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UNDERSTANDING RICOEUR ON METAPHOR

by

STEPHANIE JAN MACAULAY, B.A.

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts**

Department of Philosophy

Carleton University

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May 10, 1996

Abstract

In this essay, I focus on two broad themes to bring out the issues that underlie Ricoeur's theory of language and his theory of metaphorical process: the semantic resources of language and the cognitivity of language. The important theme that emerges in the discussion is "relation": predication as a relation, proportionality as a relation, and structural homology as a relation. For Ricoeur, the important question about metaphor is its ability to create new meaning. I attempt to show how Ricoeur's reflection on language leads to his theory of productive imagination and "metaphorical process". For Ricoeur, the productive imagination provides the mechanisms for explaining creativity and innovation in our use of language; the metaphorical process describes how we come to assimilate new predicates.

For My Dah

*I would like to thank Stan Clarke, John Leyden, and Jim Thompson
for their help and support.*

Abbreviations for Ricoeur's works

BH	"Biblical Hermeneutics"
CL	"The Creativity of Language"
CP	"Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics"
EH	"Existence and Hermeneutics"
FD	"Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation"
IT	<i>Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning</i>
MC	"Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics"
MP	"The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling"
MT	"Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text"
OI	"On Interpretation"
PD	"Problem of Double Meaning"
PTL	"Phenomenology and Theory of Literature"
QS	"The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology"
RM	<i>The Rule of Metaphor</i>
RPH	"Rhetoric-Poetics-Hermeneutics"
SR	"Sartre and Ryle on the Imagination"
SWE	"Structure, Word, Event"
WPM	"Word, Polysemy, Metaphor: Creativity in Language"
WT	"What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding"

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Introduction

... It is this or that
And it is not.
By metaphor you paint
A thing.

Poem Written at Morning, Wallace Stevens

In this essay I explore Paul Ricoeur's contribution to understanding metaphor. A great deal has been written on the subject of metaphor in a largely "inconclusive debate between the appreciators and depreciators of metaphor."¹ However, in whatever guise the particular question about metaphor takes in the philosophical literature, the general problem of metaphor concerns meaning:

Does a metaphorical statement possess, in addition to its literal meaning (with respect to which the statement will be, typically, absurd or false or pointless), another (metaphorical) meaning wherein resides its capacity to be true as well as to provide the twist of insight we derive from some good metaphors?²

Ricoeur exhaustively explores the philosophical literature on metaphor, examines questions not strictly defined by the "general problem of metaphor" as it is found in the philosophical literature, and synthesizes what he finds useful.³ Ricoeur's reflection on language and semantic innovation (as exemplified by the case of metaphor) challenges many of the presuppositions that are found in the philosophical literature: for example, the

1. Black 1990: 48

2. Cohen: 4

3. As David Klemm remarks in an introductory essay to "What Is Text?", Ricoeur's "unifying focus" in these multidisciplinary investigations is the question about what it means to be human. Such questions of "philosophical anthropology" lead Ricoeur beyond the strict confines of orthodoxy, whether in phenomenological or hermeneutical discussions, so that he often describes his activities as "bricolage"—an eclectic "appropriation" of concepts in an effort to integrate them in new, more fruitful philosophical discussions.

inheritances from the rhetorical tradition, the question of a word-to-world fit, and the designation of metaphor as a trope (device) of comparison.

The erudition of Ricoeur's works makes it difficult to assess Ricoeur's arguments easily. Incorporating the breadth of Ricoeur's arguments with their minutiae is also beyond the scope of one paper. However, I have shortened the journey through Ricoeur's works by focusing on two broad themes that bring out the key issues that underlie Ricoeur's theory of language and his theory of metaphorical process: the semantic resources of language and the cognitivity of language.

Ricoeur draws heavily on the work of structural linguistics to set up the problem of metaphor. Ricoeur identifies an issue that relates to the boundary that is usually drawn between semantics and semiotics and again between semantics and pragmatics. Ricoeur argues that there are essential differences between the semiotic analysis of the lexicon, the phonological analysis of speech sounds and the investigation of the semantic meaning of discourse. Ricoeur suggests that if a description of language involves a distinction between a speaker and a hearer and the subject matter of a conversation, then each of these distinctions requires a different explanatory procedure (RM 68).⁴ For example, structuralist accounts of language tend not to include the "dynamic" aspect of language; that is, language as it is actually used by a speaker. Pragmatic accounts, on the other hand, while not denying the dynamic aspect of language tend to define the "uses" of language as "extralinguistic" and beyond the scope of a semantic inquiry.

4. This strategy of using different analytic tools offers a challenge to viewpoints like Richard Rorty's, in which he suggests that "were we not so concerned to raise the rest of discourse to the level of science, we would not be so concerned to broaden our use of terms ... so as to make them relevant to metaphor" (Rorty 1987; 284).

In the first chapter, “The semantic resources of language,” I give the background to Ricoeur’s theory of language, which is based on the tenets of structural linguistics. The background discussions are important to an informed assessment of Ricoeur’s arguments. For example, Ricoeur agrees with Donald Davidson that metaphor does not use any “special” semantic resources—but to very different effect. Without this background on phonemic analysis, it will be difficult to follow the progression in Ricoeur’s theory of language from structural linguistics to the productive linguistic imagination, as exemplified by the “metaphorical process.”

As will become clearer in the discussion below, if we follow Ricoeur’s “detour” through structural linguistics (semiotics) and phonemic analysis (phonology), we find that linguistic “acts” reach beyond the methodological constraints of the structuralist paradigm. Ricoeur shows how it is only with an “act of predication” that a sentence is formed and how this act of predication requires a “speaker.” For Ricoeur, this “speaker” calls into question several structuralist claims about semantic meaning.

In the second chapter, “The cognitivity of language,” I explore the question of the cognitivity of metaphor. On Davidson’s account, only literal language is cognitive. However, if we have shown in the first chapter that a certain amount of cognitivity inheres in the speech sounds themselves as uttered by a speaker, then it would seem to follow (given that both metaphor and the ordinary depend on the same linguistic resources) that a certain amount of cognitivity inheres in the speech sounds that are identified in metaphor also—apart from questions about whether or not we understand the metaphor in its most “literal” interpretation. The main inquiry in this chapter, however, is what we mean by

“cognitivity.” Even if we cannot show that metaphor possesses a cognitive content, can we show what the cognitive content of a literal statement would be?

In this chapter I also explore the themes of conceptual generalization, proportional relationship and polysemy (‘the property of words to have more than one meaning’). An important theme for Ricoeur is the notion of first-order and second-order discourses, each of which uses strategies that attempt to enhance the polysemy (poetic discourse), restrict the polysemy (ordinary discourse) or eliminate the polysemy (scientific discourse) that is inherent in natural languages.

In the final chapter, “Metaphor as process,” I attempt to show how Ricoeur’s reflection on language leads to the development of his theory of productive imagination as it pertains to linguistics. From the discovery of the invariant nature of the phonological basis of natural language, Ricoeur assumes that a cognitive function attaches to all uses of language and that the important question about metaphor lies elsewhere, in what he calls the “metaphorical process.”

For Ricoeur, the important question about metaphor is its ability to create new meaning. Metaphor exemplifies, for Ricoeur, the process of semantic innovation or creativity in language—an aspect of language that is not widely discussed in the philosophical literature. Ricoeur sees the notion of the productive imagination as yielding the mechanisms for explaining this innovation and creativity in language. For Ricoeur, the “metaphorical process” entails how we assimilate new predicates, how we “make” these new predicates “semantically congruent” and how we come to understand what the metaphor “refers to.”

In the discussion that follows, the most important theme I identify for Ricoeur is that *of relation*: predication as a relation; proportionality as a relation; and homologous structures as a relation. There are, in addition, two crucial points to keep in mind throughout the discussion of Ricoeur's theory of language and of metaphor in particular: that 'predicate' is a term that can designate either a property *or* a relation; and that the copula 'be' can indicate either an objective *or* a relational sense.

The semantic resources of language

Words are not forms of a single word.
In the sum of the parts, there are only parts.
The world must be measured by eye.

On the Road Home, Wallace Stevens

Let us take Davidson's statement that metaphor "uses no semantic resources beyond the resources on which the ordinary depends"⁵ as our starting point. Ricoeur agrees with Davidson that producing a metaphor does not require anything more than the ordinary semantic resources of language; however, Ricoeur develops this notion to much different effect than does Davidson. For Davidson, metaphor is an extralinguistic or pragmatic concern because metaphor "belongs exclusively to the domain of use."⁶ In contrast, Ricoeur argues that the commonly held "extralinguistic" component of metaphor must be accounted for *within* a semantic theory of language. Ricoeur disagrees not so much with Davidson's outline of the problem of metaphor but with the boundary that Davidson draws between semantics and pragmatics; that is, what counts as semantic content in Davidson's analysis. For Ricoeur it is essential that, before we ask about the meaning or the cognitivity of metaphor, we must first define what these "semantic resources" are and what they entail.

⁵ Davidson 1978: 29

⁶ Davidson 1978: 31

The use of the term 'semantics' poses a difficulty for our discussion. Ricoeur espouses a view of semantics that addresses the question of meaning as it is expressed in the actual use of a language. To this end, Ricoeur incorporates the Saussurean distinction between *langue* and *parole* to investigate, what is for Ricoeur, the inseparably dual nature of language—that of the virtual, synchronic language system and the diachronic manifestation of that language system in an actual utterance (or use of language). For Ricoeur, a philosophy of language must account for the speaker: *someone* must speak, or actualize the language system. This necessity, as Ricoeur sees it, is not recognized by structuralist analyses that employ achronic strategies to investigate semantics. All question of the speaker in structural linguistics, for example, is beside the point: the analysis is restricted to the immanent, intra-relationship of linguistic elements.

Ricoeur acknowledges that structuralism offers "an exact scientific description of the codes and paradigms of language" (CL 465); however, as structuralism fails to account for the "specifically *human* production" in the paradigm case of the creation of new meaning in language, Ricoeur sees his philosophical task as the need "to show how human language is *inventive* despite the objective limits and codes which govern it" (CL 465). Structural linguistics disregards the subjective, phenomenological model of language and opts, instead, for a reductive analysis of language *qua* system. Ricoeur characterizes this project as the reduction of the substantive content of language (phonetic and semantic) to its strictly formal aspects. Ricoeur suggests that language,

relieved of its fixed contents, becomes a system of signs defined by their differences alone; in such a system there is ... only values, that is, relative, negative, and oppositional dimension (QS 250).

Structural linguistics (semiotics), in effect, reduces the explanation of language to an explanation of intralinguistic relationships within the system of signs; the language system becomes self-sufficient, "all its differences are immanent in it, and it is a system which precedes the speaking subject" (QS 251). Structural linguistics, then, in what Ricoeur calls its "binarist zeal,"⁷ requires adjudication because its viewpoint excludes the "triangular relationship among" a speaker, an interlocutor and the context of the dialogical situation (PTL 442).

Why is this important? In what way should it matter *how* words get uttered if meaning simply attaches to the words. As will become clearer in the discussion below, if we follow Ricoeur's "detour" through structural linguistics, we find that accounting for the creation of new meaning (what Ricoeur calls "semantic innovation") reaches beyond the methodology of structuralism. Although Ricoeur concedes that the reductive approach to language is successful and useful, it must take as *given* the creation of the utterance it reductively analyzes—there is no explanatory or descriptive analogue for the "constructive" element to complement the reductive model. Ricoeur argues that it is not enough to posit the constructive power of language to produce an utterance—*someone* must do the constructing. Ricoeur's general premise is that if a theoretical description of language involves a distinction between a speaker and a hearer and the context of a conversation, then each of these distinctions requires a different explanatory procedure (RM 68). (This question of what counts as semantics will be the crux of Ricoeur's

7. Greimas and Courtes, in *Semiotics and Language; An Analytical Dictionary*, point out that in linguistics, "a structure is said to be binary when it is defined as a relation between two terms."

challenge to Davidson, for Davidson excludes “context” from the realm of semantics:

“Literal meaning and literal truth conditions can be assigned to words and sentences apart from particular contexts of use. This is why adverting to them has genuine explanatory power.”⁸⁾

How can Ricoeur counter the claims of structuralism in favour of a “dialogical rationality” when Ricoeur himself notes that “the whole process of the objectification of language, of human action, and of symbolic systems makes procedures of explanation possible”?⁹⁾ To follow Ricoeur’s arguments we must first digress through a discussion of phonemic analysis, for it is on the basis of phonology that Ricoeur grounds the “objectivity” of the meaning of metaphor. Phonology is the science that studies the linguistic sounds we make, and Ricoeur borrows extensively from Roman Jakobson’s work on structural linguistics to ground his tensional theory of metaphor. As will be shown in the discussion below, “the phoneme is not a concrete sound ... [or] a ‘substance’ but a ‘form’, an interplay of relations” (WT 154–155). One of the main contentions of Jakobson’s studies is the invariance of the phoneme. This is an important precept, for Ricoeur uses the *positional* relation holding between phonemes as the foundational guarantee for the meaning of metaphor.

8. Davidson 1978: 31

9. Ricoeur, “Debate with Hans-Georg Gadamer,” 1991: 232

The phonemic system

For Jakobson, the focus of linguistic analysis is the word.¹⁰ The procedure of linguistic analysis is first to break down sentences or “complex speech units” into their “ultimate constituents endowed with proper meaning.” This ultimate *constituent* is called a morpheme.¹¹ Morphemes are the “minutest semantic vehicles” that carry meaning; for example, affixes like *ante-*, *in-*, *a-*, *-ing*, and *-s*. Morphemes, as the smallest linguistic constituents endowed with proper meaning, can be combined into more complex meaningful units—a word or part of a word. Morphemes can also be “dissolved into their ultimate components”—components that allow morphemes to be differentiated from each other.¹² Jakobson calls these ultimate *components* “distinctive features.”

Whenever we speak—for example, in making a *t* sound—the speaker selects from among distinctive features; the speaker’s selection ultimately distinguishes such a *t* sound from, say, an *l* sound. Sounds are made by a change in the shape of the mouth, by the placement of the tongue, by the force of the breath, by the use of the diaphragm and so on. According to Jakobson,

each of the distinctive features involves a choice between two terms of an

10. “In a normal language pattern, the word is at the same time both a constituent part of a superimposed context, the sentence, and itself a context superimposed on ever smaller constituents, morphemes” (Jakobson 1956: 72–73).

11. Greimas and Courtes, in *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*, define a “constituent” in linguistics as “any unit—from the morpheme to the syntagma—which participates in a larger construction.” Ricoeur insists that sentences do not participate in “larger constructions”; two sentences, even if they bear a “meaning relation” to one another, do not bear a semiotic or binary relation to one another.

12. Jakobson and Halle: 3

opposition that displays a specific differential property, diverging from the properties of all other oppositions.¹³

For linguists, there are twelve oppositions inherent in all the natural languages of the world: vocalic/non-vocalic, consonantal/non-consonantal, tense/lax, compact/diffuse, voiced/voiceless, nasalized/non-nasalized, discontinuous/continuant, strident/mellow, checked/unchecked (the *sonority* features); grave/acute, flat/plain, sharp/plain (the *tonality* features).¹⁴

We learn to make “sound-producing movements” as we acquire language skills. By making these movements a speaker presents the distinctive features that a hearer then extracts from the produced sound waves. Several distinctive features may have to be selected to produce one, distinct speech sound: this “bundle” of the selected distinctive features is called a *phoneme*. Not all of the twelve distinctive features mentioned above will be used in every language, but Jakobson contends that these “inherent distinctive features ... underlie ... the entire lexical and morphological stock” of all natural languages.¹⁵

In “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances,” Jakobson discusses an example from *Alice in Wonderland* that illustrates the functioning of language at the phonemic level. Jakobson points out that in the following utterance “the feline addressee attempts to recapture a linguistic choice made by the addresser”:

13. Jakobson and Halle: 3

14. Jakobson and Halle: 30–32

15. Jakobson and Halle: 28

“Did you say pig or fig?” said the Cat.

“I said pig,” replied Alice.

Both Alice and the Cat use the common code English, but for the Cat to know what Alice said it must try to ascertain which choices Alice made, which “distinctive features” she rejected and which she selected. What does this mean? Jakobson explains that

Alice had used the distinctive feature “stop vs. continuant” ... and in the same act of speech she combined this solution with certain other simultaneous features ... Thus all these attributes have been combined into a bundle of distinctive features ... The phoneme /p/ was then followed by the phonemes /i/ and /g/, themselves bundles of simultaneously produced distinctive features.¹⁶

For the Cat to understand what Alice said, it must “decode” what it hears; that is, the Cat must “pick out” and identify each “bundle” of choices Alice made. However, the Cat could not correctly pick out the distinctive features in the phonemic sequence that Alice uttered, either because the Cat wasn’t paying attention or because Alice mumbled. In any case, the Cat had to ask for clarification: “Did you say *pig* or *fig*?” Although Jakobson warns that other considerations may affect the perception of the message encoded in the speech sounds, language users generally learn to respond to and differentiate between the distinctive features.¹⁷

16. Jakobson 1956: 58–59

17. Jakobson and Halle: 8

There is a fundamental distinction between the phonetic versus the phonemic description of words. *Phonetic* differences appear at the level of the written sign of the word—for example, the phonetic difference between the *p* sound in ‘pin’ and the *p* sound in ‘spin’. (Phonetics, as opposed to phonemics, uses only the symbols of an ordinary alphabet, which have a single value, to indicate speech sounds.) However, it is the opposition between *significant* sounds that allows a hearer to differentiate meaning, and not all phonetic sounds turn out to be significant sounds. As Terence Hawkes explains in his commentary *Structuralism and Semiotics*,

what makes any sign item “meaningful” is not its own particular individual quality, but the *difference* between this quality and that of other sounds. In fact, the differences are systematized into “oppositions” which are linked in crucial relationships. Thus, in English, the established *difference* between the initial sound of *tin* and the initial sound of *kin* is what enables a different “meaning” to be given to each word.¹⁸

Hawkes also points out that not all sounds that are produced when a speaker uses a language are significant sounds:

only a relatively small proportion of the differences that actually occur between sounds are *recognized* as different for the purpose of forming words and creating meaning.¹⁹

Take the allophone, for example. An allophone is

18. Hawkes, 1977: 22

19. Hawkes, 1977: 23

one of the two or more articulatorily and acoustically different forms of the same phoneme—the aspirated *p* of *pin* and the nonaspirated *p* of *spin* are allophones of the phoneme *p*.²⁰

However, even if there is a change on the distinctive features plane in the case of allophones (or contextual variants as Jakobson calls them), what is important is that English language users do not necessarily “hear” a significant sound that will differentiate or determine meaning. Although the *p* sound is *phonetically* differentiated in ‘pin’ and ‘spin’, what determines the sense or meaning in ‘pin’ and ‘spin’ is not the allophone of the phoneme /p/ but the phoneme /s/—that is, the phoneme change from an initial /p/ to an initial /s/ in the phoneme sequence. As Hawkes explains, sounds that are not recognized as significant, even if they are *phonetically* different, are simply called the same “in the sense that they are never used to distribute ‘meaning’ between words.”²¹

The distinctive features selected and bundled by the speaker are the *components* of the phoneme. As language users, we are not free to make up meaningful sounds:

in the combination of distinctive features into phonemes, the freedom of the individual speaker is zero; the code has already established all the possibilities which may be utilized in the given language.²²

Alice could not *invent* a distinctive feature or bundles of distinctive features (like the phoneme /p/ or /t/) or a phonemic sequence (like /p/ /i/ /g/ or /t/ /i/ /g/); nor could she use a phoneme incorrectly in a context.²³ The Cat did not ask Alice whether she said /x/ /i/ /g/

20. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1976.

21. Hawkes, 1977: 23

22. Jakobson 1956: 60

23. Jakobson 1956: 58–59

or /i/ /i/ /g/ because these are unacceptable substitutions in the phoneme sequence.²⁴ This is not to suggest that such phonemic substitutions are impossible in any other codes, but only that they are currently proscribed by the *English* code. However, while the language code may arbitrarily prohibit certain phoneme sequences, the phoneme is necessarily limited by its componential nature. These are the sorts of aural and acoustical clues we differentiate when we recognize 'pig' rather than 'fig'—*that* we differentiate must remain an unarguable given.

