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Author: Noura Aljadaan
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Understanding Hyperbole

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Hyperbole has been associated with both metaphor and irony. The paper acknowledges the similarities that hyperbole has with them. It also focuses on the differences between hyperbole and both tropes. Thus, the paper shows that hyperbole is a unique figurative speech act that should not be linked to either tropes. The paper shows that hyperbole does not only share characteristics with metaphor and irony, but also it shares features with generalization. There are also differences between hyperbole and generalization. This makes it more clear that hyperbole does resemble different figurative speech acts and is distinct from them at the same time.

Keywords:

Hyperbole, metaphor, irony, generalization, pragmatics, figurative speech.

Understanding Hyperbole

1. Introduction:

Hyperbole is a kind of figurative language where the speaker says something while meaning another thing (Stern, 2000). In other words, the literal meaning of what is said does not match the intended meaning (Recchia, Howe, Ross & Alexander, 2010). When using hyperbole, speakers do not say X, rather they say something is more than X (Claridge, 2010). They exceed the limits that the hearers expect by using exaggeration (Burgers, Brugman, Lavalette & Steen, 2016). Leech (1983) states that hyperbole is a feature of everyday conversations which people use to exaggerate and evaluate. Hyperbole has been used for thousands of years and was mentioned in classical Greece handbooks (Claridge, 2010). In fact, the Roman Rhetorician Quintilian addresses hyperbole and states that people, including peasants and ignorant people, use it daily. By stating that uneducated people use hyperbole, he might be noting how easy it is to produce and comprehend hyperbole. Although humans constantly use hyperbole, it is understudied (Cartson & Wearing, 2015).

This paper is divided into two main parts. In the first part, we will discuss what hyperbole is. In the second part, we will look at how hyperbole is related to other figurative speech acts. There are three main speech acts that will be compared with hyperbole. The first is metaphor, which Relevance Theorists argue that it lies on a continuum with hyperbole (Wilson & Carston, 2007). The second is irony which some philosophers and psycholinguists claim that hyperbole is a kind of (Carston & Wearing, 2015). Finally, we will look at how hyperbole and generalization are similar. This will help us realize that hyperbole is a unique figurative speech act.

2. Definition:

Burgers et al. (2016) define hyperbole as: *'An expression that is more extreme than justified given its ontological referent' (p.166)*. In other words, they suggest that there are three main elements that will help us define what hyperbole is. The first is exaggeration. The second is the importance of the shift from the propositional meaning into what the speaker intended to say. Lastly, that there must be a specific referent assigned when speaking hyperbolically. I will explain each of those elements starting with exaggeration.

Exaggeration is the first element of hyperbole (Burgers et al, 2016). When speaking hyperbolically, the speaker is exaggerating an element or feature (Carston & Wearing, 2015). When speakers exaggerate, they usually want to emphasize the importance of something (Norasetkosol, Timyam& Sriussadaporn, 2012). The untrue statements in hyperbole are used to stress the importance and the level of the subject in conversation. The following example will be used to illustrate:

1. This is the worst thing that happened in 2005!

When (1) is uttered, the speaker is saying something untrue to stress an idea he is conveying. He is stating something false ‘worst thing that happened in 2005’ to stress his feeling that what has happened was awful.

To be able to exaggerate to a point that helps the hearer into comprehending that this is an exaggerated utterance, the contrast between the literal meaning and the intended meaning should be large enough for the hearer to notice (Claridge, 2010). If it is not, then there is a chance that the hearer will not understand that it is a hyperbolic sentence, or the utterance might seem not interesting. An example is in (2) and (3):

2. It is extremely hot.
3. It is boiling.

If (2) is uttered when the temperature is 26 degrees, this statement is not exaggerated to a degree that functions as a hint to the hearer to notice this difference. The temperature is relatively hot, but the speaker might be the kind of person that does not stand hot weather. Thus, the hearer can comprehend it as a literal statement. Whereas, if the speaker has said (3), the difference between the intended meaning ‘It is very hot’ and the literal meaning is great. Thus, the hearer gets a cue that this sentence should not be understood literally.

Furthermore, for the feature to be exaggerated, it must have a scale. There are two kinds of scales, the quality scale and the quantity scale (Ferré, 2014). The quantity scale refers to the value of the object that is being discussed (Cano Mora, 2009). The object can be positive or negative. Whereas the quality scale refers to the evaluation of the object (McCarthy & Carter, 2004). At least one of those two scales will be present when using hyperbole (Burgers et al, 2016). The following examples will be used to explain the two scales:

4. Today is the best day of my life!
5. Today is the worst day of my life!

The quality scale governs hyperbole in that the literal meaning must be more extreme than the intended meaning. Sentences (4) and (5) are all possible hyperboles. Hence, (4) evaluates the day in an extreme positive way. On the other hand, (5) evaluates the day in an extreme negative way. So, both utterances can be judged as hyperboles. The intended meaning determines which one the speaker uses. If the speaker wants to convey a positive meaning, then (4) is more appropriate. While if the speaker wants to convey a negative meaning, (5) will be used.

The second kind of scale is the quantity scale. The hyperbolic statement can be used to convey a meaning using time. Sentences (6A-B) are examples of that:

6. A. It took him a whole day to type three words on the computer.
   B. It took him a whole week to type three words on the computer.

The intended meaning of both sentences is that it took him a very long time. The speaker and the hearer do not expect that what has been uttered is literally true. The hyperbolic use showed an extreme increase of the ‘actual’ time. The measure is not governed by any rules. It can be more, or less extreme than what has been uttered. Therefore, both statements are hyperboles. There are other statements that convey the same meaning that can also be considered as hyperboles. The speaker can say that it took him a day, a week, a month, or a year. This will only affect the attitude that is conveyed and will not affect whether it is considered hyperbolic or not. The main point here is that the scale can go up and be more extreme or go down and be less extreme depending on the attitude the speaker wants to convey. Showing attitude using hyperbole will be discussed next.

