Why is this important? A key element to this move is the idea of a surprise that there are as many cops on the street as there are. Normally there are one or two or none, so what is of interest insofar as it's unexpected, is that now there are significantly more cops than normal.

In that sense it's more intuitive to think of the salient contrast as a point on the scale that marks the speaker's normative expectations or desires, which she is especially keen to convey haven't been fulfilled. Or in some cases, as in (1) through (5), she is keen to convey that they have been surpassed. For simplicity, we shall call this the *normative point* (NP) corresponding to the speaker's hopes and desires, or what is normally expected in a given situation.[4]

We can thus understand that what hyperbolic speakers seek primarily to do is to indicate that some element of reality is either greater or lesser than expected or desired. When their expectations and desires are surpassed, speakers express positive affect: they tend to be surprised, amazed, thrilled, or in awe. When their expectations and desires are thwarted, they express negative affect: they tend to be disappointed, dissatisfied, or complain. This affective element is important because it is the reason why speakers go to the trouble of contrasting how things are and how they were expected to be, namely to show how reality fell short of their expectations (or surpassed them), and how they feel

[4] This is different from Carston & Wearing's (2015, p 84) idea of "normative bias", which, following Wilson (2013), they take to be fundamental of irony. In particular, it explains why irony tends to be negative, criticizing rather than praising. This is because irony can easily exploit socially shared norms about how things should be, in order to draw attention at how such expectations have been thwarted. Carston & Wearing (2015, p 85) insist that because hyperbole can convey both positive and negative evaluations, it follows that it lacks a normative bias.

about it. This is what they care to get across, in addition to conveying the magnitude of the target property.

We can think of this expressive function of hyperbole as an operation of *regarding*. This regarding is emotional or attitudinal in nature. Appraisals or evaluative judgments are generally positive (good) or negative (bad). Emotions—positive or negative—capture how we feel about things, how we evaluate them with respect to our values, hopes, and expectations. This may involve various degrees on a scale. We can like things a little, a lot, or love them. Likewise, we can dislike, dislike strongly, or hate something. Similarly, the notion of 'regard' is an attitudinal stance we have toward something depending on how well, or how badly, it fits a normative ideal. Thus, we can hold someone or something in high regard, just as we can hold someone or something in low regard.

Walton leaves the affective evaluation out. We want to suggest that in fact there is room within his explanation to account for it, if we think of his notion of salient contrast as including normative expectations and desires that the speaker sees as unfulfilled. There is a further consequence that falls out about the force or intensity of the motion expressed. In particular, using his method of scaling up the gap between what speakers say and what they mean, we can predict that the force of the emotion or attitude expressed will correlate with how big or how small the gap is between what they say and how they expected things to be. We can adapt Walton's schema by making room for the normative point on the scale, and representing the hyperbole in (6) as follows:

SC: *fewer than quite a few* NP: [expecting a few] AC: *quite a few* [more than expected]

← *fewer* ______________________________ *more* →

EC: "*hundreds*"

("a dozen") ("thousands")

Key here is the idea that the gap between what speakers say (EC) and how they expect things to be (NP) is *greater* than the gap between how things are (AC) and how they were expected to be (NP). This is after all the whole point of exaggerating. In order to draw attention that reality is larger than expected, speakers exaggerate the gap between what they say and how they expected things to be. They need to do so precisely because they don't want to be taken to mean what they say, but rather encourage the hearer to look for a lesser quantity as what they mean to convey. This results in a *shift in salience* of the target property: *it's more than normal or expected*. In (6) the emphasis is on the abundance of cops around our street, because this is what contrasts with our expectations.

Further, we can imagine that a hearer will be even more surprised had the speaker chosen to say "There were *thousands* of cops out there"; and they will be less surprised had she said "There were *a dozen* of cops out there". Thus, affect correlates in intensity with how big or how small the gap is between what speakers say and how they expect or want things to be. The more one's expectations are thwarted, or surpassed, the more forceful the affect expressed. The closer it is to what is expected, the less intense the affect, because it conforms to one's expectations. Thus, saying something hyperbolically helps shifting the salience of what we mean to indicate, compared to making the same point literally.

