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4 Semiotic and Semantic Aspects of the Proverb

4.1 Semiotics and the Proverb

The semiotic study of proverbs has long been a claim in the field of folkloristics. The earliest explicit claim in this direction goes back to Russian folklorist and semiotician Pëtr G. Bogatyrev, a co-author of Roman Jakobson, who, as early as in the 1930s, explicitly stated: "The investigation of proverbs in their semiotic aspect is one of the most grateful tasks for a folklorist" (Bogatyrëv, 1971: 366). In contextually appreciating this statement, one should not forget that this was the time when, despite many valuable studies from the 19th century and earlier, proverb research became an increasingly important topic. Let it suffice to mention Friedrich Seiler's fundamental *Deutsche Sprichwörterkunde* (1922), or André Jolles' influential *Einfache Formen* (1930). Nevertheless, despite all achievements made at that time, the outstanding folklorist and paremiologist Archer Taylor, started his seminal book on *The Proverb* with the sharp and critical remark: "The proverb and related forms have long been objects of general interest and the occasion for many books, but they have attracted little serious and thorough study" (Taylor, 1931: vii).

Bogatyrev's postulation remained unheard until the 1960s and 1970s, when along with the rise of structuralist approaches – first in the field of linguistics, then in anthropology – semiotics, with its genuinely interdisciplinary orientation, became increasingly important. In fact, various facets and aspects concerning the semiotics of proverbs began to be studied at that time, which had – more often implicitly, rather than explicitly –, been the object of paremiological study before, but now received attention from a different methodological point of view. Nevertheless, comprehensive and systematic semiotic analyses of the proverb still today represent some kind of research desideratum.

One of the major reasons for this state of the art is the fact that both the proverb, as the research object at stake, and semiotics, as the discipline in focus, are no traditionally established phenomena in the international scholarly world. Although the proverb belongs, in principle, to the discipline of paremiology, the latter has never been institutionally established in the academic world; rather, the proverb has traditionally been served as a research object for disciplines such as folkloristics, sociology, pedagogy, linguistics, and many others, all of them looking at the proverb from different methodological perspectives, asking different questions and, as a result, obtaining different answers. Likewise semiotics, that branch of science which studies signs, or systems, and the processes of sign generation (semiosis) and usage, has

rather been a methodological tool used by individual sciences, interested in a methodological generalization of their results.

In semiotic studies, it is commonplace, in line with Morris' *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938), to subdivide semiotics into three semiotic dimensions (see below), the distinction of which has subsequently become most widespread in the field of linguistics; yet, due attention must be paid to the fact that they refer to any kind of sign processes, not only, and not specifically, to linguistics which has, as a discipline, been of particular relevance for proverbs, too, being part of verbal folklore. Notwithstanding the fact all these aspects have become most relevant in the field or linguistics, the semiotic approach and the semiotic understanding of the three dimensions outlined is much for encompassing and comprehensive, and it covers linguistics as the science of linguistic signs, too, but is of larger concern and relevance.

Keeping this in mind, it is also of utmost importance to note that, despite the three-dimensional and triadic study of semiotics, a number of dyadic relations may be abstracted for study (Morris, 1938: 6):

a) the *pragmatical dimension*,
b) the *syntactical dimension,*
c) the *semantical dimension*.

The three disciplines studying these dimensions are accordingly termed *pragmatics*, *syntactics*, and *semantics*: whereas, according to Morris' (1938) concept, pragmatics is concerned with the relation between sign and sign users, syntactics is directed towards the formal relations of signs to one another, and semantics concentrates on the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable. In this respect, it should be pointed out right away that already Morris emphasized the close interrelation between these three dimensions suggesting that they can only, for heuristic purposes, be distinguished and studied with a separate focus, but not really isolated, neither with the regard to sign usage, nor with the study thereof. Also, it should be noted, that more often than not, in the history of studies applying these concepts, implicitly or explicitly, semantics has some kind of dominated over pragmatics and syntactics, since it has always been common to ask for the function of pragmatical or syntactical factors and, by way of that, for the influence these dimensions have on the overall meaning (or even change of meaning). It seems, in this respect students of semiotics generally, and paremiologists specifically, do not differ from ordinary sign users, whose cognitive activity is principally characterized by what psychologists have termed the "effort after meaning" (Bartlett, 1932: 44) and identified as an anthropological constant (Hörmann, 1986).

Morris' rather rough approach, which owes much to the semiotic of Charles S. Peirce, has not remained unchallenged in the course of time: both the concrete definitions and the methodological approaches to each of these dimensions and their interrelations have fundamentally changed in the course of the 20th century. Nevertheless, they have served as some kind of orientation point till today. It seems therefore

reasonable to take them as a starting point for an analysis of the semiotics of the proverb, on the one hand, and of proverb studies, on the other. With this perspective, it will easily be seen that the three semiotic dimensions cover traditional folkloristic and paremiological issues, which can thus be united under a common theoretical roof.

4.2 Semiotics and Its Dimensions

4.2.1 Pragmatics

Generally speaking, *pragmatics* focuses on "the relation of signs to interpreters" (Morris, 1938: 6); more specifically, it is "that portion of semiotic which deals with the origin, uses, and effects of signs within the behavior in which they occur" (Morris, 1946: 219). It is thus concerned with the use of a sign system in contexts. Having initially been a predominantly philosophical issue, including speech act theory, pragmatics has become increasingly important since the 1970s in the field of linguistics, last but not least as a reaction to rather *context-free* structural or generativist approaches. In fact, it was *context* which received more and more attention; it became particularly relevant to study the ways in which context contributes to meaning, i.e., how meaning depends not only on structural and linguistic knowledge of a message's producer and recipient, but (also) on the context of an utterance, pre-existing knowledge about those involved, the inferred intent(ion) of the message's producer, etc. In this respect, a number of different notions of context were distinguished, such as: (a) the physical context, referring to the *real-life* situational setting of a communication act, i.e. that situation in which the communication takes place; (b) the epistemic context referring to the background knowledge (or world knowledge) of a communication, which may be necessary for understanding, but logically speaking can of course be shared on partly by producer and recipient; (c) the linguistic context, often distinguishingly termed *co-text* instead, referring to that information into which a message is imbedded, i.e. which either preceded or succeeded the message in question, or which accompanied it simultaneously (e.g., specific prosodic elements, non-verbal communicative elements, etc.), (d) the social context, specifically referring to the relationship between producer and recipient, involving, among others, hierarchies or different degrees of intimacy between them, and thus having an impact on the success communication act. The recipient's ability to understand another's intended meaning has been called *pragmatic competence*; but of course producing and conveying a message includes, to a certain degree, the anticipation of the communicative imbalance between producer and recipient, and any producer's strategy to avoid resulting problems is part of pragmatic competence, too.

With regard to *pragmatical* issues, paremiology has been concerned with the study of negotiating proverbs in natural communication (oral or written), and social life, i.e., with the analysis of speech act performances, focusing on the *why* and *how* of verbal exchanges. This line of research, despite all differences in detail, has thus basically concentrated on the proverb in its *con*text, less on the proverb as a text: in fact, proverbs are studied with regard to contextual and situational implications in the process of social exchange, on the one hand, including all pragmatic restrictions which may be effective, and with regard to functional factors, on the other. Paremiological research along this line has of course been much more concrete, than simply stating that proverbs are indirect speech acts[6]; rather, quite concrete social and cultural interactions have been analyzed in detail. Studies in this direction have a long tradition. Raymond W. Firth, for example, who was later to become an important ethnologist and a leading representative of functional cultural anthropology, referred to the importance of proverb context as early as in 1926, when he wrote: "The essential thing about a proverb is its meaning, – and by this is to be understood not merely a bald and literal translation into the accustomed tongue, nor even a free version of what the words are intended. To convey the meaning of a proverb is made clear only when side by side with the translation is given a full account of the accompanying social situation, – the reason for its use, its effect, and its significance in speech" (Firth, 1926: 134). And on the threshold to modern, structural anthropology, Ojo Arewa and Alan Dundes, in their 1966 essay *Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore*[7], explicitly postulated to complement the description of a proverb's textual characteristics by a detailed description of the context in which it is used. Their main interest was not as much the question of the function of the proverb in general, as the description of a concrete proverb's function in a specific context: "Notice that such as study of context is not the same as the more general study of functions of folklore. One can say that proverbs sum up a situation, pass judgment, recommend a course of action, or serve as secular past precedents for present action; but to say this does not tell us what the particular function of a particular proverb used by a particular individual in a particular setting is" (Arewa & Dundes, 1966: 71). Emphasis is laid here on the contextual boundary conditions of individual (proverbial) speech acts and proverb usage. Nevertheless, the ultimate object of this approach was twofold, of course: with regard to individual proverbs, the interest was to gain better insight into a proverb's functioning and, by way of that, into the complex matter of its semantic functioning;

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6 Indirect speech acts, in the tradition of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), refer to the situation when someone, in a given communication, says one thing (the locutionary act), and means something different (or additional), thus performing an illocutionary act, which has some (perlocutionary) effect on someone else.

7 This refers back, of course, to D. Hymes (1962) postulation of an *Ethnography of Speaking*, paradigmatically shifting the focus from *anthropological linguistics* to *linguistic anthropology*.

and with regard to the proverbial genre, the interest was to obtain a clearer picture of the proverb's social and cultural functions in general. This dual interest has since characterized pragmatic approaches to the proverb in the field of paremiology (see among others Briggs, 1985, Charteris-Black, 1995, Hasan-Rokem, 1982).

Summarizing the gist of this whole line of research, one can generally say that, on the whole, the predominant interest has been, to study the ways in which context contributes to, or changes, proverbial meaning, i.e., to analyze the overwhelmingly complex question how a proverb either obtains its meaning, or how it changes its meaning, or its function, depending on (a change of) the situational, contextual, or pragmatic boundary conditions of proverb usage.