Length, size, and difficulty are all features that have scales and thus have different degrees (Carston & Wearing, 2015). These different degrees are important in showing attitudes and emotions. How far the literal meaning is from the intended meaning shows the level of the emotion that is being conveyed. The following examples will be used to illustrate:

4. Today is the best day of my life!

6. A. It took him a whole day to type three words on the computer.

   B. It took him a whole week to type three words on the computer.

   C. It took him a second to type one word on the computer.

Sentence (4) shows a positive emotion. The speaker is extremely happy and excited and she showed that hyperbolically by stating that it is the best day of his life. While (6A-B) both show a negative emotion. The speaker feels irritated from the person he is speaking about. He exaggerated his action to imply that it took him more time than expected, which should not be the case. If the speaker uses the word 'week' which is more exaggerated than 'day' this is done to convey that he is more annoyed. Whereas in (6C) the meaning has shifted from being negative into being positive. The speaker is impressed that the person did not take a long time to type the words. The speaker is implying that the person types very fast. The speaker uses an extreme measure of the other side of the scale.

There is a problem that arises because there is not a lower case for the quality and the quantity scales. The following example will be used to illustrate:

6. A. It took him a whole day to type three words on the computer.

   D. It took him a minute to type ten words on the computer.

As discussed above, the gap between the intended meaning and the literal meaning should be great for the hearers to get the hint that they should not understand the utterance literally (Burgers et al, 2016). Sentence (6A) can easily be interpreted as a hyperbole as discussed above. The speaker is not satisfied with the person's performance. There is no way that a person will spend the whole day typing three words. The difference between what the speaker intended to say and the literal meaning is huge which helps the hearers understand the utterance as a hyperbolic utterance. Whereas in (6D) this is not the case. People usually do not know how many words a person can type per minute. They do not know that the average male types 44 words per minute (Ratatype, n.d.). Thus, they can interpret (6D) as literal. For many people, typing ten words per minute is considered normal. So, the difference between the intended meaning and the literal meaning in this statement is not great. Thus, there is a possibility that the hearers will understand it literally.

If they do so, then they will not only lose the hyperbolic meaning, but also, they will not understand the attitude that the speaker intended to show through this hyperbolic statement. Speakers should be careful when using hyperbolic statements. They should use an extreme measure of the feature. This will help the hearers in interpreting the statement as hyperbolic rather than literal.

The quality and quantity scales could show positive or negative attitudes as discussed above. Also, they can show impossibilities (Claridge, 2010). Sentence (7) will be used to show an impossible state:

7. I could eat a horse.

It is impossible for a person to eat a whole horse in one sitting. The speaker knows that but still uses the expression to convey ‘I am very hungry’. The hearers understand this statement as a hyperbole. They are aware that it is impossible for the speaker to eat a whole horse. They understand that the speaker intended a different meaning which is less extreme than what has been uttered.

The second component that will help us define hyperbole is that when using hyperbole there is a shift between the intended meaning and the propositional meaning (Burgers et al., 2016). The propositional meaning is more extreme than the intended meaning. Claridge (2010) and Colston & O’Brien (2000) describe this as “difference in magnitude”. The following sentences will be used to illustrate:

6. A. It took him a whole day to type three words on the computer.

C. It took him a second to type one word on the computer.

The propositional meaning of (6A) which is that ‘He spent his time from sunrise to sunset typing three words on the computer’, is a more extreme way of saying ‘It took him a very long time to type a few words on the computer’. The description of the event is much more extreme than the actual experience. This difference is bigger. The time that the speaker said it took the person to type is much longer than reality. The difference can also be smaller. That is shown in (6C). The speaker uses an extreme measure that is smaller than the intended meaning. This is also a hyperbole but it is for another intended meaning. This can be ‘He was extremely fast in typing’.

It is important to note that when a speaker uses a hyperbole, he should make sure that the hyperbolic meaning and the actual intended meaning have the same qualitive dimension. The following sentences will be used to explain:

4. Today is the best day of my life.
5. Today is the worst day of my life.

The intended meaning of (4) can be ‘Today is a good day’, which has a positive evaluation of the day. The hyperbolic meaning must also rate the day in a positive way. Since the intended meaning and the literal meaning have the same positive evaluation of the day, (4) can be judged as a hyperbole of the intended meaning. On the other hand, (5) uses an extreme measure of the same scale but it carries a negative meaning. In other words, the two sentences have different qualitive dimensions where (4) has a positive dimension while (5) has a negative one. Thus, (5) cannot be judged as a hyperbole of the intended meaning. Therefore, it can be a hyperbole for another intended meaning which is ‘Today is a bad day’. Now, the intended meaning and the hyperbolic statement both evaluate the day in a negative way.

Burgers et al. (2016) suggest that if we imagine a scale with a zero point we will be able to imagine what hyperbole is on a scale. The following examples will be used to illustrate:

6. A. It took him a whole day to type three words on the computer.
   C. It took him a second to type one word on the computer.

Let us try to visualize a scale where the intended meaning is ‘He is very slow in typing on the computer’. On the right side, we will have (6A) which is a hyperbole of the intended meaning. They both evaluate the action as being negative. They are both on the right side of the scale. Since both convey the same attitude, (6A) is judged to be a hyperbole of the intended meaning. Whereas (6C) does not have the same negative attitude because the speaker is impressed by the person’s skills. So, the speaker is conveying a positive attitude. Thus, it is different than the intended meaning mentioned above. If the speakers utter this statement while intending a negative meaning, it will be understood ironically. Sentence (6C) could be a hyperbole of a different intended meaning which is ‘He types in a very fast way on the computer’ or ironically. If the speaker wants to convey a positive attitude, both the new intended meaning and the hyperbolic meaning will have the same evaluation of the action. Thus, (6C) could be interpreted as a hyperbole.

Finally, to completely define what hyperbole is, it is important to note that when using hyperbole there should be a specific referent in mind (Burgers et al., 2016). It is very difficult to judge an utterance as a hyperbole if it is decontextualized. Colston & O'Brien (2000), McCarthy & Carter (2004) and Cano Mora (2009) argue that real life knowledge interferes with our judgments and interpretations of the utterances. Let us use the following examples to illustrate:

4. Today is the best day of my life!
1. This is the worst thing that happened in 2005!

Sentence (4) could be comprehended as literal if we know that the person speaking is an eighty-year-old man that has always struggled with money problems and is in dept. If this man won the lottery that day, it can be the best day of his life. It can also be meant hyperbolically in a different context. The referent and the context determine whether the utterance is intended hyperbolically or literally. Moreover, there are many potential referents for each statement. The referent determines the meaning of the utterance. For instance, (1) may refer to Hurricane Katrina, which is a strong storm that hit the Gulf Coast of the United States causing destruction in August 2005. If so, the sentence will not be considered as a hyperbole, and will be understood literally. While if (1) is uttered by a couple who had a divorce, this will be understood as a hyperbole. The incident is not a happy event, it may be the worst thing that happened to them but not to the world.