We do not self-consciously choose the either-or of each distinctive feature; we just speak. Simply in making the sound *p* in 'pig', a sound we have learned to make, we have already made the necessary componential choices at the phonemic level. We would also make the necessary componential choices were we to say 'pop'. We must reiterate, however, that the feature bundles in the phoneme sequence /p/ /i/ /p/ would not entail the same choices as the feature bundles in the phoneme sequence /p/ /o/ /p/.

At the feature level, phoneme patterns are always identical: the "recognition and definition of an inherent feature [of a phoneme] is based only on the choice between two alternatives admissible in the same position within a sequence."²⁵ Even though inherent features "co-exist in the code as two terms of opposition," only one of a contrasting pair can appear in the message. A "speech participant learns primarily to respond to the distinctive features" (that is, to those singular phonemic contrasts that appear in the message) in order to differentiate the semantic units in every message. For example, the

24. Jakobson: 58–59

25. Jakobson and Halle: 26

sound patternings of the phonemes /p/ /i/ /p/ will be distinguishable from the sound patternings of the phonemes /p/ /o/ /p/ each time someone utters 'pip' or 'pop'.²⁶

For Jakobson, "phonemic analysis is a study of properties, *invariant under transformations* [my emphasis]."²⁷ This point is important: the phoneme, which is constituted by invariant properties, is a constant. Further, the phoneme sequence of each morpheme (the smallest linguistic constituent endowed with proper meaning) is also constant, for if the phoneme sequence changes so does the morpheme that is differentiated. For example, the phonemic relation /p/ /i/ /p/ is invariant because if this specific relation were changed, it would indicate a dissimilar phonemic relation—say, /p/ /o/ /p/. Remember that distinctive features are, by definition, relational properties "in combination with other concurrent or successive features." So, for the phonemes in the phoneme sequence /p/ /i/ /p/ a different selection of distinctive features has been bundled together than would be the case for the phoneme sequence /p/ /o/ /p/. The relationships between phonemic constants *must* be the same for them to be re-identifiable as the same.

It is this synchronic (unchanging) dimension of the language system that, for the structural linguist, determines sense and ultimately meaning. For structural linguists the concept of the "binary opposition" of the distinctive features becomes a fundamental principle; Jakobson even stipulates that discerning binary oppositions is a child's first

26. As Jakobson says, "when dealing with a sound that in a given language figures in a definite position, under definite stylistic conditions, we are again faced with a class of occurrences and their common denominator, and not with a single, fleeting specimen. Whether studying phonemes or contextual variants (allophones), it is always, as the logician would say, the 'sign-design' and not the 'sign-event' that we define" (Jakobson and Halle: 13)

27. Jakobson and Halle: 13

"logical operation."²⁸ It must be stressed, however, that the phoneme is not in any sense substantive like the *sound* of the letter 'p': "phonemes denote nothing but mere otherness";²⁹ phonemes in themselves do not "mean" anything.

For Jakobson, the "lack of individual denotation sets apart the distinctive features, and their combinations into phonemes, from all other linguistic units."³⁰ As a colleague of Jakobson points out,

while distinctive features signal that two words are different in meaning, they do not signal what the meaning difference is: distinctive features do not (at least in their primary usage) signal meanings, if by "meaning" we mean "information more specific than otherness" or "singleness of reference." And it is in this sense and in this sense only, that distinctive features are "meaningless" and words "meaningful" ...³¹

Ricoeur stresses that the phoneme is *sublexical* and therefore carries no meaning or sense in itself (WT 154–155). It is only with the constitution of phonemes into morphemes (the smallest linguistic units endowed with proper meaning) that a sense is engendered. Even then, the morphemes are synchronic—they will carry a sense but no referential significance beyond their intralinguistic relations: a distinctive feature "denotes that the morpheme to which it pertains is not the same as a morpheme having another feature in the corresponding place."³² In this structuralist model even words (lexemes), traditionally

28. Jakobson and Halle: 60–61, as quoted by Hawkes: "As Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle point out, the discernment of binary opposition is a child's 'first logical operation', and in that operation we see the primary and distinctive intervention of culture into nature" (Hawkes, 1977: 24).

29. Jakobson and Halle: 11

30. Jakobson and Halle: 11

31. Waugh: 257

32. Jakobson and Halle: 11

recognized as carriers of meaning, possess a sense only in a positional, intralinguistic relation with other words (RM 176).

Metaviews

Structuralist analyses do not consider the “situational” aspect of an actual utterance; that is, the relations between the intention of the speaker to say something to someone else, the utterance itself, and what the hearer hears or understands by the utterance. Although phonological analysis can be applied to the vocalized sounds (phonetic matter) of an utterance, it cannot explain what the speaker intends by uttering these sounds nor what the hearer understands the utterance to mean. For this reason Ricoeur argues that structural linguistic analysis is not primary: the analysis must take as given the actualized utterance and it is thereby logically secondary to the speech phenomenon.³³

Ricoeur notes that Ferdinand de Saussure also recognized that a selection and combination of sounds is required to produce speech (*parole*). De Saussure arranged the interrelationship of signifier (speech sounds) and signified (concept) along two axes: a diachronic horizontal axis and a synchronic vertical axis.³⁴ A sign's *syntagmatic*³⁵ or

33. “My thesis...is that explanation is not primary but secondary in relation to understanding. Explanation, conceived as a combinatory system of signs, hence as a semiotics, is built up on the basis of a first-order understanding bearing on discourse as an act that is both indivisible and capable of innovation” (OI 185).

34. Krampen, 64–65: “These terms are organically deducible from one another as a series of oppositions...The most important pair of terms...is the opposition between ‘speech’ (human speaking activity) and ‘language’ or language system (in French, the opposition *parole* vs. *langue*)...Language, the abstract system at the basis of concrete expression, is a sign system. The language signs exist ‘in the head’ of the subject as associations between images of (perceived) speech sounds (not the ‘objective’ sounds!) and concepts of things, for instance (e.g. imaginings, and not ‘objective’ things). The images of speech sounds, the signifying part (signifier

syntactic relation appears as the diachronic (sequential) “unrolling” of meaning in a sentence—to this extent it is also a temporal relation.³⁶ A sign’s *associative* relation appears on the vertical axis as the synchronic (concurrent, simultaneous) relations of the language system. The synchronic language system of the vertical axis, as the repository of the total field of possible meanings, helps to determine meaning on the syntagmatic or horizontal axis, often in relation to what is *absent* in terms of meaning. For example,

part of the meaning of ‘kicked’ derives from the fact that it turns out *not* to be ‘kissed’ or ‘killed’ as the full relationships of the words in the sentence are unrolled.³⁷

It is through this “concurrence of simultaneous entities” and “concatenation of successive entities” that, according to de Saussure, speakers can produce and hearers can understand “complex meaningful sound units.”

Jakobson also uses the concept of two fundamental axes of language, but he redefines them as metonymy (substitution) and metaphor (selection). This redefinition essentially reduces the dynamic aspect of language to two basic features: substitution and selection. Jakobson uses the example of aphasia, a “partial or total loss of speech or understanding of speech, caused by brain damage,”³⁸ to illustrate the two axes of a

signifiant) and the concept, the signified part or meaning (signified *signifié*) form an undivisible [*sic*] unity as do the two sides of a coin or a sheet of paper. It is this unity which is called a sign.”

35. *Webster’s Third International Dictionary* defines syntagm as “a syntactic unit: a word or phrase that has syntactic relation”. Further, “The elements of a syntagm always stand in a mutual relationship of dependence. Every syntagm finds, for its part, a place in a superposed unity. A syntagmatic analysis is then concluded when a unity is no longer divisible into subordinated syntagms” (*Classics of Semiotics*, 255).

36. Krampen: 65

37. Hawkes 1977: 27

38. *The Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 1984 (reprinted 1989).

language system—one axis of language competency concerns the ability to substitute words and the other to select words. For Jakobson,

the most important task in linguistics is to learn how to delimit the levels. ... [I]n all linguistic questions and especially in the case of aphasia, it is important to approach language and its disruption in the framework of a given level, while remembering at the same time ... that the totality and the interrelation between the different parts of the totality have to be taken into account. Here very often linguists commit a dangerous error ... they ... treat one level only from the point of view of another level. In particular, when dealing with aphasia, we must immediately recognize that the phonological level ... cannot be viewed as a simple colony of the grammatical level.³⁹

Ricoeur contends, however, that although Jakobson uses the important concept of levels in language, Jakobson fails to discern the metalinguistic (extrastructural) component in the two-axes approach to language (RM 175).

Perhaps a further explanation here would be helpful. The definition of structuralism incorporates three fundamental notions: “the idea of wholeness,” “the idea of transformation” and “the idea of self-regulation.”⁴⁰ The notion of a structure as a self-contained “whole” refers to its “internal coherence”—no extrastructural elements are imported into the structural field either to justify its implicit presuppositions or to explain the interrelationship between the structure’s elements. Further, the constituent parts of a structure’s internal coherence “have no genuinely independent existence outside the structure in the same form that they have within it.”⁴¹ Any theoretical description of the structure must “be capable of *transformational* procedures, whereby new material is

39 Jakobson 1980: 94–95

40 Hawkes 1977: 16

41 Hawkes, 1977: 16

constantly processed by and through it.”⁴² The structure is not static in the sense that “the laws which govern it act so as to make it not only structured, but *structuring*.”⁴³ Lastly, the structure is “closed” in the sense that

it makes no appeals beyond itself in order to validate its transformational procedures. The transformations act to maintain and underwrite the intrinsic laws which bring them about, and to “seal off” the system from reference to other systems.⁴⁴

Given these structuralist precepts, Ricoeur argues that structuralist projects should be constrained at the point at which further descriptions of an analysis become extrastructural; that is, when an appeal is made beyond the structure to “validate its transformational procedures.”

For Ricoeur, any application to concepts outside the “closed” system being analyzed constitutes an extrastructural component. For example, Jakobson says that the speaker makes choices in selecting the bundle of distinctive features in a phoneme and that changes in a phonemic sequence signal changes in meaning to an interlocutor—this is why Alice could assure the Cat that she said ‘pig’ and not ‘fig’. At the very least, “choice” of phonemic sequences suggests a phenomenon, perhaps a psychological description of what we are capable of as speakers of a language.⁴⁵ As a phenomenon, it is well outside the

42. Hawkes, 1977: 16

43. Hawkes, 1977: 16

44. Hawkes, 1977: 16

45. Jakobson dismisses the dissenting view that the “choice” among componential features of the phoneme might be made arbitrarily. He points out that the methodology of linguistic analysis requires that “any distinctive feature and, consequently, any phoneme treated by the linguist, have its constant correlate at each stage of the speech event and thus be identifiable at any level accessible to observation” (Jakobson and Halle: 13–14). In 1956, Jakobson and Halle were confident enough to declare, “Our present knowledge of the physical and physiological aspects of speech sounds is sufficient to meet this demand. The sameness of a

bounded methodology of phonology—that is, an analysis of how we come to choose the phonemic sequence of the words in one sentence rather than another must appeal to concepts that do not merely describe distributive relations. On this basis, Ricoeur suggests that “the semantics of discourse is not reducible to the semiotics of lexical entities” (RM 66).

One way of describing this would be to suggest that at the level of semiotic analysis what we look at is complete and can be taken apart, examined and explained. Essentially, we can mark out and delimit the code—the virtual building blocks of language. At the level of actual speech, that is, when someone actualizes the linguistic code in an utterance, we have an interlocutionary situation that requires a different analysis: the utterance is fleeting—it is not “complete” or “static” in the way that the entity of a semiotic reduction is. For Ricoeur, an utterance—someone “saying something to someone about something” in discourse—“has a speaker, a world, and a vis-à-vis. These three traits together constitute discourse as an ‘event’ in a threefold sense” (BH 66).

For Ricoeur, Jakobson’s “monism of the sign” fails to account for the discontinuity that arises between the word in “its character of lexical sign” and the sentence in its characterization as being more than the combination of lexical signs (RM 176). That two distinct approaches to language are required is underscored by the notion of self-sufficiency that constrains the structuralist approach: as a commentator points out, each level of language

distinctive feature throughout all its variable implementations is now objectively demonstrable” (Jakobson and Halle: 14).

should be viewed not as aggregates of entities, but as structured wholes in which ... lexical, grammatical, and phonological elements function through their relationships with other elements at that level and must be defined in such terms.⁴⁶

For Ricoeur, any use of a metalanguage in a structuralist analysis characterizes a strategy of interpretation: that is, it is an appeal to explanatory procedures beyond the enclosed limits of the system of signs under study. As A.J. Greimas points out in the essay "Pragmatics and Semiotics. Epistemological Observations," it is precisely at this boundary point of semiotic (structuralist) analysis and other disciplines that the problem of metalinguistic appeal is encountered:

the semiotician who wants to construct a coherent *metalanguage* ... by using rigorously interdefining concepts ... [has] a problem in situating and defining the limits of pragmatics. This problem arises out of the fact that there is a kind of looseness in its procedures and formulations: in them, we find not only formalization of a logical type but also notations in natural languages (e.g. ... English being used as a metalanguage with which to describe Chinese). One wonders whether this looseness has to do with the principles or the appropriateness of the enterprise.⁴⁷

These debates about areas of expertise and "appropriateness of enterprise" continue. However, that we use "metalanguage" to talk about language is shown by studies of language skills acquisition and aphasic disturbances that affect such skills.

According to Jakobson,

the interpretation of one linguistic sign through other, in some respect homogenous signs of the same language, is a metalinguistic operation which also plays an essential role in child language learning. ... Recourse to metalanguage is necessary both for the acquisition of language and for its

46. Robbins 1988: 480

47. Greimas: 91

normal function. The aphasic defect in the “capacity of naming” is properly a loss of metalanguage.⁴⁸

This theme of viewpoint is important. For Ricoeur, at each explanatory or methodological level of analysis, we could say that there is a correlative shift in perspective in that we look toward a different “entity” that needs explaining. As Ricoeur iterates again and again,

semiotics is aware only of intra-linguistic relationships, whereas semantics takes up the relationship between the sign and the things denoted—that is, ultimately, the relationship between language and world (RM 74).

For example, Ricoeur, using a Fregean distinction between sense and reference, suggests that in the case of structuralist linguistics the sense of a sentence is immanent in the structure and the reference of the sentence is to its components. As Ricoeur points out, for semioticians there “is no reference problem in language: signs refer to other signs *within* the same system” (RM 74). However, if we look toward what the sentence attempts to say about some *thing* rather than toward the components of the sentence, then we are looking toward the “extralinguistic reference” of the sentence (OI 182).

For Ricoeur, the problem with the two-axes approaches in linguistics is that all suffer in a similar fashion from an appeal to metalinguistic processes (RM 347). For example, metonymy (one axis of Jakobson’s general process of language) entails substituting a name or an attribute for the “thing” we intend to designate—for example, ‘crown’ for the monarchy. Ricoeur points out that so designating “one element of [our] code by means of equivalent elements within the same code” is a metalinguistic operation,

48. Jakobson 1956: 67

as are “definition, naming, synonymy, circumlocution and paraphrase” (RM 177). The next problem is more profound as it concerns what we presuppose a sentence to be. Given Jakobson’s account, it seems reasonable to question whether our “choires” in selecting the bundle of distinctive features in the phoneme are specifically applicable to the phoneme sequences of individual words or to the phonemic sequences of sentences as a whole. For Ricoeur, this choice of phonemic sequences to signal specific changes in meaning is not coterminous with the mere concatenation of phonemes and their combination into lexical units.

This is the point of contention between Ricoeur and structural linguists. Will we want to say that semantic meaning concerns only the intralinguistic relationships between linguistic components in a sentence? Or will we want to say that semantic meaning concerns the relationship of words to the things denoted?

Apropos this question of the dynamic element in language, Jakobson himself notes three circumstances that will affect phonemic analysis: obliterating certain features or combinations of features by “phonemic ellipsis”; masking features or combinations of features by “abnormal sound production” (whispering, shouting), by the distance the sound must travel or by the perception of the sound by a hearer who may be tired; and the closeness or sameness of sound relations, which may make perception of distinctions difficult—for example, the two stops in ‘pop’ and ‘tot’, which are “high-pitched in opposition to the two labials.”⁴⁹ It seems from these caveats that some communicative interaction must take place for these problems to appear and that this interaction

49. Jakobson and Halle: 14

presupposes at least one speaker. For Ricoeur, this one speaker compromises the insularity of the structuralist enterprise: once there is a speaker actualizing the language system, Ricoeur insists that a new method of analysis is required because any of the above caveats requires an application to concepts that are outside the “closed” system’s analytic resources.

Ricoeur insists that at the point where structural analysis invokes some “meta-principle,” a different methodological approach must be adopted to reflect the dissimilarity in the points of view; that is, the dissimilarities in a perspective that is situated “inside” or “outside” the structuring model. If linguistic entities “are defined by their difference with regard to other units of the same system” only, then by definition it follows that “these entities are not related to extralinguistic realities such as things ... They are purely intralinguistic phenomena” (WPM 66).

Langue or parole?

It is the relation holding between “vocables” that is the key to Ricoeur’s structuralist insight; that is, the “immanent nature of all the relations between signs and within signs” (WPM 67). To produce a phoneme (not yet a meaningful sound), the speaker must (as Jakobson says) “make choices” or “select” among oppositions on the feature plane. However, this process is opaque to the speaker; we do not really know *how* we choose a

bundle of distinctive features that makes a phoneme.⁵⁰ Ricoeur suggests that unidimensional accounts of language like Jakobson's cannot explain the obvious phenomenon that people make verbal noises that, by convention, count as being meaningful. Ricoeur contends that structuralist accounts tend to reduce the phenomenon of language to a study of the structural relations of *langue*, which excludes *parole*.

De Saussure's work on signs, especially his work in general linguistics, is seen as the foundation for most structuralist studies.⁵¹ De Saussure, in contrast to the accepted viewpoint of his day, theorized that the units of language, rather than being aggregative, discrete, substantive words with a specific meaning attached to each one, are relational; that is, meanings will derive from the relationship that holds between units in the structure.⁵² De Saussure's "enduring contribution" to the general science of linguistics consists in the concepts of *langue* and *parole*, and *signified* (*signifié*) and *signifier* (*signifiant*).⁵³ *Langue* is the synchronic language system and *parole* is the diachronic use of language in speech. The relationship between the signified (a concept) and the signifier (a speech sound or "acoustic image" in Ricoeur's phrase) is like the two sides of one coin⁵⁴—the relationship coheres in a moment of *semiosis* (the conjunction of signified and

50. Perhaps we could reduce this whole discussion to a need for an encompassing psychological theory to account for how we choose the basic building blocks of language. Certainly psycholinguists would insist that this field of inquiry should be left to them. However, Ricoeur suggests that an adequate theory of meaning, which incorporates a sophisticated theory of language and linguistic creativity, must serve us better.

51. Hawkes 1977: 22

52. Hawkes, 1977: 22

53. Robbins, 1988: 480

54. Krampen, 69: "Signifier and signified, as two classes mutually conditioning each other and being situated in two coupled classification systems, form a dialectic unity which de Saussure calls sign (French *signe*)."

signifier) that produces the language sign or uttered word. For de Saussure,

the structural relationship between the concept of a tree (i.e. the *signified*) and the sound-image made by the word 'tree' (i.e. the *signifier*) thus constitutes a linguistic sign.⁵⁵

The sign system is necessarily arbitrary because there can be no external justification for the word 'cat' attaching to the concept "cat" except by convention. For de Saussure,

the very arbitrariness of the relationship between signifier and signified that makes language conservative in nature also serves to guarantee the "structural" nature of the system in which it occurs ... Language is self-defining, and so whole and complete. ... In other words, language stands as the supreme example of a self-contained "relational" structure ...⁵⁶

Ricoeur agrees that both *langue* and *parole* present structures. However, Ricoeur argues, *pace* de Saussure, that the structure of *parole* is not reducible to that of *langue* (IT 7). For Ricoeur, semiotic entities are signs—"merely distinctive and oppositive units within specific systems"; whereas semantic entities are "the bearers of meaning" (WPM 66). It is only in an utterance that "messages are exchanged"—the language system may provide the codes that individuals use to communicate, but the message (what is communicated) must be spoken or actualized by a speaker. From this basic dichotomy⁵⁷ of *langue* and *parole*, Ricoeur argues that other "subsidiary distinctions" follow. These distinctions force at least a recognition of the possible

55. Hawkes, 1977: 25

56. Hawkes, 1977: 26

57. Greimas and Courtes, 1982: In semiotics, dichotomy indicates "a pair of terms usually belonging to the epistemological level of the meta-language which are simultaneously posited, with an emphasis upon the relation of opposition that allows them to be linked the one with the other. The classical example is that of the Saussurean dichotomies: language/speech; signifier/signified; synchrony/diachrony. Such an approach is characteristic of the structural attitude, which prefers to posit the differences—viewed as more enlightening—before examining and defining the concepts."

misunderstandings that might surface in discussions about language—misunderstandings stemming from divergent theoretical frameworks. For example, when someone speaks, the “message is individual” even though the language “code is collective”; when we speak the “message is a temporal event” even though the code, because it must always be available, is “a synchronic system.” Further, when someone speaks, the “message is intentional” whereas the code itself “is anonymous and not intended” (IT 3).

