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The iconicity of literary analysis

The case of Logical Form

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In this paper, we propose that the iconicity of Logical Form can help us evaluate the adequateness of an interpretation. We consider the relationship between iconicity, literary texts, formal semantic analysis and interpretation. With the help of an example taken from the poem "This was a Poet –" (Fr446, J448) by Emily Dickinson, we explain in which way a formal semantic analysis is iconic of the meaning of a text. We then compare this iconic analysis to other interpretative utterances about literary texts, in particular to statements that can be considered allegories of the text meaning. With this comparison we come to the conclusion that a formal semantic analysis does not restrict interpretation, but serves as guidance towards finding out about all relevant and complex structures that should also be followed in an interpretation. A linguistic analysis is thus to be seen as a measure to test the adequacy of interpretations.

1. Introduction

In this paper, we would like to suggest that the iconicity of Logical Form can help us evaluate the adequateness of an interpretation. In order to do so, we will consider the relationship between iconicity, literary texts, semantics (in particular, semantic analysis), and interpretation.

By interpretation, in a general sense, we mean a statement that represents the meaning of an utterance (a sentence, a text) as the result of its analysis.[1] More specifically, however, it is important to distinguish between a compositional interpretation of a sentence with the formal tools of semantics and a literary interpretation of sentences or texts. In formal semantics, the meaning of a sentence arises

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1. Fishelov (2012: 50) speaks of "two kinds of interpretative activity: one concerned with 'making sense' of textual details and integrating them into a coherent whole, and the other treating texts as 'stimuli' for the readers' creative imagination". We are concerned with the first and, more specifically, with statements representing the outcome of our "making sense".

through combining the meaning of its parts, a principle called compositionality; this hierarchical structure then is interpreted by a function that maps the content of the sentence to a truth-value, as formal semantics is concerned with giving a meaning of a sentence relative to the situations in which it can be true. The interpretation function takes care of the way the different parts of the sentence are combined, so that what we arrive at is a proposition (a function from worlds to truth-values). This proposition is equivalent to the hierarchical structure of the Logical Form and is the meaning of the sentence. Let us briefly look at a very simple example:

(1)   Peter laughs.

In formal semantics, the meaning of sentences is explained as the conditions under which it is true. We can arrive at that meaning through interpreting the sentence with the help of the interpretation function by combining all its parts:

(2) $[[$ Peter laughs $]]^w = 1$ iff LAUGH (Peter) (w)

The double brackets represent the interpretation function, and the meaning of the sentence arises through the equivalence-relation with the truth-value 1. Accordingly, the sentence "Peter laughs" is true under the condition that the predicate 'laugh' is true for Peter in our evaluation world w, i.e. the current world in which the sentence is uttered. The predicate is in compositional terms a function that maps an individual and world to true iff the individual is included in the set of laughing people in the world w. The semantic interpretation of a text thus is a systematic and rule-governed way to arrive at a sentence meaning and as such is quite different from the notion of a literary interpretation of sentences or texts.

What we want to argue in this paper is, however, that the two kinds of interpretation are by no means disconnected: we suggest that an adequate literary interpretation of a text has to stand in an iconic relationship to the semantic analysis of it – and we will explain shortly how this iconic relation is to be defined. In the above example, this relation may seem quite trivial; but as soon as we consider ambiguous sentences that allow for a number of possible sentence structures, we will see that only if a literary interpretation of the text is built up parallel to the relation between the different semantic readings an ambiguous sentence can have, is it an adequate interpretation of the text. Accordingly, the iconicity between semantic structure and literary interpretation can be used as a measure to determine whether a literary interpretation is adequate or not. As far as we know, no one has been concerned with the iconic aspect of interpretation in this sense.[2]

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2.   The notion of interpretation and iconicity pursued in this paper should not be confused with Peirce's term interpretant, which is an element of the sign itself ("the understanding that we have of the sign/object relation", Atkin 2013) and is therefore not a representation, verbal or otherwise.

1.1 The agenda of our paper is twofold:

We are concerned with the interpretation of literary texts and wonder if the concept of iconicity may help us find out more about how (and how well) textual interpretation works. That is to say, we are not concerned with the iconicity of literary texts (an inexhaustible subject in itself) but with the relationship between texts and interpretations. Our focus is on literary texts because, as a rule, they trigger more complex analyses (e.g. caused by ambiguity) than other types of text. They frequently invite or even demand interpretation. In order to evaluate interpretations, we are looking at their relation to the texts with which they are concerned.