4.2.2 Syntactics

As to the syntactical dimension, it cannot be overemphasized that syntactics must not be identified with, or reduced to, the (study of) grammatical concept of syntax in linguistics, i.e., the rules and principles of sentence structures and processes by which sentences are constructed. The linguistic study of syntax may, of course, be sub-summarized under the broader concept of syntactics, but the latter, in its semiotic understanding of the term, refers to (the study of) signs in their relations to one another generally.

Before pointing out the relevance of syntactics for paremiology, it seems necessary to emphasize that in this context, a number of further distinctions should be made, which have not always been kept apart as clearly as would have been desirable. Partly, this is due to Morris' own ambiguous statements, partly to later interpretations of his statements by other scholars. A major problem consists in the wrong identification of syntactics not only syntax, but also with syntagmatics, thus excluding paradigmatic sign relations from the field of syntactics. In his *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, Morris (1938: 14) defined syntactics rather specifically as being concerned with "the consideration of signs and sign combinations in so far as they are subject to syntactical rules" (the latter being meant as formation and transformation rules in terms of formal logics); but he also, in a more general way, spoke of "the formal relation of signs to one another" (Morris, 1938: 6). Later refining these definitions in his book *Signs, Language, and Behavior*, Morris (1946: 219) saw syntactics not only generally dealing "with combinations of signs", but also as that "branch of semiotic that studies the way in which signs of various classes are combined to form compound signs" (Morris, 1946: 355). Whereas the first statement thus still refers to combinatorics and seems to imply a syntagmatic perspective, the second refers to any kind of relation between signs, possibly including paradigmatics, too, and the third specifically aims at the combination of signs from different classes being interrelated in one way or another. In order to cover all aspects of syntactics, it seems therefore reasonable to pay attention to the methodologically important juxtapositions of *paradigmatics*

vs. *syntagmatics* and *simultaneity* vs. *succession*, which stand in specific relations to each other.

When, per definition, syntactics includes (the study of) syntagmatic relations of a given sign concerning its relation(s) to other signs with which it is combined, this necessarily implies a specific succession or sequentiality, i.e., an extension in the temporal and/or spatial dimension. Following the above definitions, a syntactical approach needs not be syntagmatic, however; rather, it may include paradigmatic relations between signs as well (Posner, 1985), which concern a sign's relation(s) to signs within one and the same sign system and, consequently, no temporal or spatial extension. As a consequence, a paradigmatic focus implies simultaneity, in contrast to a syntagmatic focus, implying succession. In sum, a syntactical approach would thus not be restricted to syntagmatics, but include paradigmatics, as well and, as a consequence, not necessarily imply sequentiality. Moreover, syntactics would also include the (study of a) simultaneous combination of heterogeneous signs, i.e., signs from different sign systems being merged into a complex sign, or a sign complex.[8]

These distinctions, as theoretical as they may appear to be at first sight, are highly relevant for paremiological analyses, too. In fact, paremiological studies have always included syntactical studies, without necessarily having been understood or termed as syntactical in the sense outlined above. It goes without saying that no exhaustive or systematic account can be given here, but it may be helpful to give at least some examples:

a. Approaches to proverbs concerning the linguistic embedding of a verbal utterance into the linguistic context, for example, would be a typical case of a syntactical-syntagmatic approach: concentrating on the linguistic environment of a proverbial utterance would focus, among others, on the study of the verbal text preceding or succeeding a given proverb utterance, often referred to as *co-text* instead (Catford, 1965: 30), in order to distinguish such verbal embeddings from situational contexts. Such analyses would also attempt to identify introductory (*pre-proverb*) formulae, i.e., some kind of preceding verbal prompters, verbally introducing proverbs into a running conversation and separating them from the ongoing text, as well as extensions and elaborations, including stylistic extensions, strategies of commenting, proverb dialogues competitions, etc. Studies of proverb usage in a given situational context with particular regard to non-verbal communicative elements accompanying it, would be an instance of simultaneity-oriented syntactics, studying the combination of heterogeneous signs into a compound sign complex. What is relevant here is of course not the nonverbal channel as such, but the simultaneous combination of (different) signs; this instance is therefore different, of course, from studies of proverb

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8 Heterogeneous signs may of course not only simultaneously accompany, but also precede or succeed a given sign, thus implying syntactical sequentiality as outlined above.

usage in particular societies, when proverbs are not orally expressed, by on drums, through gestures, in dancing, etc., without verbal accompaniment.

b. A syntactical-paradigmatic approach, as compared to this, asks for a definition of which paradigm is under study, since paradigms are not a priori given truths, but the a posteriori result of definition. Such a paradigm may be represented by all proverb variants and variations belonging to one and the same proverb (with a given language or even cross-linguistically), it may comprise all proverbs belonging to a specific structural type, e.g. all those including formulae like *Where ... there*, *Like ... like*, etc., or it may even concentrate on all proverbs of a given language, studying their interrelations, and it may as well study all proverbs, within a given culture or not, in their mutual interrelations, including what has been termed paremiological homonyms, synonyms, antonyms, etc.

As has been pointed put above, syntactical approaches would of course comprise linguistic syntax analyses, studying grammatical specifics of proverbs, as well. It should be noted, however, that in this case the concept of proverb as the object of research is, from a semiotic point of view, essentially different from its understanding in the examples above. In all previous examples, a proverb has been understood as a proverbial entity, i.e., as one sign studied in its relation to other signs. It has been thus ignored, at least temporarily, that a proverb itself is composed of more than one constituting sign, since a proverb, by definition, is composed of minimally two words, and each individual word is a sign in its own right[9], the proverb thus turning out to be what has been termed a super-sign, i.e. a complex sign, or a sign complex.

Accepting the assumption that a word obtains its meaning only in co(n)text, it turns out that any change in this respect, as well as any pragmatic difference, will have impact on proverb meaning, showing once more how closely interrelated pragmatical, syntactical and semantical aspects are, and how fluently these aspects merge into each other, despite any heuristic focus.

4.2.3 Semantics

As compared to Morris (1938: 6) definition of semantics as "the relation of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable", he later regarded it as dealing "with the signification of signs in all modes of signifying" (Morris, 1946: 219): whereas in the first case, we would thus be concerned with some kind of reference semantics, the later modification is more general in scope, rather focusing on the conditions which

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9 There is no need to enter a more detailed discussion here as to the semiotic status of phonemes, as the smallest linguistic units bringing about a change of meaning, or of morphemes, as the smallest grammatical units, or the smallest linguistic units bearing meaning.

must be fulfilled for something to be denoted by a sign, or for a sign to serve as denoting, or signifying, something, respectively.

In the course of time, and mostly related to the fields of philosophy of language, on the one hand, and linguistics, on the other, the discipline of semantics has undergone important developments and sustainable changes. In the field of linguistics it has become common, irrespective of methodological differences, to distinguish different branches, or foci, of semantics, depending again on the specific focus of research: whereas *lexical semantics* is concerned with the meanings of words and morphemes, as well as the structure of a (mental) lexicon as a whole, *sentence semantics* studies how (i.e., by what kind of rules) the meaning of larger syntactic units, such as phrases, clauses, or sentences, can be described and eventually derived from individual words; *text semantics* concentrates on the combination of sentences, i.e., the representations of real or hypothetical (presumed, fictive, etc.) facts into coherent narrative, descriptive or argumentative structures; and *discourse semantics* concentrates on the level of texts in interaction (discussions, conversations, etc.) Quite obviously, these different aspects interact in specific ways.

What is important here is that all these aspects are essentially relevant for semantic studies in the field of paremiology, too. The proverb being defined as a folklore unit on the sentence level, sentence semantics is of course specifically concerned. Quite obviously, the study if or how from the meanings of individual words, as the constituents of a sentence, along with combinatorial semantic, morphosyntactic and syntactic rules relate to the meaning of syntactic entities (phrases, clauses, sentences), cannot be solved without information from lexical semantics: independent of the fact if different kinds of tropes and figures are included, or not, sentence meaning might well not emerge from the meanings of its components (see below). But it would be a too narrowing view to restrict paremiological semantics to these two aspects – ultimately, the meaning of a proverb is likely to transcend sentence boundaries. Depending on the definition of *text*, a proverbial sentence can be seen to be a full text in its own right, eventually embedded into a situational context and additional co-text. Likewise, the integration of a proverb into discursive structures parallels the importance of co(n)textual structures already pointed out above with reference to pragmatics and syntactics.

It is obvious that neither a historically nor a conceptually oriented survey of semantic approaches can be given here, be that with regard to semantics in general or to the narrower field of proverb semantics, only. In any case, it seems worthwhile emphasizing again, with regard to the three-partite division of semiosis outlined above, Morris' emphasis of the unity of the three dimensions involved, and referring to the fact that ultimately, that any semiotic process can only be adequately studied paying due attention to the indispensable interrelationship of all three dimensions. Not any one of them must be isolated from any one of the others except, temporarily, for heuristic purposes. Based on these general assumptions, it has become a commonplace in semiotics, specifically in process-oriented semiotics, that signs do

neither occur isolated from other signs, nor outside of a specific situational context; consequently, meaning is generally considered to emerge as a result of operations which sign users fulfill by way of texts (in a broad semiotic understanding of this term) in particular communicative situations.