There are two reasons for having different referents (Burgers et al., 2016). The first is prior knowledge of the topic discussed. If the hearers do not know what the eighty-year-old man has gone through, they can easily understand the statement as a hyperbole for 'It is a really good day'. Having different references is affected by culture and common knowledge. The following sentence will be used to illustrate:

8. He has billions!

7. I could eat a horse.

Sentence (8) can either be understood literally or hyperbolically according to the participants in the conversation. For instance, if they are from The United Kingdom, the speaker may mean that the person they are talking about is very rich. Here, the statement is a hyperbole of the intended meaning. Whereas if the speakers are from Zimbabwe, where it is somehow common to have this kind of money due to the hyperinflation in that country, the utterance will be understood literally.

The background knowledge and expectation in that society fill in the gap that is created between the literal meaning and the hyperbolic meaning (Burgers et al., 2016). The British hearers know that it is not normal for someone to own billions. Accordingly, they will assume that the speaker is exaggerating to convey that the person is very rich. Whereas if the hearers were from Zimbabwe, their background may help them understand the utterance literally. The second reason for having many possible referents is because the referent can be a real or fictional person or event. Having many potential referents will allow the extra-textual referents to be real or fictional. For example, (7) could be understood hyperbolically if a human uttered it. While it could be understood literally if a hypothetical creature featured in a movie uttered it.

So, when speaking hyperbolically, speakers utter a literal meaning that is different from what they intend to say, which is a less exaggerated version (Fogelin, 1988). When they do that, speakers expect the hearers to correct the meaning into a less extreme meaning while still understanding the attitude the speakers intended to convey.

3. Relation with other figurative speech acts:

Usually, theorists either associate hyperbole with metaphor or irony. They are all figurative speech acts were the speaker says something intending another meaning to be conveyed (Stern, 2000). Before discussing hyperbole's relation to both tropes, we will distinguish between irony and metaphor.

Theorists such as Colston & Gibbs (2002) examined the act of metaphor in relation to irony. They questioned whether people use the same interpretation process in understanding them or not. If not, then irony and metaphor are distinct not only in their use but also in how the mind decodes them. Colston & Gibbs's (2002) study concluded that adults took longer time to understand irony than it took them to understand metaphor. This, they argue, is due to the 'metarepresentational reasoning'. Adults use this kind of reasoning to understand irony but it is not needed to understand metaphor. This will be explained using the following example from Clark (1996):

9. A: what a gorgeous day!

   B: yes, isn't it!

Actual situation: unexpected heavy rain, A and B expected the weather to be nice.

Metarepresentational reasoning means that there is an extra layer that needs to be decoded. This layer is present because when producing irony, the speaker says something false (Wilson & Sperber, 2012). Therefore, the hearer needs to decode this false statement first (Happe,1993). Metarepresentational refers to utterances that have a higher- order representation with a lower-order representations imbedded in them. A higher- order representation could refer to an utterance or a thought. While lower- order representations refer to three different things. Public representations, which mean utterances. Mental representations, which could be thoughts. Finally, obstruct representations, which refer to sentences or prepositions. So, an utterance, a high- order representation, could have a thought that is different than what has been uttered, a lower- order representation. For example, (9A) has a higher- order of representation and a lower- order. The higher- order representation is the literal meaning of what has been said. So, the higher- order representation is that 'the day is gorgeous'. This is not what the speaker intended to say. The statement also has an imbedded lower- order representation, which is the intended meaning. This might be 'what an awful day!'.

Since metaphor and irony are understood at different ages, this suggests that there are different mechanisms that are responsible for interpreting each of those figurative speech acts. This is due to the '*different cognitive and pragmatic demands'* that irony and metaphor need (Colston & Gibbs's, 2002). Irony uses metarepresentational reasoning whereas metaphor uses modulation. Metaphor's use of modulation will be discussed later. Finally, speakers may use irony to convey a negative attitude of mocking (Wilson & Sperber, 2012). Whereas when speakers use metaphor, they describe an event (Cartson & Wearing, 2015). These will be discussed more deeply later.

In this section, we will discuss the relationship that metaphor and hyperbole have. We will examine Relevance Theory's approach to their relationship. In the second part, we will examine irony and discuss the views that considered hyperbole as a kind of irony. In the last part, we will look at generalization and what it shares with hyperbole.

3.1 The relationship between hyperbole and metaphor:

One of the main arguments that Relevance Theorists consider is that the literal and the nonliteral language, except irony, go through the same interpretation mechanism (Carston, 2002; Wilson &

Carston, 2006). When the listeners try to comprehend a statement, they modulate the meaning of the words to an '*occasion specific*' meaning (Carston & Wearing, 2011). For example, the meaning of the word 'dog' has a mental representation in the human mind. So, DOG could include mental images of different kinds of dogs. It could also have the connotation of loyalty. These are the encyclopedic entries of the word 'dog'. The hearers adjust the meaning of the word 'dog' when the speaker utters it to reach the intended meaning. In other words, when the hearers listen to an utterance with the word 'dog', they will modulate through the encyclopedic meanings that are associated with this word. They will use cues from the context and the input to choose the meaning that best fits. This modulation process suggests that there are more concepts in a language than there are words that are used (Vega Moreno, 2007). As a result, the speaker can produce non-lexicalized concepts using other lexicalized ones that share the logical or encyclopedic entries (Carston, 2002). A person can use the word DEVIL to convey the connotation of 'very mean'. There is not a single word that carries the meaning 'very mean', so the speaker uses the encyclopedic entries to help in expressing that thought. This modulation process uses an ad-hoc concept (Wilson & Carston, 2007; Walaszewska, 2011). The ad-hoc concept means that the hearer either narrows or broadens the meaning to get to the speaker's intended meaning (Wilson & Carston, 2007). Narrowing is used when the intended meaning is more specific than what has been uttered (Wilson & Carston, 2007; Rebollar, 2015). An example of narrowing is shown through the following example:

10. I am not drinking tonight.

The speaker could mean what he said literally, intending the meaning that he will not have any liquids tonight. Perhaps he has an operation in the morning and cannot drink any liquids that night. He can also mean a more specific meaning. In that case, the intended meaning will be that he will not drink any alcoholic beverages. This is something specific that the speaker will not drink. When the hearers listen to this utterance, they combine this input with the context. Therefore, they will check their knowledge about the speaker, and after that reach the intended meaning. So, they will check, do I know that the speaker has a surgery in the morning? No, I am sure the speaker will not have a surgery tomorrow. Thus, the speaker may mean alcoholic drinks. This process leads the hearers into narrowing the meaning. Thus, resulting in a subset of the concept DRINKING. This subset means a specific kind of drinks which is alcoholic drinks.