Of course, de Saussure addressed the concept of dynamics in language through “semiosis.” However, semiosis—the moment at which, at the “instance of discourse,” the signifier and the signified unite to make the sign—was left relatively unexplored: de Saussure, although cognizant of the conceptual necessity of *parole*, concentrated on *langue*. De Saussure was more concerned with the question about “which ‘internal’ laws form the basis of speaking and understanding speech.”⁵⁸ Ricoeur, following the lead, I suspect, of the apologist literature for de Saussure, suggests that the “perversion” of structuralism lies in its proponents misappropriating the methodology of the “general science of signs” in only its aspect of *langue*.⁵⁹ It is under the extension of a “general theory of signs,” Ricoeur argues, that linguistics assumes the role of a “paradigmatic example of a sign-system.” And, as a result, these postulates assume methodological

58. Krampen: 64

59. For example, Krampen often complains about the misappropriation of Saussurean concepts: “This exact definition of the relationship between linguistics and ‘the science that studies the life of signs within society’ has been frequently forgotten or even perverted by epigones of de Saussure. Thus Barthes ... turns this relationship around: ‘...c’est la sémiologie qui est une partie de la linguistique’ (it is semiology which is a part of linguistics)” (Krampen: 63).

preeminence not only for linguistics but for any “discourse” using sign-systems; for example, Lévi-Strauss’s comparative mythology.⁶⁰ Each sign-system becomes a

a world of its own, within which each item only refers to other items of the same system, thanks to the interplay of opposition and differences constitutive of the system ... [making it] a self-sufficient system of inner relationships (IT 6).

Ricoeur points out that in a strictly structural analysis of the language system, the question “Who speaks?” is not applicable. Ricoeur argues, however, that someone must use language to produce an utterance, to communicate—using language is a phenomenon, an event, because it is linked to the fact that someone speaks. For Ricoeur, the structuralist paradigm restricts questions of reference to the components within the sign-system itself, which excludes not only the speaker but also what the speaker is talking about:

the signs of language refer only to other signs in the interior of the same system so that language no more has a world than it has a time and subject ... (FD 133).

It is to address this structuralist or unidimensional approach to language, “for which signs are the only basic entities,” that Ricoeur proposes “a two dimensional approach” in which he postulates that language must rely

on two irreducible entities, signs and sentences ... This duality does not coincide with that of *langue* and *parole* ... or even as that duality was later reformulated as the opposition between code and message (IT 6).

Ricoeur sees structural analysis as an abstracting, reductive exercise that presupposes the condition in which language is already acquired and in use—whether in

60. See also Boon’s essay “Claude Lévi-Strauss”.

speech or in a text. Structural linguistics cannot adequately account for the subject—the person who makes the meaningful sounds that a hearer understands—as it deals only with systems of signs.

For Ricoeur, nouns or names without the contexture of a sentence do not have semantic meaning, only potential meaning. Isolated words will not have a semantic meaning without some context in a sentence or in a concrete situation. Ricoeur explains as follows:

The sentence is realized in words, but the words are not simply segments of it. A sentence constitutes a whole which is not reducible to the sum of its parts; the meaning inherent in this whole is distributed over the “ensemble of the constituents” (RM 67).

The meaningful sounds that a speaker makes carry a sense that an interlocutor hears—the sense rests on the speaker’s combination of linguistic units into sequences and on the hearer’s recognition of the combination. However, Ricoeur says that it is not the mere concatenation of potential linguistic units that makes an utterance; it is the *integration* of the linguistic units made by a speaker that produces the meaningful utterance or sentence:

words acquire an actual meaning only in a sentence and that lexical entities—the words of the dictionary—have merely potential meanings in virtue of their potential uses in typical contexts (CP 169).⁶¹

For Ricoeur, then, Jakobson’s account does not go far enough; it is not the concatenation of lexemes in sequential strings that gives meaning to a sentence, it is the integrative

61. Interestingly, Jakobson quotes Hughlings Jackson’s 1864 comment that supports Ricoeur’s suggestion here: “It is not enough to say that speech consists of words. It consists of words referring to one another in a particular manner; and, without a proper interrelation of its parts, a verbal utterance would be a mere succession of names embodying no proposition... Loss of speech is the loss of power to propositionize... Speechlessness does not mean entire wordlessness” (Jakobson 1956: 71).

relationship between units of different levels that generates meaning:

whereas distributional relationships hold between units of the same level, the elements of different levels are governed by integrative relationships (RM 67–68).

For Ricoeur, the highest integrative unit defines each level of appropriate methodological approach. From phonology we derive phonemic analysis—we discover the phonemes, which in turn are combined sequentially into a recognized (by convention) meaningful series of sounds. Phonemes are meaningless as they are sublexical units. The higher integrative unit for the phoneme, which must presuppose phonology, is the morpheme—mere syllables and affixes. Morphemes carry an identifiable minimal meaning—they are the smallest meaningful units. Morphemes are combined and integrated to constitute a higher meaningful unit—a lexeme or word. Lexemes (words), however, are the boundary units of semiotics; they cannot be combined and integrated into a *higher* meaningful unit. For example, lexemes joined with other lexemes (say, with a hyphen) will form a compounded lexeme but not some new higher unit of meaning different in kind to its constituents.⁶²

But *how* does this “integration” take place? There are rules of positional combination—the syntax of the language—but these rules are purely descriptive (codified), for *how* a speaker makes a sentence is still not explained. Questions of how the integration into higher meaningful units occurs is not an issue in semiotics, which is purely a reductive analysis. For Ricoeur, the description of how a speaker utters a sentence will

62. Ricoeur resists the argument that there could be kinds of sentences to forestall the suggestion that lexemes could be integrated into a higher meaningful unit—the sentence.

presuppose the semiotic ground (which itself presupposes the phonological ground), but it will use a methodology that is fundamentally different to reductive strategies. Ricoeur invokes the Saussurean tradition to suggest, broadly, that if the boundary or defining limit of semantic analysis is the sentence, then semiotics will be the purview of *langue* up to and including the point of semiosis (the moment that the signifier and the signified unite to make a sign) and semantic theory will be the purview of *parole*. Both *langue* and *parole* are clearly involved when we speak or use our language. For Ricoeur, this distinction defines semiotics and semantics:

the sign is the unit of semiotics while the sentence is the unit of semantics. As these units belong to different orders, semiotics and semantics hold sway over different arenas and take on restricted meanings (RM 69).

To highlight this theoretical difference between *langue* and *parole*, Ricoeur (following Émile Benveniste) substitutes the term 'discourse' for the term '*parole*', not only

to emphasize the specificity of this new unit on which all discourse relies, but also to legitimate the distinction between semiotics and semantics as the two sciences which correspond to the two kinds of units characteristic of language, the sign and the sentence (IT 7).

Discourse

According to Ricoeur, the process by which a language user manipulates the language system is one of contexture—that is, "the act or process of weaving or of assembling and putting together parts into a connected structure," of integrating discrete elements

together into a whole.⁶³ It is through an act of contexture by a language user that the lexical value of a word, as it is shown forth in a sentence, is determined. The act of contexture remains a process requiring theoretical explication because *how* we manage to do this remains, for the most part, hidden from us. For the sake of argument, let us agree that the sentence is the smallest meaningful unit of discourse—a sentence will not integrate into a higher meaningful unit different in kind, nor can discourse (as bundles of sentences) be analyzed reductively into meaningful units smaller than a sentence (a lexeme not being a sentence). This concept of contexture, through which we seem able to use language to convey some message to an interlocutor, is not merely the concatenation of linguistic elements. Were this the case, any assemblage of linguistic elements would be meaningful both to a speaker and to a hearer—and it is clear that this is not the case.

Ricoeur's point is that the mere conjunction or disjunction of the distinctive features of the phoneme does not produce a sentence any more than the mere combination of words does. For example, in stringing phonemes together we do not make a sentence: *Boulegh crudef deuteronom paalzre suctorian*. Nor in stringing words together do we make a sentence: in "Boudoir crudely in deuteronomy paltry of single sugarplum sings" there is an intralinguistic relation holding among the lexical constituents, but a sentence—a comprehensible utterance—must be more than the mere concatenation of these elements. It is an *integration* of the lexical constituents (consistent with the code of the language) that produces a meaningful utterance—an integration requiring a speaker.

⁶³ Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1976.

As we discussed above, in the case of structural linguistics each phoneme is defined *in opposition* to other units, whether these other units are other phonemes or combinations of phonemes. This is not the case for a sentence, however. This point is crucial, for if there were a “morphology” of sentences, that is, sorts of sentences into which opposite sentence-units could be integrated, then the structuralist paradigms would be applicable to discourse—that is, a reductive rather than a hermeneutic approach would be appropriate. However, Ricoeur (following Benveniste’s claims) attests that there are several points that preclude this possibility: there is no higher integrative unit for which propositions could serve as a “class of distinctive units”; propositions can be combined in a consecutive order but not integrated into some new unit; propositions are not signs even though they contain signs; and finally, as opposed to phonemes and morphemes, which have a distribution at their own levels and a use at higher levels, “sentences have neither distribution nor use (as integrated in some higher level)” (RM 68).

As with Jakobson, Benveniste’s “notion of level is itself integral, not external, to the analysis; it is incorporated into the analysis as an ‘operator’” (RM 67). Ricoeur interprets this to mean that a linguistic unit can be defined as such only if it can be identified “within some higher-level unit”— for example, the phoneme in the morpheme, the morpheme in the lexeme, the lexeme in the sentence. Ricoeur notes that the word occurs in

an intermediary functional position that arises from its double nature. On the one hand it breaks down into phonemic units, which are from the lower level; on the other, as a unit of meaning and together with other units of meaning, it enters into a unit of the level above (RM 67).

Ricoeur suggests that the “integration into larger wholes” gives the “sense” to an utterance and that the “dissociation into constitutive parts” gives the form to an utterance (IT 7). By definition, semiotics comprises the formal aspect of language as its operation “relies on the dissociation of language into constitutive parts” (IT 7). In contrast, semantics, “as the science of the sentence,” is “defined by the integrative procedures of language” (IT 7–8). Discourse, therefore, can be defined as the

counterpart of language understood as code or system. Discourse *qua* event has a fleeting existence: it appears and disappears. But at the same time—and herein lies the paradox—it can be identified and reidentified as the same. This ‘sameness’ is what we call, in a broad sense, its meaning (CP 167).

If for the moment we grant that “distributional relationships hold between units of the same level” and that “elements of different levels are governed by integrative relationships,” then we would be forced to recognize that semiotic “meaning” could not be equivalent to semantic “meaning”. Semiotic meaning derives from the meaning attributions that are found in the lexicon of a given language. The lexicon of a given language is the repository or catalogue of meanings attributed to lexemes (words) as they have been used in discourse (*parole*): to this extent the lexicon is descriptive—after the fact of an utterance—rather than prescriptive. Many words, neologisms for example, are used extensively in “ordinary” communication *before* they appear catalogued in the lexicon. How likely is this? Think of any idiomatic saying that has become common in speech. For example, ‘action’—in the sense of “the most vigorous, productive, or exciting activity in a particular field, area, or group <go where the *action* is>”—is an additional meaning that the lexicon now attributes to the word ‘action’. “New” words are also added to the

lexicon, words which may be very familiar (like 'defibrillate') or rather obscure (like 'afghanistanism').⁶⁴ The point is that the lexicon of the English language, for example, is not fixed: the conventional meanings attributed to words are not invariant (attributed meanings can change), nor is there necessarily only one meaning attributed exclusively to each word. (In a specific sentence only *one* meaning of a word is usually applied, but this does not entail the conclusion that there can be only one lexical value for the word in every context.)

These considerations lead to an important precept for Ricoeur. As the basic unit of discourse—the sentence—cannot be integrated into a higher meaningful unit, it does not qualify for semiotic analysis. As Ricoeur says, this new strategic level requires a new approach. Discourse is differentiated from a system of signs in several ways: "systems of signs are merely virtual, language as discourse is actual"; "systems of signs are properly anonymous, discourse requires a speaker"; "the sentence as a whole is the bearer of meaning ... something other than and more than the signified of individual signs" (WPM 67–68). By adopting the structuralist paradigm, Ricoeur can suggest that

if the sign (phonological or lexical) is the basic unit of language, the sentence is the basic unit of discourse. Therefore it is the linguistics of the sentence which supports the theory of speech as an event (MT 197).

What does it mean to say that speech, discourse, is an event? For Ricoeur, it means that whenever we say something (utter meaningful sounds) we string words together sequentially so that discourse thus has temporal dimension (FD 133). This temporality is opposed to the achronicity of language *qua* system, which Ricoeur describes as "outside

64. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1976: "Addenda Section"

time.” Ricoeur thus adopts the notion of the “instance of discourse” to draw attention to this characterization of language as language-event or speech-act: “all discourse is produced as an event; as such, it is the counterpart of language understood as code or system” (MC 167).

Because speech must be produced (that is, the language code must be actually vocalized or written by a language user), Ricoeur suggests that it can be described as a work of language in the same way that “the literary work is the result of a labour which organises language” (FD 137), that is, a work “of composition” (FD 138). For Ricoeur, a speaker manipulates an inventory of sounds in the linguistic code to produce an utterance, just as, say, a painter manipulates a brush and a medium to produce a painting (a work). This is an important methodological insight (although we must not press the analogy too hard):

By introducing the categories of production and labour into the dimension of discourse, the notion of work appears as a practical mediation between the irrationality of the event and the rationality of meaning (FD 137).

Ricoeur identifies a tension in discourse: to reiterate, the event of discourse is “fleeting” and yet

it can be identified and reidentified as the same. This “sameness” is what we call, in a broad sense, its meaning (CP 167).

What Ricoeur tries to show is that the corollary of discourse *qua* event must be discourse *qua* system—otherwise, how could we guarantee a sameness of meaning for interlocutors to use and understand. Ricoeur suggests that, along with Benveniste, we should define semantics by predication, that is, by an instance of discourse—a process outside the “purely semiological distinction” between substitution and selection (RM 180).

As Ricoeur notes, "Benveniste puts 'being a *predicate*' ... at the forefront of the characteristics that belong" to the level of discourse. Further, Ricoeur points out that "even a grammatical subject is optional; a single sign suffices to constitute a predicate" (RM 67–68). For Ricoeur, it is an *act* of predication that makes an utterance.

Acts of predication

To investigate a work of language, therefore, is to investigate a phenomenon. With this notion Ricoeur limits the universalizing claims of structural linguistics by showing that the language code remains virtual until it is actualized in a sentence or an utterance by a speaker. For Ricoeur, discourse "is realised as event but understood as meaning" (FD 137). Accordingly, for Ricoeur, the limit of the structuralist methodology is the instance of discourse, for the

units of meaning elicited by structural analysis signify nothing; they are only combinatory possibilities. They say nothing; they conjoin and disjoin (PD 77).

Structural analysis must bracket the "phenomenology of speech and of the speaking subject" and consequently it does not address itself to questions like

how ... an autonomous system of signs, postulated without a speaking subject, enter[s] into operations, evolve[s] toward new states, or lend[s] itself to usage and to history (QS 250).

Using and understanding language as it is given to us in "ordinary discourse" (what others might call "natural language" or "ordinary language") is what Ricoeur calls a *first-order* discourse. Ricoeur assumes without argument that we seek "to bring into

language an experience, a way of living in and of Being-in-the-world which precedes it” (OI 196). Ricoeur also suggests that his proposed theory of language “contributes to this ontological vehemence an analytical precision which it would otherwise lack” (OI 196). Ricoeur locates this “analytic precision” in the structural linguistic account of language.

However, Ricoeur notes that there is also a problem for a strictly phenomenological analysis of language in “the paradox of the fleeting event and the identifiable and repeatable meaning” (FD 137). How is it that we can identify again and again the meaningful sounds of a fleeting utterance? How do we explain the *simultaneity* of the limited, invariant code and the limitless variability of utterances? Spoken language is sequential (diachronic) in the sense that we string words together. To this extent, phenomenology analyzes only the “effect” of understanding the spoken word—it does not explain how the words come to be available for use. For Ricoeur’s notion of the “dialectic of event and meaning” to be serviceable, both structural and phenomenological considerations must play a role. What concerns us most, after all, is not just “the fleeting event, but rather the meaning which endures” (FD 134). As Ricoeur points out, the meaning inheres in the identifiable and re-identifiable sameness of sound units—that is, the phonological system underlying (and determining) the meaningful sounds we make (CP 167).

An example may be helpful: think about a “speaker” manually signing a speech. Having a familiarity with the linguistic code of a manual sign language does not produce meaningful motions in space. It takes a “speaker” to manifest the code of the manual sign language, which will remain merely potential until that moment of actualization. Of

course, a "speaker" could communicate with gestural motions made with the hands indicating hunger, for example, but this gesture, even though it may convey a meaning, would not constitute a "language used by a community of speakers" in the strictest sense. There is a "language used by a community of speakers" only because the code of the manual sign language guarantees that specific motions constitute specific meanings that can be used and re-identified over and over again. Ricoeur does not use this example, but it suffices to undergird his point that speech is an act by a speaker that nonetheless requires a synchronic linguistic code.

In addressing this "initial paradox" of fleeting event and re-identifiable meaning, Ricoeur contends that each "strategic level" of language requires a different investigative approach that addresses the differences in "methods, points of view, and models" (SWE 80). For Ricoeur, the pivot for this linking of methods focuses on "*the word*, which is the place in language where this exchange between structure and event is constantly produced" (SWE 80). Ricoeur, therefore, does not suspend the considerations of structural analysis in his discussion of metaphor because they do have an appropriate field of application. *A fortiori*, Ricoeur stresses that

to understand a text is to follow its movement from sense to reference, from what it says, to what it talks about. In this process the *mediating* role played by structural analysis constitutes both the justification of this objective approach and the rectification of the subjective approach (MT 218).

For Ricoeur, the objectivity of language inheres in the structural or linguistic analysis of the speech sounds that we make. The subjectivity attaches to the speaker who actualizes (or integrates) that objective linguistic code in an actual utterance. In this way, Ricoeur

grounds the subjective in an objective condition. The importance of this notion, of course, is that on this basis Ricoeur can argue that creativity in language, what many might argue is the irrationality of language, attaches to all uses of language; that there is no “objective” or literal use of language contradistinguished to some “subjective” or figurative use of language. The process of using language can be creative, whether we use language for a figurative (artistic) purpose or for an literal (scientific) purpose.

Perhaps an example will help to illustrate the difference that Ricoeur postulates between the combination of linguistic units (vouchsafed by the structuralist methodology) and the integration of linguistic units into an utterance by a speaker. Consider the painter who creates a work (perhaps *Voice of Fire*) that is later displayed in a gallery. The painter who creates a work manipulates a medium with tools. However, the mere manipulation (or combination) of elements does not make the painting—the painter’s creative intention must be considered to play a key role if for no other reason than that the painter stopped working on the painting because it was “complete” or “finished” at one specific moment rather than at any other moment. For our purposes, it is the creative “integration” of the painter manipulating the objective elements that yields “the painting.”

To each person who looks at the work, it makes sense as a painting because the observer sees a painted canvas hanging on a wall, looking like what we conventionally expect a painting to look like and hanging where we conventionally expect it to be. (Although there was controversy about whether *Voice of Fire* was worth the price that was paid for it, there was no controversy over whether or not *Voice of Fire* was a painting.) The observer can even explain the sense in which *Voice of Fire* is a painting: it

makes sense as a painting because an artist has obviously worked (with brushes) a medium (paint) on some ground (canvas). And yet the observer still might not understand what message the painter intended to convey or to communicate in producing the painting. Avant garde works, for example, are often less recognizable as “works” because in them the artists explicitly set out to challenge our conventional expectations of what a “work” should be. The intention of the avant garde artist can be to experiment with a given medium or even to shock potential audiences: think about Duchamp’s “readymades”—works like *Bicycle Wheel*, which is a bicycle wheel mounted on a stool. As Calvin Tompkins reports, in *The Bride and the Bachelors*, “According to Duchamp, a painting that does not shock is not worth painting.” A painting that shocks an audience can only do so if it somehow frustrates, upsets or even insults an audience’s conventional expectations.