What do we mean by the iconicity of an interpretative statement? As Max Nänny has pointed out, iconicity is an act of interpretation, as it means "to perceive similarities between the meaning of a sign or text and the formal means used for its expression" (Nänny 1999: 174). The iconic interpretation of an interpretation in its relation to the text may therefore be regarded as an example of second-order iconicity. We are looking at the relationship between a literary text, its formal semantic analysis, and its literary interpretation. As the semantic analysis is related to the text in a rule-governed way, its iconicity may be taken for granted. Less obviously, literary interpretation can be regarded as a set of signs that may stand in an iconic relation to the object it refers to, the literary text. We can therefore find out more about the iconicity of literary analysis by considering its relation to formal semantic analysis. It should be clear that, in a context of Peircean terminology, we are dealing with iconic diagrams since the similarity is not based on inherent features but on relationships between the elements of the text and its formal semantic analysis on the one hand and the elements of the literary interpretation on the other.[3] We think that it is possible to regard interpretations as diagrams of texts. If there is an element A in a text that we interpret as A′, and an element B that we interpret as B′, the relation between A and B should be equivalent to the relation between A′ and B′ (as shown in the diagram in (3)).

(3) A → A′
B → B′
C → C′

Accordingly, an adequate interpretation is characterized by stable equivalences of this kind. In other words, if the relation between text and interpretation can be called an iconic one, it is by definition adequate. (This does not necessarily mean

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3. For a recent, succinct discussion of Peircean terminology, see the introductory section of Elleström (2015). See also the section "Definition" at the Iconicity in Language and Literature website: ⟨www.iconicity.ch/en/iconicity/index.php?subaction=showfull&id=1197027781&archive= &start_from=&ucat=2&⟩

that such an interpretation is satisfactory in every respect but it is the condition of its being valid.) A particular challenge (and a test case) for this hypothesis is presented by ambiguity. When element A is considered ambiguous, we interpret it as both A′ and A″ (and so forth).

(4) A → A′
  A → A″
  B → B′
  C → C′

In this case, an overall interpretation of the text can only be given after the relation between the two interpretations A′ and A″ has been made explicit. Furthermore, the relation between A and B should be equivalent to both the relation between A′ and B′ and the relation between A″ and B′.

1.2 This is where the second item on our agenda will come in:

We think that a syntactic and semantic analysis of the text, interpreting it compositionally and arriving at an outcome that represents the meaning of the sentence, can help us evaluate the adequateness of an interpretation, and that its iconicity has a key function in this.

  In order to reach our aims, we will first explain with the help of an example taken from the poem "This was a Poet –" (Fr446, J448) by Emily Dickinson in which way such a semantic analysis is iconic of the meaning of a text. We will then compare this iconic analysis to other interpretative utterances about literary texts, in particular to statements that can be considered allegories of the text meaning (to be explained below). We will consider such allegorizations as attempts at diagrammatic iconicity. As a last step, we will show that this semantic analysis, because it is plausibly iconic, allows literary interpretation to proceed on a firmer basis.

  While our basic proposal applies to all kinds of texts, we will focus on a specific example from a literary text because this example represents very well the challenge offered to interpretation by this genre. It seems plausible to assume that our proposal makes sense generally when it makes sense with a text that approaches the limits of interpretability. We are not giving an overall interpretation of this poem but will keep in mind that interpretations of parts of the poem may or may not agree with an interpretation of the whole. The function of a semantic representation can best be shown by concentrating on the last two stanzas.

2. What is iconic about a semantic representation of the sentence meaning?

A semantic analysis maps grammatical structure to the meaning of the text:

(5) This was a Poet –
It is That
Distills amazing sense
From ordinary Meanings –
And Attar so immense

