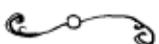


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Fishing FOR Evidence:

Processing and
understanding
figurative
language


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Original paper:
The Psycholinguistics of Metaphor



Glucksberg, S. (2003). The psycholinguistics of metaphor.
Trends in cognitive sciences, 7(2), 92-96.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1364661302000402>



If someone says...

My lawyer is a shark!

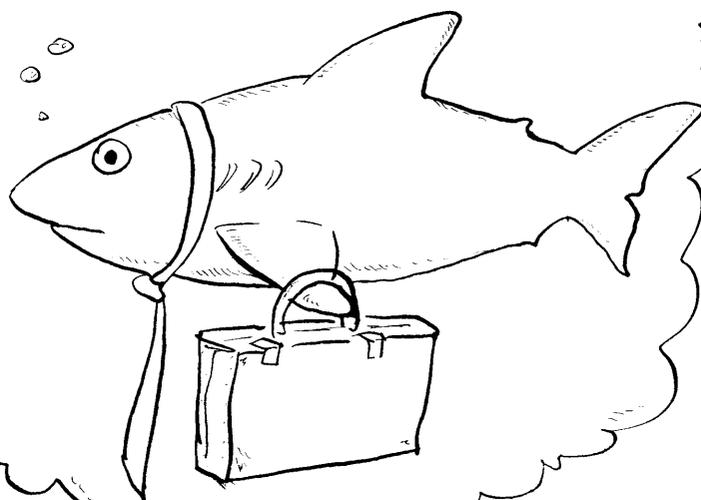


you probably imagine...

This!



And not this...



Technically, "my lawyer is a shark" doesn't make sense, but we understand it because it's a metaphor!

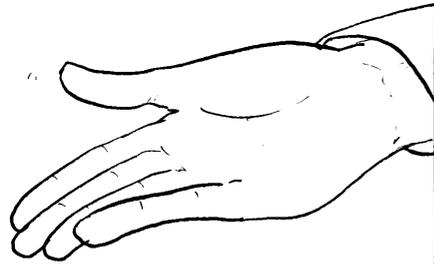


So how does it work? How do we understand what is meant with such figurative language? I've got a few ideas about that!



One older view is the

Standard Pragmatic View



Which says our brains first take the phrase literally, realize it doesn't make sense, then discard it, and then search for a figurative interpretation.

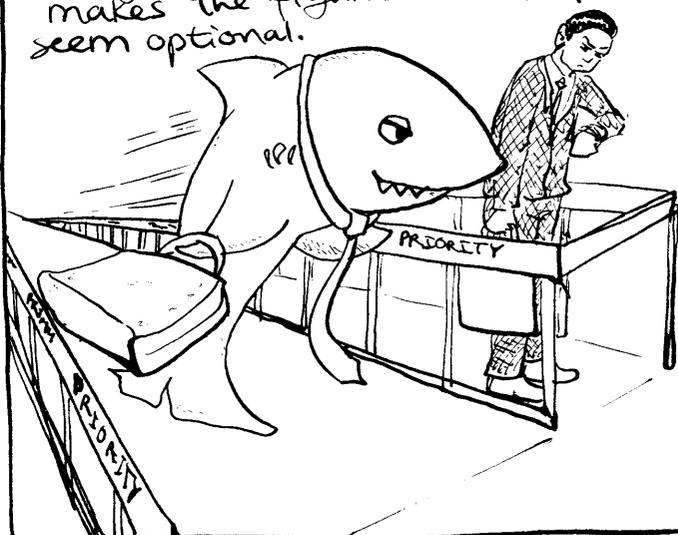


Standard Pragmatic View



However, there are two issues with this approach!

1: The literal meaning is assumed to take **PRIORITY** over a figurative meaning. Plus, this makes the figurative interpretation seem optional.



2: When we search for figurative meaning, how do we know which features the metaphor is referring to?