Knowing that something *is* a painting does not entail that we understand *what* the painting is about. Similarly, we may hear the sounds and follow the sense of an utterance during the instant that it is uttered, we may even be able to explain in what that sense inheres and yet still not understand *what* the speaker intends to communicate. For example, we are all familiar with sentences that presuppose knowledge of a specialized vocabulary or jargon. These sentences are recognizable as sentences, but they may not be meaningful to most of us: for example, “Vision was count fingers in the eye.” We can recognize the syntactic organization of the sentence (subject, verb, subject complement, prepositional phrase) and to that extent we can say that it makes sense as a sentence. But

it may not be a meaningful sentence to us because we do not understand what information the speaker intends to convey.⁶⁵

What is important in this example is that Ricoeur postulates that the hearer must “interpret” the sounds of the linguistic code as they are manifested in the utterance in order to “understand” the utterance; that is, the hearer must “decode” the message that the speaker “encoded” in the utterance. For example, it is obvious that impairments like motor aphasia, auditory aphasia or dyslexia, uphold this functional distinction between “encoding” and “decoding.” Ricoeur sees the “encoding” process as a speaker’s intentional use of the lexicon—however, this description of use exceeds the methodological limits of structural analysis. In uttering a sentence, therefore, the speaker transforms the individual words into “a whole which is not reducible to the sum of its parts.” In each utterance,

new properties appear, which derive from this specific relationship between units of different levels. Whereas distributional relationships hold between units of the same level, the elements of different levels are governed by integrative relationships (RM 68).

For Ricoeur, the integrative relationships that appear at the level of ordinary discourse result from

the attempt at expression made by a speaker who, wanting to formulate a new experience in words, seeks something capable of carrying his intention in the network of meanings he finds already established (RM 298).

65. However, the sentence is meaningful in ophthalmological discourse. In context, “Vision was count fingers in the eye” indicates that the visual acuity in the eye that is being examined is “count fingers”—the person being examined can distinguish the number of fingers being held up in front of the eye but little else.

If, as some structuralist positions suggest, the code strictly determines what it is possible to utter (without uttering nonsense), how can the language change, expand the network of meanings, introduce new conceptual terms? To account for such changes, structural linguistics must look outside the confines of the static code toward a discipline that could explain this phenomenon, which leads to two alternatives: to deny the possibility of historical change in the lexicon or to relegate such questions to some other discipline and thereby dismiss them. Ricoeur disapproves of both strategies and tries instead to find a richer, more encompassing philosophy of language. Where the network of meanings fails to provide something capable of expressing a speaker's intention, Ricoeur posits the notion of "semantic innovation."

Can rule-governed activities be creative?

For the moment, let us digress. How can we show the disjunction between the fields of semiotics and semantics that Ricoeur postulates? Is it possible that we can call into question Davidson's formulation of the problem of metaphor as resting on "the distinction between what words mean and what they are used to do"?⁶⁶ Ricoeur suggests that *all* use of language is creative. Davidson, to preserve a distinction between "creative" (irrational) metaphor and prosaic (rational) statements that can have truth or falsity, argues that making and understanding metaphor is creative and "little guided by rules" as opposed to

66. Davidson 1978: 31

literal statements, which (we are led to suppose) are governed by rules.⁶⁷ Can we show how Ricoeur's contention that using language is creative despite its rule-governed nature is plausible? As an exercise let us take Black's linguistic "frame" and "focus" model to construct an example in which a camera will be analogous to a language system.

A camera is a "system" of components that function together in a relation that can be used as a "tool" to produce an image: the aperture and the shutter must be controlled and the selection of the settings is up to the camera user. In our analogy, the "frame" will indicate the area in a field of vision that the camera will expose on film to produce an image; the "focus" will set an object or objects apart from the background of the area that is framed. In this way, Ricoeur's insistence on the concept of the language user and the "act of predication" can be incorporated. It is the camera user who not only points the camera and thus chooses *what to frame* out of a possible image field, but who also selects what to focus on to give the best or most exemplary image in the area that the user has chosen to frame. The selection could be which faces in a crowd to preserve, which places, which events, which moments of reportage or sentimentality.

The camera user must also control the amount of light that exposes the film (aperture) and its duration (shutter speed). Manipulation of the aperture affects the depth of field in the resulting photographic image, which in turn emphasizes the foreground or the background in the camera's field of vision. These adjustments made by the camera user obviously compromise the claims of the verisimilitude of the resulting image—"reality" is not faithfully captured on the film. Competence in using the camera

67. Davidson 1978: 29

will govern the technical excellence of the resulting photographic image. Innovation on this basic competence allows the camera user to record images that can call attention to specific details in the field of the camera's frame—for example, which objects will be less identifiable or less accentuated in the field. These choices will depend on what effect or image the camera user wants to produce. As for the analogy itself, both a language system and a camera system presuppose makers of the system, users of the system, and (on the part of the user) an intent to communicate "something to someone about something."

The camera user manipulates the interplay of the shutter and the aperture to show forth objects that are framed within the camera's field of vision. We would not be tempted to suggest that somehow the elements of the camera itself directly correspond with the world nor that the elements of the camera directly correspond to the elements of the camera user's thoughts. However, we could say that the camera "mediates" between the *intention* of the camera user to produce a particular image and the *reality* of the world that the particular image shows forth. Similarly, for Ricoeur, language mediates between the world and the thoughts of the speaker without corresponding ontologically to the elements of either. The camera is the tool with which the camera user seeks to capture or to show something significant in a field of vision—to draw attention to some particular by manipulating the camera so as to uncouple the particular from its usual relationships within the visual field.

We may want to say that the sorts of pictures my Aunt Helena takes will not be the same as the sorts of pictures that an artist or a naturalist takes. But the photographic images in all these cases will be the result of a process that affects light-sensitive emulsions

layered on a film or backing. The difference, then, between these sorts of images must inhere in what the image is *about*. Most of us use a camera to record personal events like birthday parties: we pick up the camera, adjust the focus and press a button. We get an image that (we hope) is in focus and shows the moment when the birthday child blows out the candles on the cake. We could call this the “ordinary” image; it is straightforward, uncomplicated and—to the extent that any photograph can be said to *represent* or *reflect* the world—literal.

However, in producing an image that records the actual scene of a birthday gathering, we could focus on the antics of one child in the background of the scene. This second photographic image would not strictly (or literally) “represent” the whole birthday scene, but there would be no “deviation” in the procedure of using the camera to produce this image nor would the image itself be “deviant.” We could also focus on the behaviour of the wasps that are hovering over the birthday cake. This third photographic image would not “represent” the birthday party scene in any commonsense way as it reduces the scene to include only the wasps—we may not even be able to infer that the photographic image was taken at a birthday party.

All these images must result from the manipulation of the mechanical elements of the camera (shutter and aperture) by the camera user. There is only one sense in which we can physically use or adjust the mechanical components of the camera—there cannot be a “literal *use*” versus a “figurative *use*” versus a “documentary *use*” of the camera—and the resulting photographic images will be a function of how light ultimately affects the film emulsion. However, this consideration is separable from the question of how a viewer (or

even the camera user) appreciates, understands or sees the photographic image. It is also a matter of convention that we recognize these images as “representative” of a real scene or of real people or of real things at all.

It is the arrangement of the interplay between the mechanical components of the camera that produces not only the “ordinary” image but also the “innovative” image and even the “documentary” image. We are not physically restricted to *using* the camera in a particular way to take pictures of birthday parties; we can do different things with the camera to produce images that are not literal in the sense of reproducing a particular scene. We can achieve effects by blurring the focus or by “tricking” the colour film by manipulating the lighting. But we can also change the scene itself by accentuating the foreground or the background of an image, which will change not the effects of the photographic image but what shows as being significant in the image. By altering the focus to accentuate particular aspects of the scene, we in essence change what counts as the “reality” of the scene: the photographic image will show a scene that will not necessarily coincide with how that scene was experienced directly by the participants—even if we could agree on what that experience was for all the participants. As noted earlier, the question of how accurately the camera lens can reflect the world remains problematical. We can be certain, though, that the camera does not necessarily show the world as it “really is.”

The artist, the naturalist and Aunt Helena must all arrange a relationship between the camera elements in order to communicate. If Aunt Helena (or the artist or the naturalist) ignores the relationship between shutter, aperture and light, she runs the risk of

producing an image that is so overexposed or underexposed that no one will be able to understand what the photographic image is about or recognize what it is supposed to show forth. Similarly, the artist is not free to alienate the relationship between shutter, aperture and light to the point where the elements no longer functionally interact—even though it would be physically possible to do so, we would be unable to recognize what the resulting image was supposed to show forth. Even if an independent “aesthetic” canon were devised to assess the success of such radical images, it would still not be the case that the camera itself somehow transcends its mediation between the camera user and the world—the camera must still be pointed at something, the shutter opened and closed, and the light-sensitive emulsion exposed to light.

For the sake of argument then, a photographic image is restricted in that the medium does not allow the camera user the freedom to express an image that does not somehow involve light—this is a functional limitation of the tool. However, this limitation does not preclude the camera user from pushing the conventional limits of the photographic image by experimenting with the constituent parts of the camera—film emulsion, shutter speed, aperture settings—or by exploiting the physiology of human eyes to “trick” the viewer into seeing and interpreting a photographic image in a way that is contrary to fact (for example, presenting an image of sand dunes that appears to be a vignette of human anatomy). The point is that a tool does not proscribe innovation by predetermining the limits of the possible—depending on the purpose and skill of a user, a tool can be used for innovation and for the extension of conventional boundaries.

For Ricoeur it is obvious that someone must use language “to say something to someone about something”. Keeping our analogy in mind, we can say that the language system is like the camera: it is a tool for representation (Aunt Helena) and expression (the artist) and analysis (the naturalist). All uses of the tool—language or camera—are purported to represent or express the world within a specific field of reference. Northrop Frye, in *The Educated Imagination*, also suggests that we can have different reasons for using language; for example, describing self-consciousness, or describing the social environment in which we participate, or describing the constructs of our imaginations. However, having different reasons for using a language is not equivalent to suggesting that we thus use different kinds of languages. Generally we use only one language resource (say English), but we can use this language resource for different purposes.

The purpose of this digression is to suggest that how the camera is used as a tool to communicate something about the world may be similar to how language is used as a tool. In effect, to the extent that we use a camera for different purposes, so we also use a language for different purposes—that is, to produce a “literal” image (statement) or a “figurative” image (statement). The analogy should not be forced too far, but its salient point is to show that *until* we have looked at the photographic image, we have no logical grounds upon which to decide that Aunt Helena’s images are representative (literal) or that the artist’s images are expressive (figurative) or that the naturalist’s images are documentary (analytic)—we have only our expectations that *usually* Aunt Helena’s images are representative and that *usually* the artist’s images are figurative. In this there can be no defensible reason for assuming that Aunt Helena uses the camera

literally—“literal” can only describe the end result (the photographic image) of using the camera—any more than the artist uses the camera figuratively or the naturalist uses the camera analytically. To this extent, “literal” and “figurative” are classificatory distinctions that concern the photographic image only and not the camera or the camera user. As

Nelson Goodman suggests, a photograph

denotes a certain scene and is a concrete instance of certain shades of gray. But what is the logical character of the relationship the picture bears to what it is said to express?⁶⁸

In the same way, we might suggest that an utterance “denotes a certain scene and is a concrete instance of certain human, verbal sounds. But what is the logical character of the relationship the sound bears to what it is said to express?”

We can say that there is a discontinuity—a gap—in what we call language between the static linguistic system, or code, and the dynamic manifestation of that code in an act of speech. As such, Ricoeur identifies a dichotomy in the functional opposition between combination (form) and integration (meaning):

The *form* of a linguistic unit is defined as its capacity for being broken down into constituents of a lower level. The *meaning* of a linguistic unit is defined as its capacity to integrate a unit of a higher level (RM 68).

The discontinuity between these two modes of language, as formulated by linguistic structuralists like Jakobson, produces a tension between the distributional relationship among units that denote “mere otherness” and the integrative relationship among units that yield meaning. Ricoeur points out that in a strictly structural analysis of the language system, the question “Who speaks?” is not applicable. And yet, *someone* must use the

68. Goodman 1968: 50

resources of a language to communicate—language of itself does not communicate. It is in a new domain, not one that is explored by structuralist accounts, that interpretation properly enters our considerations. For Ricoeur, interpretation (in a broad sense) is an application to concepts that are alien to or belong outside the “closed” system being analyzed. For example, in structural linguistics any discussion about how a speaker comes to choose this word rather than another must utilize concepts properly belonging to phenomenology or to psychology.

It is in this gap between the “closed system of signs” and the “openness of language” that Ricoeur locates a tension. Tension is the principle thematic preoccupation throughout his works and especially *The Rule of Metaphor*, in which Ricoeur sketches a “tensional” theory of metaphor and metaphorical function. Ricoeur insists that *tension* requires interpretation (BH 35)—it is precisely here that Ricoeur locates his philosophical “reconstruction on a new basis.” Ricoeur also suggests that through the linguistic analysis of metaphor we glimpse the functioning of creativity or imagination, the phenomenon of which we can only describe. As Kant mentions, although we cannot “eavesdrop” on ourselves, we can “observe in ourselves the various acts of the representative power *when we call them forth* [which] merits our reflection.”⁶⁹ Ricoeur argues that those who define metaphor simply as a rhetorical device “restrict themselves to classifying it ... but as soon as rhetoric looks into generative causes, it is already considering ... a theory of the production of metaphorical meaning” (RM 65) and not simply cases of “deviant naming.” In this Ricoeur sees the exploration of metaphor as providing a paradigm for exploring

69. Kant, *Anthropology*: 13

imaginative functioning through language (SR 167). (Ricoeur's argument supporting an approach to metaphor as metaphorical process is discussed in the final section of this paper.)

It does not seem to make sense that the "figurative use of language" can be different in kind to the "literal use of language"—in both cases we utilize only one language resource. We could speculate, as does Ricoeur, that innovation in language use itself may be a process perhaps akin to Kant's productive imagination (one that is partly under our conscious control and partly not) or may be any generative process that is described scientifically or spiritually. However, before we move on to Ricoeur's most ambitious formulation, let us review what we have discovered so far.

Ricoeur shows the disjunction between the synchronic nature of language (as linguistic code) and the diachronic nature of language (as linguistic event). Given this disjunction, Ricoeur argues that we need different methodological approaches to explore the question of meaning: At the level of structural analyses, meaning pertains to the internal coherence of phoneme sequences and to the positional relation holding between infralinguistic elements. At the level of an actual utterance, meaning pertains to the syntactic coherence (integration or contexture) between the lexical units of a sentence to what the sentence is about (its extralinguistic reference or direction). Ricoeur shows how it is only with an act of predication that a sentence is formed (or semantic meaning is generated) and that this act of predication requires a "speaker." Ricoeur suggests that structural analyses cannot adequately explore the question of the speaker without appealing to extrastructural principles; therefore, a different methodological approach is

required to explore the question of the semantic meaning of metaphor. For Ricoeur, language use must be part of any semantic theory—structural linguistic accounts err by failing to make a distinction “between two kinds of linguistics: semiotics and semantics” (IT 8).

But how is this call for a different methodological approach related to Ricoeur’s disagreement with Davidson about the boundary between semantics and pragmatics? Both Davidson and Ricoeur agree that metaphor uses the same semantic resources as does ordinary language. Further, Davidson, in stressing the truth value and truth conditions of a proposition or “literal” statement, already betrays the implicit presupposition that there is a comparative (and verifiable) relationship between the literal statement and the “world” to examine. By definition, Davidson must also reject the structuralist approach, for if the semantic meaning of a proposition is limited to an *intralinguistic* analysis, how can we assess its truth value? That is, how can we assess the truth or falsity of the proposition in expressing some fact about the world if we are restricted to examining only the intralinguistic relationships holding between elements in the proposition? For Ricoeur also, as soon as an appeal is made to entities not so defined within the structuring model, we are no longer dealing with “purely intralinguistic phenomena.”

However, a divergence appears with Ricoeur’s sketching out of a theory of language that incorporates the tenets of structural linguistics: Based on the invariance of the phoneme, Ricoeur grounds the identifiability and re-identifiability of semiotic meaning (distributional relationships), whether in literal language or figurative language. For

Ricoeur, using language in discourse (an event) is the “counterpart of language understood as code or system.”

Davidson, however, suggests that “all communication by speech assumes the interplay of inventive construction and inventive construal.”⁷⁰ This becomes a subtle point of issue between Davidson and Ricoeur. For Davidson, “using language” relates to its interpretive, descriptive and performative *functions*; that is, the uses to which we put language, like praising or praying. For Ricoeur, using language simply entails someone speaking or writing at the moment when someone speaks or writes.

There is a deeper problem, however. Davidson seems to equate “literal language” with “semantic meaning” on the basis of the specific cognitive content of literal language, a content that Davidson denies to metaphor.⁷¹ Ricoeur sets the problem up differently by suggesting that a specific cognitive content is inherent in the speech sounds themselves—whether in a literal or metaphorical utterance. This question of where to locate a specific cognitive content constitutes Ricoeur’s disagreement with Davidson about the boundary between semantics and pragmatics. Therefore, our next task must be the examination of what constitutes the cognitivity in language: Is it the sounds we make or is it the meanings we attach to the sounds?

70. Davidson 1978: 29

71. Davidson 1978: 44

The cognitivity of language

It matters, because everything we say
Of the past is description without a place, a cast
Of the imagination, made in sound ...

Description Without Place, Wallace Stevens

Davidson argues that only literal language is cognitive, and anything we notice as the result of understanding a metaphor cannot be some “special” meaning attaching to the metaphor *in addition* to the literal meaning. Davidson suggests that the insights we gain through metaphor may be extremely important, but these insights are extralinguistic and, as such, outside the realm of an inquiry concerned with semantic meaning. As Davidson says,

what metaphor adds to the ordinary is an achievement that uses no semantic resources beyond the resources on which the ordinary depends.⁷²

However, Davidson does not show how literal language is cognitive. In “what” does the cognitivity inhere? If metaphor and the ordinary use the same semantic resources, and the ordinary is cognitive, then in what manner is metaphor not cognitive? Ricoeur argues that as phonemes ground both the ordinary and metaphor, both the ordinary and metaphor must, at least to this extent, enjoy the same portion of cognitivity.

The question remains, though: What is cognitivity? Is cognition strictly the faculty of knowing, conceiving or perceiving that is contradistinguished from the faculties of emotion and volition? Is this all Davidson means—that metaphor is a purely emotive

72. Davidson 1978: 29

adjunct to a message or that metaphor is simply a performative linguistic act? Does this not beg the question to define metaphor in such a way as to preclude a discussion of its cognitivity at the outset? If cognition is a faculty of knowing, what supplies the informative content that we extract from an utterance—even a “literal” utterance? Is this informative content strictly semantic or could there be something else included?

Even Jakobson admits that there are other “types of coded information-bearing features that any member of a speech community has been trained to manipulate” in addition to the distinctive features that constitute the phonemes as described above. There are configurative features, which

signal the division of the utterance into grammatical units ... particularly into sentences and words, either by singling out these units and indicating their hierarchy (culminative features) or by delimiting and integrating them (demarcative features).⁷³

There are also expressive features, which

put the relative emphasis on different parts of the utterance or on different utterances and suggest the emotional attitudes of the utterer.⁷⁴

There is also further information in a speaker’s speech sounds, other than the linguistic code, that a hearer can extract. As Jakobson points out,

the code of features used by the hearer does not exhaust the information he receives from the sounds of the incoming message. From its sound shape he extracts clues to identify the sender. By correlating the speaker’s code with his own code of features, the hearer may infer the origin, educational status and social environment of the sender. Natural sound properties allow

73. Jakobson and Halle: 8–10

74. Jakobson and Halle: 8–10

the identification of the sex, age, and psychophysiological type of the sender and, finally, the recognition of an acquaintance.⁷⁵

Jakobson's description strengthens Ricoeur's contention that a different methodological approach is needed for analyzing semantic meaning as manifested in oral communication between interlocutors, one that incorporates not only the speaker's intended meaning but also the situational context in which the utterance takes place. There is the involvement of the hearer in discerning the content of the uttered speech sounds and the interpretation of the intended meaning with regard to an assessment of the situational context. In this sense, the simple exchange of a greeting is not really simple—it is just our intrinsic familiarity with the process that makes it seem so.