From the familiar species
That perished by the Door –
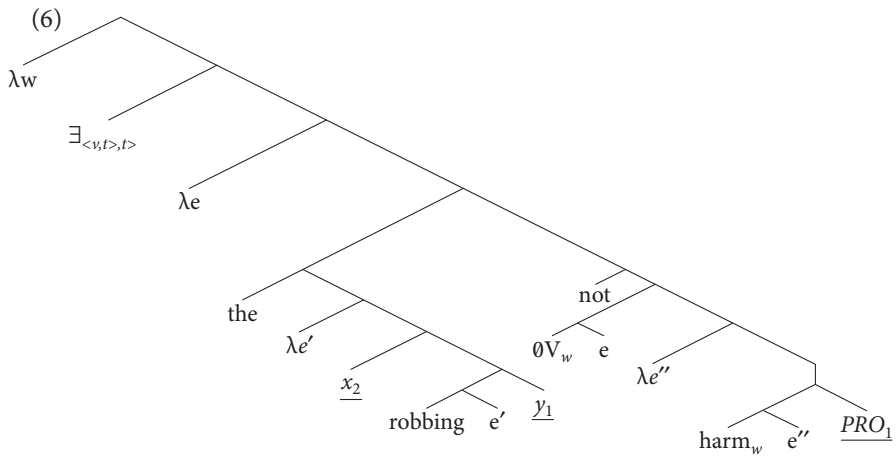We wonder it was not
Ourselves
Arrested it – before –

Of Pictures, the Discloser –
The Poet – it is He –
Entitles *Us* – by Contrast –
To ceaseless Poverty –

Of Portion – so unconscious –
The Robbing – could not harm –
Himself – to Him – a Fortune –
Exterior – to Time –[4]

Line 2 in the fourth stanza in Example (5) is ambiguous: Semantically, we need to specify who the agent of the robbing is and who is being robbed. Furthermore, the transitive verb 'to harm' requires an object that is being harmed. The (simplified) Logical Form (LF) in (6) represents the elliptical structure of the sentence. The LF of a sentence is the representation of its hierarchical structure; it enables us to derive the meaning of it by combining the meaning of its branches in a systematic (structure driven) fashion (cf. Beck & Gergel 2014; Heim & Kratzer 1998):[5]
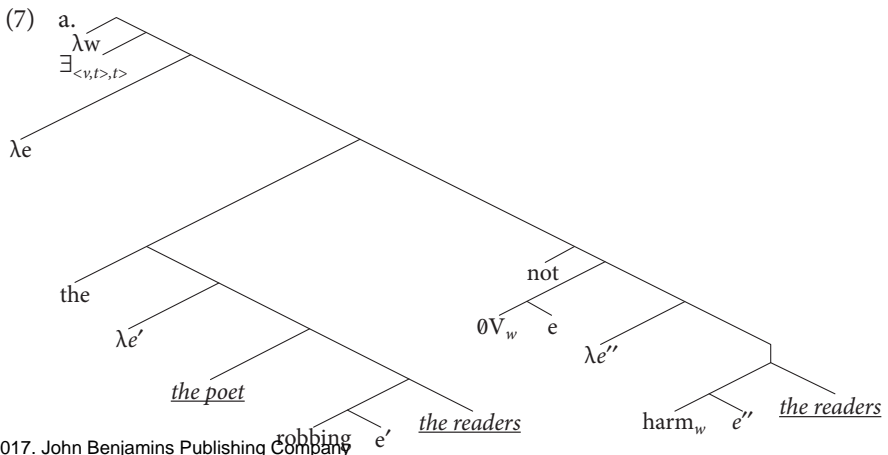
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4. Emphasis added by the authors. The arrangement of the lines follows the manuscript (Dickinson 2013), available at ⟨www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/75099⟩.

5. The LF given in (6) assumes additional structural information about (i) the existential closure of the event-variable and (ii) the semantic content of the Verb Phrase. Regarding the existential closure, this is just a simplified means to bind the event-variable and evade aspectual information. In order to interpret the Verb Phrase, we need the decompositional element of an empty verbal head that yet comes with a function that contains the decompositional CAUSE and BECOME elements (cf. von Stechow 1995; Beck 2005). Both notions are, however, not the main concern of this paper and discussing them would be beyond its scope. Also, for simplicity reasons, we have left out the modal 'could' in the LF.