Generally speaking, it should be pointed out that the notion of *semantics* has been ambiguously used in the past, and that we have been concerned with different readings of the term *semantics*. Most importantly, and irrespective of different methodological approaches complicating the situation, two different levels of abstraction should clearly be kept apart. When *semantics* was introduced as a scholarly term in the linguistic discourse by Bréal in 1883, its task was supposed to be the description of the meaning of words and of meaning change; this led to a rather colloquial usage of the term, semantics often being understood as a synonym for *meaning*. Proverb semantics, thus understood, would then be but the meaning of a proverb – indeed such readings can be found, e.g., in Lundberg' 1958 study on *The semantics of proverbs*, concentrating on contradictory interpretations (i.e., meanings) of proverbs within a given language.[10]

More adequately, however, and following the tradition outlined above, semantics should not be understood in terms of *meaning*, but of *the study of meaning*, or *science of meaning*. Semantics, in this understanding, thus would not be the object of study, but the discipline of studying the object; and since the object, in this case (i.e., the proverb), is a linguistic expression, this would ask for a description and study of (the process of generating) meaning. From this perspective, any attempt to *explain* or to *interpret* a proverb, i.e., to describe its meaning, could thus be classified as being semantic, and any description of proverb meaning would fall into the field of proverb semantics. It would be too easy, however, to leave this statement as it is: on the one hand, it is quite evident that no (proverb) meaning can ever be described without at least a minimum of meta-linguistic competence, be that implicit or explicit; on the other hand, ambition and scope of different meta-languages, or their degrees of abstraction, may be quite different, up to the level of specific theories of proverb meaning and meaning generation. Meta-language thus turns out to be a crucial factor in context of proverb semantics, and it seems reasonable to recall some elementary cornerstones about the status and function of meta-language.

4.3 Metalanguage

Generally speaking, meta-language is language about language. As compared to this, the language which is spoken about is called an *object language*; in case some

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10 Later, Milner (1969) would elaborate on this observation, interpreting them as an intralingual, though intercultural phenomenon.

meta-language itself is made the object of study, i.e. functionally turning out to be the object, we speak about meta-meta-language. Any meta-language includes two main components (Baranov, 2007: 78): (i) the *initial alphabet of elements* or *units* (vocabulary of metalanguage) and (ii) the *allowed rules for the generation of well-formed metalanguage formulae* (expressions) from initial elements.

It goes without saying that not only is meta-language itself concerned by all three dimensions of semiosis (i.e., by pragmatic, syntactic and semantic aspects) but also may it concern all aspects of a given object language, not only the semantic dimension focused here, in terms of a *semantic meta-language*. As Baranov (2007: 78) correctly points out, with regard to phraseology, expressions of a semantic meta-language must convey the essential features of the meanings of the object language expressions.

In this respect, two positions may be distinguished, with regard to the completeness of description (Baranov, 2007: 81): for the first, the goal is a (maximally) complete analysis and exhaustive description of meaning, including all necessary and sufficient conditions for its correct use; according to the second, a semantic metalanguage can describe only a part of the content of a language expression.

From a model theory perspective, a meta-linguistic expression can be regarded to be a model of an object expression; quite obviously, a meta-linguistics model can in practice cover but selected properties considered to be relevant in a given research context. As a consequence, the view on the object, as well as its description, will change depending on the meta-language chosen. Different meta-linguistic approaches and any theory of proverb meaning will therefore arrive at different semantic descriptions, and with each difference in describing a proverb's meaning the latter will seemingly change, to a certain degree.

There are, at least, two more factors to which due attention must be paid with regard to the influence of meta-language. First, one should not forget that the more general (broader, abstract) a given meta-language is, the more phenomena it will be able to cover, but on costs of the degree of specificity of description. And second one should be well aware of the fact that meaning is, after all, the outcome of a dynamic process – but any description of meaning is bound to arrive at a static result. Alone from this fact it follows that any attempt at describing a concrete meaning will always face serious difficulties, if it will not even be principally doomed to failure.

Estonian folklorist Arvo Krikmann has adequately drawn the necessary conclusions from these general and theoretical problems. On their background the proverb as a genre seems to be specifically characterized by a number of factors responsible for what he has termed its semantic indefiniteness: in addition to modal, functional, pragmatic, situational, and other factors, Krikmann (1971) particularly emphasized the importance of the chosen meta-language. According to him, it is simply impossible to define a proverb's meaning exactly, and he concludes: "[...] the meaning of a proverb [...] is, for a researcher or a user, a mere semantic potential. The final and maximally definite meanings of a certain text manifest themselves only in concrete actualizations of this text" (Krikmann, 1974: 5).

Ultimately, attempting to solve the problem, we are therefore faced with a methodological dilemma, since analyzing a proverb text we are concerned with two antagonistic tendencies. On the one hand, we are faced with the *absolute sum* of all *possible* meanings which represent a proverb's semantic potential. On the other hand, we have to do with the sum of all *real (actual)* meanings, as manifested in all its previous realizations, and since we do not know all these actual realizations, we usually have no chance to explicate the proverb's semantic potential in such a way that it corresponds to its actual meanings. This deficit is responsible for a number of possible error sources in any attempt to describe a proverb's meaning (Krikmann, 1974: 5):

> i. a semantic description is attributed to the text, which is too broad (or too general) – as a result, the description includes a number of unreal meanings, in addition to all real meanings;
> ii. the description is too narrow – consequently, part of all real meanings remain out of the consideration;
> iii. errors (1) and (2) occur simultaneously – in this case, the description introduces some unreal meanings and excludes, or neglects, a part of real ones;
> iv. the interpretation fails entirely and the formulation of the semantic potential does not include any real meaning.

Despite this seemingly hopeless situation there have always been (and will always be) attempts to describe proverb meanings, notwithstanding all theoretical problems pointed out – after all, there are simply concrete practical needs to do so, maybe even less for paremiology than for paremiography, striving for some kind of semantic arrangement of proverbs. In this respect, paremiologists and paremiographers, have always had to deal not only with the interaction of semantics with pragmatics and syntactics – it is yet another problem, which is essentially responsible for the proverb's semantic indefiniteness, namely, factors concerning its indirectness, figurativeness, non-literalness, etc.

The assumption of indirectness has always, in one way or another, played an important role in the history of proverb scholarship, primarily with regard to semantic issues, including however pragmatic, linguistic, poetic and other approaches.

4.4 "Indirectness" and "Non-literalness"

From a pragmatic point of view, it might eventually be appropriate to classify a proverb as an indirect speech act. This concept goes back to ideas from the philosophy of language, mainly Searle's (1975) discussion of *Indirect Speech Acts*, based on his earlier *Speech Act Theory* (Searle, 1969), and referring back to Austin's (1962) well-known treatment *How to do things with words*. In this framework, we are concerned with a direct speech act, when a speaker utters a sentence and means exactly and literally what s/he says (Searle, 1975: 59). But a speaker may also utter a sentence, mean what s/he

says, but additionally mean something more, or something different instead. In these cases, we are concerned with indirect speech acts, when "the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer" (Searle, 1975: 60).

On this basis, there have been a number studies on the speech act character of the proverb. And there have not only been attempts to characterize the proverb, due to its citational character, as a doubly indirect speech act (Norrick 1982), there have been efforts to define specific paremic speech acts – Nahberger (2000: 121), Nahberger (2004). Such attempts may be reasonable from a philosophical or maybe even pragmatic point of view. If, however, such classifications are helpful for semantic purposes (be that in a paremiological context or not), is an entirely different matter. Ultimately, the status of indirect speech acts has increasingly been principally called into question in the last years, not only due to the fact that the majority of speech acts in every day conversation have turned out to be indirect (Crystal, 1987: 121); profound skepticism has also come up for theoretical reasons, stating, e.g., that "there are no indirect speech acts" (Bertolet, 1994: 335), claiming "that indirect speech acts, if they do occur, can be explained within the framework of conversational implicature" (Green, 2009), or declaring "that the notion can be discarded with no significant methodological loss" (Chankova, 2009).

The question of figurativeness in proverbs has preoccupied generations of paremiologists, and monographic surveys of the proverb use to devote separate chapters to this question – Seiler, (1922: 149), Röhrich & Mieder, 1977: 90), and many others. More often than not, juxtapositions of the following kind have traditionally been put forward:

metaphorical proverb	vs.	*proverbial apothegm* (Taylor 1931)
proverbe	vs.	*dicton* (Greimas (1970)
proverb proper	vs.	*maxim* (Barley 1972)
proverb proper	vs.	*folk aphorism* (Permjakov (1979)

Although at first sight such distinctions, irrespective of differences in terminology, seem to refer to similar concepts, they may have been based on different assumptions: On the one hand, the difference may either have been assumed to be (a) *categorical* or (b) *gradual* (allowing for possible degrees and transitions between both); on the other hand, the juxtaposition may have been motivated either on the basis of specific (c) *textual* characteristics, or the difference have been seen in (d) *pragmatic* respects (i.e., in the act of proverb usage, strictly asking for a distinction of literal or non-literal usage of a proverb, rather than of literal and non-literal proverbs).

One might argue, or course, in favor of the notion that these different assumptions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and that we are rather concerned with different perspectives: from a text-oriented approach (c) one might, for example, treat

a proverb, be it categorically (a) or (b) gradually (more or less) literal or non-literal, as a homonymic and polyfunctional text (c). One might also classify a proverb as literal or non-literal, from an a posteriori perspective, without claiming that such a categorization is possible a priori, too, on the basis of information given in the text itself – after all, any word can be used metaphorically, and even the classical sentence *Colorless green ideas sleep furiously*, seemingly semantically anomalous at first sight, has repeatedly shown to be fully reasonable, if interpreted metaphorically.

Be that as it may, the problem of literal and non-literal meanings is too complex to be answered straight-forward. In any case, it seems reasonable see a parallel here to what (Burger, 2007: 91) has suggested for phrasemes, namely, to speak of *literal reading*, rather than of *literal meaning*. While this wording emphasizes the recipient's active role and makes it clear that the distinction outlined may be a cognitive, rather than an exclusively text-based phenomenon. Moreover, it has generally been assumed that distinctions which can be made from text-oriented studies are relevant for, or paralleled by cognitive processes, as well, among others, Norrick (1985: 27) claims that a speaker "means what he says on the literal level, but he means something more in context", particularly if one takes into account that the "literal meaning (or rather one literal meaning of several potential ones, as the components can be polysemic at the literal level) can be activated [...], but does not have to be of any importance in the actual use of language" (Norrick, 1985: 91).