Obviously, there is a greater complexity of information inhering in speech sounds than is generally considered in philosophical discussions of the "content" of utterances. Generally, informational content is seen to relate to the extralinguistic circumstances of the dialogical situation. There is, in addition to the semantic or linguistic content of the communication, the extralinguistic content of the communication—perhaps observing the fear on your interlocutor's face that discloses to you the urgency of following the order, "Duck!" What is interesting in Jakobson's comments about "natural sound properties" is that he locates some of this "extralinguistic" informational content in the speech sounds themselves. Jakobson shows that what we usually accept as extralinguistic content inheres in the sound patternings of the utterance itself as information that can be extracted.⁷⁶ This

75. Jakobson and Halle: 11

76. Waugh, 265: "Sound is, by its very nature, *functional* or *semiotic* and not merely phonic: the same phonic property may perform different functions in different languages, and different phonic properties may perform the same function in the same language. Moreover, sound is *multifunctional*, being invested simultaneously

information is to a certain extent “invisible,” even subliminal, for we do not seem to consider it. Perhaps we assume that the recognition of acquaintanceship or of gender is a “visual” recognition and not an “acoustic” recognition. (For example, it is obvious that in most cases we are cognizant of, at the very least, the identity of an interlocutor from only the utterance “It’s me.”) It is possible that a bias against the “acoustic dimension” of informational content permeates philosophical discussions about semantics.⁷⁷

What becomes interesting for us to consider is the question of the “cognitive content” in speech—a content “based on or capable of being reduced to empirical factual knowledge”⁷⁸—that in most cases in the philosophical literature is explicitly denied to metaphor. But if we insist on the broader sense of the word “cognitive” (and also its first meaning in the dictionary)—“of, relating to, being, or involving cognition,” which is “the act or process of knowing in the broadest sense; specifically: an intellectual process by which knowledge is gained about perceptions or ideas”⁷⁹—then, by definition, a case could be made that we must acknowledge a dimension of “cognitivity” inhering in the

with a variety of functions.”

77. For example, K. Chukwulozie Anyanwu, in “Sound as Ultimate Reality and Meaning. The Mode of Knowing Reality in African Thought”, suggests that the European epistemological attitude does not exhaust “the criteria of ‘true’ knowledge” and that Western philosophical traditions disassociate types of experience: “...we interpret everything that we claim to know with certain epistemological attitudes or with certain assumptions, concepts, theories, models of reality and worldviews; but this attitude is not the same for all men, in all cultures and at all times. ...African thought considers the body as a living-force, a rhythmic impulse as well as a work of art. Thus, consciousness emerges from this aesthetic and rhythmic flow of life-force...in such a way that dancing and thinking are the same things. In other words, when the body dances, the mind thinks properly because dancing and thinking (body movement and mind movement) constitute a harmonious, creative and dynamic process. ...Sound is the model of the African universe and the mode of knowing in African thought is permeated by aesthetic qualities” (Anyanwu, 29–37).

78. *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*

79. *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*

speech sounds themselves. (Simply in "hearing" an utterance we gain knowledge about our interlocutor.) Were this to be the case then, without further operational distinctions to define cognitivity precisely, all utterances deemed to be metaphor would have the same least (or foundational) cognitive content as all utterances deemed to be literal. The speech sounds we make in simply uttering a sentence, however else they may be classified, guarantee this. Can we reasonably exclude the broader sense of "cognition" in favour of the more restricted sense without begging the question? As Philip Wheelwright suggests, in "Semantics and Ontology," as we all proceed from some epistemic predisposition, the "best thing" is to examine our "main presuppositions" openly.⁸⁰

Jacob Bronowski, in *The Origins of Knowledge and Imagination*, suggests that

we have all been hagridden with this idea that the world is there and that our modes of perception do not much influence how we interpret it; that we can get at the nature of the world without much bothering about the apparatus we use.⁸¹

Bronowski disagrees with this approach: citing, for example, the crudeness of the physiology of the eye and the discriminating view of the world we actually "see."

Bronowski suggests that at a very basic level the brain makes inferences about the visual signals it receives from the components of the eyes. Bronowski describes the visual process thus:

The eye is full of rods and cones, and in each of them there is a fluid called visual purple which is bleached when light strikes it. Once it has been bleached a rod or cone cannot see again until it has been revived. The step from purple to colorless (like all steps from any color to no color)

80. Wheelwright: 62

81. Bronowski: 6

represents a lowering of energy. ... this short description tells you enough to make it clear that the eye does not form a continuous picture.⁸²

Bronowski relates that the "precise information" we receive from our brains is composed of very coarse units:

the back of the retina has an elaborate wiring circuit which picks out conjunctions which are meaningful in the outside world. Boundaries are such conjunctions. So are differences in color.⁸³

How is this important to the discussion of language acquisition? If, in theory, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the eye's physiological response to the world and what we "see," then it is plausible to suggest that none of the "primitive units" of our senses give us *in toto* the discrete "experiences" we describe as 'seeing', 'hearing', 'touching', 'tasting' or 'smelling'. Our "naming" or being able to name a thing then becomes the result of a very complex process of apprehension, selection and conceptual generalization (a conclusion that is vouchsafed by studies showing the disruption of these complex processes, as in the case of aphasia).

In whatever theoretical terms one wishes to employ, there is nothing simple, in the sense of first philosophy, in the name 'tree' or 'dog' or 'man'. That we have ordered our sensory experiences into coherence, that we have abstracted from this coherence individual objects (say, objects in our field of vision), that we have then conceptualized these individual objects into generalized kinds of objects, is not, nor can it be supposed, a "simple," atomistic process. It is not controversial to point out that considering the sheer

82. Bronowski: 14-15

83. Bronowski: 18

volume of sensory stimuli that we receive as individuals every moment—whether or not we are specifically conscious of such stimuli—our names for singular objects must presuppose a complex arrangement or prior ordering of these sensory (neural) stimuli. Whether this “ordering” is physiological or inherently psychological or intellectual is another question.

Hearing a language spoken usually entails, for most of us at least, auditory and visual stimuli. Our singular names for such complex orderings of stimuli cannot truly intimate a one-to-one correspondence between the word ‘hearing’ and its relata—if there are any! I am not advocating a profound scepticism concerning these matters, for we are constrained by our physiology to perceive in a particular manner, one that is ineliminable in our investigations. Bronowski’s points do suggest, however, that our presuppositions may require reexamination. As Kathleen Wilkes cautions, for example, in an article about brain lesions and cognitive functioning, we must ignore “the everyday assumption that seeing is a simple and unitary matter” in favour of the “technical concept” that seeing “is composed of contributory theoretical functions which complex cerebral structures underpin”⁸⁴ The tenor of these remarks may be Kantian, but it remains the case that the process by which and through which we are able to use language remains inaccessible to us directly. This point is repeated throughout this paper, for it serves to underscore Ricoeur’s call for a more comprehensive theory of language. Granted, physiology is not the purview of philosophy, but is it reasonable to put forward a theory of language and meaning in language without accommodating the facts of human physiological constraints?

84. Wilkes: 463

It is a brute fact that initially we *experience* (whatever this might be) without the intervention of language; but, in general, at the point at which we begin to differentiate 'things' in the world—sounds, parents, food, toys—we acquire “a world already spoken into existence.”⁸⁵ Gadamer reiterates this theme:

Perhaps the key insight in my own work is that we are never at the zero-point, we are never starting out new, we are always already en route.⁸⁶

Ricoeur takes as rudimentary the historicity of our “spoken world”:

Between living and recounting, a gap—however small it may be—is opened up. Life is lived, history is recounted (OI 179).

If we doubt the legitimacy of Ricoeur's claim here, it is at least plausible to argue that the acquisition and maintenance of language skills, even at the most basic level of ostensive naming, shows forth a process through time. We learn, we remember and we assimilate language through imitative speech behaviour—at least at the beginning of our apprenticeship. We can call this description of learning language “historical” in the sense that, at the very least, what I can say now about the experience of learning a language I could not say as I was acquiring the language. The historicity of language is important for Ricoeur to establish: if how we use words in a particular language changes, whether in the history of the language itself or in the personal history of an individual speaker, then the meanings assigned to words may also change. This possibility throws doubt on such presuppositions as words having precise and stable meanings: attributions of meaning could be alterable. For Ricoeur, it is the

85. Peterfreund, 1987:

86. Gadamer and Ricoeur, 1982: 303

semantic dynamism, proper to ordinary language [that] gives a “historicity” to the power of signifying. New possibilities of signifying are opened up, supported by meanings that have already been established (RM 298).

Forgetting the differences

Bruce Gregory, in *Inventing Reality*, suggests that we “want to believe there is some unique way our words hook onto the world and that this hooking, or accurate representation, makes our statements true or false.”⁸⁷ However, with the eclipse of Newtonian mechanics, the classical world view no longer offers the reassurance that there is indisputably a one-to-one correspondence between our words and what “really” is. As Gregory shows, the fundamental particles of relativity and quantum mechanics are not “observable” in any “ordinary” sense; that is, we are unlikely ever to observe entities of statistical or theoretical probability directly. That we cannot directly observe quarks, or anti-quarks for that matter, “make[s] it hard to maintain the convention of an absolute word-to-world fit.”⁸⁸

These observations do not purport to nullify the truth claims of scientific discourse; only to suggest how a “word-to-world fit” is not the most useful (or supportable) approach in a discussion of word meaning if (1) we accept the limitations of how our sensory abilities discriminate neural information (implicit in our

87. Gregory: 185–186

88. Gregory: 186

acknowledgement of aphasic disturbances that affect linguistic or motor skills) and (2) credit the theoretical limitations currently extant in the field of physics. As Ricoeur notes, these doubts oppose the traditional presuppositions of philosophy. The problem grows larger when we move from strictly prosaic concerns to the concerns of psychology and human cognition: for example, "Does the term 'imagination' designate a single, coherent phenomenon or a collection of experiences only distantly related?"⁸⁹ Given these doubts, we must identify our presuppositions if we are not to be reduced to embracing dicta. Perhaps a further elaboration on this issue of rationality and convention will be helpful.

Jorge Luis Borges wrote a story in which his chief protagonist, Ireneo Funes, possesses great powers of recall.⁹⁰ We might be tempted to think of this character as an idiot savant, but it is Borges' description of Funes' life after an accident (which leaves him paralysed) that is of interest to us here. The narrator of Borges' sketch suggests that Funes was

almost incapable of ideas of a general, Platonic sort. Not only was it difficult for [Funes] to comprehend that the generic symbol *dog* embraces so many unlike individuals of diverse size and form; it bothered him that the dog at three fourteen (seen from the side) should have the same name as the dog at three fifteen (seen from the front).

The narrator relates that Funes' memories

were not simple ones; each visual image was linked to muscular sensations, thermal sensations, etc. Two or three times he had reconstructed a whole day; he never hesitated, but each reconstruction had required a whole day.

89. Ricoeur 1978, "Imagination in Discourse and in Action": 4

90. Borges, "Funes the Memorious"

As the narrator continues reminiscing, we learn that Funes “invented an infinite vocabulary for the natural series of numbers” in which each number had a distinct name, “a kind of mark”: *Máximo Pérez* would replace 7013, for example. The narrator attempted to explain to Funes that his “rhapsody of incoherent terms was precisely the opposite of a system of numbers,” but Funes apparently “refused to understand.” The narrator reports that “with no effort, [Funes] had learned English, French, Portuguese and Latin”; but the narrator also suspects that Funes was

not very capable of thought. To think is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions. In the teeming world of Funes, there were only details.

But is Borges’ narrator correct—does thinking require forgetting differences, generalizing, making abstractions?

Robert E. Haskell, in “Anatomy of Analogy: A New Look,” suggests that, as no experience we have is

ever exactly repeated, all so-called repeated experiences are but analogous experiences fitting an abstract form. ... Consequently, all reality is analogue-as-abstraction.⁹¹

Further, Haskell suggests that analogy is synonymous with

the well-known constructs of stimulus generalization, constancy and transposition phenomena, isomorphic relations, metaphor, abstraction, transfer, and the more recent signature of science—model.⁹²

Haskell concludes, on the strength of “no experience is ever exactly repeated,” that “the literal statement is a fiction; it is an analogue.” This conclusion, Haskell suggests, makes

91. Haskell: 160–161

92. Haskell: 161–162

us “uncomfortable” because the “traditional ontological categories are crossed”—it renders meaning “vague.” Haskell cites the results of many psychological investigations that have highlighted the role of creativity in the production of an analogy: thus, for example, the psychologist George Thompson says that “creativity, artistic or scientific, is in all probability directly related to the parameters of stimulus generalization.”⁹³

Haskell also builds on the physiological ground that supports his thesis; the work of the bio-physicist John Platt he finds most significant. As a result of studies on the physiology of the eye, Platt finds that the eye’s

information processing and coding operations suggest that by way of its scanning functions and specialized cells, the eye abstracts from the mosaic environment invariant relationships and transformations.

Platt concludes from these findings that

intelligence may be the ability to perceive successive analogies at higher and higher levels of abstraction; a multiple repetition of a single basic neural process of organization ... [of] analogic progression.⁹⁴

On the basis of these foregoing observations, Haskell suggests that the “difference between the use of analogy in science and in the humanities is the more systematic use of it in science.” As the term ‘analogy’ is not an acceptable appellation in scientific discourse, the approved term being ‘model’, Haskell quips that “models are analogies travelling incognito.” For Haskell, analogies or models are, or are descriptive of, isomorphic relations. Haskell suggests that these isomorphic relations and, presumably, systems of

93 Haskell: 162–163

94 Haskell: 164

isomorphic relations “are the basic mode from which all order is made.” As Haskell points out in defense of this characterization, the

Greeks used the term *analogia*, not only in the sense of a linguistic equation but in terms of mathematical proportion as well.

As Haskell relates,

Poincaré (1952) has demonstrated with immutable logic that in mathematics, although not confined to it, prediction without generalization is impossible. Since the circumstances under which one operates will never be the same, all that can be affirmed is that under analogous circumstances an analogous fact will be analogously produced.⁹⁵

The conclusion, as Haskell sees it, is that “to predict” outcomes in science requires the use of analogy and generalization (as a “variant form of analogy”).⁹⁶

In the philosophical literature we also find the thesis that metaphor is often used in constructing heuristic scientific models; key words or phrases can serve as conceptual paradigms, as in the *fabric* of space or the *wave* property of light. The adjunct to this view is that depending on how we conceptualize a topic will determine not only how we define our presuppositions but will also predetermine the kinds of considerations that are excluded from an inquiry. For example, depending on how we conceptualize “mind” will determine not only how we define what the mind is, but also what we come to posit about the nature of intelligence. Robert Sternberg, in *Metaphors of Mind. Conceptions of the Nature of Intelligence*, suggests that a “geographical metaphor” about mind will elicit the question “What form does a map of the mind take?” and a “computational metaphor” will

95. Haskell: 166

96. Haskell: 165–166

elicit the question "What are the information-processing routines (programs) underlying intelligent thought?" Each metaphorical concept about what the mind is or how it functions will yield differing points of departure for inquiry: a "biological metaphor" will begin with brain physiology whereas an "epistemological metaphor" will begin with the possible structuring processes of knowledge.⁹⁷

I suppose we could say that we conceptualize through the use of metaphor—certainly scientific discourse and religious discourse often approach central concerns metaphorically. For example, think of the metaphor 'the world is a mechanism'. Under the influence of such a conceptualization or "root-metaphor," nature becomes a mechanism that is subject to laws and regularity—it can be studied. The conceptualization also provides that "everything is by design" so that any order that is found in the world vouchsafes the existence of an ordering intelligence. Or think about the conceptualization of the "great chain of being" and how subscribing to it can implicitly (or explicitly) affect our ideas of social stratification and desert, or how it can influence scientific theory, as in the case of Darwin, under the guise of evolutionary "progress". Perhaps these notions make too large a claim for metaphoric conceptualization; at the very least, however, we could say that "metaphorical concepts provide ways of understanding one kind of experience in terms of another kind of experience."⁹⁸

Metaphorical models can be explanatory by showing how a model is similar or dissimilar to its descriptive counterpart. Perhaps we should say that most of our

97. Sternberg, 1990: 4

98. Lakoff and Johnson: 324

conceptual thinking is analogical rather than metaphorical—at the very least it is uncontroversial to suggest that we use analogical models to aid our investigative inquiries. For the purposes of this discussion, however, perhaps the most contentious notions in the philosophical literature about metaphor concern what happens to “dead metaphors”—those meanings once described as metaphorical that become “literal” and part of everyday language usage; for example, the “mouth” of the river. The work of Lakoff and Johnson addresses this issue directly—for them, far from “vanishing” from our conceptual frameworks, metaphors come to “colour” our cognitions profoundly. Lakoff and Johnson insist that “no account of meaning and truth can be adequate unless it recognizes and deals with the way in which conventional metaphors structure our conceptual system.”⁹⁹ Even more strongly, they suggest that the

problem of the cognitive status of metaphor raises basic epistemological and ontological challenges to our theories of how experience is possible for us. If metaphors actually *create* similarities, any ontological description of the way things stand forth or reveal themselves to us as meaningful will itself be inextricably linked to metaphor. And even if metaphors do no more than *reveal* similarities, we will still need a detailed epistemological explanation of how it is possible for us to conceptualize experience metaphorically.¹⁰⁰

For Ricoeur, however, these approaches to the problem of metaphor do not address his central concern about the semantic meaning attaching to metaphor. For Ricoeur, examining the functioning of metaphor is important because it can yield insights into “semantic innovation” or the creation of new meaning. The exploration of “root”

99. Johnson 1981: 43

100. Johnson 1981: 43

metaphors may offer psychological insights about conceptualization, but it does not address the question of the creation or generation of new meaning that most interests Ricoeur.

F.R. Bradbury, in "Scientific Method," also discusses the use of models in scientific inquiry. All models, he suggests, are a "simplification, and therefore a distortion of what they model, whether this be with regard to scale, or to detail, or to both."¹⁰¹ Further, as "*models are made with an object in view*," this simplification is eminently useful—even at the expense (inevitably) of detail. Bradbury also supports Haskell's position that "all reality is analogue-as-abstraction"—he shows that although a model is "a crude abstraction from the complexity of the real situation," this is its greatest "virtue." By reducing the complexity of a real situation or observational situation, the model functions as "a simplifying and unifying concept."¹⁰²

Bradbury outlines three types of models that are used extensively in scientific discourse: the iconic model, the analogue, and the symbolic model. Bradbury defines the iconic model as "a miniature, simplified in detail or function, of the full-scale object"; analogues as the "descriptive representations of the modelled object or system, which may have little outward similarity to the object in size or shape" (for example, engineering blueprints); and symbolic models as expressing relationships by using symbols, the greatest

101. Bradbury: 80

102. Bradbury: 82

sub-class of which are mathematical symbols.¹⁰³ Bradbury theorizes that scientific or experimental

observation is an experience in which the physico-biochemical stimulus (caused by observing) meets the imagination and past experience of the observer, which imposes an *interpretation* of what is observed. ... Most will look at or observe the system or situation and interpret it, in light of their experience, in the old way ... The theory is born when *someone recognizes the new pattern* and can describe it in words, models or numbers.¹⁰⁴

As many have suggested, echoing Ernst Gombrich in one form or another, "there is no innocent eye." If we use models to provide "simplifying and unifying concepts," we are in effect talking about individuals having theories (or organizing principles or interpretive strategies) with which they structure their thoughts, their communications, their beliefs, their way of living in the world. An academic discipline also requires hierarchical principles or theories with which to organize the myriad details of anecdote, observation or research. It seems prudent, therefore, to acknowledge, following Wheelwright,

that every attempt at philosophical investigation starts out from some structuralist prejudice—some predisposition to arrange the basic categories and relations in one way rather than another.¹⁰⁵

This point need not be contentious: even Karl Popper writes that

we shall have to get accustomed to the idea that we must not look upon science as a "body of knowledge," but rather as a system of hypotheses; that is to say, as a system of guesses or anticipations which in principle cannot be justified, but with which we work as long as they stand up to

103. Bradbury: 79

104. Bradbury: 84

105. Wheelwright: 62

tests, and of which we are never justified in saying that we know that they are “true” or “more or less certain,” or even “probable.”¹⁰⁶

These notions force us to notice an issue that appears in any theoretical discussion about language—about what it is, about what it does. Although we may assume that a word has some direct relation or reference to an actual object in our environment, Funes’ discontent with the broad, signifying status of the word ‘dog’ suggests that this may not be the case. It must then be our *acceptance* of a signifying convention that allows us to use such generic terms as ‘dog’ without the least concern that using such terms could be problematic, that there is no such “actual” generalized object in our environment. The possibility of a problem is underscored by Haskell’s report on the analogical and generalizing nature of our physiological-psychological ordering of “reality”. We could agree with Funes that “the dog at three fourteen (seen from the side)” may or may not be “the dog at three fifteen (seen from the front)” —there is no guarantee of identity here. But Funes is confusing the “literal” or “formal” identity of the dog (“Is it *really* the same dog?”) with the “nominal” generalization ‘dog’ (“That’s a dog again”).¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Mary Hesse has argued that

*all applications of general terms, however apparently literal, depend on perceptions of similarities between their referents.*¹⁰⁸

Let us agree for the moment that Haskell’s research has force and that “all so-called repeated experiences are but analogous experiences fitting an abstract form.” Were

106. As quoted by Holton, *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought*: 20

107. Hesse 1987: 311. Examples paraphrased from “Is it *really* an X”, “That’s an X again”.

108. Hesse 1987: 311

we to consider someone like the character Funes, for whom no experience is “ever exactly repeated,” no generic word like ‘dog’ could accurately be applied to objects in unlike situations. From this point of view, an infinite vocabulary (or at least a very large one) *and* a very good memory would be necessary to carry on conversations (or even observational notations) about the world we experience—see, hear, smell, touch—every day. Were this the case, we would be forced to conclude with Borges’ narrator that it is only with “generalizations,” “abstractions” or “forgetting differences” that we are able to use the broadly signifying words of our language to communicate successfully with each other.