(6)

λw

$\exists_{\langle v,t\rangle,t}$

λe

the

$\lambda e'$

not

x_2

robbing e'

y_1

$\emptyset V_w$ e

$\lambda e''$

harm_w e''

PRO_1

As we can see here, the text leaves out information that is needed to complete a semantic computation of the sentence meaning. More specifically, the subject of the sentence "the robbing" is underspecified in such a way that agent and patient of the robbing-event are left out. This case can be seen in parallel to other cases discussed in Heim (2001), where she calls them cases of semantic ellipsis: The syntactic structure is complete, but further semantic information is needed to fully interpret the sentence. As there are several possibilities as to how to include the necessary information, this semantically elliptical structure leads to ambiguity within the poem. Before we can arrive at a sentence meaning (in the sense of a proposition, which is a function from worlds to truth-values), we have to find values for the variables x and y in (6). The text itself offers two plausible ways to resolve these points of semantic ellipsis: There are two contextually available antecedents, the poet and the readers, who are equally plausible candidates for the two variables. It is, however, not clear which individual stands for which variable.

Accordingly, we can identify two ways to semantically compute the sentence meaning that are reflected in two distinct (simplified) LFs:

(7)   a.

λw

$\exists_{\langle v,t\rangle,t}$

λe

the

$\lambda e'$

not

the poet

robbing e'

the readers

$\emptyset V_w$ e

$\lambda e''$

harm_w e''

the readers

b.

λw

$\exists_{<v,t>,t>}$ λe

the not

$\lambda e'$ $\emptyset V_w$ e $\lambda e''$

the readers harm$_w$ e'' the poet
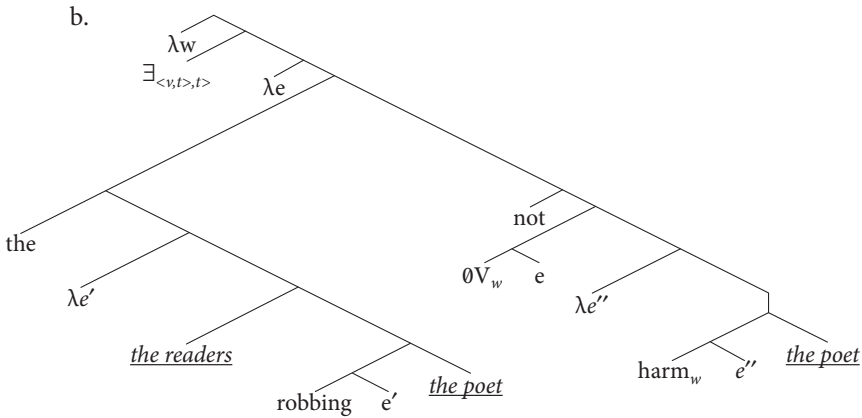
robbing e' the poet

Compositionally interpreting the two Logical Forms results in two distinct propositions (see (8) and (9) below):

(8) $\lambda w:\exists!e'$[the poet robs the readers in e']. $\exists e$ [BECOME$_w$ (e) ($\lambda e''$. Not harmed w (e'') (the_readers))&CAUSE$_w$ ($\iota e'$[the poet robs the readers in e']) (e)]
'The robbing of the readers by the poet does not harm us (the readers).'

(9) $\lambda w: \exists!e'$[the readers rob the poet in e']. $\exists e$ [BECOME$_w$(e) ($\lambda e''$. not harmed w (e'') (the_poet))&CAUSE$_w$ ($\iota e'$[the readers rob the poet in e']) (e)]
'The robbing of the poet by the readers does not harm him (the poet).'

The reference of the variables x and y can semantically be assigned in two ways, depending on which individual available in the text, either the poet or the reader, is mapped to which variable. Generally, this means that the way we resolve the elliptical structure of the sentence makes a difference regarding the overall meaning of the sentence. From the point of view of semantics, the mapping of a Logical Form to the meaning of a sentence (represented as a proposition) is rather trivial. However, in our ambiguous example, the question arises which status the two readings in (8) and (9) have with respect to the overall sentence meaning. We argue that both readings coexist, a notion that is specific to fictional discourse[6] and, as a rule, not applicable in everyday discourse.[7] If we assume the poem to be an instance of cooperative communication, the ambiguity created by the underspecified NP element has to be intentional and thus, being maximally informative means to include both readings in the interpretation of the poem. Accordingly, instead of deciding in favour of one interpretation, the two LFs together form the

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6. The poem is regarded as fictional in the sense outlined by Bauer and Beck (2014). Such texts do not claim to make any assertions about reality (and are not dependent on it for their meaning) but are still relevant to real people.