On the other hand, broadening, which is the other result of the ad-hoc concept, is used when the speaker is conveying a more general sense than what is lexically encoded in the utterance (Wilson & Carston, 2007; Rebollar, 2015). It is achieved by loose use. Approximation, hyperbole and metaphor result in a concept that is broader than what the speaker literally says. Relevance Theorists argue that they are on a continuum. In other words, when the speaker utters a statement there are many potential meanings that hearers modulate through. The most extreme measure of this continuum is metaphor. They are all used as an alternative for literal language to reach optimal relevance (Wilson & Carston, 2007). An example of this continuum is (11):

11. The film made me sick.

This sentence can be interpreted literally, as an approximation, hyperbolically, or metaphorically (Carston & Wearing, 2011). There is not a clear cut-off point between those possibilities. The context and the encyclopedic information available in the concept SICK determine how the hearers will interpret the statement. There are different encyclopedic properties that can be found in the concept SICK, each of them represents a figurative speech act. Those encyclopedic properties are:

12. A. Vomit
    B. Nauseous
    C. Discomfort
    D. An expression to show a negative psychological reaction.

The implication of (11) depends on the context and the encyclopedic assumptions. Hence, in a certain context the encyclopedic assumption (12A) will be the only relevant assumption. This is because it is the only one that yields cognitive effects. Accordingly, it is the only way that the hearers will find the sentence meaningful. These affect the hearers' understanding of the statement into a literal understanding. Whereas in another context, the only encyclopedic assumption that will be relevant is the one in (12B), thus the intended meaning will be an approximation. If the encyclopedic assumption in (12C) is the relevant assumption to a context, then the hearers will understand the statement as a hyperbole. Finally, if the context is most relevant to (12D), the hearers will understand the statement metaphorically.

The comprehension process for all those speech acts is the same (Carston & Wearing, 2011). The lexically encoded concept SICK gives access to different encyclopedic assumptions. The hearers then choose the most appropriate meaning depending on the context. The hearers decide whether to understand it literally or nonliterally. If the hearers decide that the utterance is meant in a nonliteral way, they must decide to which extent they should broaden the meaning (Wilson & Carston, 2007). This depends on two things (Carston & Wearing, 2011). The first is how easy it is to access this assumption in relation to the context. Then, the context should be relevant to either external representations or internal ones. This could happen through sounds, thoughts or memories (Wilson & Carston, 2007). For example, when (11) is uttered while the speaker is panicking, the hearer may associate what has been said with his memory of this action. This will lead him into understanding the word SICK as the encyclopedic meaning (12C), which is a negative psychological reaction. The other thing that affects the hearers' choice of which figurative speech act is in use, is what the implications that depend on that context are. The hearers combine the input with the expectations resulting in the arrival to the intended meaning. They broaden the entry in search of relevance. '*They follow the path of least effort'* while adjusting the meaning. They also test the interpretation and stop when they reach the intended meaning.

Finally, the processes of narrowing and broadening are complementary (Wilson & Carston, 2007). Both, narrowing and broadening, affect the truth conditions of an utterance. For instance, when the speaker utters (11), it will be judged as true or false according to the speaker's feelings. So, if the speaker intended the implication of assumption (12C), and the context lead to that assumption as well, then what has been said will be judged as true. Narrowing restricts the category denotated by the linguistically encoded concept whereas broadening extends it. The hearer chooses to broaden or to narrow depending on his expectations of what is relevant. Both hyperbole and metaphor are loose uses of language where the hearer must adjust the meaning to arrive to the speaker's intended meaning.

Another similarity between hyperbole and metaphor is that both can be understood at an early age. McGhee (1971) claims that children understand hyperbole by the ages of 7 and 11, which Varga (2000) and I are arguing against. This claim is based on the idea that the cognitive abilities that are required to understand this language flexibility emerge by the age of seven. McGhee's (1971) claim would suggest that hyperbole and metaphor have two different interpretation mechanisms. This is against the Relevance Theorists claim. In response to that, Varga (2000) monitored preschool children to check their use of hyperbolic statements. The children's ages ranged between four to five years old. The results show that children at those ages could comprehend and produce hyperbolic statements. When someone speaks to them hyperbolically, those children do not need any explanation. Therefore, they do not need to be told that the speaker is exaggerating. They do not see it as a direct challenge. In other words, those children do not perceive the hyperbolic statement as direct accusation. They understand it as playful. When confronting them with a hyperbolic statement, they respond hyperbolically as well. This creates tension. The tension is because when the original speaker says something hyperbolically, the hearer imitates the speaker's hyperbolic use. They continue doing that which causes pressure because they do not want to be the ones that stop this language play. They want to exaggerate more than the previous speaker. This tension disappears when one of the conversation participants decides not to produce a hyperbolic statement. This study shows that children as young as four years old can produce and comprehend hyperbole. They have the cognitive abilities to decode hyperbole at a young age unlike what McGhee (1971) suggests. It is important to note that those abilities are not present in all children at that age. Let us take Pam, Carol, Elisha and Pete as examples. They were all monitored in that experiment, yet, not all of them mastered the use of hyperbole. Pam, for example, was not able to comprehend hyperbole at all. While Carole was better in understanding it that Pam was but she did not always understand it. Whereas Elisha and Pete mastered the use of hyperbole. They could produce and comprehend hyperbolic statements every time they came across it. This shows that not all children at that age are able to comprehend hyperbole. The cognitive abilities do vary between those children. In general, most children will be able to comprehend hyperbole at the ages of four to five years old but not all. When comparing those results to metaphor, we will find that children understand both at a young age. Several studies show that children can understand metaphors by the age of three years old (Deamer, 2013). They do not understand both figurative speech acts exactly at the same age, but both are understood at an early age. Thus, suggesting that they have the same interpretation mechanism.