Few of us, without the prodigious memory of Funes the Memorious, could catalogue our memories with an infinite vocabulary, and so we use the generalized terms of our language conventions to communicate what we want to express to another person. Without this capacity for generalization and simplification, we could relate masses of details, each singularly named, but would this serve us well? For example, if each singular naming denotes a singular object in a specific physical and temporal context as experienced or observed by a specific individual, then without the same experience or observation of the same singular object in the same physical and temporal context *and* having been given the same singular naming as our interlocutor—well, what *would* we be saying to each other? Further, if this were the case, think of what we would have to remember about each fleeting experience or daily observation. Like Funes, we would be forced to aver “My memory, sir, is like a garbage heap.” Indeed, Bradbury remarks that

if science were, simply, a huge collection of facts and figures it would today, even with the very best possible indexing system, be an unwieldy and relatively useless rag-bag.¹⁰⁹

However, we often forget the corollary of this position: that it is only by convention that the acceptable generalized terms of a given language are posited. Often we move toward discussing language *simpliciter* as positing word meaning in a one-to-one correspondence with a signified object. This reification of language as somehow being primary—as “a system which precedes the speaking subject” (QS 251)—creeps into most philosophizing discussions, including my own. That words are generalized terms, abstractions, must be borne in mind to navigate the “wordy” debates in philosophy concerning metaphor—not so much to prove one approach or theory over another, but to serve as a corrective to arguments whose merits must be better expressed. As Black sees it, we might be tempted to complain about an

ungrounded profundity [in these discussions] because so many writers, agreeing with [Middleton] Murray that “metaphor is as ultimate as speech itself, and speech as ultimate as thought,” rapidly draw ontological morals, while leaving the nature of metaphorical speech and thought tantalizingly obscure.¹¹⁰

Some philosophers assume that literal language is cognitive in contrast to figurative language (metaphor), which is purely emotive; further, that “metaphors are relatively inconsequential unless they are cognitive.”¹¹¹ Ricoeur does not argue for the blurring of the literal-figurative distinction; rather Ricoeur suggests that the distinction

109 Bradbury: 78

110 Black 1990: 48

111. Cohen. 3

should be redescribed. For Ricoeur, "literal meanings" can be found in the lexicon or dictionary; but literal meaning attaches to a word—not to a sentence. For Ricoeur, the error that is usually made is to suppose that the lexicon posits one meaning for each word. Ricoeur points out that the lexicon is "polysemic";¹¹² that more than one meaning (or meaning description), based on how the word has actually been used, often attaches to a word in the dictionary; and that a word's possible meaning is determined only in the context of the specific sentence in which it is used.

Based on the "semantic choices" of a speaker and the context in which the dialogue takes place, "a certain amount of univocity is reached" in the utterance that an interlocutor understands. Ricoeur suggests that the

use of language is governed not only by syntactic rules of grammaticality, but also by semantic rules of sense compossibility. In order to make sense together, words must have a mutual appropriateness, a semantic pertinence (WPM 73).

This notion of "semantic pertinence" is very important for Ricoeur. As the semantic field of meaning for a word can be widespread in a language where there can be more than one meaning for a particular word, Ricoeur suggests that a

rule of semantic pertinence requires that when we speak, only a part of the semantic field of a word is used. The remainder is excluded, or, rather, repressed, by the process of mutual selection exerted by the sentence as a whole and by the context of discourse on its parts (WPM 73).

112. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* defines polysemy as "multiplicity of meaning"

According to Ricoeur, we develop strategies in our use of language to limit the misunderstandings that can arise; misunderstandings that are inherent in the polysemy of language.¹¹³

Polysemy

What is the polysemy of language? For Ricoeur, polysemy “is readily defined as the property of words in a natural language to have more than one meaning”; that is, “one name with several senses” (WPM 70). It is upon this “crucial phenomena of natural languages” (WPM 70) that Ricoeur bases his arguments, for polysemy requires a limiting context before a meaning can be determined (WPM 70). For Ricoeur, the

simplest message conveyed by the means of natural language has to be interpreted because all the words are polysemic and take their actual meaning from the connection with a given context and a given audience against the background of a given situation. Interpretation in this broad sense is a process by which we use all the available contextual determinants to grasp the actual meaning of a given message in a given situation (WPM 71).

The polysemic meaning attributions in a dictionary describe how a word or term has been used by a linguistic community: for example (with apologies to Plato), the different senses

¹¹³ There is a notion afoot that there is no such thing as polysemy --we mistake it for a rich variety of homonymy. Although in itself this notion is intriguing, it will not help us to disentangle the problems currently encountered in the philosophy of language if we take for our starting point (with Ricoeur) the guiding theme of economy in Humboldt's aphorism that language results from “an infinite use of finite means”. Ricoeur, however, argues that a lexicon “based on the opposite principle of total univocity of all its elements, that is to say, on the principle of only one sense for one name, would be infinite if it were destined to convey from one person to another the richness of concrete and qualitative experience (WPM 70).” This, I suspect, is the moral to Borges' story “Funes the Memorious.”

attributed to the adjective 'good', as in "a good knife" or in "a good child"; or the difference in meaning attribution between the verb 'man' and the noun 'man'.

Ricoeur argues that we *use* language and, therefore, that we use language for a purpose: to communicate with others in our linguistic community. If my intention is to communicate with another person, to give expression to a memory or observation I wish to relate, some basis of understanding must be available to both the speaker and the listener to accomplish a "communicative act." Ricoeur defines this communication as "ordinary language," which is "the attempt to convey information from speaker to hearer concerning the concrete situations of everyday life" (WPM 73). Ricoeur defines ordinary language as one of the natural languages (like "English, French, German").¹¹⁴ Ricoeur suggests that "ordinary language" requires a "minimal technicity" or competence, but that such competence does entail a knowledge of syntactic and semantic rules—even if this knowledge is informal. Even a gestural communication between individuals requires the basis of understanding that a gesture *could* express some communicative act on the part of another, rather than merely being a physical movement like a tic, stretching or exercising. As Ricoeur points out,

it is in the context of this or that symbolic convention that we are able to interpret a given gesture as having this or that meaning; the same movement of the arm can, depending on the context, be understood as a way of greeting, of hailing a taxi, or of casting a vote.¹¹⁵

114. Ricoeur suggests that ordinary language is used to "convey information from speaker to hearer concerning the concrete situations of everyday life which are differently experienced by the individual members of the speech community..." (WPM 73).

115. Ricoeur, "Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator": 434

Conversations between individuals with no common language (like English or Flemish) still depend on both individuals knowing what “using a language for conversing” entails. The details of nomenclature could be worked out by trial and error or by ostensive example, but both parties must be familiar with what they are trying interactively to accomplish—to have a conversation using language.

For Ricoeur,

ordinary language and artificial language not only belong to two irreducible strategies, but have different aims (WPM 75).

Scientific language, as opposed to ordinary language, is indifferent to context: the purpose of scientific language is to ensure that the meanings “remain the same through all the arguments” (WPM 75). The strategy of scientific language is an attempt by members of a linguistic community to eradicate the polysemy of language rather than merely reducing it, as is the case in ordinary language (WPM 74). Scientific language redefines or reformulates the terms of ordinary language to limit polysemy, introduces special terms that denote “only quantitative entities, to the exclusion of the qualitative aspect of our experience” (WPM 74), and abstracts or formalizes terms to the point that rules for “reading” or understanding the mathematic symbols and symbolic generalizations of science are required (WPM 74). Ricoeur calls this extreme formalization of a polysemous language an artificial language.

For Ricoeur, scientific language does not aim to communicate in the sense that ordinary language does—its aim is “argumentation” (WPM 75). Poetic language, as opposed to ordinary language and to scientific language, exploits the polysemous lexicon to produce a text that can be interpreted to “mean all that it can mean.” However, both

poetic language and scientific language are second-order strategies that are imposed on ordinary discourse and, to this extent, are parasitic on it.

Ricoeur suggests that we can call scientific language, “speculative discourse” or “explanatory discourse.” Speculative or explanatory discourse is a second-order discourse that attempts to strip away the associative connotations, or “encrustations” to use Davidson’s phrase, of the lexical value of words. In comparison, in the sphere of poetic discourse we try to enlarge the range of the lexical value of words; we try to exploit the connotative resources of language to allow a poetic discourse to “mean all that it can mean.” Ricoeur stresses the heterogeneity of the kinds of discourse, but stops short of endorsing a radical incommensurability of language-games. Both speculative discourse and poetic discourse are secondary to what Ricoeur calls “ordinary” discourse or “natural” language—the language that we use every day to communicate with others in our shared linguistic community. Still, it is what we do with the resources of language that is important, and it is bound up with a *telos* of why we attempt to communicate with each other at all.

Ricoeur suggests that the notion of polysemy is resisted because it undermines a pursuit for precise and stable meanings—polysemy admits ambiguity into our use of language (WPM 71). For Ricoeur, ambiguity may also be significantly functional depending on the speaker’s intention to increase the possible interpretations of the discourse (poetic) or to eliminate the ambiguity of the discourse (speculative). Ricoeur stresses, however, that polysemy is not equivalent to, or a species of, ambiguity (as others might suggest): “polysemy is a feature of words ... ambiguity is a feature of

discourse ... " (WPM 72). If the intention or aim of language users is to evoke the plurivocity of language in discourse (speech or texts), their efforts can be classified *ex post facto* as poetic discourse. Conversely, if language users aspire to render a monosemic clarity, intending to produce discourses that can be interpreted unequivocally, their efforts can be classified *ex post facto* as speculative (philosophical, scientific) discourse.

This disparity of aims in the strategy of using language is important to Ricoeur's project. For example, it is often assumed that ontological and theological discourse, because they often employ metaphor, are a species of poetic discourse and not a philosophical discourse concerned with truth. But Ricoeur, following Aristotle, points out that metaphor was used by the domains of both rhetoric and poetics (RM 12). According to Ricoeur, we now attribute an attenuated rôle to rhetoric, one that degenerated from Aristotle's original tripartite formulation of rhetoric as a theory of "argumentation," of "style" and of "composition" (RM 9) in three typical areas: deliberative (in assemblies), judiciary (in tribunals) and epideictic (in "commemorative gatherings") (RPH 138). The significance for Ricoeur will be that the opposition in the aim or intention of these separate spheres of discourse must be acknowledged in any discussion of metaphor; that is, the function of metaphor in rhetoric cannot be assumed to be identical to the function of metaphor in poetics. For example, Ricoeur says that Aristotle defined rhetoric as "the art of inventing or finding proofs" (RM 13), which certainly does not describe how we usually view poetry. Based on this observation, Ricoeur suggests that the dichotomy between rhetoric (the oratory art of persuasion) and poetics (which does not seek to persuade) constitutes a distinction between spheres of discourse and that metaphor may be

reassessed without running counter to an inherited tradition—"metaphor ... has a foot in each domain" (RM 12). For Ricoeur,

this duality of function and of intention is more radical than any distinction between poetry and prose; it constitutes the ultimate justification of this distinction (RM 13).

For Ricoeur, each sphere of discourse has a *telos*, that is, a purpose or goal. This teleology can be related to Ricoeur's notion concerning the strategies of language and further discriminated in the spheres of particular discourse. Scientific discourse does not seek verifiability; rather it seeks consistency, which allows, for example, anomalies that compromise a theory or unconventional hypotheses that challenge the status quo of a scientific community to be bracketed. For Ricoeur, each discipline employs codified principles to evaluate its methodology and its conclusions: we could describe scientific method, structuralism, literary criticism and hermeneutics (as redefined by Ricoeur), for example, as codified principles of evaluation. However, Ricoeur will also insist that each methodology has boundaries that limit its application so that structuralism is not the correct methodology for evaluating acts of speech any more than scientific method is the correct methodology for evaluating a poem. That one methodology enjoys preeminence in a community is, I submit, a matter of contingency—not one of merit or of truth.

However, even though Ricoeur has constructed the foundation for his tensional theory of metaphor with extensive argument, he has still to answer Davidson's question about what we understand when we understand a metaphor. For Davidson, what we understand in a metaphor is not semantic—the metaphor may "nudge" us into noticing something significant or new or unusual, but this quality of good metaphors belongs

strictly to the domain of language use.¹¹⁶ How will Ricoeur justify the semantic content of a metaphor? As we discussed in the first chapter, Ricoeur adopts Benveniste's notion and defines semantics by predication. Further, as it is this act of predication that also produces a metaphor, Ricoeur focuses on the copula—the quintessential moment of predication—in an attempt to answer Davidson's question. On the basis of the proportional relationship that Ricoeur argues exists between the terms of a metaphor, he suggests how we can separate the semantic content of metaphor from what the metaphor makes us notice.

All things in proportion

The traditional view of metaphor is usually found in two general variants: the substitution view and the comparison view. Briefly, in the substitution view a metaphor can be replaced by a literal paraphrase because a metaphor is simply substituted for a literal statement. For example, a metaphor in the form of "A is B" merely substitutes "B" for the literal phrase "C" in "A is C." In the comparison view of metaphor, a metaphor in the form "A is B" merely condenses the intended simile "A is like B." The metaphor is condensed (or elliptical) in the sense that it can be replaced by a literal comparison because the metaphor merely "leaves out" the explicit comparison. Metaphor, in both these cases, is essentially a "decorative" device; it is a "poetic" rather than a "prosaic" (plain) use of language.¹¹⁷

116. Davidson 1978: 31

117. Shibbes, *Analysis of Metaphor*: 152

The widely held notion that metaphor involves comparisons (similes) follows from Aristotle's suggestion that "a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars."¹¹⁸ From Aristotle's suggestion that the juxtaposition of the ordinary modes of speech with unusual employments gives rhetoric and poetics their great advantages, we inherit the notion that metaphor is merely an ornament to, or a "style" of, using language:

Diction becomes distinguished and non-prosaic by the use of unfamiliar terms, i.e., strange words, metaphors, lengthened forms, and everything that deviates from ordinary modes of speech.¹¹⁹

The received view of metaphor ascribed to Aristotle is that metaphor transfers meaning from one sphere to another:

Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on grounds of analogy.¹²⁰

Davidson suggests, reasonably it seems, that "metaphor makes us attend to some likeness, often a novel or surprising likeness, between two or more things."¹²¹ For Ricoeur, however, the metaphor does not show forth comparisons *per se*: we "see" similarities through (or in spite of) the differences between two or more things. For Ricoeur, it is not some concrete or literal "likeness" that we attend to in the case of metaphor. We attend to the *relation* holding between the terms of a metaphor, which admits of an identity or

118. Aristotle, *Poetics*: 1459a

119. Aristotle, *Poetics*: 1458a

120. Aristotle, *Poetics*: 1457b

121. Davidson 1978: 31

similarity statement by virtue of the copula ("A is B"). The copula is not a statement of an equivalence between the terms themselves, for there are two senses in which the verb *to be* can be taken: an objective existential sense and a relational sense. As Ricoeur points out,

for Aristotle the metaphor is not the analogy itself (i.e., equivalence of the relations) but rather the transference of the name of the second term to the fourth and vice versa on the basis of the proportional relationship (RM 197).

Scott Buchanan, in *Poetry and Mathematics*, discusses the concept of proportionality in mathematics, which entails the notions of ratio and analogy. We must remember not only that Aristotle defines metaphor as consisting "in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else ... on grounds of analogy," but also that the "Greeks used the term *analogia*, not only in the sense of a linguistic equation but in terms of mathematical proportion as well."¹²² The concept of proportion in mathematics, I trust, can be accepted as uncontroversial; what may be more controversial is the suggestion that the concept of proportion may function homologously in language. To consider the plausibility of this suggestion, let us review Buchanan's discussion of the concept of ratios:

From the point of view of postulate theory, multiplication and division are accurate and delicately discriminating selections of complex relations between elements. The ratio abstracts and fixes these relations and manipulates them without actually carrying out the operations which they make possible. It abstracts the bare relations. ...

This abstractive property of ratios is further brought out in the proportion which, very simply defined, is the statement of identity or similarity between two relations each of which holds between two or more

122. Aristotle: *Poetics* 1457b

magnitudes. Here no relation of identity or similarity is stated between the elementary magnitudes, that is, the terms of the proportions, but the relations between these terms are said to be identical or similar. Thus A, B, C and D may range over the whole field of numbers, and yet it may remain true that $A:B :: C:D$.¹²³

There are two points in this passage that are important for us to consider in our discussions about metaphor. Buchanan points out (1) that the ratio abstracts, fixes and manipulates the complex relations *between* elements “*without* actually carrying out the operations which they make possible” (my emphasis); and (2) that there is no “existential” statement about an objective identity or similarity between the “terms of the proportions,” but that there is an identity or similarity statement made about the *relations* holding between the terms of the proportions. With the extension of these notions to linguistic analogy (metaphor)—for example, in a heuristic scientific model—we can say that what we explicate in our theory of metaphor is not the direct comparison of one term with another term but the *relation* holding between each of the terms. Whatever relation holds between terms A:B will be identical or similar to the relations holding between terms C:D, without the further stipulation that somehow the terms A:B *are* the terms C:D (in an objective or ontological sense). This proposal underscores Ricoeur’s arguments, in *The Rule of Metaphor* and in other papers: that in linguistic analysis we discuss not the idea-content of the sentence but the relation holding between the linguistic (semantic) elements of the sentence.