7. It is common practice in linguistics to assume that any ambiguity in everyday discourse has to be resolved – ignoring for now that there are specific instances of everyday discourse that exploit ambiguity as well, e.g. wordplay or joke-telling.

text meaning, showing that the overall meaning of the sentence consists of two readings that stand in a relationship to each other. To that effect, in order to identify the overall meaning of the sentence, we have to specify the relationship between the two propositions. This is an additional interpretive expense necessitated by the specific pragmatic nature of the poem as fictional discourse.

Logically, there are several possibilities to combine two propositions. Among those possibilities, the two most common operations are disjunction and conjunction (cf. Gamut 1991). The disjunction is the union of the two propositions, saying that either one of them can be true. The conjunction is the intersection of the two propositions, saying that both have to be true at the same time. Depending both on the embedding context of the poem and on the semantic contribution of the propositions, we can determine if they are combined via disjunction or conjunction. Only in cases where a conjunction of the readings would lead to a contradiction do we have to combine the readings via disjunction. Since this is a rescue-strategy and a pragmatic reinterpretation mechanism saving the text from being uninterpretable or even false, it has to be given up as soon as the context allows for a conjunction.

The two propositions in (8) and (9) can be combined via conjunction. That means that both propositions are true at the same time: simultaneously, it is the case that the poet robs the readers and the readers rob the poet. Accordingly, the relation between poet and readers is reciprocal: concurrently, poet and readers are robbed without being harmed. A disjunction of the readings, in turn, would not result in reciprocity; rather, the meaning would be roughly the following:

(10)   'It is the case that either the poet robs the readers without harming them, or it is the case that the readers rob the poet without harming him.'

Here, instead of thinking about what consequences a reciprocal relationship of poet and readers can have, the question would rather be what the individual consequences would be for either choice. The immediate context of the poem, where the relationship between the readers and the poet is already described as being reciprocal, such that both parties gain and lose something in their interaction, confirms the conjunction as the most plausible choice to combine both readings.

Generally, through the syntactic and semantic underspecification of the poem, we are called upon to find possible readings of the elliptical structures of the text. The example discussed here is just one of those cases where several interpretations interact. In order to find a consistent meaning of the poem as a whole, all instances of ambiguity have to be taken as contributing to several possible readings of the text which then have to be related to each other. Thus, when we come to our example, it is likely that we have already established several possible ways of reading the preceding text, one where the poet does something to the speaker *et al.*, and one

where speaker *et al.* do something to the poet. Accordingly, the interpretations of the preceding lines of the poem strengthen a conjunctive reading of our example.

A point where the reciprocity and agency of both poet and readers is stressed can be found in Lines 3 and 4 of the third stanza: "Entitles Us – by Contrast – / To ceaseless Poverty –". The combination of "entitle" with "poverty" has to be reinterpreted (ignoring for now that the line could be read ironically, as well), as the lexical information of both the verb and its argument contradict each other: poverty is nothing that someone is entitled to. Here again, there are two ways of reinterpretation: either we reinterpret "entitle" such that it fits the argument, or we reinterpret "poverty" as referring to a positive quality that is worthy of entitlement. Both options can be seen below:

(11) a. 'The Poet condemns us, in contrast to himself, to poverty (consisting in the inability to disclose pictures).'
       b. 'The Poet entitles us, in contrast to himself, to keeping pictures undisclosed.'

In the one case, (11a), the readers are left poor by the poet, whereas in the other case, (11b), the poet is left poor by entitling the readers to something valuable. Analogous to the robbing-case, we will combine both options via conjunction, which already points towards a reciprocal relationship between readers and poet.

In the immediate context of "the robbing", the ambiguity of "could" (interpreted as past tense and as conditional) in line 2 of stanza four further confirms the combination via conjunction. "Could" here touches upon an ambiguity of the temporal reference of the sentence: either, past tense takes scope over the modal "could", or we can assume the sentence to be in present tense and "could" contributing a counterfactual meaning component, which results in roughly the following two readings. We will see that both readings of "could" support the conjunction of the two robbing-readings:

(12) 'It is not the case that at some time before the reference time, there was a world accessible from the evaluation world where a robbing-event lead to a harming event.'

(13) 'It is not the case that there is a world accessible from the actual world where a robbing-event (will ever) lead to a harming event.'

We will term the first reading the past-reading and the second one the modal reading.