As we have discussed the similarities between hyperbole and metaphor, we will talk about their differences. The first difference is the scale that each of them uses when interpreting the utterance. As discussed above, when the hearers hear an utterance, they adjust the meaning to make it fit the context. This adjustment process is governed by scales. As discussed earlier, there are two kinds of scales, the quality scale and the quantity scale. The quality scale governs the interpretation of metaphorical statements whereas the quantity scale governs the interpretation of hyperbolic statements (Cartson & Wearing, 2015). Let us use the following statement as an example:

11. The film made me sick.

When the speakers utter this statement wanting a metaphorical understanding, they expect the hearers to adjust the quality scale (Carston & Wearing, 2015). Hence, when hearers try to decode the statement, they access the encyclopedic assumptions looking for a quality that fits this statement. Thus, resulting in the intended metaphorical understanding which could be 'The film made me have a negative psychological effect'. Whereas if the speakers intend a hyperbolic interpretation, they will expect that hearers will adjust the quantity scale. If we use the same example, the hearers are expected to access the encyclopedic assumptions and modify the quantity. Thus, resulting in a description that is less extreme than what the speakers have uttered. This could be 'The film made me feel uncomfortable'.

The second difference between metaphor and hyperbole is that the hearers broaden and narrow when they interpret a metaphor while they only broaden when they interpret a hyperbole (Sperber & Wilson, 2012). The following statement will be used to illustrate:

13. She is an angel.

If the speaker uses this metaphor, the hearers will have to go through narrowing and broadening to understand this statement. They will narrow the interpretation of ANGLE to only include prototypes of angles. So, they will exclude the spiritual creatures. After that, they will broaden the concept and will include all 'kind' people. Therefore, when interpreting a metaphor, hearers use a combination of both broadening and narrowing to reach the intended meaning. Whereas as discussed above, when interpreting a hyperbole, the hearers will only need to broaden the meaning. For example, in (11) the hearers will broaden SICK into the intended meaning (12C), which implies discomfort.

Another difference between hyperbole and metaphor is that metaphors can be long or short while hyperboles are always short. For instance, you can find whole poems that are made of many stanzas that are metaphorical for another thing. An example of a poem that is a metaphor for something else is Cross by Langston Hughes. Meanwhile, when using hyperbole, speakers utter short hyperbolic sentences, as shown in the previous examples.

The third difference between hyperbole and metaphor is that when speakers use metaphors, they are describing a state (Cartson & Wearing, 2015). Hence, metaphors describe the world. For example, a speaker uttering (13) is describing the person in a positive way. The positive meaning the hearers get is from the encyclopedic entry. It has a positive denotation. This positive meaning is not conveyed using metaphor, it is shown through the word choice. So, the speaker uses a metaphor to merely describe the state that the woman is in. The positive meaning conveyed is because of the use of the word 'angel'. On the other hand, when speakers use hyperbolic statements, they do not only describe what has happened but also, they show how they feel about this action. Sentence (6A) will be used to illustrate:

6. A. It took him a whole day to type three words on the computer.

In (6A), the speaker is conveying an attitude. When the speakers choose to use hyperbole in their speech, they want to convey that the event is more than they expected and show how they feel about this increase. The evaluation of the event can either be positive or negative as discussed earlier. In the example presented, the speaker is not satisfied with the progress of that person he is talking about. So, hyperbole has an evaluative component that metaphor does not have.

3.2 The relationship between hyperbole and irony:

When using ironic statements, the speaker utters something wanting a different content to be expressed (Carston & Wearing, 2015). Humans are experts in this kind of language, they use it to negotiate and create personal relationships with others (Dews, Keplan & Winner, 1995; Harries & Pexman 2003). Although speakers take a risk of being misunderstood when speaking ironically, they are usually comfortable when using irony (Gibbs 2000; Pexman & Zvaigzne, 2004). An example taken from Clark (1996) will be used to explain what irony is:

9. A: what a gorgeous day!

   B: yes, isn't it!

   Actual situation: unexpected heavy rain, A and B expected the weather to be nice.

Ironic statements are untrue statements that are used to convey something else (Fogelin 1988, Carston & Wearing 2015). So, in (9) both participants in the conversation are saying something that is not true. The speaker in (9A) is saying something opposite than what they intend to say which is that the day is not 'gorgeous'. The speaker in (9B) also intends to say 'no, it is not gorgeous' rather than 'yes'. The hearer must do a correcting process to get the accurate intended meaning. This is an extra layer of metarepresentational reasoning (Happe, 1993; Carston & Wearing, 2015). Metarepresentational reasoning was discussed earlier. So, statement (9B), for example has a higher- order of representation and a lower- order. The higher- order representation is the literal meaning of what has been said. So, the higher- order representation is that 'I agree with you, the day is gorgeous'. The statement also has an imbedded lower- order representation, which is the intended meaning. This could be 'I agree with you; the weather is awful'. This happens when the speaker in (9B) realizes that the speaker in (9A) is being ironic and intends another meaning as discussed above.

The Relevance theorists believe that irony is based on echoing (Wilson, 2006). The following statement will be used to illustrate:

14. Mary (*after a difficult meeting*): That went well.

Mary in (14) does not intend for the statement to be understood literally. Her intended meaning is that the meeting did not go well as she expected. She is echoing a previous thought she had when she expected the meeting to go well. She might be criticizing herself for being naïve enough to think that the meeting will be good. Her hopes that the meeting will go in a good way did not translate into reality. Thus, she echoes this thought to show the distinction between what has been said and the actual situation. This happens because she, or any person who speaks ironically, want to convey an attitude and show emotions towards the event. Here, she is criticizing what happened in the meeting. Carston & Wearing (2015) support the notion that irony is used to convey attitude towards a topic that the speaker is talking about. Ironic statements are not only used in criticism, but also in anger, irritation, teasing and to make jokes (Sperber & Wilson, 1981). Mary in (14) could be criticizing, angry and irritated at the same time. She could be making a joke amongst her friends as well. Ironic statements are not usually used to complement or show positive emotion. They are usually used to convey negative feelings.