We thus reached a richer understanding of what hyperbolic speakers are up to in *saying more than they mean*: namely, they shift the salience of the target property to make a more emphatic point, and in doing so they express how they feel about the gap between how things are and how they were expected to be.

3 Context-relative Scaling

So far we saw that hyperbole involves *evaluating the magnitude of a target property F* along a relevant scale. This property may be positive or negative. So to assess how large, or how small *F* is, we need to move either up or down along the *F*-scale. As a rule of thumb, if what is said is high up on the scale, then what is meant is lower down the scale.[5] Analogously, if what is said is low down on the scale, then what is meant is higher up on the scale. What results is a gap between what we say and what we mean. Nevertheless, what matters is not the precise quantity of *F*, but rather a comparative measure derived from it, namely that *F is more, or less, than expected or desired*. The more inflated the exaggeration, the bigger the gap, and the more forceful the emotion expressed is likely to be.

Now, in order to implement a scaling operation in a given hyperbolic use we have to take into account the contextual variation of the relevant scale.[6] For example, consider (7)

[5] Carston & Wearing (2015, p 81) also point out that key to a hyperbolic use is that the description used is stronger than a "*weaker scaled-down description*" the speaker means to convey.

[6] Cappelen and Lepore (2005), in a useful discussion on comparative adjectives (pp. 21, 22), discuss the reading of "That building is small." They state ". . . the building in question is not being said to be small for an object in general (whatever that may mean) (p. 21), implying again that the nature of such types of assessments as 'small' is uncertain. Lasersohn (2005) argues that ¨truth values of sentences containing

(from Carston & Wearing), uttered by a child realizing that his bigger sister has been served a piece of cake that is slightly larger than his own.

(7) My piece of cake is *tiny*.

The child regards his piece of cake (or its size) as smaller than he expected or wanted. He's obviously unhappy about this. But what matters here is not that his cake is small, because it isn't. Rather, it's only small compared to his sister's, and this is why he's unhappy.

What's going on here? In order to evaluate the size of the cake we need to invoke a conceptualized scale for cake size. This scale varies depending on what the cake *is for*—is it for a wedding; for a 10-yr child; for someone overweight, or someone on a diet? Clearly, different purposes for cake eating come with different expectations about the standard size in each context. So, what the child is doing in (7) is shifting the context from a context of <*cake-for-small-child*> to a context of <*cake-for-big-child*>, so that "tiny" now must be evaluated in the latter context where the standard cake size is slightly bigger than in the former context. What results from this shift is a bigger gap between the cake size that he's been served and the size he wanted to eat, since a context of <*cake-for-big-child*> he should have been served a size at least as equal to that his sister's. Thus, by drawing attention to the differential between how much he's been served and how much he should have been served, the child emphasizes how much less cake he received than desired. The bigger this gap, the more forceful his dissatisfaction—e.g. had he used "microscopic", "minuscule", or "infinitesimally small", instead of "tiny". This creates a shift in salience as a way of expressing a forceful emotion.

---

predicates of 'personal taste' such as *fun* or *tasty* must be relativized to individuals." Perhaps comparative adjectives, additionally, should be included in such a group.

Now, imagine I utter (7) in response to you serving me a full size of cake, after I've told you I'm on a diet. Here again it's not the case that the cake is small; after all it's a normal size portion. It's just bigger than I wanted. So, if there is a sense in which I'm exaggerating, it's not exaggerating how small it is, but rather how big it is. Thus, I'm not only hyperbolic, but also ironic because I say something I don't mean. What I mean instead is that you gave me a way too big piece of cake than I asked, and therefore I want to draw attention to how much this fell short of my expectations. How do I do this?

We contend that, as in the child's cake example, there is a shift of context in evaluating the size of cake I received. This time the shift is brought about by pretence: I pretend to be the kind of person who would find the size of the cake small in order to shift the context from a larger <*normal-diet*> scale to a reduced <*low-sugar-diet*> scale so that "tiny" must now be evaluated in this latter context where a smaller piece of cake is expected and desirable. Thus, what counts as normal portion in the former context, counts as big portion in the latter context. This results in a shift in salience, emphasizing how much more I received than I wanted. In addition to being hyperbolic, I also aim to draw attention to how foolish one would be to take me at face value about the small size of the cake.