Firstly, the past-reading of "could" agrees with earlier time references: the past tense at the beginning of the poem ("This was a poet") seems to make a reading where the poet is the robber more plausible. The poet did something (already) in the past, whereas we learn that the group including the speaker did not do something in the past ("We wonder it was not / Ourselves / Arrested it – before"; ll. 3–5

of stanza two). But ll. 7–8 are also underspecified and thus lead to two options of interpreting "before", meaning either "We wonder we did not arrest it before the poet did it" or "We wonder we did not arrest it earlier". The past-reading of "could" thus agrees with the conjunctive reading of our example.

Secondly, the modal reading of "could" seems to make it more likely that the readers are the robbers as: even if there were a (possible) robbing by the speaker *et al.*, this could not harm (themselves; the poet). In this reading, the temporal reference is nearly irrelevant. It is only important that a possible robbing would not be able to be harmful. Here, the robbing event is a possibility. Again, it only *seems* as if this reading privileges one agent (in this case, "us"). Even though the poet's activity is associated with the past, it is also covered by the modal reading of "could". This is suggested both by the timelessness claimed for the poet in the last line ("Exterior – to Time –"), as well as the fact that he still does something in the present ("Entitles Us", l. 3 of stanza three) and could possibly do further things. Accordingly, the two readings of "Robbing" are not attached to different points of time. Dickinson, by alluding to the fact that fictional discourse, of which poetry is a part, is not dependent on time in the real world, implicitly reflects on the fact that a conjunction of alternative readings is possible.

Thus, both readings of "could" equally go together with an active poet and an active group of readers – furthering the conjunction of the two readings of "the robbing", as the conjunction is stable across other, immediately surrounding, elements of the text that are equally ambiguous. Taking the ambiguity between a robbing by poet and a robbing by the speaker and others to be conjunctive, this again will have to be checked against the interpretation of other elements of the poem.

We can capture the overall meaning of our present example (ignoring the semantic contribution of *could* for the sake of simplicity) in the following formal way:

(14) $\lambda w : \exists ! e'[\text{the poet robs the readers in } e']. \exists e[\text{BECOME}_w (e) (\lambda e''. \text{Not harmed}_w (e'') (\text{the\_readers})) \& \text{CAUSE}_w (\iota e'[\text{the poet robs the readers in } e']) (e)] \& \lambda w : \exists ! e'[\text{the readers rob the poet in } e']. \exists e[\text{BECOME}_w (e) (\lambda e''. \text{not harmed}_w (e'') (\text{the\_poet})) \& \text{CAUSE}_w (\iota e'[\text{the readers rob the poet in } e']) (e)]$

'It is (simultaneously) the case that the poet robs the readers without harming them and that the readers rob the poet without harming him.'

The decisive information for the overall interpretation of the sentence is the nature of the relationship between the two readings. Semantics gives us a tool to specify this relation in saying that it is a conjunction in agreement with the other elements present in the poem. The conjunction of the two propositions is thus mapped to the overall text meaning. This mapping is an iconic diagram offered by the semantic analysis of the text.

3. Alternative (allegorical) interpretations

We suggest that, at this point, we briefly consider interpretations of Dickinson's poem that have been offered and compare them to the explanation of the text meaning just offered. It has been claimed by Northrop Frye in his influential book *The Anatomy of Criticism* that "all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of poetic imagery" (1957: 89). If we regard allegory, in the definition of classical rhetoric, as extended metaphor (Quintilian 1966: 9.2.46), we see a link to the iconicity of interpretation. Metaphor can be seen as iconic in various ways; Munat, for example, sees "metaphorical chains" as "constructing a diagrammatic relationship between the conceptual domain and linguistic expression" (2005: 400). Using Frye's terms, there is a relation between the ideas and the linguistic expressions (the "structure of poetic imagery") in the text; the chain of ideas can be called an iconic diagram. On a more literal level, interpretations are frequently paraphrases of the text, which are also, in a very simple way, diagrams of the text (but not of the meaning), for the relation between the elements of the paraphrase should be equivalent to the relation between the elements of the text.