Let's start with **Issue 1**: Does the literal meaning take **PRIORITY**



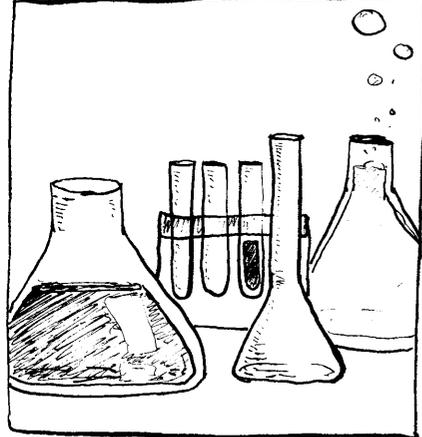
A first counterpoint is that some figurative forms are never intended literally.



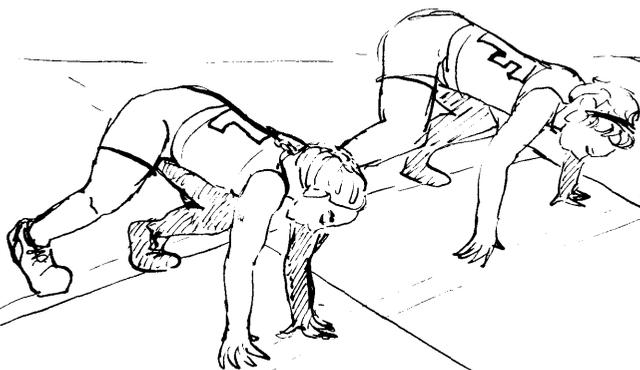
Grandpa kicked the bucket...



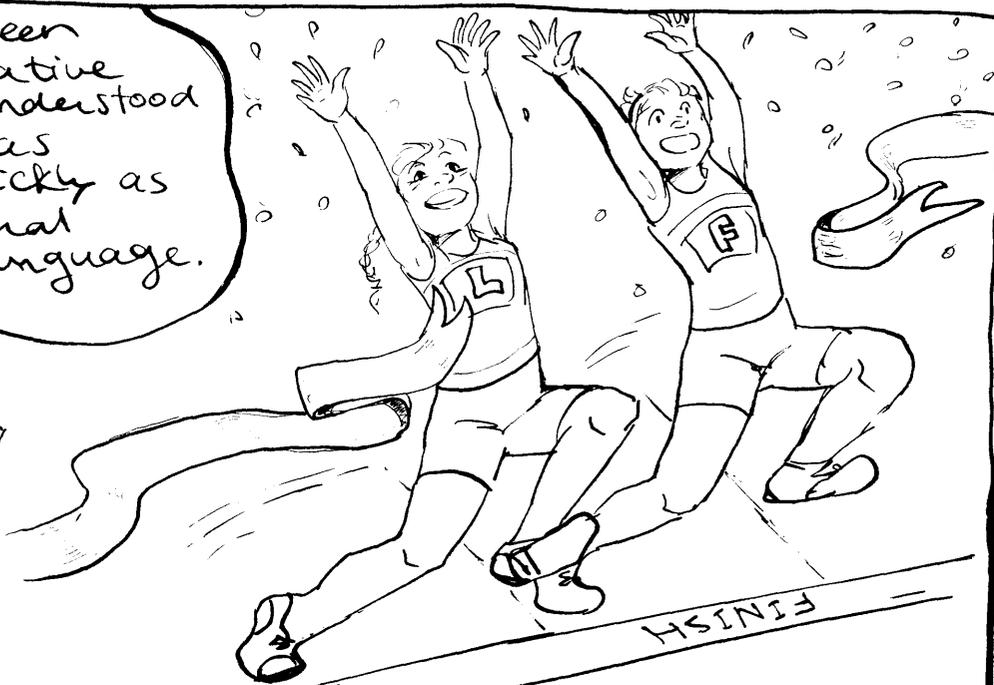
A Second Counterpoint is supported by experimental evidence.



If literal meanings take priority over figurative ones, then logically, it should take longer for figurative interpretations to be processed!



However! It has been shown that figurative language is understood just as quickly as literal language.



Speakers cannot choose to understand meaning or not. Meaning is generated automatically, if someone intends to do so or not.



