

INTERPRETING FIGURATIVE MEANING

Interpreting Figurative Meaning critically evaluates the recent empirical work from psycholinguistics and neuroscience examining the successes and difficulties associated with interpreting figurative language. There is now a huge, often contradictory, literature on how people understand figures of speech. Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr., and Herbert L. Colston argue that there may not be a single theory or model that adequately explains both the processes and products of figurative meaning experience. Experimental research may ultimately be unable to simply adjudicate between current models in psychology, linguistics, and philosophy of how figurative meaning is interpreted. Alternatively, the authors advance a broad theoretical framework, motivated by ideas from “dynamical systems theory,” that describes the multiple interacting influences that shape people’s experiences of figurative meaning in discourse. This book details past research and theory, offers a critical assessment of this work, and sets the stage for a new vision of figurative experience in human life.

Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr., is Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He is the author of several books including *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding*, *Intentions in the Experience of Meaning*, and *Embodiment and Cognitive Science*. He is also editor of the volume *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought* and editor of the journal *Metaphor and Symbol*.

Herbert L. Colston is Professor of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin, Parkside. He has published widely and edited several books including *Figurative Language Comprehension: Social and Cultural Influences* and *Irony in Language and Thought: A Cognitive Science Reader*.

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Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr.

University of California, Santa Cruz

Herbert L. Colston

University of Wisconsin, Parkside



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