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What We Reconstruct in Enthymeme Reconstruction: A Linguistiic-Argumentative Approach

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1. Since we are all natural language communicants, we always construct implicit messages when we speak or write to each other. Enthymemes have to do with implicitness but of course, they differ in scope. Some of the differences easily come to mind. Thus, enthymemes only occur in reasoning (argumentation) and are themselves incomplete arguments while implicitness is a general property of natural language. Strictly speaking, we never can encounter non-implicit sentences because in both their focal and non-focal parts there is always something having to do with shared and individual information.

Therefore, the components of natural language arguments, being expressed by sentences are inherently partially implicit: (a) linguistically, since elliptic argumentative sentences are often used, particularly, in dialogues; (b) cognitively, since it is not possible to explicate everything he/she grounds his/her message on for fear of never leaving a vicious circle of the need to clarify; (c) pragmatically, because in sincere argumentation a sender would probably want his/her message to be purpose-sufficient (thus leaving a lot of pertaining information aside), precise (leaving elaboration aside) and laconic (leaving details aside) (cf. H.P.Grice's (1975) principles of efficient communication). These factors must be taken into account for analyzing the comprehension activities of recipients: to what extent (if ever) do they need to reconstruct the unexpressed information?

2. At first sight, linguistic reconstruction proper is easy to perform, because it does not appear to need special scholarly skills; cognitive and pragmatic reconstruction is harder to do because these types of activities usually interrelate. But that is not necessarily so. On the one hand, what is possible to be done does not always need to be done, and, some parts of the message may remain unreconstructed. On the other hand, there are types and procedures of comprehension that concern not only linguistic comprehension proper, but also the cognitive and pragmatic ones.

Thus, a recipient never analyzes all components of the message with one and the same degree of precision. This is because we, as recipients, apply different kinds of understanding to different parts of the message that we comprehend. In understanding, I differentiate between *referent recognition, meaning comprehension, sense decoding, and sense comparison.* The ground for this taxonomy is semiotic structure of messages.

According to systemic-semiotic approach (R.Piotrovsky's St.Petersburg school – cf.: Lesokhin et al, 1982), studying how the text functions presupposes detecting meaning and sense of the text and is implemented on two levels of semiosis. Text is treated in that approach as a compound sign thus being the result of primary semiosis; it functions as a ready-made model in various situations of communication (secondary semiosis). In the primary semiosis the potential information of the text is reflected. In the semiotic structure of the text, the content is placed into the Designation which is a set of characteristics of the referential situation. The mental picture of the referent is a Denotation seen as a single whole. The morphologo-syntactic image of the material text is regarded as an Index. Emotional and evaluative features of the referent are regarded as a Connotation. In the secondary semiosis (a concrete situation) the text acquires a

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Concept as a set of communicatively important Designation features on which comprehension of the referential situation is based. The number of text Concepts is thus equal to the number of text recipients. This view of semiosis applies to highly rigid (easily modelled) texts where the Index is readily identified and reconstructed.