Theorists and psycholinguists such as Fogelin, Guttenplan, Leggitt & Gibbs argue that hyperbole is a kind of, or a member of the trope of irony (Carston & Wearing, 2015). Whereas others think that they are distinct. The theorists who argue that hyperbole and irony are distinct argue that irony has three features that hyperbole does not have (Wilson & Sperber, 2012). We will use the following examples to illustrate:

14. Mary (*after a difficult meeting*): That went well.

4. Today is the best day of my life!

The first distinction between irony and hyperbole is that irony expresses an attitude of mocking and sarcasm. Mary in (14) is being sarcastic by saying that the meeting was a good meeting. Whereas in (4), the speaker is using hyperbole to show a positive attitude. The speaker is not mocking nor being sarcastic. So, hyperbole does not show sarcasm and mockery as irony does.

The second feature that distinguishes irony from hyperbole is that paralinguistic cues are required when using irony and optional in hyperbole. Piskorska (2016) discusses many cues that help a person perceive an utterance as an ironic one. There are prosodic and paralinguistic cues. Examples of paralinguistic cues are tone, facial expressions, gestures and content. Bryant & Tree (2002) argue that the ironic tone differs from one language to another. The English one depends on flat intonation, slower tempo, low pitch and greater intensity. Nasalization, slow speech rate and prolonged syllables are characteristics of the ironic tone as well. The claim is that there is not a hyperbolic tone while irony does.

Finally, irony is different than hyperbole because it has normative bias. Irony conveys criticism and points out how things should be (Sperber & Wilson, 1981). For example, Mary in (14) is not only being sarcastic, she is also criticizing how the meeting went by showing an attitude of disapproval. This is a negative emotion that is conveyed through irony. It is not common to use irony in a positive way. Whereas with hyperbole, there is a positive emotion as in example (4). The speaker is satisfied with what happened on that day.

As shown above, pure hyperbole, is claimed to be different than irony because it does not show an attitude of sarcasm, it does not use paralinguistic cues nor does it have normative bias (Wilson & Sperber, 2012, Carston & Wearing, 2015). Yet, two of those features can be used to prove that irony and hyperbole are in fact very similar (Carston & Wearing, 2015). They are called ‘counterparts’. They show a distinction on the surface between irony and hyperbole, however, when looking in depth will reveal some similarities. The following statements will be used to illustrate:

4. Today is the best day of my life.

5. Today is the worst day of my life.

The first ‘counterpart’ is the evaluative feature. Yes, hyperbole does not have the normative bias, yet it does show attitude. When speakers use a hyperbole, they have a purpose of showing an attitude. Statement (4), for example, shows a positive attitude while (5) shows a negative one. Each statement carries a different emotion. Thus, hyperbolic statements can show different kinds of attitudes. In other words, hyperbole is evaluative, it differs from irony in showing attitude towards a state of affair while irony shows attitude towards a thought.

The second ‘counterpart’ is in that both irony and hyperbole use paralinguistic cues, specially tone. As discussed above, speakers use tone as a hint that helps the hearers understand what has been uttered as an ironic sentence. Hyperbole has a unique tone (Carston & Wearing, 2015). The hyperbolic tone is a combination of strong accent and lengthening the stressed syllables. Hyperbolic utterances also have wider pitch than non-hyperbolic utterances. The tone is not constant because it differs from one utterance to another depending on the attitude that is displayed. As discussed above, positive and negative attitudes can be conveyed through hyperbole. So, the tone differs according to the attitude. It is important to note that if irony is present in the same utterance that is hyperbolic, the hyperbolic tone will not disappear. To conclude, both irony and hyperbole use distinctive tones to evaluate.

3.3 Conclusion about metaphor, irony, and hyperbole:

Furthermore, the interpretation of hyperbole is achieved when the hearer fills the gap between what the speaker could mean and what the situation really is (Carston & Wearing, 2015). Hyperbole occurs in many ways. It can occur as pure hyperbole or it can occur with metaphor, irony or any other non-literal speech act. There are separate pragmatic mechanisms that are involved in the interpretation of different speech acts. The following statement will be used to explain:

4. Today is the best day of my life!

When pure hyperbole occurs as in (4), the interpretation of it is easy. Hearers only shift the meaning to a less exaggerated version in the same scale. This shift is on the quantity scale. This happens because when uttering the sentence, the speaker uses the word that is at the end of the same scale. This adjustment will help the hearers understand the sentence in the same way that the speaker intended, which could be 'Today is a very good day'. The same sentence can be ironic in a different context. Let us suppose that the speaker had a bad day, he is using irony and hyperbole at the same time to express that 'It is not a good day'. When the hearers try to interpret this statement, it is not enough that they adjust the quantitative scale only. This will leave them with a hyperbolic meaning only. Thus, resulting in understanding the intended meaning 'Today is a very good day', which is the opposite of what the speaker intended to say. Hearers must decode the metarepresentational reasoning as well. So, to understand a hyperbolic statement that co-occurs with another figurative speech act, hearers must use more than one interpretation mechanism to help them get to the intended meaning. Whereas if the statement is a pure hyperbole, the hearers will only adjust the quantity scale to reach the intended meaning.

Thus, hyperbole is like both irony and metaphor. At the same time, hyperbole is distinct from them. It is different because it could use one or more than one interpretation mechanism according to the statement. This is because it co-occurs with many figurative speech acts. This will not be found in either irony or metaphor. Hyperbole is different than metaphor in that it uses a distinctive tone to help the hearers realize that it is a hyperbolic statement. Which makes it similar to irony. Also, it is distinct from metaphor in that it, like irony, shows an attitude towards the event whereas metaphor describes the event only. These distinctions are very important because it also distinguishes between metaphor and irony. Hyperbole is different from irony as well. The first distinction is that hyperbole, like metaphor, is a loose use of a language. Hearers usually modulate through the available encyclopedic meanings to get the intended meaning. So, irony does not use the same processing mechanism as hyperbole. The other distinction between irony and hyperbole is that children understand hyperbole, like metaphor, at an early age. Studies have shown that children understand hyperbole by the age of four. Which is earlier than when they can understand irony. However, children understand irony by the age of six (Happe, 1993). So, hyperbole is like irony and metaphor. This similarity between the two makes hyperbole distinct from both tropes. Thus, hyperbole cannot be judged as a 'kind of' irony nor metaphor.