This shows that hyperbole is deeply contextual. The same utterance can be a hyperbole serving different purposes. This is because the relevant scale along which the target property is to be measured can vary with context. Relative to a context, different directions of movement along the scale are permissible to recover the hyperbolic message. Now we want to explore the extent to which those movements along the scale can become short-circuited in conventionalized hyperbolic uses.

4 Conventionalized hyperbolic evaluation

There are times when we mean “always” in a strict sense of always, with no exceptions. For example, “the sun always rises in the east”. Other times, however, we mean “always” and “never” more loosely. For example, consider a couple discussing how they feel about different goings-on in the house:

(8) You *never* put the dishes away.

(9) You *always* leave the faucet on.

These are examples of so-called *Extreme Case formulations* (ECF) (Pomerantz, 1986). In (8), the addressee is criticized for failing to put the dishes away every time they wash them; in (9) for leaving the faucet on every single time they use it. Clearly, if taken literally, this is an unfair exaggeration. The accused party may feel entitled to respond: “but you don’t notice the instances where I *do* put the dishes away”.

What’s going on here is that the speaker is making a *subjective* assessment where she focuses on some situations where the dishes are not put away. What’s salient is the high frequency of the incident compared to the low frequency where the addressee does put the dishes away. This is nevertheless a subjective feeling of frustration where the speaker is narrowing down the context to only those instances where the addressee fails to comply with her desire.

Similarly, “all the time” in (10) shifts the salience of the evaluation from an objective to a subjective one:

(10) Those two are together *all the time.* (referring to two close friends.)

It is natural to read (10) as *Every time I see them, they are together*, where the focus is on the high proportion of situations where these two friends are together rather than not. This is surely an inflated, or even skewed, assessment of the frequency. But the purpose is not to provide an accurate assessment. Rather, it's to express surprise at the relative high frequency the speaker observes every time she sees them. This may be associated with a different feeling depending on context. Sometimes the speaker might feel jealousy or suspicion; other times happy approval.

Finally, consider more conventionalized uses:

(11) He threw up *all over the place*.

(12) You're taking *forever* to finish this paper.

(13) Sure, *anytime*. (in response to being thanked for help)

None of these is intended literally. (11) is used to paint an image of the degree to which the target is unwell. (12) is used to express the speaker's exasperation. (13) is used to express a favorable disposition to help. Because "anytime" is so strongly conventionalized, we often use it even when we lack a favorable attitude, but we want to present ourselves as willing to help in order to preserve good relations in the future.[7] Because of its conventionalization, this opens up the possibility of exploiting it for ironic purposes.

As these examples show, conventionalized hyperbole is used to portray and display our emotions in order to elicit a certain emotional response from the audience. This is so

[7] See Brdar-Szabó and Brdar (2010, p. 402), Colston (2015, p. 54) for discussion of "anytime."

even with highly conventionalized uses such as *Extreme Case Formulations*, whose hyperbolic content has been bleached away through frequency of use over time.[8] Brdar-Szabó and Brdar (2010, p. 391) note that number-based hyperboles can “correspond to the intensity of emotive reactions”, thereby “partially structuring the domain of emotive experiences”. Consider the following:

(14) I have told you *a thousand times* that . . . (Brdar-Szabó & Brdar, 2010, p. 391)

(15) He missed the goal by *at least 30 meters* (Brdar-Szabó & Brdar, 2010, p. 392)

(16) It’s, like, *a thousand miles* in that direction.

(14) is used to express the speaker’s exasperation: “*I’ve told you way too many times, and I’m unhappy to be telling you again*.” (15) is used to regard the shot on goal scornfully. (16) is used to express the speaker’s exasperation about the distance they still need to cover. What matters here is not the exact assessment of a quantity, but rather how the speaker feels about the gap between how things are and how they were expected or desired. *Extreme Case formulations* are thus a tool for portraying emotions in discourse.

Other times, conventionalized hyperbole is used with a view to persuading audience members who are likely to remain skeptical about the extent of the target property. In the following example, from Colston (2013), the speaker uses an *Extreme Case formulation* to quell any doubts.