   We propose a somewhat different model for text comprehension. In our view, secondary semiosis has little to do with non-literal sign comprehension; rather, it is understanding differentiated for different communicants depending on individual spheres of their Significations. The figure below is a schematic description of semiosis.
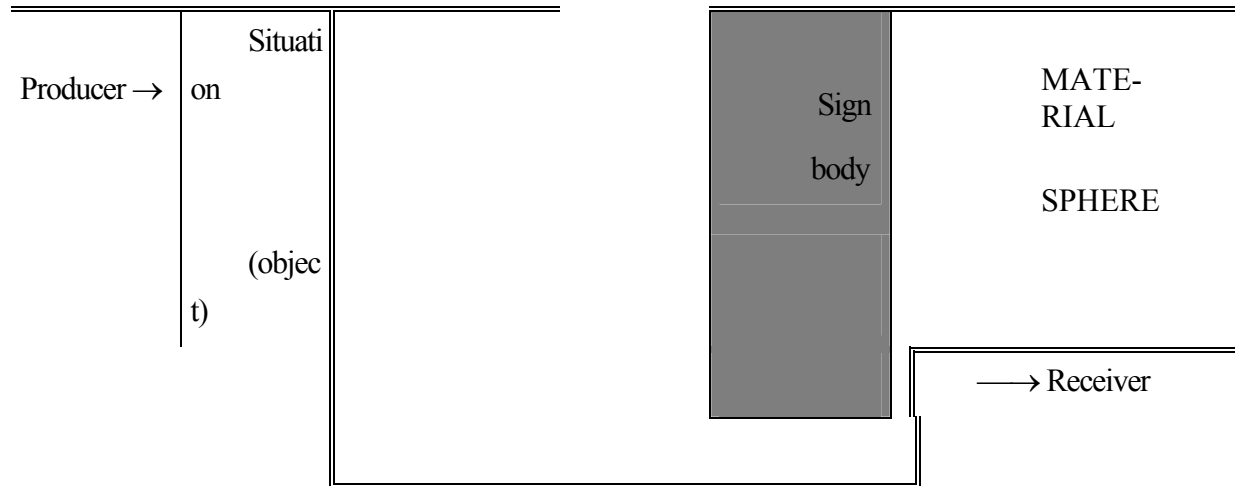
Producer →	Situation				Sign	MATE-RIAL
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⟶ Receiver
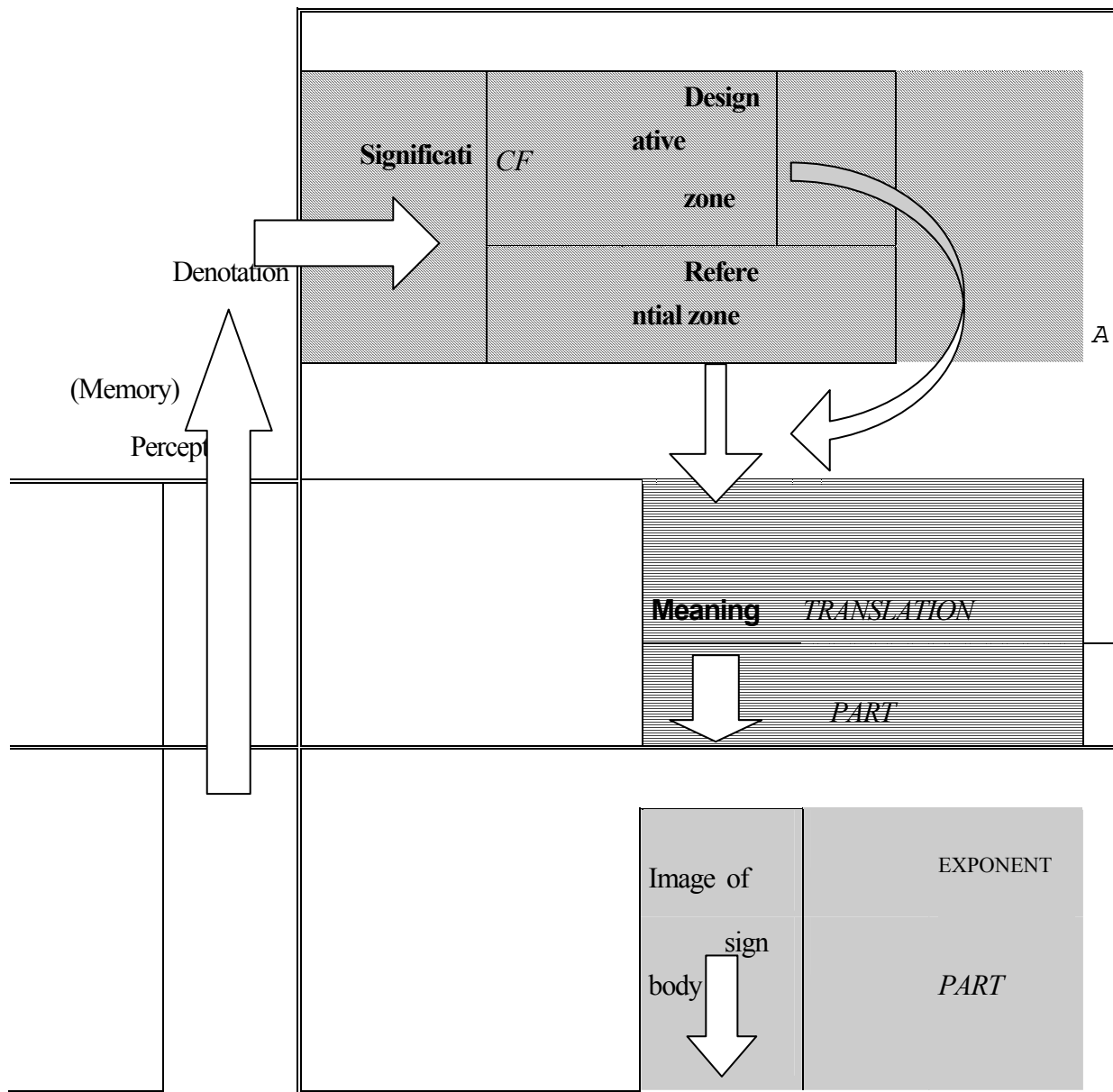
Figure 1. Message semiosis (*IF* stands for *individual field, CF* – for *conventional field)*