Related issues have been the study of specific psycholinguistic studies of proverb comprehension, where a crucial question has been if understanding a proverb's literal meaning is an obligatory pre-condition for the decoding of its figurative meaning. Since Grzybek's (1984c) early summarizing discussion of results available at that time, much progress has been made in this field (e.g., Gibbs et al., 1996, Honeck, 1997). Various models have been propagated, starting from two-step *literal first* models, over *multiple meanings* models, up to *conventional meaning models*, to name but a few, all of them concentrating on the question, how paremic meaning is achieved, if and how (elements of) literal meaning may come into play or not. Unfortunately, in many relevant studies, many possibly interfering factors have never been systematically controlled, starting from a clear phrase-paremiological distinction between idioms, proverbial sayings and proverbs, including the differentiation of different kinds of proverbs as well as of different kinds of tropical process involved – be that on the lexical or the sentence level (see below) – up to differences depending on (individual) familiarity with the given proverb.

The above-mentioned point of different kinds of figurativeness concerns two aspects: on the one hand, this concerns individual tropes (such as metaphors,

metonymies, synecdoches, etc.) as lexical components possibly present in proverbs,[11] on the other hand, this relates to the proverb text as a whole, i.e., its overall paremic (transferred, indirect, non-literal, non-figurative, etc.) meaning. Although Seiler (1922: 152), in his *Deutsche Sprichwörterkunde*, drew on this difference as early as in 1922, both aspects which must be clearly distinguished have often have not been kept apart – both problems are principally different, yet closely related, depending again on the approach chosen.

4.5 Holistic vs. Componential Analysis, Analytical vs. Synthetic Clichés

In a more modern approach, Krikmann suggested to distinguish two different methodological approaches to explain proverb meaning:

(1) The first approach, which might be termed *componential*, regards the proverb text as **internally heterogeneous**. It tries to tell apart *content elements* (*c*-elements) from *formal elements* (*f*-elements). Formal elements are, among others, any kind of relational words or quantifiers, syntactic formulae, such as *every, all, if ... then, better ... than*, etc. All other words belong to the *c*-elements; these can be further subdivided into semantically (c_1) *literal* and (c_2) *transferred* (non-literal, figurative, tropical, etc.) elements, based on the assumption that there is, in principle, a literal reading of words, and a non-literal (figurative) one. The exact distinction between *c*-elements and *f*-elements may vary, of course, as well as the classification of specific kind of trope involved, depending on various factors; but all approaches along these lines share the assumption that figurativeness (non-directness, figurativeness, poeticalness, etc.) is not assigned to the proverb text as a whole, but is restricted to its individual elements (or even to the c_2-elements, alone).

(2) The second approach, which might be termed *holistic*, considers the proverb text as an *internally homogeneous* entity. All its elements are considered to belong to a specific *secondary* language, a proverb representing a *secondary modeling system*, i.e., a semiotic superstructure built upon (the basis, or principle of) natural language as a *primary modeling system*. From this perspective, approaches along the componential approach appear to be restricted to the analysis of the proverb as a linguistic entity,

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11 In this respect, Norrick's (1985: 101) appeal to pay attention to these different kinds of tropes is important, although his assumption that no one has ever attempted to define or catalogue the types of figures proverbs contain commonly, is far from being correct, if one does not ignore older sources as, e.g., Klimenko (1946) detailed study of tropes in Russian proverbs.

studying it in the framework of sentence semantics (see above). In contrast, according to the holistic approach, a proverb is seen not only as a linguistic super-sign but as an even more complex superstructure, a paremic super-sign, in analogy to any poetic work of art. In this framework, the eventual occurrence of tropes on the lexical level may result in different subcategories of proverbs, but the overall classification of a proverb as being *completely poetical* would not be touched by this detail, the semantic description of a proverb thus asking for a specific meta-language beyond sentence semantics.

From a different perspective, we are thus faced again with the proverb's semiotic status as a sign complex, or a complex super-sign. Comparing these two approaches just outlined, there are some similarities between the two, since in both cases, lexical tropes may but need not be contained; furthermore, both do not exclude, or even claim that there is some information beyond the information given on a merely linguistic level. Yet, both approaches differ in important respects:

a) the status and role of lexical tropes, particularly concerning their relation to the syntactic and proverbial whole, is treated differently;

b) the need to develop a specific meta-language for the description of what is assumed to be some kind of additional information, is seen differently, and clearly relevant in the second approach only.

Whereas the first approach thus focuses on a componential analysis, eventually being negligent of the need to develop of a specific meta-language for the semantic description of the proverbial whole, in addition to its the second approach, with its particular emphasis on the additional (*secondary*) meaning, is faced with the need to offer a solution as to the interplay between lexical and proverbial levels, particularly with regard to figurative processes involved. Again, we have a parallel to the narrower field of phraseology, and one cannot but agree with H. Burger (2007: 92), for whom "one of the main semantic problems in phraseology is describing and explaining if and how the two meanings or levels of meaning are connected".

According to the componential approach, a proverb text thus is regarded to be not principally different from any other verbal text, except for the indirectness of the speech act of its utterance (see above), and for the eventual inclusion of lexical tropes. Under this condition, a proverb is submitted to semantic analyses in a linguistic framework. For approaches along these lines, *literal* meanings (or readings) of the proverb and/or its components are a pre-condition of analysis.

In this respect, the concept of *semantic autonomy* has been used in the field of phraseology, in order to study "how much and in what way the components of the phraseme contribute semantically to its overall meaning" (Burger, 2007: 96). Along these lines, idioms without semantically autonomous components have been termed non-compositional, those with semantically autonomous components have been termed compositional; as a consequence, such idioms have been termed non-motivated or opaque, on the one hand, and motivated or transparent, on the other, both

types also allowing for combinations leading to partly idiomatic (motivated, transparent) idioms (Burger, 2007:96).[12] The classification of a phraseme to be (more or less) motivated thus depends on a decision how the individual components contribute to the overall phraseological meaning. It seems that with regard to this point, things are considerably different in paremiology: although here, too, we may ask how the individual components contribute to the whole, and if, or how, these components can be motivated, these questions are not relevant for a classification of the proverb meaning as a whole, which is always motivated, even if possibly in different manners (see below).

Componential analyses in paremiology, however, tend to see the overall proverb meaning, which may frankly be admitted to exist, either as an emerging result of the (the analysis of) individual components, or it tends to be completely ignored and regarded as being out of scope. Quite typically, Norrick (1985: 9), for example, suggests that a semantic analysis of a proverb must begin with a literal reading[13], before its *customary meaning* or *standard proverb interpretation* (in his terms) can be achieved. The *literal* meaning, in this context, is not the original proverb text, but a literal paraphrase of its *surface form*.[14] In Norrick's understanding, this intermediate step may be necessary for proverbs which contain, for example, archaic or peculiarly proverbial syntactic constructions or lexical items; according to Norrick (1985: 81) such proverbs (i.e., only such proverbs) are "not amenable to regular compositional semantic interpretation" – from what we learn that all other proverbs obvious are considered to be amenable. Whereas compositional analysis thus is regarded to be not only possible, but also necessary, in order to arrive at a proverb's *literal* meaning, there is, according to Norrick (1985: 82), no need to semantically analyze proverbs in order to provide them with what he terms *standard proverb interpretations*: since proverbs are not freely generated, "no analysis of their internal semantic structure is necessary to provide readings for them" (Norrick, 1985: 82). Both statements taken together, it becomes obvious that the semantic (compositional) analysis is confined to *literal* readings, and that the semantic analysis of proverb meaning as such ultimately is not even touched upon in his approach, except for everyday re-phrasings

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12 In linguistics and semiotics, different kinds of *motivation* have been distinguished, originally referring to Saussure's distinction of arbitrary and motivated signs. In a more general sense, we are concerned with the derivation of form, meaning, function, usage, or historical development of simple or complex signs, on the basis of formal (morphological, syntactic, phonological, graphical), semantic, or sign-external aspects.

13 Norrick uses both terms, obviously interchangeably, i.e., *literal reading* as well as *literal meaning*.

14 The *literal* reading of the proverb *Like father, like son*, for example, would be *Father and son are alike*.

of proverbs' customary meanings.[15] Based on the *literal* reading, Norrick (1985: 81), assumes proverbs to be either literal or figurative, depending on the relation between the literal meanings determined for them and their *standard proverb interpretations*[16]; more specifically, he claims that if the literal reading *coincides* with the customary meaning, a proverb is literal, else figurative (Norrick, 1985: 1). Irrespective of the fact that the whole approach is highly problematic, from a theoretical point of view[17], it turns out that proverbs which contain some kind of trope on the lexical level are classified as *figurative*, all others as *literal*.

At closer sight, the crucial question raised above, as to possible interrelations between lexical tropes and the paremic meaning of the proverb as a whole, thus turns out to remain unanswered, in this approach. And although it is conceded that "information beyond that present in a simple semantic decomposition of lexical items may play a crucial role in interpretation" (Norrick, 1985: 114), the same holds to as to the question how to semantically describe a proverb's customary meaning, as an inventorized unit, admittedly being considered as "belonging to a particular language" (Norrick, 1985: 1).

