

**For Media Students and Professionals:  
Metaphors and Large Language Models**

*Audio Transcript*

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If you're doing PR or are a science journalist, one of the things that you often do that we also kind of do as academics is to try to explain complicated technological or scientific concepts to a general public that is not going to understand the details. To do that, we often use metaphors, and that's a totally normal and acceptable thing to do. But when we're using these metaphors, we need to think about what the metaphors say about the technology or scientific thing that we're describing.

In our paper, we argue that ChatGPT is a soft bullshitter, and we kind of guardedly argue that it may be a hard bullshitter. But the argument that it's a hard bullshitter is that, according to us, a hard bullshitter is someone who doesn't care about the content of what they say. They don't care if what they say is true or false, but they are trying to deceive you, not about what they're saying, but about who they are or what their goals are.

And while we don't think ChatGPT has a mind in the sense we do, or goals in the sense we do, it is programmed to perform a task. And the task it's programmed to perform is to converse with someone in a way that's indistinguishable from a human agent.

If you're using the metaphor of something like a hallucination or a lie or something like that to describe why ChatGPT does things wrong, the right metaphor to use isn't hallucination, it's bullshit. Because that kind of conveys the function that it's designed to do in a way that will be accessible to people who aren't familiar with the technical details.

Be careful when you are, as a PR person or as a journalist, given a metaphor by somebody who's working in science or technology, because the metaphor that they give you to explain what their technology is doing might not be the best one. It might instead be one that's good for marketing their product.