Sign comprehension order is practically the reverse of that of sign production. The ideal sphere of semiosis comprises the Content part, the Translation part and the Exponent part. In the material sphere we find the body of an exponent, a sender, a receiver, and a situation / an object; the material part is not of primary importance for semiosis. The Content part contains the Denotation, the Perception, and the Signification; the latter consists of designative area and the referential area. All the referential area and a part of the designative make up the conventional field of the Signification; the rest of the designative sphere is the individual field of the Signification. The Translation part contains (linguistic) meaning. The Exponent part contains the image of a sign body. This representation is oriented at the semantic aspect of comprehension where explicit signs are present.

The Denotation is treated of here as an ideal object, its ideal representation which is still non-symbolised. The Denotation correlates to the Perception but does not inherit all its features; this is correlation of the virtual VS. actual type. If actual reflection of the situation takes place, the notions of Denotation and Perception are mandatory for semiosis. If an object is extracted from memory, the denoting process is carried out without the Perception.

The Signification has a complex structure. On the one hand, there are referential and designative areas, on the other – individual and conventional fields. The term *conventional* seems preferable to others (p.ex. *mutual, common*, etc.) because it can be easily applied for various texts, including scientific and argumentative ones. The text is aimed to transmit information about a state of affairs. When encoded, the latter first of all generates the denotative-referential structure of the text. This encoding is carried out by means of non-reflexive imprinting and is not linguistic in the strict sense of the word. Referent formation is class identification of a Denotation. The mentioned denotative-referential complex is then correlated with a model already present in the person's memory. This type of reflection is no more passive but is purposeful. This is a designation stage of message generation.

Based on the treatment of semiosis we can single out different types of message comprehension. The general type will be Understanding. Within it, we single out three types.

Referent recognition applies to all fully-significant message elements to form a general meaningful idea of the message. Referentially-deficient recognition is understanding of syntactically functional elements because they do not denote objects or ideas but only unite them into a single whole (a sentence). For example, in *This behaviour of yours is an absolute disgrace* all the words are referentially recognised except *of* where referentially-deficient recognition takes place. Referent recognition is basic type of understanding, i.e. no higher type is possible without such recognition.