Whereas thus, in the framework of componential approaches, there even may be no need to develop a specific meta-language for paremic meaning, it is just this specific paremic content which renders the proverb a secondary modeling system, for the second approach. Here, a proverb is treated not only as a linguistic, but also, additionally and indispensably, as a paremic entity. In other words: from this perspective, a proverb is analyzed both as a text in ordinary language, as the primary modeling system, and as a specific paremic entity, belonging to a specific paremic plane of language, assumed to represent a second level of meaning.

This approach theoretically owes very much to literary and cultural semiotics. In this theoretical framework, linguistic analyses are of course not excluded – but (additionally) considering the proverb to be a specific paremic text, all text elements are

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15 At closer sight, even these demands are not met in Norrick's approach; after all, a standard proverb interpretation *Fear gives the ability to fly* of the proverb *Fear gives wings* (Norrick, 1985: 194) is more than far away from any kind of customary meaning, to give but one example.

16 More specifically, depending on this relation, synecdochic, metonymic, metaphoric (and eventually further) types of proverbs may be distinguished – see e.g., Norrick (1985: 108).

17 Although the *customary meaning* may eventually be described with terms from everyday language, this may not blind us to the fact that we are concerned with a different, meta-lingual function of language. The (meta-linguistic) description of a proverb's customary meaning and its literal reading may of course *coincide* formally, but not functionally, in this case both being but homonymous expressions. It is therefore profoundly misleading to speak of a coincidence between literal and customary meaning – a meta-language must principally not only have a logical lexicon not smaller than that of the object language, but it must also necessarily have variables belonging to a higher logical type than the variables of the object language. Thus, for both 'literal' and *figurative* proverbs the literal reading must differ from its meta-lingual description, and every change in the type of meta-linguistic description would let this conception collapse like a house of cards.

considered to fulfill semantic functions, and they must be strictly distinguished both from all elements of the primary language and from those of a given meta-language used for their semantic description (in both cases we would otherwise be concerned with homonymous elements). We will come back to details of the concept of secondary modelling systems, further below, and we will discuss what this concept has in common with approaches distinguishing between two kinds (or levels) of signification, a primary (denotative) and a secondary (connotative) one. There is more than one scholar who has advanced this view, but with regard to the question raised above, Permjakov's approach deserves some in-depth treatment here.

Permjakov's approach[18] is based on the fundamental distinction between analytical vs. synthetic clichés, relating not only to proverbs, but to all categories of linguistic stereotypes. The main difference between these two types of clichés is seen to consist in the way how the constituent signs are fused to a complex supersign (a term not used by Permjakov himself):

> – *analytical clichés* can have only a *direct overall meaning*: even if an individual constituting element is used in a non-direct (i.e., transferred, or figurative) understanding, these stereotypes tend to remain mono-semantic, i.e. they have one concrete meaning and do not ask for some extended interpretation;

> – *synthetic clichés*, as compared to this, are assumed to have an extended (transferred, figurative) overall meaning, in addition to the direct, which cannot (or not completely) be derived from the meanings of the individual components; synthetic clichés are considered to refer not only, as a linguistic supersign, to a specifically denoted segment of reality, but, as a paremic cliché, to all similar situations of which they are a model.

The crucial difference between analytical and synthetic clichés thus is the kind of overall motivation, which goes along with their mono- vs. polythematicity, on the one hand, and their quality of being a secondary modelling system or not. To give but one example as to the concept of polythematicity: prognostic sayings[19] such as *When swallows fly high, the weather will be dry* or *Low flies the swallow, rain to follow* would have to be considered as analytical clichés, being restricted to the observation of swallows' behavior and predictions derived from it, and allowing for no (or at least not asking for any) semantically extended interpretation; in contrast, the thematically similar proverb *One swallow does not make a summer*, as a synthetic cliché, also (or even only) works when referring to situations which have

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18 A synoptic survey of Permjakov's conception can be found in his 1970 book *От поговорки до сказки*, which was translated into English in 1979 under the title of *From Proverb to Folktale*. However, his theory of proverbs was significantly elaborated upon in the 1970s and therefore is not contained in the English translation, which is obsolete, in this respect.

19 Sometimes, such prognostic sayings have been termed *weather proverbs*, although the term *proverb* is reasonably better reserved for synthetic clichés.

nothing to do with swallows (or other kinds of birds), seasons of the year, etc.[20], but rather, in a more general sense, to situations in which the (first) appearance of a specific phenomenon should not be (mis)interpreted as an obligatory index of the appearance of circumstances usually accompanying it.[21]

Thus attributing the proverbial genre to the category of synthetic clichés, it is important to emphasize that this concerns *literal* (*L*-proverbs) and *figurative* (*F*-proverbs) proverbs alike. In this respect, it is of utmost importance to emphasize that a proverbial text as a whole is always motivated, i.e., neither in *L*-proverbs nor in *F*-proverbs motivation can be absent; this is a clear difference in comparison to the situation in phraseology, where a phraseme may be fully motivated, partly motivated, or non-motivated, depending on the component's status, their function for the phraseological whole and the possibility to derive the latter from the individual components (Burger, 2007: 96).

Yet, both types of proverbs differ according to their motivational character: *F*-proverbs are (or can be) motivated figuratively, *F*-proverbs directly. The fact that not only *F*-proverbs, but *L*-proverbs as well are synthetic, so that the overall meaning of both can be understood to be extended (or transferred), may at first glance be as surprising, as well as the fact that not only *F*-proverbs, but also *L*-proverbs can contain individual (lexical) tropes – yet, these assumptions are fully in line with what has been termed a *holistic* approach above.

Under these conditions, the figurative character of proverbs appears in a different light, as compared to many traditional conceptions: now the question is foreground, which options and which restrictions there are as to the occurrence of tropes in *L*-proverbs and in *F*-proverbs. In the framework outlined, this question may be asked separately (a) on the basis of text properties, and (b) with regard to properties of the lexical components. Both perspectives are not completely independent of

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20 In one way or another, this concept thus is based on conventionalized meanings of lexical signs. This does bit exclude, of course, that one might artificially construe a (situative) context, in which a figurative interpretation of a prognostic saying might be possible; however, in this case we would not be concerned with an analytic cliché any more, but with an instance of paremic homonymy.
21 Ultimately, it is this Generic-Specific relation, which has been emphasized by cognitive linguists from the 1980s on (e.g., Lakoff & Johnson (1980), in context of a theory of metaphor, to be relevant for proverbs, too (e.g., Lakoff & Turner (1989 : 162). Notwithstanding the lack of empirical evidence, including the danger of overemphasizing subjective introspection (Gibbs et al. 1996), cognitivist linguistics has attracted much attention by phraseologists and paremiologists, ignoring the close resemblance of these ideas to Permjakov's linguistic and folkloristic ideas, as pointed out by Krikmann (1984) in his critical review of the cognitivist approach. In this context, Krikmann suggests that the Generic-Specific metaphor might be better understood as a metonymy; this classification might be seen as a parallel to Norrick's (1985) classification of proverbs as *scenic species-genus synecdoches* – but in this case, the proverb as a genre would generally be concerned and not – as Norrick (2007: 389), basing his distinctions on the relation between 'literal' and customary meaning, sees it –, only a specific subtype of proverbs.

other because, according to Permjakov (1979: 113-115), for each of the two paremic types there are clear interdependencies between the properties of the components and global text properties.

In addition to further distinctive properties enumerated by Permjakov (1979: 10-112), the one which is most relevant for the treatment of figurativeness in proverbs and the distinction between *L*-proverbs and *F*-proverbs is the dichotomy between directly motivated and figuratively motivated components, the latter further being sub-divided into metaphorically motivated, on the one hand, and otherwise motivated components (i.e. metonymies, synecdoches, hyperboles, etc.), on the other. From this results an essential difference between the overall meaning of *L*-proverbs and *F*-proverbs:

1. the overall meaning of *F*-proverbs is always metaphorical, and no direct interpretation is possible here;
2. for *L*-proverbs, a direct interpretation is possible, notwithstanding the possible presence of figurative components.

This general distinction goes along with a number of differences as to constituting components:

1. both *L*-proverbs and *F*-proverbs may contain direct components:
   a) in *L*-proverbs all components can be direct
   b) in *F*-proverbs it is excluded that all components are direct
2. both in *L*-proverbs and in *F*-proverbs all components can be figurative (that means, neither *L*-proverbs nor *F*-proverbs must obligatorily contain a direct component)
3. both *L*-proverbs and *F*-proverbs may contain a metaphorical component:
   a) if an *L*-proverb contains a metaphorical component, then it must also contain either another direct or a figurative (but in this non-metaphorical) component
   b) in *F*-proverbs at least one of the components must be metaphorical
   c) *F*-proverbs may contain, in addition to a metaphorical component, direct components; if, however, an *F*-proverb contains, in addition to a metaphorical component, further figurative components, these can only be metaphorical ones.

Table 4.1 summarizes the most important properties of *L*-proverbs and *F*-proverbs[22] (Permjakov, 1979: 122).

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22 'Proverbial aphorisms' and 'proverbs proper' in Permjakov's terminology

Table 4.1: Text and component properties of proverbs

	Text properties			Component properties				
	1	2	3	1	2a	2b	3	4
	Possibility of transferred interpretation with direct components present	Possibility of direct interpretation with transferred components present	Overall meaning always metaphoric	All components can be direct	All components can be metaphoric — Metaphoric transfer	All components can be metaphoric — Metaphoric + non-metaphoric transfer	Obligatory present of direct component	Obligatory presence of metaphoric component
L-proverb	+	+	–	+	–	+	–	–
F-proverb	+	–	+	–	+	–	–	+

Against this background, proverbs such as *The apple does not fall far from the tree* or *Too many cooks spoil the broth* may of course quite easily be attributed to *F*-proverbs; with regard to L-proverbs, however, the matter is slightly more complicated, because not only *non-pictorial* proverbs such as *Nothing ventured, nothing gained* or *Exceptions prove the rule* would belong to *this category*, but also sayings containing lexical tropes, such as *Speech is silver, silence is golden* or *A lie has no legs*.