For example, do we believe that the “flow of electricity” is identical (literally, actually) to the “flow of water”—or do we rather thoroughly understand the analogy? We

123. Buchanan: 86–87

do not see electricity physically flowing like water with a current, and the metaphor itself does not describe specifically the transfer of kinetic energy from one electron to the next. However, what we say about electricity and the behaviour of electricity using this analogy of flow is “seamlessly” interconnected with the theories that allow us to manipulate and to direct the use of electricity. Electrical flow is not identical physically to the flow of water; however, the proportional relation between water and its physical behaviour is usefully similar to the observed behaviour of electricity. Further, the metaphor has been so successful that it has been incorporated into the general lexicon as one of the meaning descriptions of ‘flow’—“the continuous transfer of energy as of electricity or heat.”¹²⁴

How does this discussion of the relations holding between ratios help us? Many argue that there can be no “true” referential direction in metaphor. This argument is most convincing when it is used in discussions of poetic metaphor. However, we accept the suggestion that mathematical relations and devising new mathematical relations through the use of ratios is unproblematic and that the referential validity of the ratios remains intact. If we could show how metaphors can be constructed in terms of proportional relations, then perhaps it will be more difficult to dismiss a discussion about the possible referential direction of metaphor. For example, Buchanan continues: even

the strict mathematical form of the analogy $[A:B :: C:D]$... is capable of great versatility without losing its accuracy or elegance. For instance, once the relations in the proportion are grasped, it is immediately seen that one can take it by alternation: $A:B :: C:D$ is not violated if we say $A:C :: B:D$. Inversions produce another variation $B:A :: D:C$ and by combined alternation and inversion $C:A :: D:B$. Also $A \pm B:A$ or $B :: C \pm D:C$ or D . This is by composition and division. Further we may have a continued

124. *Webster's Third International Dictionary*

proportion of many ratios such as $A:B:C:D :: E:F:G:H$ or $A:B :: C:D :: E:F$ and these can run through the poses of alternation and division and their combinations.¹²⁵

The significance for our discussion of metaphor in this further elaboration is that, if it is unproblematic for mathematicians to manipulate the terms of the proportion without affecting the terms themselves or losing "accuracy or elegance," then the metaphor (linguistic analogy) should be able uncontroversially to effect the same function. There need be no question of how objectively (existentially) "a woman is a rose" ($B:D$) if what we grasp or understand is the proportional relation holding between the terms; that is, "love is to the woman" ($A:B$) as "sunshine is to the rose" ($C:D$). More importantly, however, if the "strict form is capable of great versatility" in mathematics, by extension the strict form is also capable of great versatility or novelty in language; for even if there are precise and stable meanings (in the literalist sense) for words in the language, new proportional relationships between the words (terms) can be expressed using inversion, alternation, composition and division—operations that do not affect the original values of the terms but which may yield new "proportional" values. These new proportional values, as exemplified in the case of 'flow' above, can become incorporated in the lexicon; that is, what others call "dead metaphor" (and sometimes banal or unemphatic metaphor), Ricoeur calls "lexicalized metaphor."

If the explication of the mathematical analogy holds as well for the linguistic analogy, then the "interplay between identity and difference" that Ricoeur attributes to the copula 'is' will inhere not in an objective (existential) identity but in an identity or

125. Buchanan: 86–87

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similarity of the relations holding *between* the terms of the metaphor. The point to be made here about how we can “understand” metaphor is important: as in mathematics when our “grasping” of ratios can stand as an independent moment, apart from how we understand the significance of the ratios or the uses to which the ratios are put, so too there must be an “independent moment” in our “grasping” of a metaphorical statement, apart from how we understand the significance of the sentence or the uses to which we put the sentence. For Ricoeur, when we grasp the relations holding in a proportional metaphor, we grasp its semantic meaning. Further questions about whether a statement is “figurative” or “literal” in a comparison with a “state of affairs” is a separate concern, a concern that is independent of questions about whether the elements or terms of the sentence have coherent semantic interrelationships.

Davidson suggests that metaphor is simply a literal statement that “inspires or prompts the insight” that we value in a metaphor. Davidson further suggests that, in general, what the metaphorical insight reveals is not the “recognition of some truth or fact” so that we cannot express the insight with any “literal expression.”¹²⁶ Davidson also notes that our inability to paraphrase a metaphor attaches equally to “any use of language” that “attempts to spell out what [it] makes us notice.”¹²⁷ For Davidson, “seeing as is not seeing that.”¹²⁸ But do Davidson’s assertions suffice if we consider the possibility that is opened up by the significance of the proportional relations between terms in a metaphor

126. Davidson 1978: 45

127. Davidson 1978: 45 (fn)

128. Davidson 1978: 45

(as based on the proportional relationship between ratios)? In the case of mathematical ratios, we “see” or “understand” the proportional relationships holding between the terms—we easily grasp the “seeing as” of $A:B :: C:D$ in all its combinations. We also grasp the “seeing that” of $A:B :: C:D$ in all its combinations because we build further mathematical propositions on these proportional relationships. Is it so clear that we can assert that with this mathematical insight we do not “recognize some truth or fact”? Is it so clear that we can assert “seeing as is not seeing that”?

The seeing-as function usually attaches to the idea-content of the terms in the sentence, as Davidson suggests. However, what if the iconic element in the proportional relations holding between the terms in a metaphor is what we “see” instead of some idea-content? Rather than trying to explain how we can use a “stereoscopic vision” to keep before us in a “linguistic fashion” the visual gestalt of Wittgenstein’s “duck” or “rabbit”, rather than trying to explain how we can see *things* in a new light, Ricoeur suggests that we have only to describe the new proportional relations we perceive holding between the terms of a metaphor. Whether we choose to call this ability linguistic imagination or some other name, what Ricoeur points out is that the seeing-as function may not be a “picturing” in the sense of an actual picture or image but rather a “schematizing.” If the seeing-as function is unproblematic in the field of mathematics, then it is plausible to suggest that the seeing-as function could be unproblematic in the field of language. We need not describe how the function works—it is properly a neurological or a psychological question; but *if* the seeing-as function remains problematic in the field of language, then, by extension, it should be problematic in the field of mathematics.

Disagreement about this point may rest on a bias concerning what an "iconic" element could be. However, in the construction of meaning it need not be a moment of a "visual" or a "picturing" resemblance in a naive sense—it could be homologous to the way we describe the iconic moment in mathematical reasoning. For example, Black enlists an iconic moment in mathematical reasoning to illustrate how we could be trained—could learn—the geometric relationships that can be found in a six-pointed star.¹²⁹ Black tries to show that "someone who *affirms* a metaphorical statement," that is, not merely to "entertain" one, must "at least be thinking" of "*A as B*."¹³⁰ (This is also the criticism Black levels against one of Davidson's statements that "metaphor is the dreamwork of language.") Black suggests that just as we train a child to see a

star as superimposed parallelograms; a metaphor thinker sees [e.g.] life as a flow of information; both apply concepts that yield discovery; both manifest skills shown in ability to tease out suitable implications of their respective insights.¹³¹

Black also goes to great pains to argue for the "identify of structure" in relationships between the primary and secondary implication-complex of metaphors: for example, Black suggests that in

"Poverty is a crime," "crime" and "poverty" are nodes of isomorphic networks, in which assertions about crime are correlated one-to-one with corresponding statements about poverty ... [so that] every metaphorical statement may be said to implicate a likeness-statement and a comparison statement, each weaker than the original metaphorical statement.¹³²

129. Black 1990: 65

130. Black 1990: 64

131. Black 1990: 66

132. Black 1990: 63

But interestingly, neither of Black's arguments can usefully be extended to our discussion of *ratio* because Black's geometric figure is still essentially visual. Black uses the geometric figure as a heuristic aid to discovering relationships, but what "picturing" equivalent in the sense of geometric figures could we apply in the case of ratios? Further, Black is trying to show that "metaphorical thought" is not merely a "flash of insight" but that "thinking in metaphor" is "to think of something (A) *as* something else (B)."¹³³ This is exactly the problem that this detour through proportionality is trying to circumvent.¹³⁴

Whatever description we employ to ground the analogical aspects of mathematical reasoning the same description can be used, if not to justify at least to propose a similar functioning of the analogical aspects of linguistic reasoning. Conversely, if the stated case as it pertains to language is dismissed, the analogical aspects of mathematical reasoning could also be called into question: If the process is wholly mysterious in the case of metaphor, would it not also be wholly mysterious in the case of analogical reasoning in mathematics? If the question of the process is outside the purview of analogical reasoning in mathematics, but that this question does not affect its "accuracy or elegance," why can the question about the process (psychological, physiological or occult) not be bracketed in

133. Black 1990: 64

134. Ricoeur also alludes to this hidden ontology quite often, for example, in *The Rule of Metaphor*: "if metaphor consists in talking about one thing in terms of another, does it not consist also in perceiving, thinking, or sensing one thing in terms of another" (RM 83). However, as Ricoeur suggests that language is an ineliminable mediation, is it not difficult then to argue that through language we can discuss being directly? Ricoeur himself later points this out: in *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur remarks that in error he "even suggested that 'seeing-as', which sums up the power of metaphor, could be the revealer of a 'being-as' at the deepest ontological level" (TN1: xi).

the same way for metaphor without then disqualifying its claims to “accuracy or elegance”? As Goodman quips,

the question why predicates apply as they do metaphorically is much the same as the question why they apply as they do literally. And if we have no good answer in either case, perhaps that is because there is no real question.¹³⁵

This gambit, of course, depends on an acceptance of the argument that there is an equivalence between the proportionality of the ratio as it is used in mathematics and the proportionality of analogy as it is used in language. However, even without an acceptance of this claim, the argument does raise at least a point to be answered: How are the cases different? And, following Davidson’s sling, it’s no good saying that ratios in mathematics simply have “cognitive content” for this is like saying “sleeping pills put you to sleep because they have dormative [*sic*] power.”

I suspect, though, that we may have a different problem here. Davidson suggests that making and understanding metaphors is not part of a “basic” linguistic competence. Ricoeur, by making the metaphorical process the exemplar of what is inherent in our imaginative functioning (in the Kantian sense), will have to disagree and insist that making and understanding metaphors is part of a basic linguistic competence. The problem for us arises in the use of mathematical proportionality to show how metaphor can have an iconic component that is not visual, like “a picture” or “faded representation.”

Ricoeur has called mathematics an “artificial language”—it properly belongs to the strategy of a second-order discourse. That we “grasp” the relations holding between the

135. Goodman 1968: 50

ratios is an ability that we could argue is acquired only through training. By extension, we could suggest that the ability to grasp a metaphor also is acquired only through training. We might end up arguing that metaphor is not part of a basic linguistic competence but part of a sophisticated competence that involves specialized linguistic training so that we can participate in second-order discourses. Were this to be the case, then at the level of ordinary (first-order) discourse we might not be able to make or understand metaphors or analogies. However, the question becomes moot—I do not believe that Ricoeur’s theory of language is developed enough to posit the limits or the extent of basic linguistic competence (it’s not a problem that he has set himself to answer). And Davidson cannot use the notions of first- and second-order discourses without compromising his own stance. For Ricoeur, it is the question of “linguistic imagination” that remains the most important point to explicate: it could be the case that our basic linguistic competence is sophisticated simply because our faculty of “imagination” is sophisticated.

As we participate in discourses that are increasingly abstract, the question of the iconic moment, the “seeing-as” of new relationships, becomes more problematic. For example, where would we locate a “picturing” in the concepts of quantum mechanics, which are purely mathematical descriptions? As Bohr has been said to insist: “There is no *quantum world*. There is only an abstract quantum description.”¹³⁶ If we describe quantum physics as dealing with relativity and probability, we can manipulate the mathematics but we will find it difficult to discover a “concrete” example with which to illustrate the concepts. As one author points out, modern physics

136. Herbert: 17

in spite of its overwhelming practical success in explaining a vast range of physical phenomena from quark to quasar, fails to give us a single metaphor for how the universe actually works.¹³⁷

The point in specifying the homologous relation between mathematical analogy and linguistic analogy is not so much to limit the field of possible metaphors, or to insist that all metaphors must be of an analogical type, but to suggest how we might constitute the field of possible metaphors on the basis of *relation*, in whatever form it is delineated. Ricoeur also posits the limit of semantics at the point at which a non-verbal iconicity, a sensible or pictorial moment, becomes an integral part contributing to the meaning of an utterance. This "fusion of sense and the imaginary," Ricoeur suggests, requires a "phenomenology of the imagination" or a psycholinguistics in that it incorporates a properly psychological moment (RM 214).

However, these reflections seem to stray from our central concern in this chapter: How do we identify the cognitivity of language? Even if, as Davidson suggests, there is no cognitivity to identify in metaphor, have we been able to identify the cognitivity in literal language? Ricoeur's examination of the cognitive content of language must be set in the context of Ricoeur's theory of language as a whole. It is a complex construct that incorporates all the themes that we have touched on so far; all are germane and integral to the validity of Ricoeur's theory. Let us try to view these themes from a different perspective.

When we speak, we use linguistic sounds (words) to carry our intended meaning to our interlocutor. However, given our long detour through structural linguistics, we

137. Herbert: xi

have also discovered that underlying the phonetic configuration of our natural language there is a phonological substrate. The phonological characterization of our natural language shows how the smallest linguistic constituents endowed with semantic meaning (morphemes) can be “dissolved into their ultimate components,” which are called distinctive features. A bundle of distinctive features—the phoneme—is what ultimately allows morphemes to be differentiated from each other. At this level of a strictly formal explication of language, Ricoeur argues that we only identify the invariant properties of phonemes; “that is, relative, negative, and oppositional dimension.”

Similarly, we showed how the physiology of the eye gives us very coarse units from which we, nonetheless, gain a precise and discriminating view of the world we actually “see.” As our physiology gives us only these primitive units, we argued that the discrete experiences we describe as ‘seeing’, ‘hearing’, ‘touching’, ‘tasting’ or ‘smelling’ must, therefore, result from a very complex process of apprehension, selection and conceptual generalization.

For Ricoeur, this “very complex process” ties in with the Kantian notions of the magnitude and undifferentiated *sensa*. Kant defines sensibility as *sensa* and imagination; that is, *sensa*, which are the intuitions that are given to us through our senses, and the spontaneity of the imagination that represents them.¹³⁸ For Kant, knowledge acquisition is only possible through sensibility and the synthesis performed by the understanding. From these theoretical antecedents, Ricoeur suggests that the question concerning the cognitive content of language can be explored through two very different explanations; that is,

138. Kant: *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*

through Jakobson's account (and in the accounts of other linguistic theoreticians) of the cognitivity that inheres in the speech sounds themselves and through Kant's concept of the cognitive powers inherent in sensibility.

The "active principle" in the Kantian sensibility is imagination. We must remember, however, that for Kant imagination can be either reproductive or productive.¹³⁹ Ricoeur suggests that it is "not easy to draw out all the consequences of the decisive distinction introduced by Kant between *productive* and *reproductive* imagination"; further, that in discussions concerning the "philosophy of imagination" we fail "to account for 'productive' imagination in terms that do not reduce it to a 'reproductive' imagination" (SR 167). For Ricoeur, the locus for the possibility of semantic innovation (as exemplified by the case of metaphor) is the productive imagination. As such, Ricoeur sees semantic innovation as a process that must incorporate the full complement of Kantian sensibility: cognition, imagination and feeling.

139. Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*: [A118]

Metaphor as process

Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show

The Statues, W.B. Yeats

In Ricoeur's paper, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling," we are introduced to the important notion of the productive imagination as yielding the mechanisms for explaining innovation and creativity in language. Ricoeur's arguments entail three salient points: (1) that "metaphor is an act of *predication* rather than of *denomination*"; (2) that "a theory of deviance is not enough to give an account of the emergence of a *new congruence* at the predicative level"; (3) that "there is a structural analogy between the cognitive, the imaginative, and the emotional components of the complete metaphorical act."¹⁴⁰ Many might argue that these last considerations are not properly the purview of a philosophical inquiry. For Ricoeur, however, there must be a semantic moment that supplies an informative (objective) kernel in all utterances that use language—including tropes like metaphor. As such, it must be investigated.

For Ricoeur, a semantic theory of metaphor must explain

the capacity of metaphor to provide untranslatable information and, accordingly ... metaphor's claim to yield some true insight about reality (MP 141).¹⁴¹

140. Ricoeur 1978: 156–157

141. Untranslatable, by definition, indicates that the information "is not capable of being put into another form, style or language."

Ricoeur's main challenge to theories of metaphor like Black's and Davidson's, I think, is pointed: How are we to account for innovation in the use of language, for the emergence of new meaning? For Ricoeur, the significance of the question of metaphor lies in its commonly held capacity to set an image before the eyes: especially the capacity of metaphor that lets us see similarities or resemblances where none were previously recognized or articulated.

Ricoeur suggests that metaphor is often described as "subjective" or "figurative" because most examples of metaphor used in philosophical arguments seem to derive a metaphor's significance from the "feeling" or "image" that the metaphor evokes. Ricoeur points out that in arguments like these the metaphorical statements have already been categorized as having no informative value and, consequently, no truth claim. For Ricoeur, such explanations about metaphor mistakenly define metaphor by its capacity "to elicit feelings" or "to display images" and conclude that these feelings or images are the only "genuine information" about reality that the metaphor alludes to.

However, Ricoeur argues that feelings and images have a "constitutive function" in *all* uses of language—not just the use of language to make a metaphor. Ricoeur readily admits that this contention seems to fly in the face of the

well established ... dichotomy between sense ... and ... representation, if we understand "sense" as the objective content of an expression and "representation" as its mental actualization, precisely in the form of image and feeling (MP 142).

Ricoeur suggests that we inherit such views about metaphor from Aristotle: metaphors, good metaphors, "'set before the eyes' the sense that they display" (MP 142). In light of this inheritance, Ricoeur suggests that we assign "a kind of pictorial dimension" to

metaphorical meaning. From this "picturing dimension" of metaphor, we tend to emphasize the "figurability" of metaphor and thereby reinforce a dichotomy between "objective" (literal) language and "subjective" (figurative) language.

Traditionally, metaphor is explained in terms of deviance: that the common name for a thing is not used and a name belonging to something else is substituted instead. As Ricoeur points out, the

rationale of this transfer of name was understood as the objective similarity between the things themselves or the subjective similarity between the attitudes linked to the grasping of these things (MP 143).

(The reasons for using the substituted name were usually "to fill up a lexical lacuna" in the language or to "decorate discourse.")

Black rejects the traditional views of metaphor and endorses the interaction view of metaphor, a view that derives from I.A. Richards' "tenor and vehicle" theory of metaphor. Black's conception, which is slightly modified in "More about Metaphor," outlines a "focus and frame" relationship in a metaphorical statement that is governed by "syntactical and semantical rules which if violated produce nonsense or contradiction."¹⁴² Black identifies "two distinct subjects" in a metaphorical statement: a primary (principal) subject and a secondary (subsidiary) subject. The "focus" in the context of the "frame" of the sentence determines the meaning of a metaphorical statement. For Black, any part of

142. Shibbes: 153

speech can be used metaphorically—not just nouns or verbs. However, the locus of metaphorical meaning must be within a context—that is, within a phrase or a sentence.¹⁴³

For example, in the metaphorical statement “The chairman *ploughed* through the discussion,” the focus is *ploughed* (the term that is contraindicated in the context of a business meeting) and the frame is the rest of the sentence. A term is contraindicated in “a system of relationships” or in a “system of associated commonplaces” rather than against some one other singular term. So, in the context of this particular sentence the system of relationships apropos of business meetings does not usually incorporate a system of relationships apropos of farming. The “focus” or term that is contraindicated is still necessary, however, as the point of intersection or *interaction* between the two “systems of meaning associations.” As Black explains, the

metaphorical utterance works by “projecting upon” the primary subject a set of “associated implications,” comprised in the implicative complex, that are predicable of the secondary subject.¹⁴⁴

For Ricoeur, Black’s interaction theory of metaphor gives us a better explanation of the capacity of metaphor to yield insights into likeness than do explanations of metaphors as “deviant denominations.” For Black, “the bearer of the metaphorical meaning is no longer the word but the sentence as a whole” (MP 143). In Black’s interaction theory, a metaphor is not a case of a deviant substitution—it is “an interaction between a logical subject and predicate.” The significance for Ricoeur is that a

143. This view opposes Davidson’s contentions that context has no bearing on meaning, especially in the discussion “Tolstoy is a moralizing infant” in which “moralizing infant” is taken as having a literal meaning and not a metaphorical one at all.

144. Black 1990: 59

metaphorical statement cannot be defined as a deviant denomination, for a metaphorical statement is constituted only by the ascription of a deviant *predicate* to a logical subject.

But how do we make or identify deviant predications? For Ricoeur, this is the problem that remains unsolved in an interaction theory of metaphor: How do we explain the “transition from literal incongruence to metaphorical congruence between two semantic fields” (MP 145)?

Ricoeur suggests that a new “semantic proximity” of semantically distant terms is achieved through a “shift in logical distance,” which he suggests simply redescribes Aristotle’s *epiphora* or transfer in meaning. However, although Black’s interaction theory can deal with the notion of a shift in logical distance, Ricoeur points out that Black’s explanations rely heavily on the notion of an already (previously) existing “system of implications” and “associated commonplaces” (MP 145). Black’s theory cannot address the “semantic innovation” of newly devised implications that are outside the existing system of implications and associated commonplaces. If we understand a metaphorical statement that establishes an entirely new (unheard of) system of implications, *how* have we come to understand the statement? This is precisely the question that Ricoeur challenges us to explore: How do we account for “the innovation proper to this shift” in logical distance?