There are communicatively focal / important elements that need concentration by recipients. Only to such elements do we apply the rest of the types of understanding. *Designation comprehension* implies understanding notional characteristics of the focal elements. If the former are shared (collectively or with the recipient only), we deal with meaning; if they are individual (i.e. different from the recipient's), we deal with sense. The notional characteristics of the foci can be expressed in their premises (p.ex., when the focal element is a phrase or a sentence). If the premises are explicit, the recipient can compare them with the ones she herself would have for the focal element in question. If they are implicit, they need to be reconstructed for adequate estimation of the focus. Such reconstruction is argumentative by nature because the recipient looks for grounds of the analysed notions.

Sense decoding is based on prognostic reconstruction of the premises; they presumably reflect the sender's individual background. Efficient here can be local coherence analysis based on an informal syllogistic technique. The technique is based on transforming the focal message into a rigid subject-predicate structure to which an algorithm is applied for getting unambiguously formulated premises. That is a method of syllogistic argument reconstruction where the recipient finds valid premises.

Sense comparison is applied to the reconstructed premises: the recipient evaluates their degree of plausibility to his/her own. If they are "good", the argument is correct. The notion of correctness is applicable only to arguments, and not to the focal messages proper: the latter can be consistent with the recipient's background (and therefore be correct) but may not follow from the sender's message if the reconstructed premises are inconsistent with the previous or succeeding explicit information in her text.

3. Partially implicit communication becomes enthymematic in argumentative contexts.

We do not always reconstruct enthymemes to comprehend an argument correctly if we feel or think that the missing premise is self-evident. The problem here is, however, that the self-evidence has to be conventional; if it is not, we (argumentation scholars) try to find the way out using certain principles like Charity. But the Charity Principle is culturally-specific (cf. a stark example of categorization principles in the Maori language in Australia, which are very different from ours – cf. G.Lakoff). That means that conventions are also conventional. Another problem with the Principle is that in everyday argumentation conventions can be linked with different message elements, i.e. presuppositions can be used for elements of the sentence, and not for the sentence as a whole. Two cases can be mentioned in this respect: (A) arguments with one-place predicate and (B) with two- or three-place predicates, cf.:

(A)

_   *Oh yes, family life is wonderful!* (charitable sentence presupposition: love and tenderness, kids, homely atmosphere)

_   *Really? Do you call it life?* (subject kernel presupposition: impossibility to always make your own choice, limitations in behavior, etc. – all having to do with what looks like existence rather than with life)

In this dialogue, there is a syntactico-semantic shift. This shift has a double nature. In the surface structure of the sentence, there is a focus shift from the kernel of the predicate to the kernel of the subject. Non-emphatic utterances in the English language are standardly constructed so that principal information could be placed in its final part. The recipient, however, intentionally places the accent on the previously unfocused part of the sentence thus changing its pragmatic meaning.

In the inner semantic structure, the shift is of a feedback type: what is meant is, first, that family life is not wonderful and, secondly, why exactly it is not, with the presuppositions functioning as premises. The focusing of the subject is thus inalienable from the property information contained in the predicate: if there were no estimation, there would probably be no questioning of definitions.

(B)

_   *Our soldiers have killed that monstrous beast at last!* (charitable sentence presupposition: The monstrous beast deserves being killed)

_   (a) *Are they soldiers? They used their guns!* (subject kernel presupposition: The brave would never use their weapons against the unarmed)
(b) *Killed? They were executing him for half an hour!* (predicate kernel presupposition: If one is tortured when executed, it is murder)
(c) *Monstrous, you said? Do you find buffaloes monstrous, too?* (complement phrase presupposition: the ugly-looking animals can be nice "for beauty is found within").

These examples show that unlike in the case (A), reconstruction of presuppositions in multi-place predicate sentences does not have to depend on other parts of the sentence. Therefore, the Principle of Charity can be differently applicable for reconstruction of arguments with different structures. Therefore, different reasoning systems should be used for reconstructing enthymemes of different syntactico-semantic types.

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