In practice, the classification of tropical and proverbial types may turn out to be more complicated, due fact that the exact definition of a component may be no straight-forward procedure, but the result of a set of complex interrelations. As has been mentioned before, according to Permjakov's text-based approach, analytical and synthetic clichés may be distinguished "depending on the character of links between the component words" (Permjakov, 1979: 106). This formulation is likely to be interpreted in favor of a *component-first approach*, implying that an analysis of the components' status allows for conclusions as to the status of the proverbial whole – in fact, the components' status is, however, but a result of using a proverb as a whole. The word *apple*, however (by default denoting a round fruit with red, yellow, or green skin, firm yellow-white flesh and little pips inside), remains to denote this fruit and not, for example, a pear, independent of the fact if an apple denoted by this word falls far from a tree or not, unless this word occurs, for example, in a proverbial sentence like *The apple does not fall far from a tree*, i.e., when used as a proverb, to refer to a situation which has nothing to do with apples. It is thus the use of the proverb as a whole, which turns the overall meaning out to be proverbial, and only *a posteriori*,

i.e., as a consequence of proverb usage, its individual components may turn out to be figurative, and then we can say something about the figurative status of their components in their intra-textual interrelations.

Starting the analysis from individual words may be an interesting occupation for linguists and folklorists, who are interested in theoretical possibilities. It may also be a necessary procedure in case of unknown proverbs (in this case representing a task to be solved, in this respect similar to riddling processes), or when either a proverb user or a scholar is concerned with proverbs from a culture other than the one s/he is enculturated in. Yet, there is no reason to assume this to be the standard direction of the genesis of proverbs' figurative meanings; rather, knowledge about proverb usage (including internalized about previous usages) in terms of cultural (paremiological) competence seems to play the crucial role. Researchers, oscillating between participation and observation, may eventually forget about this, in this case running into to a methodological trap known by the name of *metagenetic fallacy*.

The lessons to be learnt from these observations are manifold. First, it is obvious that *component-whole* strategies may exist, but that they may differ for ordinary users and analytical researchers. Moreover, and maybe more importantly, they may differ across users, depending on familiarity with a given proverb. In this context, the status of individual tropes is not independent of the status of the proverbial whole; but it would be wrong to assume that the components' status determines the status of the whole – rather, the status of the whole determines the components' status, which then can be understood to stand in specific intra-proverbial interrelations.

This concerns not only, of course, the fact that we are generally concerned with a trope, and not only can eventually determine a specific kind of trope, but also its further semantic interpretation: when used as a proverb as, e.g., in the proverbial sentence *A rolling stone gathers no moss*, individual component like *rolling*, *stone*, or *moss* may turn out to be used figuratively, but how rolling is interpreted (desirable flexibility and diligence, or hyperactivity?), if semantic features of *stone* are activated or not, or if *moss* is understood to be something like *material wealth* or a i.e., desirable to be obtained, or rather avoided,[23] depends, first of all, not on lexical semantic processes, but on the overall paremic meaning, concerning the proverb's overall relation to the denoted (extra-linguistic) segment of reality, which plays the crucial role in this respect.

As a result, it turns out that problems of proverb semantics obviously cannot be solved without reference to some kind of extensional semantics (i.e., taking into account, in one way or another, extra-proverbial reality), and that some concept is needed for what has repeatedly been termed the *proverbial whole*, the *abstract proverb idea*, or the paremic *information beyond the proverb text as such*. In other words: as it is admitted that a proverb contains paremic information beyond the

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23 Lundberg (1958), Milner (1969).

linguistic information given in the text (and that this additional information is not only provided ad hoc by verbal co-texts or situational contexts, but is part of cultural memory at large, based on previous textual and pragmatic experience), no componential semantic description will arrive at an adequate description of proverb meaning; as a consequence, paremiology is in need of having (a) to define referential aspects of proverb usage, and (b) to discuss how this additional information can be semantically described and if a special meta-language is needed for this description. For this purpose, a short theoretical discussion of semiotic foundations seems to be necessary.

4.6 Sign Concepts: System-based vs. Process-oriented Semiotics

In most sign concepts, particularly those used in the field of linguistics, and here first of all those which feel obliged, in one way or another, to the Saussurean tradition, a sign is understood as a binary relation between a signifying expression and a signified content[24], as illustrated in Figure 4.1:

Figure 4.1: Bilateral sign concept

In this framework, a sign is considered to be an element of (or belong to) a given sign system, its meaning depending on its relation to (or rather difference from) the other signs of that system. On the basis of the sign's differential relations, the denotative level of signification is determined as the basis of any sign process, from which more complex relations are possible in two directions: either towards a meta-linguistic or towards a connotative sign. In the first case, the combined expression and content planes of a given (denotative) sign serve as the content of a meta-linguistic sign; in the second case, expression and content of the denotative sign function as the expression of a connotative sign. This approach goes back to Danish linguist Hjelmslev's ideas in his *Outline of Glossematics* (1957). It was later popularized by scholars such as Roland Barthes, who applied this concept not only to individual signs, but transferred it to texts (e.g., myths), using *text* in the broad semiotic meaning of this term, not restricting it to verbal texts, treating them as super-signs as outlined above. Usually, both

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24 The fact of Saussure's psychological (or cognitive) definition of the sign and its components is not of primary concern here.

processes are depicted separately; as compared to this, Figure 4.2 is an attempt to represent both levels simultaneously.
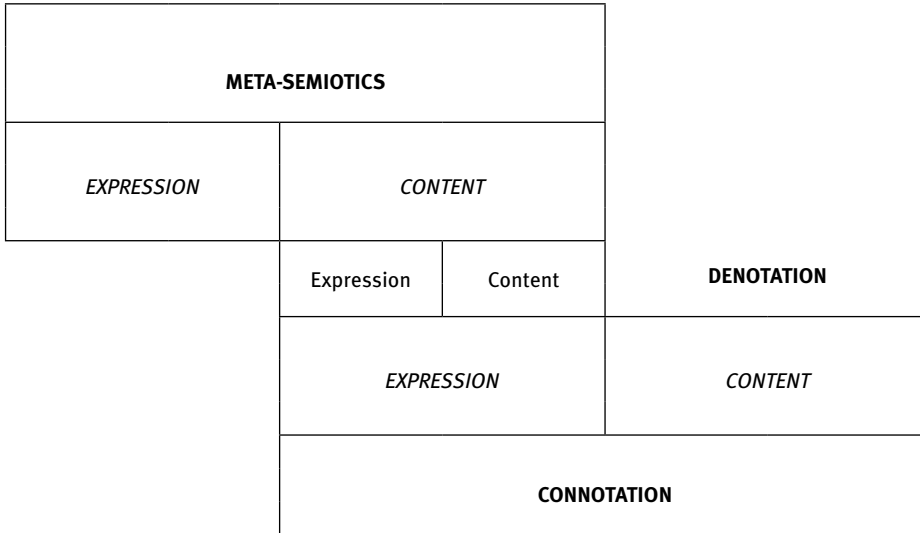
META-SEMIOTICS			
EXPRESSION	*CONTENT*		
	Expression	Content	**DENOTATION**
	EXPRESSION		*CONTENT*
	CONNOTATION		

Figure 4.2: Simultaneous representation of both levels of sign

As can easily be seen, in this concept the question of an adequate meta-language is complicated by the fact that the meaning of a connotative sign, like that of a denotative, can only be described by meta-linguistic procedures. A crucial question thus is if that meta-language which covers the first (denotative) level of meaning, can (or should) also cover the second (connotative) level of meaning, or if special meta-language is needed for each of them.

Moreover, such a scheme is almost perfectly suited to evoke objections from a theoretical point of view for other reasons:

a) it includes only two levels of signification, not taking into consideration the possibility that there might be multiple levels in the process of meaning generation;

b) it appears to operate on both levels of signification with fixed assignments between expression and content, which may not be less relevant in semiotic reality;

c) it seems to suggest the possibility of a strict distinction between denotation and connotation, neglecting fluent transitions between both;

d) it gives rise to the impression that we might be concerned with an allegedly successive generation of connotative meaning, implying the need of a literal reading of the denotative meaning first, ignoring the option that the connotative meaning might be accessed directly, leapfrogging the denotative one.

Further objections might come not only from post-structuralist and deconstructivist positions, but from a process-oriented semiotic perspective as well. As compared

to system-based approaches, rooting in the Saussurean tradition, process-oriented approaches, particularly in the tradition of Charles S. Peirce[25], are principally dynamic: semiosis here is characterized by signs principally referring to other signs, the process of meaning generation thus turning out to be, theoretically, an infinite regress. In this respect, Peirce's 19th century ideas meet current post-structuralist and deconstructivist ideas: not only is the assumption of a fixed relation between signifying and signified repealed, also becomes the strict separation of denotative and connotative structures of signification void. Whereas such views thus rub theoretical salt into the wounds of methodological shortcomings of structuralist approaches, they are not compatible with practical needs to describe meanings, e.g., for a lexicographic or, in our case, paremiographic purposes. In a way, they even seem to be inconsistent with the long and productive traditions in these fields, as insufficient, unsatisfactory or *authoritative* as the attribution of allegedly fixed meanings may seem to (post) modern theorists.