(17) No, I *always* turn the oven *completely and totally off* when I’m finished with it.

Pomerantz (1986, p. 227) describes a case in which a patient comes to a doctor’s office,

[8] Bybee, 2010; Givón 1973, 1975; Lord, 1976.

seeking lab results, and the receptionist assures the patient that the results are not in yet, but that she could phone the doctor's office the next day for the results. The patient replies:

(18) Patient: That's not a problem?

Receptionist: No. People do it *all the time*.

Here "*all the time*" indicates that obtaining lab results by phone is a very common situation. High frequency is equated with normality, and so with the acceptability of the practice.

Pomerantz (1986, p. 225) notes another case where an *Extreme Case formulation* is used strategically to benefit the speaker. A caller to a suicide prevention line is asked why she has a gun. It turns out that her husband owns the gun. After asking whether the husband is a police officer, the caller says no, and the counselor concludes:

(19) Counselor: He just has one.

Caller: Mm hm, It—u—*Everyone* does, don't they?

The caller thus paints a world in which she puts forward the assumption that everyone is a gun owner as a way of portraying gun ownership as normal. This serves after all to exculpate herself from any responsibility.

So far, we saw that conventionalized hyperbolic uses exploit intensifications of size, quantity, and frequency, to express a certain emotion or attitude, and intensify their force. We hear people saying that something is "the best thing ever", "the greatest", "unbelievable", "jaw-droppingly great", "tremendous", "triumphant", and the like, as terms of praise designed to promote something as being slightly better than it is. This happens especially with politicians in the U.S. referring to America as “the greatest country on Earth”. We also hear pessimistic people for whom everything is “terrible”, “the worst thing ever”, “bad”, “awful”, and the like, and who thus seek to downgrade something as lower than it is. Such affective strategies serve as rhetorical devices to induce an emotional response in the audience.

5 Hyperbolic Compounds

So far we’ve looked at self-standing hyperbolic utterances—so-called ‘pure hyperbole’—because the hyperbole operates directly on the literal meaning of expressions to make an adjustment of the target property along a relevant scale. There are, however, nice examples where hyperbole combines with other figures of speech within a single utterance. Carston and Wearing (2015, p. 81) list a wide range of possible combinations including hyperbole:

(20) That child is the devil incarnate. (hyperbole and metaphor)

(21) They go about together like Siamese twins. (hyperbole and simile)

(22) The gargantuan paunch over there is my step-father. (hyperbole and metonymy)

(23) It’s the end of the world. (hyperbole and irony)

[describing someone’s angry reaction when he finds he’s got a parking fine]

(24) Those tickets cost an arm and a leg. (hyperbole and idiom)

(25) Money is the root of all evil. (hyperbole and proverb)

[in response to a situation in which someone has claimed a little more on their expenses than they were strictly entitled to]

These are cases of hyperbolic compounds to the extent that either the whole compound becomes hyperbolic or hyperbole is an input for another figure to build upon. We'll briefly sketch an explanation of these dual-figure uses, and unpack the implications they have. A full treatment requires a different paper, but a sketch can be instructive.

It is very common for metaphor to combine with hyperbole. We often say of someone that she's a "saint", "angel", "star", "Maria Teresa"; that he's a "giant", "rocket", "dynamite", "towering figure", "devil", "genius", "Spartan", etc. Admittedly, these are worn-out metaphors; nevertheless they are hyperbolic metaphors because the metaphorical expressions have a hyperbolic quality in that they register the target property either at a positive or negative extreme of the relevant scale. Thus, saying of someone that "*she's an angel*" conveys that she's very kind, good, and ready to help, more than anyone else, but not to an extremely high degree of helping with no fail. Thus, by placing the metaphorical features at one of the extremes of a quantitative scale, the metaphorical effects become intensified.