One last argument concerns the idea that figurative interpretations would be optional.

Ohh
So it was
wonder

So it was
wonder

ERROR [X]
DO YOU WISH TO UNDERSTAND THIS MESSAGE?
 YES NO

Hmm...

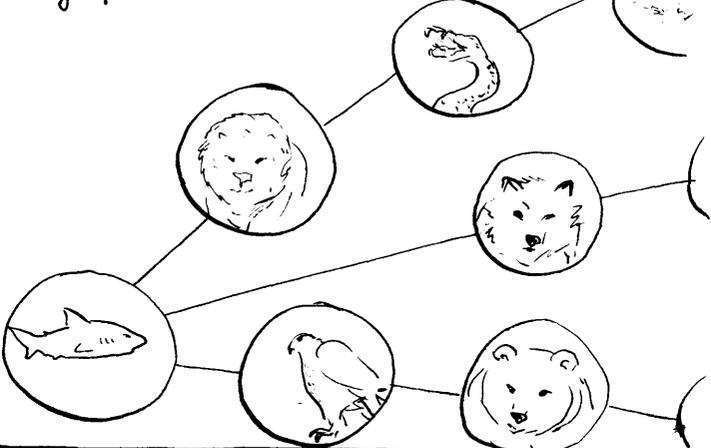


"My lawyer is a shark" doesn't make sense if one takes it as a literal shark -

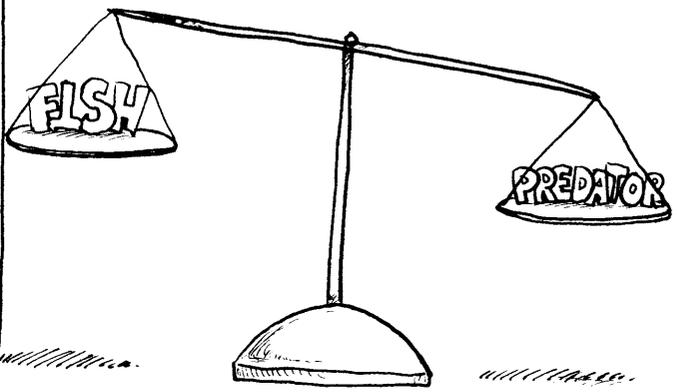
Issue 2:
How do people arrive at the correct interpretation?



- but it does make sense when looking at a broader category, namely "shark" as referring to the whole category of predatory creatures.



So, "shark" can refer either to its basic level, a literal fish, OR an abstract level, as a member of the category of predatory animals.



This is called 'dual reference'; using a typical example of a more abstract category to refer to that concept in general.



Lets consider the example "My job is a jail"



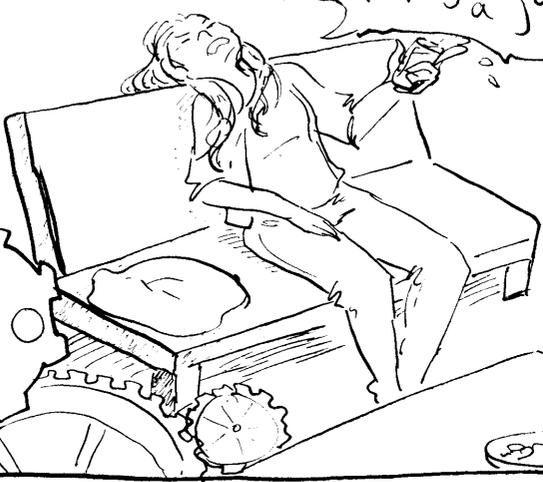
It doesn't mean your job looks like this ...



but rather that it belongs in the category of unpleasant confining situations!

People understand that with metaphors, words may refer to a higher, more abstract level.

Ugh, and my job is a jail !!



Tell me about it, I can't escape my job either!