3.4 Hyperbole and Generalization:

As far as I know, hyperbole and generalization have not been associated together in any study. What interested me in looking at their relationship is a book called 'Girls of Riyadh' by Raja Alsanea. The title of the book caused controversy in Saudi Arabia (Donna, 2005). It might be that the author intended it to be a hyperbole, yet people understood it as a generalization. The book presents the story of four girls from Riyadh. Each one of those women has a story. Their stories revolved around men and relationships. At the time this novel was written, having a relationship with a guy was considered as a taboo in Saudi Arabia. People got angry because they thought that none of these women represents the 'real' Riyadh girl. The kind of girl that has never talked to a strange man. The girl that waits for an arranged marriage. The one that will know her husband after they get engaged or even married. Thus, it was banned in Saudi Arabia (Donna, 2005). The writer Mariam Abdel-Karim al Bukhari, who writes in Al-Riyadh newspaper admits that she has not read the book yet she announces that the title is *'hurtful to the girls in our country'*. She also demands that the author should *'issue an apology to the girls of Riyadh'*. Alsanea responds in an interview that this is a technique that she used (Edaat, 2011). She states that it is a way to promote for her book. She argues that she could have made the title 'Girls from Riyadh' and by that avoid any misunderstanding, but this would make the title weaker.

There are two things that hyperbole and generalization share. The first is that they are both blatant exaggeration. The other thing they share is that are both used in persuasion. Before discussing how they are similar and how they are different, I will briefly present generalization. The following examples will be used to illustrate:

15. All birds fly.

16. Most students passed the exam.

17. Birds fly.

18. Please mom! All my friends are going to the party.

There are three different kinds of generalization (Walton, 1999; Tindale, 2007). The first is the absolute or universal generalization. When using this type of generalization, the speaker says that the property that is generalized will be found in all the members of that group, no exceptions. So, if the speaker utters (15), he believes that there are not any exceptions. If there are, like ostriches for example, the statement will be judged as a false statement. This kind is usually used by political leaders. The second kind of generalization is the inductive generalization. When the speaker uses this kind of generalization, he is saying that there are exceptions to this generalization. For example, when the speaker utters (16) he does not want to make the claim that 'All students passed'. There is a specific exception to this generalization. It is also used by politicians and in advertisements. The third kind is the presumptive defeasible generalization. When the speaker uses this kind, he is stating that some members of that group have a property in common. For example, in (17) the speaker is saying that generally, if it is a bird, it will have the ability to fly. This kind of generalization allows the existence of exceptions. So, (17) will not be judges as a false statement because of ostriches. This kind of generalization is the weakest kind of generalization.

It is important to note that it is easy to overgeneralize (Tindale, 2007). If speakers overgeneralize, they are making a hasty generalization. They make the error of stating something is more than what they have evidence for. For example, in (18) the speaker and the listener know that the speaker is not one hundred percent sure that what has been uttered is true. This will be discussed later. Walton (2005) points out that the problem with using generalization as a base in arguments is that people might feel passionate about their point of view. By being so, they overlook the evidence they have and need in the case. Thus, committing an error (Tindale, 2007). Another problem is that when using inductive generalization, a speaker uses the power of suggestion to draw the intended generalization of universal (Walton, 1999). Jacobs (1995), who studies advertisements, analyzes the fallacy generalization. He shows that this generalization is responsible for the interpretation of 'some' which means 'at least one' into 'two or more' in advertisements. He states that this hasty generalization also upgrades the meaning to the viewers without them realizing. So, the viewers might understand 'many' as 'most' without being aware.

He states that this is not an error that advertisers do. However, it is a clever way of using the power of suggestion. They do that to promote their products so that the viewer wants it. At the same time, the advertisers have a way to deny the generalization if they legally need to.

Firstly, we will compare between generalization and hyperbole. We will show the similarities between them. The first similarity is that generalization and hyperbole are kinds of blatant exaggeration. The following sentence will be used to illustrate:

19. Disney is the happiest place on earth.
18. Please mom! All my friends are going to the party.

Sentence (19) is a hyperbolic sentence that is used as an advertisement (Disneyland park (n.d)). The intended meaning is 'You will have fun in Disney'. Disney Land has associated happiness with its park to promote their park. People do know that happiness is not linked to geography. Being somewhere does not mean that you will be happy. Also, there are many Disney parks around the world, which one is the happiest place? The sentence is an exaggeration that people are aware of. Yet, people seem to repeat what the advertisers say. In other words, when people post a picture of their visit to Disney Land online, you will often find the caption of their pictures 'I am in the happiest place on earth'. On the other hand, the same applies to generalization. When a teenager utters (18) to his mother, both know that what has been uttered is not true. The teenager does not know whether everyone is going or not. He must also know people who are not invited to the party. This means that they are not going. Both the parents and the speaker know that what he said is a generalization. He is saying that to convince his parents to let him go. Which leads us to the second similarity between hyperbole and generalization, persuasion.

When using a persuasive dialogue, the speakers have different points of views (Walton, 2013). Because those points of view are against each other, each speaker wants to prove that his point of view is stronger than his component's. Each of them wants to resolve this issue by convincing the other that his point of view is stronger. Both hyperbole and generalization are used as persuasive devices.

To explain persuasion, I will discuss classical rhetoric. Specifically, how Aristotle addressed the rhetoric of persuasion. He argues that credibility is established by three aspects ethos, pathos and logos (Claridge, 2010). Ethos means that the speaker's good character can be used as evidence in his speech. Pathos refers to the emotional impact that the speech has on the hearer. Finally, logos refers to the way the speaker builds his speech and the evidence he has in a logical argument to convince the hearer. These three aspects work when using hyperbole. That is, in ethos, if the person overuses hyperbole in his speech, listeners will usually perceive him as untrustworthy. For example, in his article, Harwood (2017) from CNBC news states that President Donald Trump's favorite tool is hyperbole. This tool, he argues, has caused him to lose credibility. This also applies to advertisers and people (Reinking & Osten, 1993). They must be careful when using hyperbole. Hence, overusing it might cause the speaker to lose credibility. On the other hand, if the speakers minimize rather than use hyperbole, they might appear boring or not convincing (Claridge, 2010). In other words, speakers must be careful when using hyperbole since the degree of it is important in shaping the hearer's feelings about it. Whereas in pathos, using hyperbole can affect the hearer's attitudes and opinions. Hyperbole may make things desirable. It can make things seem more important than they are, or more frightening. Thus, impacting the feelings of the hearer. For example, you will find people who save up money to go to Disney. For them, they will be extremely happy there. Finally, in logos when a speaker uses hyperbole, he can maximize an aspect or a proof while neglecting others. An example of logos will be shown later.