In answer, Ricoeur cites the work of the French theoretician Jean Cohen. Cohen defines metaphor as a case of “semantic impertinence”; that is, a metaphorical statement includes a predicate that is “not normally used in relation to a particular subject.”

However, to be successful metaphor must not only depart from normal conventions of

usage but must also be "acceptable." As Ricoeur points out, a "semantic clash" alone does not make a metaphor—it is a new, emergent predicative meaning that makes a metaphor. For Cohen, metaphor violates "the code of pertinence or relevance which rules the ascription of predicates in ordinary use" (MP 144); however, the semantic innovation of metaphor establishes a new pertinence (a new congruence) so that an "utterance makes sense as a whole."

In Cohen's view, a metaphorical statement establishes a new pertinence in the following way: in deviating from the formal syntactic (syntagmatic) relations between the terms in a sentence, a metaphorical statement reduces the syntactic deviation by establishing, at the same time, a new semantic pertinence. The new semantic pertinence is established by producing a lexical (paradigmatic) deviance for the lexical value of the "logical subject" so that a new meaning emerges, and can always emerge, if the metaphorical statement is understood. Without establishing a new semantic pertinence, the metaphorical statement would not be well understood—a new meaning would not emerge. In this way, even though the semantic deviance pivots on one term in a sentence, the new meaning is borne by the metaphorical statement as a whole. Ricoeur describes this new meaning as the "collapse of the literal meaning" with a strict definition: "that is, from the collapse of the meaning which obtains if we rely only on the common or usual lexical values of our words" (MP 144).

Ricoeur sees metaphor as incongruent with our "conventional" linguistic usage and expectations; it is the non-congruence with the language users' expectations that shows forth the metaphor. Many argue that in the case of a metaphor, the literal meaning of the

sentence is patently absurd or false—that rivers even now do not literally (actually) have mouths. However, this example supports Ricoeur's contention: this turn of phrase is, by convention, one of the meanings of 'mouth' that can be found in the English lexicon. The 'mouth' of the river is no longer a metaphor in the strict sense—it is one of the lexicalized meanings, based on how the word is actually used by the linguistic community, that is found in the dictionary. The phrase "the mouth of the river" is not an example of an unconventional usage of the lexicon, whereas the phrase "the orifice of the river" would be. (It must also be noted that unconventional usage will not always lead to examples of metaphor.) Further, both unconventional usage and unconventional usage that produces a metaphor can be inappropriate or unsuccessful in communicating some intended meaning. For Ricoeur, metaphor can be called a deviation only to the extent that the innovative use of the lexicon deviates from conventional practice. However, he will insist that metaphor is not the *improper* use of the lexicon.

For Ricoeur, a theory of language must explain the semantic innovation inherent in the case of metaphor, in which a new predicative meaning emerges and establishes a new predicative congruence. How do we account for the moment of our grasping the similarity that allows us to "see" the semantic congruence in a case of semantic impertinence like metaphor? Ricoeur argues that only a theory of language that incorporates the productive imagination can give us an adequate (albeit fledgling) explanation of semantic innovation. Ricoeur suggests that there are three moments in the functioning of the productive imagination that must be explained: predicative assimilation, iconic assimilation, and referential suspension. Ricoeur stresses that the moment of an imaginative functioning

must be “immanent—that is, not extrinsic—to the predicative process itself” (MP145).

Ricoeur also includes “feelings”—the somatic or sensory dimension of the Kantian reproductive imagination—in a semantic theory of imagination. Ricoeur cautions that the “feelings” he points to are not coextensive with our notion of “emotions.” Ricoeur suggests that “feelings” are integral to the functioning of imagination that he outlines: as part of the schematizing function of the imagination, as part of the picturing function of the imagination, and as part of the *epoché* of the referential function.

Predicative assimilation

For Ricoeur, predicative assimilation is “the first function of imagination in the process of semantic innovation” (MP 146). In the case of metaphor, imagination plays an essential role in the predicative process by giving us the insight into similarity. As Ricoeur reminds us, Aristotle said “that to make good metaphors is to contemplate likeness.” Ricoeur suggests that “this insight into likeness is both a seeing and a thinking” (MP 145).

To illustrate this point, Ricoeur uses the example of proportional metaphor (“A is to B what C is to D”) to suggest how the insight into likeness is a “thinking.” What we grasp in a proportional metaphor is the “combinatory possibilities offered by the proportionality” ($A:C :: B:D$)—this is a “thinking.” However, Ricoeur argues that this “thinking” is also a “seeing” in the sense of Kant’s schematism¹⁴⁵ because we restructure

145. Ricoeur’s incorporation of Kant’s schematism may seem unlikely. However, we only have to recall that the definition of ‘cognition’, exactly what is at stake in these discussions of the cognitive import of metaphor, is defined as “the act or process of knowing including both awareness and judgment; *also*: a product of this act”

the semantic fields (realign our categorizations) based on the new relationships we “grasp instantaneously” (or discover) between the terms of the ratios. Ricoeur calls this “*productive character*” of our insights a “*predicative assimilation*.” We assimilate these new relationships based on the insight we gained from the proportional metaphor. In essence, with this assimilation we “make” the terms of the proportional metaphor similar (“that is, semantically proximate”).

Ricoeur acknowledges that many will resist the notion that predicative assimilation can be “ascribed to the imagination.” In answer, Ricoeur stresses the paradoxical nature of the predicative assimilation to support his contentions. The paradox, he suggests, easily lends itself to “Ryle’s concept of ‘category mistake’, which consists in presenting the facts pertaining to one category in the terms appropriate to another” (MP 146). The predicative assimilation does not conflate or collapse the distinctions between the semantically distinct common categorizations; a metaphor obtains only when we “continue to identify a previous incompatibility *through* a new compatibility.” For Ricoeur, a metaphor indicates a tension that is “not so much between a subject and a predicate as between semantic incongruence and congruence” (MP 146). Productive imagination, for Ricoeur, is precisely this capacity or ability to produce new genres by assimilation. A metaphorical statement serves as an exemplar of this assimilative process through which we maintain the tension between logical sameness and difference (or remoteness and nearness in logical distance).

(*Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*). Remember, too, that Kant’s main discussion of the “schematism of the categories” can be found in the “Transcendental doctrine of the faculty of judgment”. Given these considerations, it does not seem unreasonable for Ricoeur to discuss schematism in the context of metaphor.

Iconic assimilation

Ricoeur characterizes the “pictorial” aspect of imagination, that is, the “setting before the eyes,” as the “*figurative* aspect of metaphor.” Ricoeur points out that the “figurability” of metaphor is the aspect of metaphor that Richards intended to delineate with the “distinction between tenor and vehicle” (MP 147). Ricoeur argues that the distinction between tenor and vehicle does not map directly onto Black’s distinction between frame and focus. Ricoeur points out that frame and focus

designate only the contextual setting—say, the sentence as a whole—and the term which is the bearer of the shift of meaning, whereas tenor and vehicle designate the conceptual import and its pictorial envelope (MP 147).

For Ricoeur, imagination not only schematizes semantic innovations but also pictures them by first accounting for the “frame/focus interplay” and then by accounting for the differing levels of tenor and vehicle. Ricoeur suggests that we call the picturing function, as distinct from the schematizing function, the “*iconic* aspect of metaphor” (following the sense of the Peircean “distinction between sign and icon”).

The iconic aspect of metaphor embroils Ricoeur in a difficult argument because it is easy to fall into defining image and imagining in the Humean sense of a faded sense impression. Ricoeur admits that his discussion borders uncomfortably on “a semantics of productive imagination and a psychology of reproductive imagination” (MP 149).

However, Ricoeur argues that to imagine, as exemplified in the case of metaphor,

is not to have a mental picture of something but to display relations in a depicting mode. Whether this depiction concerns unsaid and unheard

similarities or refers to qualities, structures, localizations, situations, attitudes, or feelings, each time the new intended connection is grasped as what the icon describes or depicts (MP 148).

The significance for Ricoeur is that in a metaphor (especially the process we go through in assimilating a metaphor), we explore “the borderline between the verbal and the non-verbal.” Understanding metaphor has both verbal and non-verbal aspects—what we hear, how we assimilate (understand) what we hear, and how we “picture” what we assimilate. For Ricoeur, imagining is a “concrete process” of predicative assimilation in which and “through which we see similarities” (MP 148). In this way, Ricoeur suggests, we can also “do justice ... to the Wittgensteinian concept of ‘seeing as’” (MP 148).

Referential suspension

Ricoeur’s final moment accounts for how we understand what the meaning of a metaphorical statement is about. For Ricoeur, “meaning” pertains to the predicative assimilation of the metaphorical statement—what could loosely be called Frege’s *Sinn* or sense of a statement. However, we must emphasize that for Ricoeur the “sense” of a statement is in “contradistinction to *Bedeutung* [reference or denotation].” This distinction is fundamental in Ricoeur’s work: “to ask *about what* a metaphorical statement is, is something other and something more than to ask *what* it says” (MP 150).

Ricoeur may insist on this distinction between sense and reference, but what does it hold for our inquiry? For Ricoeur, the “insight” gained from a metaphor (which also alludes to its cognitive import) pinpoints the moment of a shift from sense to reference

that is inherent in all discourses, not just poetic discourse. Ricoeur suggests that metaphorical statements considered at the moment of this shift are better described in terms of a model, rather than in terms of a proportional metaphor. Models operate as heuristics that enable us to change how we perceive the world or states of affairs. Following Goodman's theory, Ricoeur suggests that all symbolic systems (and language is included under this rubric)

are denotative in the sense that they "make" and "remake" reality. To raise the question of the referential value of poetic language is to try to show how symbolic systems *reorganize* "the world in terms of work and work in terms of the world" (MP 150).

Ricoeur points out that poetic language is commonly seen as referring "to nothing but itself." This observation leads many theorists to claim that poetic language "implies a mutation in the use of language" because it subverts the "normal" referential direction of language "toward the non-linguistic context" by stressing the message itself—a view that Ricoeur sees as underpinning theories of the poetic function of metaphor as "the valorization of the message *for its own sake*" (MP 142). Ricoeur does not suggest that these commonly held views are erroneous, only that these views are incomplete.

For Ricoeur, the referential direction is ambiguous in poetic discourse. As such, the referential function in poetic discourse is not suppressed, as argued by others, but altered. Ricoeur suggests that Jakobson's split reference and Bedell Stanford's stereoscopic vision both describe "ambiguity in reference." For Ricoeur, poetic discourse refers to 'reality' "by means of a complex strategy which implies, as an essential component, a suspension and seemingly an abolition of the ordinary reference attached to descriptive language." For Ricoeur, this suspension (or *epoché*) is simply the "negative

condition of a second-order reference"; second-order only "with respect to the primacy of the reference of ordinary language" (MP 151).

Ricoeur characterizes this suspension or *epoché* as a moment of imagination. For Ricoeur, imagination

does not merely *schematize* the predicative assimilation between terms by its synthetic insight into similarities nor does it merely *picture* the sense thanks to the display of images aroused and controlled by the cognitive process. Rather, it contributes concretely to the *epoché* of ordinary reference and to the *projection* of new possibilities of redescribing the world (MP 152).

Using Ricoeur's notion of "re-description," perhaps we could suggest that language used in everyday, ordinary conversations should be called "descriptions" of lived experience. Following Ricoeur, this lived experience is necessarily mediated by language. However, we might call an individual's attempt to "express" this lived experience a description of "reality" (a first-order discourse). All second-order discourses are *re-descriptions* of this initial description of reality. Although Ricoeur does not insist on drawing this conclusion, as speculative and poetic discourses are equally second-order discourses (parasitic upon the language resources of the linguistic community at large) both are subject to the rules of "compossibility" and the principles within each sphere, and both can lay claim to a species of truth that is defined by the *telos* of each discipline.

As each sphere of discourse entails a *telos* and, therefore, a conception of what counts as "truth," the unavoidable result of Ricoeur's explorations is the discovery of the "tensive" nature of truth. This does not insinuate that "truth" is necessarily relativistic. As practitioners in each discipline rigorously follow the canons and principles of their discipline's methodology, "truth" becomes the manifestation of the "answers" or

“discoveries” vouchsafed by each methodology. In other words, even if “truth” is variously defined and identified by each methodology, each of these “truths” will be the same; that is, each “truth” bears the same formal relation to the canons and principles of its methodology, regardless of how the particular “truth” is manifested or described. This is the purport of Ricoeur’s principle concerning the “homology” of structures.

Concluding remarks

As I noted above, Ricoeur’s theory of language is a complex construct. My main contention is that the context of Ricoeur’s theory of language as a whole must be taken into account to follow his arguments through structural linguistics through to his formulation of a productive imagination. Ricoeur’s theory of language is based on several key notions that were discussed under the broad concepts of the semantic resources of language and the cognitive resources of language. There is the importance of relation in Ricoeur’s work: relation in terms of predication, in terms of proportionality, and in terms of homologous structures. There is also Ricoeur’s use of the relational sense attaching to the term ‘predicate’ and to the copula ‘be’.

Ricoeur’s theory postulates a disjunction between the synchronic nature of language (as linguistic code) and the diachronic nature of language (as linguistic event). Given this disjunction, Ricoeur calls for a correlative shift in methodological approaches to explore the question of meaning at the level of infralinguistic elements, at the level of syntactic coherence and at the level of extralinguistic reference. Based on this dual nature

of language, Ricoeur argues that the traditional boundaries between semantics and semiotics, and between semantics and pragmatics should be redrawn. At this point, the differences between what Davidson and Ricoeur see as the "uses" of language become obvious in the discussion: for Davidson, "using language" relates to its performative *functions*; whereas, for Ricoeur the uses of language are bound up in the *telos* of discourse. The differences between Davidson's suggestion that literal language has specific cognitive content and Ricoeur's suggestion that a specific cognitive content is inherent in the speech sounds themselves also become clear.

How does Ricoeur's "metaphor as process" fit in with the discussions of metaphor found in the philosophical literature? Let us take Davidson's paper, "What Metaphors Mean" as an example. In this paper, Davidson propounds a view of metaphor that already brackets the question of the cognitive status of metaphor in favour of notions like creativity, rhetorical style and emotive force. For Davidson, "novelty is not the issue"—a metaphor remains a metaphor due to its "built-in aesthetic feature," which surprises or delights, that we can "experience again and again."¹⁴⁶

Davidson's opening sentence in this paper¹⁴⁷ co-opts the notions that metaphor, like dreams, is essentially irrational; that interpretation is required to understand metaphor and, as is the case with dreams, the interpretation is not linguistic but psychological (that is, extralinguistic); and that the making and interpreting of metaphor, or dreams, is

146. Davidson 1978: 36

147. "Metaphor is the dreamwork of language and, like all dreamwork, its interpretation reflects as much on the interpreter as on the originator" (Davidson 1978: 29)

creative and “little guided by rules.”¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Davidson argues that metaphor is a “legitimate device not only in literature but in science” and that it is useful in its interpretive, descriptive and performative functions (as in prayer or praise). For Davidson, metaphor is a linguistic *phenomenon*: “what distinguishes metaphor is not meaning but use—in this it is like assertion, hinting, lying, promising, or criticizing.”¹⁴⁹

Davidson’s account is provocative, and it certainly provokes Black in the “afterthoughts” section of the Sacks collection.¹⁵⁰ For Davidson, the question about the way metaphor works is a pragmatic concern rather than a semantic concern. Black, on the other hand, is most interested in the way metaphors work in providing interlocutors with insights and previously unanticipated information about the world. Davidson does not deny that these are interesting questions about metaphor, but he does argue quite forcefully that metaphor has no cognitivity to identify.

However, in the foregoing discussion, Ricoeur has put forward several salient counters to some of Davidson’s presuppositions. Ricoeur has shown how all language use can be described as “creative” (or in Davidson’s terms “irrational”) in the sense that the subjectivity of language use is grounded in the objective condition of the synchronic linguistic code. Ricoeur juxtaposes the irrationality (creativity) of the linguistic “event” with the rationality of the meaning that is apprehended—although not in the way that Davidson does. Rather than locate the rationality in a “type” of language use (for example,

148. Davidson 1978: 29

149. Davidson 1978: 41

150. Black: “How Metaphors Work: A Reply to Donald Davidson”

scientific language), Ricoeur locates the rationality in the synchronic language code and the conventions governing its application.

Ricoeur has also shown how the re-identifiability of metaphor rests not on a similar "interpretation" of a metaphorical statement, but on the invariance of the phonemic sequence that guarantees the re-identifiability of the meaning of the metaphorical statement. We also showed how rule-governed activities can be creative and how "interpretation", in its broadest sense, is the attempt of an interlocutor to capture the intended meaning of a speaker (for Ricoeur, the interpretation is semantic—not extralinguistic).

Some of Ricoeur's less successful arguments relate to homologous structural relations. For example, Ricoeur suggests that "feelings" are integral to the functioning of imagination. Davidson, I suspect, could easily call this metaphor's "built-in aesthetic." It is not necessarily the case that Ricoeur's formulation is wrong, but unless we take into account the whole of Ricoeur's theory of language and metaphorical process (including the tenets of structural linguistics and a sophisticated concept of "productive linguistic imagination" with its schematizing function), many of Ricoeur's points have no force.

Ricoeur's notion of the "tensive" nature of truth springs also from the concept of homologous structural relations. For example, we can call making a metaphor a phenomenon only in the banal and unrestrictive sense that "speaking"—that is, somehow choosing words to express an intention "to say something to someone about something"—is a phenomenon. Until a sentence is actually uttered or written, metaphor is merely a potential classification of the sentence in the same sense that ambiguity,

hyperbole, irony, and metonymy are. For Ricoeur, metaphor is an *ex post facto* classification—one that is variously identified, for example, as a figure or metaphor in poetry and fictional literature, and as model or analogue in scientific or philosophical literature. What Ricoeur attempts to establish is the notion that a metaphor (model, analogue) functions as a heuristic that enables the exploration of a field of inquiry. This hypothesis or heuristic is subject to a discipline's rules of investigation, which evaluate the usefulness of the heuristic and its relation to truth as defined within the disciplinary discourse. As such, Ricoeur suggests that we can posit a metaphor's relation to what counts as truth within the formal "canons and principles" of each disciplinary discourse.

Are these counterpoints to more entrenched, traditional positions on metaphor conclusive? Admittedly, Ricoeur's theory of productive imagination deals with themes not usually explored in questions of metaphorical meaning. Ricoeur's main contention about predication defining discourse, however, is a major challenge not only to structuralist approaches but also to pragmatic approaches as well. As Ricoeur argues, it is only in the contexture of a sentence that semantic meaning shows forth, and making a sentence requires an *act* of predication. This formulation compromises the structuralist position by insisting on the need for a "speaker" to actualize the linguistic code that is manifested in a sentence. For pragmatic positions, Ricoeur's *act* of predication relocates and redefines the area of the "use" of language, so that it becomes some further question what uses we put language to or what its performative functions are.

For the most part, however, I suspect that Ricoeur's contribution to the literature on metaphor will be difficult to assimilate into the current North American views on

metaphor. There are several possibilities for this difficulty. Ricoeur's work is multidisciplinary, and such works often alienate or violate established perspectives. Then, too, there is the problem with terminology and language: many of Ricoeur's works must be translated. However, most importantly, Ricoeur's hypothesis about metaphor, apart from being complex, incorporates a structural linguistics that follows the lead of French structuralism, with a number of critical reservations (RM 319).¹⁵¹ There is a gulf separating the different approaches to structural linguistics that may not be resolvable. For example, Greimas notes that for

North American structuralism ... meaning exists, but one can say nothing about it. However, as far as French structuralism is concerned, meaning happens to be the essential dimension of language.¹⁵²

I suspect that without an appreciation of the background context of Ricoeur's arguments, especially the continental background, we make erroneous assumptions about what we think Ricoeur "must be saying."

151 The use of the term 'structuralism' itself poses a problem for our discussion, for it brings a set of assumptions to an appraisal of Ricoeur's work that may be misleading. According to A.J. Greimas and J. Courtes, "structuralism designates either, in the American sense, the achievements of the Bloomfieldian School, or, in the European sense, the continuation of the theoretical effort of the Prague and Copenhagen Schools, based on Saussurian [*sic*] principles. The fundamental incompatibility between these two perspectives derives from the way the problem of signification is considered."

152. Greimas: 539

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