And when

it is

Said

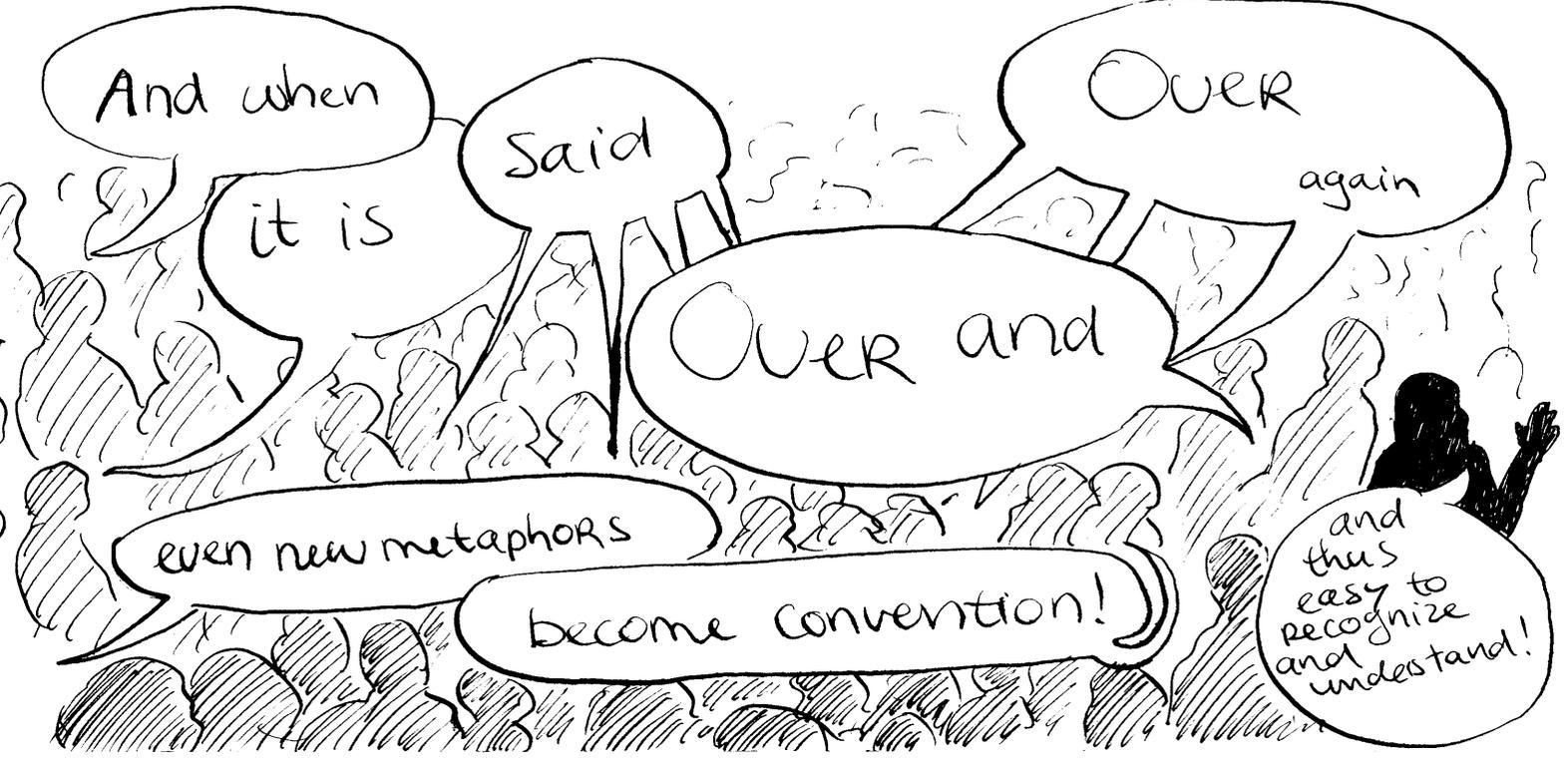
Over again

Over and

even new metaphors

become convention!

and thus easy to recognize and understand!





To recap, this approach
 counters the standard
 pragmatic view;
 literal meanings have
 no priority, and
 metaphors can be
 understood via
 dual reference,
 among other
 things.



This by far doesn't
 mean that metaphor
 research is done yet!
 There still remains a
 Sea of knowledge
 to explore!