This works because metaphor and hyperbole are thought to be different—metaphor is about a qualitative shift; hyperbole about a quantative shift—so they complement each other well when they combine. This insight has been developed in Popa (2009, ch 9). More recently, Rubio-Fernandez, *et al* (2015, p. 24), Carston and Wearing (2015, p. 88) argue that "hyperbolic uses involve a shift of magnitude along a dimension which is intrinsic to the encoded meaning of the hyperbole vehicle, while metaphor involves a multidimensional qualitative shift away from the encoded meaning of the metaphor vehicle”.[9]

Key to their conception is the idea that both metaphor and hyperbole are *descriptive* or *representational* devices. They talk about the world with a view to describing a situation or representing a state of affairs by other than literal means. With metaphor, speakers describe how things are in the world by evoking similarities in thinking about one thing in terms of another. As a result, we can *see similarities* between distinct conceptual domains, thus seeing the world in a new, evocative light. With hyperbole, as we argued above, the description of the world is exaggerated in order to convey a weaker description. The crucial difference, as Carston & Wearing (2015, p 89) put it, is that “metaphor is a bid to give precise expression to a thought or experience for which there is no literal linguistic encoding, while what is fundamental to hyperbole is the expression of an evaluation (positive or negative) of a state of affairs”.

This means is that when metaphor and hyperbole combine, we can predict that metaphor will come first in the order of interpretation, and hyperbole will operate on the metaphorical output. This is because hyperbole is evaluative, and therefore can take in its scope any description of a state of affairs—be that literal or metaphorical. We can test this with more creative uses of hyperbolic metaphors:[10]

(26) She’s the *Empire State Building*.

(27) Writing a thesis in 5 years is a *marathon*.

[9] Carston & Wearing (2015, p 89) also insist that in both metaphor and hyperbole the meaning is “lodged in the words”, thus affecting the propositional content conveyed, and their interpretation requires an adjustment of the literal meaning of the target expression.
[10] (26) through (30) are from Popa (2009).

(28) After winning the English cup Manchester United fans were on *the Everest of optimism* for winning the European cup. (BBC-radio 4)

(29) His eloquence could *split rocks*.

(30) Her bedroom is the *size of Cornwall* (Carston & Wearing 2015, from Wilson)

(31) You would have thought him a *basket of mulberries* (Aristotle's *Rhetoric*).

(32) That surgeon is a *butcher*.

Without attempting a full analysis, what stands out in these examples is the idea that metaphor works as a basis for hyperbole to build upon. In this sense, we have to understand the metaphor first, and then use the metaphorical content as input for an operation of hyperbolic exaggeration as we described in section 2. For example, what we exaggerate in (26) is the impressive stature of a woman; in (27) the sustained effort that writing a thesis requires; in (28) that Manchester United fans were extremely happy for winning the European cup; in (29) that the man's eloquence was remarkable; in (30) that her living arrangements were very spacious and comfortable; in (31) that the man had an immense black eye; and finally in (32) that the surgeon is an extremely incompetent surgeon.

Hyperbole is here conditioned on metaphor in that it exaggerates the metaphorical effects, thus making the metaphor more emphatic. It works by placing the metaphor at one of the extremes of the relevant scale in order to convey that the target property is greater or lesser than expected or desired.

In contrast, when hyperbole combines with irony, their interaction is somewhat different than when hyperbole combines with metaphor. This is because both hyperbole and irony are evaluative devices. Where they differ is in the object of the evaluation: hyperbole involves an exaggerated evaluation of a situation or a state of affairs, whereas irony involves an evaluation of someone's thoughts, hopes and expectations with a view to ridiculing them. Thus, when they combine we can predict that hyperbole will come first in the order of interpretation, and then irony will operate on the hyperbolic output. Consider the following, excerpts from a food critic:

> (33) "It is a small, self-satisfied chain that's been unloaded from the mother shop, which is a sort of Cotswold Westfield … A passing friend told me he'd gone in to buy some cheese, "*but I only had £196 on me*".

> (34) "[T]he sausage was *really special*. I managed one bite and then wordlessly passed a slice to the Blonde. She chewed, and her face collapsed, like when sunlight hits the vampire. "Why did you make me eat that?" she said. "It's vile." No, my love, it's not vile, it's rancid. It's the *rare savour* of rancid pig. Now, I'm sure they'd have told me it was *some old breed specially hung, artisanally made with care and attention*, and that because I'm only used to commercial, mass-produced pork, I've lost the ability to enjoy the real thing. Well, actually, I haven't. It was rancid, and it was disgusting".