We have selected two interpretations for the example "This was a Poet –" found in the critical literature on Emily Dickinson. They do not refer to exactly the same sentence that we concentrated on before but will show what this kind of interpretation is doing. The first one is the following:

(15)   "[The poet] creates pictures of immortality, and when these rich visions are disclosed to us in the form of images and metaphors our daily world fades by contrast into ceaseless poverty".   (Kher 1974: 118)

The second one presents an ambivalent attitude to the Poet of the poem:

(16)   "So sufficient is [the Poet] unto himself, he would scarcely notice should he be robbed. […] By condemning us 'by Contrast – / To ceaseless Poverty –,' this Poet, far from enhancing his readers, underscores their inadequacy".   (Leiter 2007: 208)

Both interpretations are mixtures of paraphrase (and quotation) and metaphorical replacement. The metaphors are striking because they are contradictory: in the first interpretation, the ceaseless poverty is the fading of "our daily world" as a result of the poet's "rich visions"; in the second interpretation, our "ceaseless Poverty" is the result of our being condemned to it by the poet. The question is whether these partly metaphorical paraphrases are iconic diagrams of the text. Each of them contains an element of causation. In the first case, our world appears poor due to the rich visions of the Poet. In the second case, we are poor

because the Poet condemns us to this state. We do not think that the relationship between the elements of the interpretation is equivalent to the relation between the elements of the text. It is difficult to see the same kind of causation in the lines of the poem "The Poet – it is He – / Entitles Us – by Contrast – / To ceaseless Poverty –". This contrast between what the text says and the allegorical interpretations shows, furthermore, that there is no relation of similarity, which is the prerequisite of iconicity, unless one interprets "Entitles" ironically and represents it by "Condemns" – but then you should say so.

Taking into account our semantic analysis of just one line of the poem, we can see that both allegorical interpretations miss out on a relevant complexity the poem offers, namely the mutual nature of the relation between poet and reader which is revealed through the conjunction of the two interpretative possibilities we saw earlier, and the complex interaction of these readings with the interpretation of the preceding and following ambiguities and ellipses. Thus, even an incomplete semantic analysis that concentrates on one line of the poem can reveal the inadequacy of the other interpretations.

This inadequacy of the other interpretations also guides us towards the last part of this paper: not only does a semantic analysis of a text provide an iconic diagram that is adequate as an interpretation, but it also guarantees that all complex aspects of the text are taken up by the interpretation.

4. Semantic representation as a touchstone of any other "deep" analysis

Every interpretation that goes beyond the semantic level of the text has to be built up in accordance with the possibilities illustrated in the conjunction of the two propositions as shown in (8) and (9). Why is this the case? Because it is a poem, a fictional text, the propositions have to be combined via disjunction or conjunction. This is due to two specific facts about lyrical texts. Firstly, they lack sufficient contextual information that may guide the reader to disambiguating them. The only contextual information available is the text itself. Secondly, the poem is nevertheless seen as an instance of cooperative communication. Accordingly, cases of underspecification and ambiguity have to be regarded as intentionally included in the text. Maximal informativity on the ground of the cooperative principle thus has to include all readings these structures make possible. Linguistic theory should be extended to account for cases as we find here, where the context is restricted and where maximal informativity consists in including all readings. In a non-fictional, non-poetic text belonging to everyday communication one would, as a rule, regard the co-existence of the two propositions as an accident or mistake and cancel out one of the propositions. This is, interestingly, what the interpretations have done

which we have just cited (in (15) and (16)). The literary interpretations have, curiously enough, failed to take the text seriously as a literary product. The choice of a conjunctive rather than disjunctive reading is strengthened by the immediate context of the sentence. What we have called textual element B (or C) in the introduction is, e.g., the preceding textual element "Entitles Us – by Contrast – / To ceaseless poverty", where we have found a similar pattern of reciprocity.

Thus, the semantic interpretation of this element can illustrate with the help of the relationship between the two LFs how the interpretation of the text comes about. The iconic diagram resulting from the semantic analysis consists in the fact that the relation between textual elements A and B (and C) is adequately represented by the relationship between A′ in conjunction with A″ and B′ (and C′). This iconic diagram has to be seen as a starting point for further in-depth interpretations which have to have this analysis at their core. Coming back to our example, we see that the key element of further interpretations should be the mutuality between poet and readers: Both take something away from each other. Any interpretation that shifts the relation between poet and readers towards an imbalanced or one-sided one is not iconic of the textual structure.

In that way, the concentration on the linguistic structure should not be seen as a restriction to interpretation, but rather as guidance towards finding out all other relevant and complex structures that should be taken into account in an interpretation. The semantic analysis offers a structure whose relation to its textual interpretation is iconic and can thus serve as a measure to test the adequacy of interpretations.

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