

Coercion and the resolution of interpretive mismatches

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Coercion has been a useful notion in semantic theory for almost twenty years, and has represented a definite improvement in our understanding of the Semantics / Pragmatics interface. Our aim is to discuss some aspects of coercion and reinterpretation phenomena from a Relevance-theoretic perspective; in particular we will try to find an adequate way of building a restrictive notion of coercion with precise limits. In our view, this implies treating coercion operations as one of the tasks involved in the inferential specification of the explicit content of an utterance, and resorting to the conceptual / procedural distinction for linguistic semantics which is relevant because conceptual meaning is flexible enough to be coerced and reinterpreted, while procedural meaning cannot be coerced. Such a perspective leads to a typology of interpretive conflicts and the mechanisms involved in their resolution, including coercion, accommodation, metaphoric / metonymic reinterpretations, and the derivation of echoic readings.