Such theoretical discussions must be as strange to paremiographer and paremiologists, striving for semantics descriptions of proverbs, as is the assumption of "invariant meanings" for contemporary post-structuralist and deconstructivist semiotic approaches. In this respect, it is important to note an essential difference between the original Peircean concept and these *modern* ideas: in contrast to current approaches, which see the principally infinite regress as an absolute and indispensable principle, the possibility to communicate is ensured in Peirce's pragmatic approach by the circumstance that at the end of the theoretically infinite regress in semiosis, there stands what he termed a final *logical interpretant*, which does not finish, but interrupt the potentially infinite semiosis.[26]

As compared to the system-bound bilateral sign concept above, process-oriented semiotics thus might eventually provide an alternative theoretical, but obviously impractical basis; this approach might also, under certain conditions, seen to be not fully in contrast to meaning descriptions in terms of a culturally accepted consensus. In this respect, one should not forget that although each process of meaning

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25 Broadly speaking, in a Peircean framework, a sign process is a dynamic interaction of three components: the *representamen*, a functionally defined sign carrier, an *object*, and the *interpretant*, an interpreting consciousness. The *object* additionally is specified as an *immediate object* (as represented in the sign itself), and the *dynamic object* (only indicated by the sign, to be cognized by collateral experience only); similarly, different kinds of interpretants are distinguished, which need not be discussed here in detail. In any case, an interpretant must not be confused with the interpreter as the sign user.

26 According to Peirce (Hartshorne & Weiss, 1931-1958), this logical interpretant is "what *would* finally be decided to be the true interpretation if consideration of the matter *were* carried so far as that an ultimate opinion *were* reached". The final interpretant thus ultimately is based upon some customary interpretive consensus, which in principle is only an ideal and can be achieved only by way of some (quasi-asymptotical) approximation.

generation is in principle an individual act of meaning generation and interpretation, in case of proverbs we are specifically concerned with collectively or culturally conventionalized and agreed-upon meanings. This view would not claim such culturally accepted meanings, or their descriptions, to be fixed, obligatory once and for all; rather, taking into account individual proverb use, all factors of semantic indefiniteness pointed out above would persist, the meaning description thus turning out to be exactly that semantic potential it has been postulated to be above. Seen from this perspective, connotative meanings and their semantic descriptions thus

– would not be confined to two meanings, or levels of meaning, but include possibly multiple planes, of which the denotative and the connotative ones are those which most likely to incorporate inter-subjective consensus;

– would not imply any assumption as to successive stages in comprehension processes, i.e. they would not make, for example, any predictions as to some stepwise succession as, e.g., in terms of a denotation-before-connotation approach;

– would not go along with the authoritative claim to represent the only, true or ultimate meaning; rather it would be understood to be as one of many possible meanings in the course of an eventually longer (and theoretically infinite) chain of meanings;

– would represent some kind of temporary snapshot, subject to diachronic changes, rather than eternal truth;

– would remain to have the status of a semantic potential, along with other elements of semantic indefiniteness as acknowledged in the field of paremiology.

Under these conditions, semantic concepts distinguishing between a denotative and a connotative plane of signification might be unfettered from structuralist restrictions without at the same time forfeiting the chance to describe meanings which lend themselves to inter-subjective consensus within a given culture, despite all potentiality and tentativeness. The remaining methodologically crucial question how paremiologists can provide reliable semantic descriptions is a process which includes two different aspects: (a) insight into proverbs meanings, and (b) their meta-linguistic description. Both issues have been dealt with before: one the one hand, the inevitable oscillation between (intrinsic) participation and (extrinsic) observation, on the other hand, the choice of concrete meta-language in the process of finding a balance between specificity and generality.

Attempts to avoid getting lost in a circle of arguments and counter-arguments have referred to the above-mentioned concept of connotative semiotics, defining the proverb as a connotative semiotic super-sign. One of the first to apply this concept to proverbs was Canadian anthropologist Crépeau, referring to a rather peripheral remark by Greimas (1970: 310), seeing proverbs as *connotative elements [éléments connotés]*: "On the first level, signification is determined by denotation, i.e., by an immediate (albeit arbitrary) relation between designating and designated. On the second level, signification is determined by connotation, i.e., by a mediated relation between

connotating and connotated" (Crépeau, 1975: 288). Crépeau was not the first to propagate this concept: with explicit regard to proverbs Russian scholar Čerkasskij (1978) had already promoted this idea some years before him, assuming that the aggregate of expression and content is but the verbal realization on the linguistic level, at the same time representing the substance of expression for the supra-linguistic semiotic level of an *inhomogeneous* text, in which more than one sign system is simultaneously operative. In this context, Čerkasskij made an important distinction: according to him, a sentence such as *The apple does not fall far from the tree* is the complex sign to denote a particular, individual situation, of one may say that the text represents a verbal model of that situation; as a proverb, however, it serves as a sign not of an individual situation, but of a *class of situations*, and thus serves not (only) as a primary, but as a secondary modeling system.

Illustrating the application of these ideas to the concept of connotative semiotics outlined above results the graphical representation depicted in Figure 4.3.
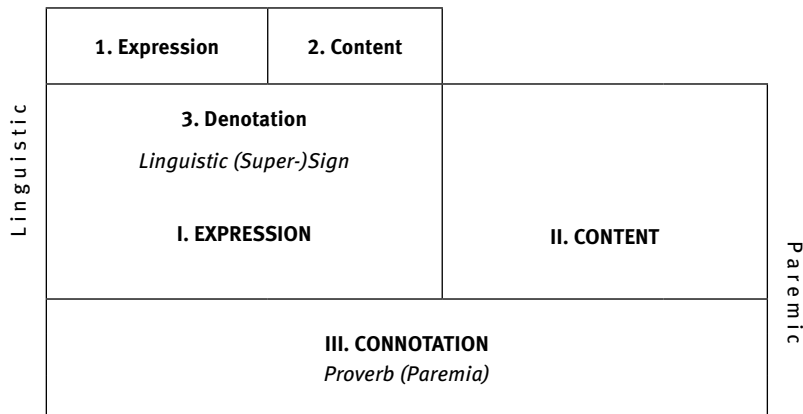

Figure 4.3: Application of Čerkasskij's and Crépeau's ideas to the concept of connotative semiotics

Both Čerkasskij and Crépeau thus, independent of each other, developed similar ideas, although with slightly different (not necessarily contradictory) foci as to the conclusions drawn: whereas Čerkasskij paved the way for model-oriented interpretations, Crépeau emphasized the importance of analogy – two interpretations which do not necessarily contradict each.

4.7 Logics and Analogics

Crépeau (1975) illustrated the distinction between two levels of signification, and the importance of analogy, referring to the following proverb: *Dog of the king – king of*

the dogs. If the implicit analogy, so his argument, were to be determined on the basis of the first level of signification only, one would arrive at an absurd formulation like *Dog : King :: King : Dog*. In fact, however, we are rather concerned with a different analogy, which may be expressed in terms of *King's Dog : Other Dogs :: King : Dog*. Crépeau's considerations are relevant in several respects, not only with regard to the important distinction of two levels of signification. They also deserve special mention here because they introduce the important concept of analogy,[27] which opens the doors in two directions: first, they allow for the conceptual integration with attempts to logically formalize proverbial structures; and second, they can perfectly be combined with theoretical concepts distinguishing different types of situation, relevant in context of the proverb and its usage. Both lines shall briefly be outlined here, starting with those attempts concerned with logical modelings of proverbial structures.

Earlier works in this direction, including those from Klaus (1964) or Kanyó (1981), focused on the level of denotation only; moreover, they tended to neglect important differences between phrasemes, idioms, and proverbs. As compared to this, Krikmann (1984) took into account the distinction of both levels of signification, and presented a coherent concept with a theoretically substantiated distinction between phraseological and paremiological entities. This distinction is based on the fundamental juxtapositions of phraseological information (P_x) and paremic information ($P_x \supset Q_x$), on the one hand, and existential ($\exists_x$) and universal ($\forall_x$)quantification (*there exists* and *for all*), on the other.[28]

In detail, it is a matter of scholarly tradition, of course, how the resulting categories may terminologically be distinguished from each other, and how they are logically symbolized. In any case, three kinds of basic categories[29] result from the above distinctions:

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27 In this respect, one should well be aware of the fact that, logically speaking, analogy principally includes the relation between two ordered pairs (of terms or concepts); quite characteristically, the ancient Greek term ναλογία (*analogia*) originally meant proportionality, in the mathematical sense, and eventually was translated into Latin is *proportio* as a set of equations in which two relations are equated. There is no need to go into details here as to a discussion of analogy – after all, one may still today side with John Stuart Mill's (1843) wise words saying that "There is no word, which is used more loosely, or in a greater variety of senses, as Analogy".– Nevertheless, Crépeau may be seen fully right in arguing that proverbs need not necessarily be characterized by fully explicit four-term analogies.

28 The background of these distinctions must be seen in philosophical and linguistic theory, where a proposition includes nomination, predication, junction, and quantification. In this context, nomination is a necessary condition for predication, the latter implying the attribution of a property to a subject (or object). Whereas phraseological information (*P*x) thus concerns nomination (which, grammatically speaking, is not restricted to nouns, but may comprise verbs, too), paremic information (*P*x É *Q*x) contains, by definition, a predication, a proverb thus corresponding to a proposition, which may either refer to the relation between two (or more) objects, or to an object an (one of) its properties.

29 It goes without saying that within each of these basic categories, a number of further subdivisions are possible and necessary.

