

Online Proceedings

SESSION 1B

LINGUISTICS AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Session Moderator: Ellen Kaisse, Linguistics

Mary Gates Hall 082A

1:00 PM to 2:30 PM

* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

Meaning, Metaphor, and Linguistic Indeterminacy

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Mentor: Ann Baker, Philosophy

We have inherited from Gottlob Frege, the notion that the meaning of a word is rooted in some combination of its sense and its reference. In common rhetoric this corresponds roughly to the difference between the denotation and the connotation of a word. At the root of these distinctions is the worry that there may not be a way to firmly ground linguistic meaning. These theories of language try to explain how our words, used properly, can connect to the world and thereby ensure that we can communicate with each other. However, literally used words account for only a portion of the meaning we are able to communicate. This creates a significant issue for those theories of meaning, like Frege's or Bertrand Russell's, where meaning must correspond to a reference or definite description. The problem comes to the forefront when we consider metaphors, in which words seem to convey a meaning that is wholly other than what they literally mean. This is the fundamental problem of metaphor—that we can understand and communicate a specific meaning by saying something that appears to be semantically or referentially different. This is the *problem* of metaphor, because no current theory can adequately explain how metaphors can communicate meanings that do not directly correspond to their constituent words. There are three primary theories of metaphor—comparison, interaction, and Davidsonian. I will argue first, that our conception of metaphor is too narrow and that there are different types of metaphors; and second, that because of this each of the above theories are false, as they only account for one or the other metaphor types. This highlights both the large role that metaphor plays in our language and our current inability to fully parse its function, as either a semantic or pragmatic feature of language.