Understanding Figurative Language: From Metaphor to Idioms

This book presents the first comprehensive account of how people use and understand metaphors in everyday life.

This book examines how people understand utterances that are intended figuratively. Traditionally, figurative language such as metaphors and idioms has been considered derivative from more complex than ostensibly straightforward literal language.

Glucksberg argues that figurative language involves the same kinds of linguistic and pragmatic operations that are used for ordinary, literal language. Glucksberg's research in this book is concerned with ordinary language: expressions that are used in daily life, including conversations about everyday matters, newspaper and magazine articles, and the media. Metaphor is the major focus of the book. Idioms, however, are also treated comprehensively, as is the theory of conceptual metaphor in the context of how people understand both conventional and novel figurative expressions. A new theory of metaphor comprehension is put forward, and evaluated with respect to competing theories in linguistics and in psychology. The central tenet of the theory is that ordinary conversational metaphors are used to create new concepts and categories. The theory is then extended to two other domains: idioms and conceptual metaphors.

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