In my opinion, these three aspects of credibility can apply to generalization as well. As stated above, it is important to generalize to convince others, yet one must be aware of not being perceived as lying. Also, generalization can affect a person's emotions and opinions. An advertisement, for example, can persuade a person to buy something he does not need. In generalization, the speaker maximizes a proof and downplays others. In other words, both hyperbole and generalization are used by people who think that the hearers have a different attitude than theirs. They use those two to highlight an aspect they believe will help their argument and downplay other aspects that may work against them. Also, as stated above, if a speaker does not generalize to a certain extent, he might be boring. The same is with hyperbole, if a person uses it and the difference between the intended meaning and the literal meaning is small, what have been said could be boring.

Although both hyperbole and generalization are used in advertisements and politics, the examples I will use to show how the two are related are from politics. Both are used by politicians to convince people that what they did, or about to do, is for the good. The following examples will be used to illustrate:

20. Donald Trump: *'But what she doesn't say is that tens of thousands of people that are unbelievably happy and that love me'* (Fortune Staff, 2016).

21. Barack Obama: '*No one's born a computer scientist but with a little hard work and some math and science just about anyone could become one*' (Code.org, 2013).

Although I stated earlier that Donald Trump has lost his credibility with many Americans, this was not the case during his presidential campaign. In a presidential debate against Hillary Clinton, Trump announces that she is downplaying the fact that 'tens of thousands' of people love him which can be found in (20). Their love is 'unbelievable' and they are happy with what he has to offer. He built up his argument in by stating that Clinton is downplaying this important fact. When he uses a hyperbole implying that a huge number of people are 'unbelievably' happy with him, he is trying to affect people's emotions. Also, he wants to persuade the people who are not convinced with what he is offering to rethink and reevaluate. It is in human nature that when they see someone that is loved by the majority, they will try to find good qualities about that person. This might also imply that the people that do not like him are few. Meanwhile, he downplays the fact that many people dislike him. He does so to continue affecting people's emotions. Thus, they will try to find why many people like him, and very few don't. His previous announcements affect how people perceive this one. He is now known for using a lot of hyperboles but at that time many people believed him and took what he said literally. They were not aware of how he likes using hyperbole to affect others. Thus, this could have affected many Americans and led him to win the election.

On the other hand, an example of generalization is produced by president Obama in (21). He wanted to persuade people to support the Computer Science Education Campaign. Here, Obama started his speech by stating that every American needs computer and persuaded the American people to help America by learning computer sciences. He did not mention any other profession which is important to the country, he just focused on the importance of computer sciences. He used the second kind of generalization which is inductive generalization. He did that by using the words 'just about anyone'. He did not want to use universal generalization and state 'anyone could be one'. This is because he did not want to be accounted for his speech nor to be a person who stated a hasty generalization. His character is trustworthy by many Americans and he does not want to lose their trust. All these factors contributed to the affect that this short speech had on the American people which resulted in their support to this campaign. So, both generalization and hyperbole share a function which is persuasion.

Moving on, we will show how hyperbole and generalization are different from one another. The following examples will be used to illustrate:

3. It is boiling.

2. It is extremely hot.

22. Everyone who uses our website end up with the job of his or her dreams.

The first difference is that when using hyperbole, the difference between the intended meaning and the literal meaning should be big. As discussed above, (3) will be easier for hearers to interpret as a hyperbole than (2) in a certain context. The reason is that the intended meaning is less extreme than the literal meaning. Whereas with generalization, if the speaker says something more than he intended, it will turn into hasty generalization and this will be considered as an error. For example, in (22), the company announced something they do not have evidence for. Thus, they are committing a hasty generalization. If one person who used this website ended up in a job she did not dream of, the statement will be judged as a false statement. The advertiser has committed something illegal.

Moving on to the second thing that distinguishes hyperbole from generalization. The following examples will be used to illustrate:

4. Today is the best day of my life!

6. C. It took him a second to type one word on the computer.

23. Many people who use our website end up with the job of their dreams.

When the hearers process a hyperbolic statement as the one in (4), they automatically understand that the speaker intended a less extreme meaning than what has been literally said. That is, they will understand that ‘today’ is not the best day, yet, it is ‘a very good day’. So, they downgrade the meaning to a less extreme version. When a speaker utters something like (6C), the intended meaning is more extreme than the literal one. Thus, the speaker will need to upgrade the meaning to reach the intended meaning. While when using generalization, hearers usually upgrade the intended meaning. As Jacobs (1995) stated, hearers usually upgrade statements like (23) which use the word ‘many’ into ‘most’. They do that unconsciously. So, when the hearers process hyperbole, they can understand a less or more extreme meaning while with generalization, they understand a meaning that is more extreme than what has been uttered.

These similarities between hyperbole and generalization show the uniqueness of hyperbole. In other words, hyperbole has been associated with metaphor and irony because it shares some characteristics with each of them. This has been discussed earlier. Also, hyperbole is different from irony and metaphor. Generalization and hyperbole have the same pattern. They share some characteristics yet they are different from one another. This shows that hyperbole resembles different categories. This does not mean that hyperbole is a ‘kind of’ any of them. It just shows that hyperbole is a combination of characteristics that can be found in other speech acts. Since hyperbole shares different characteristics with other speech acts, we might be able to understand different figurative speech acts when we examine hyperbole.

4. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the title of this paper is hyperbolic. There is not a complete understanding of what hyperbole is yet. It is not considered unique because of a feature that it has and cannot be found in another figurative speech act. On the contrary, it is unique because it shares features with metaphor and irony that are essential in distinguishing those two from each other. It also shares characteristics with generalization. Hyperbole is a feature of everyday language, it is easy to learn, yet it is understudied. I personally think that when we understand hyperbole we will know more about irony and metaphor. Therefore, we could predict a theory that can explain ordinary speech acts and figurative speech acts including irony.

Total word count: 10000, excluding references and examples.

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