In (33) the speaker ironically suggests that organic shops have become so inaccessible that you can't even buy cheese for under £200. For this to get off as irony it's important that we understand the target of irony as hyperbolically exaggerated. In (34) the speaker engages in pretence about that the exaggerated qualities of the sausage was "really special", of a "rare savour", thus making fun of those who might enjoy it because it was prepared in some pretentious manner ("some old breed specially hung, artisanally made with care and attention"). We contend that hyperbole works better as an input for irony because it has the potential to make a more salient contrast between how things are and how they were expected or desired to be.

6 Concluding

In this paper, we've argued that we can think of what hyperbolic speakers are doing in *saying more, or less, than they mean* is in terms of a mechanism of shifting the salience of the target property to make a more emphatic point. This enabled a definition of hyperbole not just in terms of its form, but in terms of its effects and its purpose. We characterized its form as a shift of magnitude along a scale of measurement, together with the expression of affect about how speakers feel about the gap between how things are and how they were expected. In terms of its effect, it uses this magnitude shift to make the target property more salient. We've seen through examples that the key purpose of hyperbole is to express with colour and force that the target property is either greater or lesser than expected or desired. Finally, we've also looked at hyperbolic compounds. When it combines with other figures hyperbole operates by magnifying the specific effects of the figure it operates on. We saw that hyperbole works as an input for irony, whereas it builds on a metaphor to increase the effects of that metaphor.

References

Aristotle, 350 BC. Rhetoric. (W. Rhys Roberts. Trans. 1954). Available online from http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.html).

Brdar-Szabó, Rita and Brdar, M. (2010). "Mummy, I love you like a thousand ladybirds:" Reflections on the emergence of hyperbolic effects and the truth of hyperboles. In A. Burkhardt, & B. Nerlich (Eds.), *Tropical Truth(s): The Epistemology of Metaphor and other Tropes* (pp. 383–427). Berlin / New York: De Gruyter.

Bybee, J. (2010). *Language, usage, and cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cappelen, Herman and Lepore, E. (2005). *A Defense of Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism*. Malden: Blackwell.

Carston, R., & Wearing, C. (2015). Hyperbolic language and its relation to metaphor and irony. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *79*, 79–92.

Colston, H. L. (2013). Presentation 2.1.13 at the University of Alberta. https://vimeo.com/58920047

Colston, H. L. (2015). *Using Figurative Language*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Givón, T. (1973). The time-axis phenomenon. *Language*, *49*, 890–925.

Givón, T. (1975). Serial verbs and syntactic change. In Charles N. Li (Ed.), *Word order and word order change: Niger-Congo* (pp. 47–112). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Gibbs R.W. (1994). *The Poetics of Mind.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grice, H. Paul. 1975. Logic and conversation. In Cole, P., & Morgan, J. (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics, vol. 3: Speech Acts* (pp. 41–58). New York: Academic Press.

Lasersohn, P. (2005). Context dependence, disagreement, and predicates of personal taste. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, *28*(6), 643–686.

Lord, C. (1976). Evidence for syntactic reanalysis: from verb to complementizer in Kwa. In S.B. Steever, C.A. Walker, & S. Mufwene (Eds.), *Papers from the parasession on diachronic syntax* (pp. 179–91). Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.

Norrick, N. R. (2004a). Hyperbole, extreme case formulation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *36*(9), 1727–1739.

Norrick, N. R. (2004b). Hyperbole in proverbs and proverbial phrases. In C. Földes (Ed.), *Res humanae proverbium et sententiarum: ad honorem Wolfgangi Mieder* (pp. 219–227). Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen.

Pomerantz, A. (1986). Extreme case formulations: A new way of legitimating claims. *Human Studies*, *9*(2), 219–230.

Popa, M. (2009). *Figuring the code: Pragmatic routes to the non-literal*. PhD dissertation, University of Geneva.

Rubio-Fernández, P., Wearing, C., & Carston, R. (2015). *Metaphor and Hyperbole: Testing the Continuity Hypothesis*. *Metaphor and Symbol* 30:1, 24-40.

Walton, K. (2017). Meiosis, hyperbole, irony. *Philosophical Studies. 174(1): 105-120*