Category	Logical formulation	Type
I	$\exists_x (x = a)(P_x)$ or $\exists_{x_i} (P_x)$	Phraseme
II	$\exists_x (x = a)(P_x \supset Q_x)$ or $\exists_{x_i} (P_x \supset Q_x)$	Proverbial phrase / saying
III	$\forall_x (P_x \supset Q_x)$	Proverb

Items to be classified as phrasemes thus are characterized by existential quantification and ask for the choice of an individual argument (denoted as $x = a$, or x_i) complementing the phraseological information P_x as, e.g., in expressions such as *to spill the beans*, or *to bury the hatchet*, linguistically resulting in an expression such as **Peter spilled the beans*. As compared to this, proverbial phrases such as *to put the cart before the horse* or *to set a fox to keep the geese* would also be related to existential quantification with an individual argument, but – in contrast to phrasemes – contain paremic information ($P_x \supset Q_x$), that is, concern the relation between two concepts and/or the attribution of a property to (at least) one of them. Finally, proverbs are by definition complete propositions, prototypically represented by items such as *The apple does not fall far from the tree* or *Water always flows downhill*, as heterogeneous as these may two examples may seem to appear at first sight; in this respect, it is important to note that proverbs are logically, but not necessarily grammatically complete statements, universal quantification being obligatory and characteristic for them from a logical perspective.[30]

Items of all three classes have partly been dealt with by different disciplines: phrasemes and proverbial sayings have been in the focus of phraseology, or idiomatics, the lacking distinction between these two classes being favored by the fact that, in languages like English, they have been sub-summarized under the common term *idiom* without further distinction. Proverbial sayings and proverbs, as compared to this, have been studied by paremiology, the group of proverbial sayings thus having received scholarly attention from both fields.

One of the reasons for these disciplinary overlappings is of course the existence of fluent transitions between phrasemes and proverbial sayings as well as between the latter and proverbs. But such zones of possible interferences, which eventually make the attribution to one of the categories difficult, may also be related to differences in meta-language. Expressions such as *a wolf in sheep's clothing* or *to make a mountain out of a molehill* may, one the one hand, be paraphrased mono-lexically (e.g. in terms of *pretender*, *hypocrite*, *pharisee*, or *exaggerate*, *overemphasize*, respectively), resulting in the perception of one concept only; on the other hand, they may also be interpreted to explicitly relate two concepts with each other (e.g., something *small* and

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30 The fluent transitions from proverbial phrases to proverbs become most evident in verbal constructions like "One/You should (not) …".

unimportant vs. something *big* and *important*, or *peaceful looks* vs. *dangerous charac-ter*, etc.), thus the relation between two different concepts tending to being focused. By way of a pragmatic solution, it may seem reasonable, from a semiotic point of view, to consider such items to represent some kind of phraseo-paremiological homonyms (Grzybek & Eismann, 1994).

Quite obviously, the distinctions discussed here concern both proverbs' textual surface (i.e. the denotative level of signification) and the meta-linguistic modeling of their connotative meaning structures; in this case, the concrete attribution to one of the categories again depends on specifics of usage, rather than on textual charac-teristics only. Usage, however, now concerns not so much situational circumstances, but first and foremost cognitive processes, the relevant question concentrating on the point if a user tends to see the items verbalized in the given phraseo-paremiological expression to represent an individual concept or a specific relation between concepts – a task not only for the disciplines of phraseology and paremiology, but first and foremost for psycholinguistics, which might find a promising field of research here, using more refined theoretical distinctions than has hitherto been the standard.

Despite a number of open questions and unsolved problems outlined above, we can thus return to Crépeau's conclusion that a proverb's paremic meaning results from the structural integration of two levels of signification, which in general way can be represented in terms of the logical formula A : B :: C : D.[31]

4.8 Analogy, Double Analogy, and the Concept of Situativity

This analogy should not be confounded, however, with the analogical processes involved in proverb usage, as pointed out by folklorist Peter Seitel in a number of papers, in which he suggested a useful heuristic model (Seitel, 1969; 1972). Seitel's schema is based on the central assumption that the situation in which a proverb is used (the *interaction situation*) is of course not identical with the situation verbally rep-resented in and by the proverb text (the *proverb situation*), and that both of them are not identical with the situation the proverb refers to[32], i.e., the situation to which it is intended to be applied (the *reference situation*).[33] According to Seitel, proverb usage is

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31 There is no need to deal here in detail with the circumstance that not in all proverbs, all terms of these relations must be explicitly expressed.

32 A proverb may, of course, but need not refer to the situation in which it is used; but heuristically, both must be principally distinguished.

33 Seitel's original term *context situation* is avoided here and replaced by the term *reference situa-tion*, since *context* might erroneously be applied the interaction situation. Quite evidently, a proverb may refer to that situation, in which it is used, but this is not necessarily the case; as a consequence, it is better to clearly (heuristically, conceptually, and terminologically) distinguish them.

thus related to two distinct, though closely related processes: (i) the process of relating proverb situation to reference situation, and (ii) the speech act of applying the proverb in an interaction situation. This resulting differentiation is illustrated in Figure 4.4.
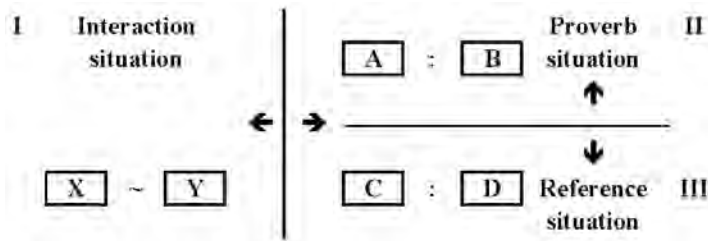

Figure 4.4: Basic distinction of three types of situation involved in proverb usage

As can be seen, proverb usage thus is related to two distinct though closely related processes: (a) the speech act of applying a proverb in a given interaction situation[34], and (b) the process of relating proverb situation to reference situation. Concentrating on the second process, Seitel sees it as an analogy between the relationship of entities of the proverb situation and entities of the reference situation, which he expresses in terms of $A : B :: C : D$ (Figure 4.4).

Quite obviously, the situational schema refers to the first, denotative level of the *proverb situation* (i.e. the proverb text), ignoring the existence of two levels of signification outlined about and the structural analogy resulting from it. In fact, we thus seem to be concerned with two different analogies which; unfortunately, both of them have been symbolized in an identical manner (i.e., by way of $A : B :: C : D$), what may give rise to difficulties when attempting to integrate both views. In fact, such attempts, as e.g. suggested by Grzybek (1984a: 235), have not always been correctly understood (Honeck, 1997), last not least due to the fact that identical symbols have been used to refer to different things; as a consequence, it seems reasonable to explicate the argumentation stepwise again.

For the purpose of the necessary integration of both approaches, it seems first reasonable to maintain the symbolization $A : B$ for the denotative signification of the proverb situation, and to replace Crépeau's symbols for the second level of signification (i.e., $C : D$) by the symbolic notation of $p : q$; the structural analogy outlined by Crépeau would thus be symbolized as $A : B :: p : q$. Under this condition, the extra-linguistic reference situation can be symbolized as $C : D$, as in Seitel's schema; and since it is rather the paremic meaning of the second (connotative) level of signification, which is related to the reference situation, the analogy outlined by Seitel might

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34 Here and throughout this text, particular forms of proverb usage as, e.g., in literary texts, will not specifically be dealt with.

is then symbolized as *p : q :: C : D*. All in all, this would result in the double analogy *A : B :: p : q :: C : D*, as suggested by Grzybek (1984a), and as illustrated in Figure 4.5.
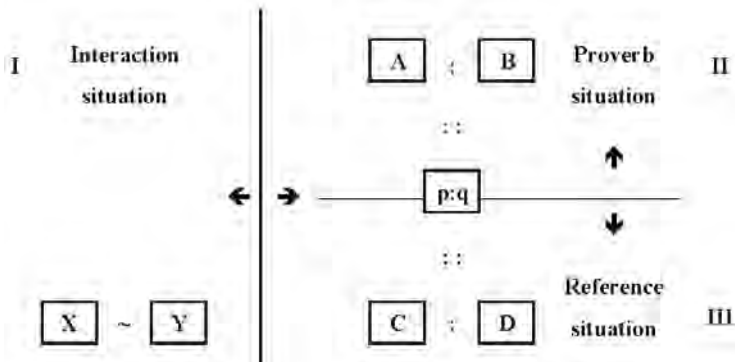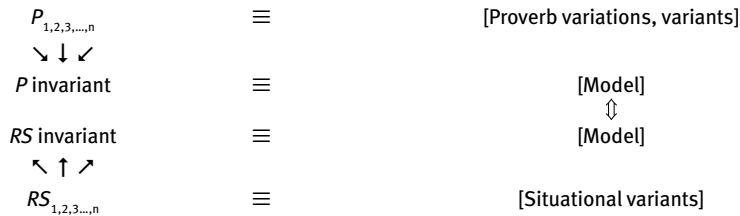

Figure 4.5: Double analogy in proverb usage

Although this schema, attempting to integrate two different concepts, pays due attention to the processes involved, it has later turned out that it needs some additional specification and modification (Grzybek, 1998; 2000; 2007; Chlosta & Grzybek, 2005), a major problem to be seen in the (at least implicit) identification of two abstraction results, which de facto are not identical. This becomes evident from a closer look at model-theoretical concepts, in line with modern paremiological ideas, which have emphasized the important role of models and modeling inherent in proverbs and proverb usage. Given a principally infinite set $\mathbf{S} = \{P_{1,2,3,...}\}$ of individual proverbs (i.e., of proverb texts), and given a principally infinite *set* $\mathbf{R} = \{RS_{1,2,3,...}\}$ of (possible) reference situations to which any one *P* of the proverbs may refer, all those proverbs from **S**, which express one and the same meaning, can be considered to be variants, or variations[35], of one and the same proverb invariant, or *model situation*; and all those individual reference situations *RS* from **R**, to which a given proverb (or one of its variants, or variations) may refer to can be considered to be some situational class, or type, which is represented in terms of a *situation model*. These assumptions can be illustrated as follows:[36]

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35 As to a more detailed distinction between the notions of *variant* and *variation* (see Grzybek et al., 1994; Grzybek, 2012b; Chlosta & Grzybek, 2005)

36 Although sets *S* and *R* both are, in principle, infinite, a given individual's proverb knowledge is, of course, characterized on the basis of a limited number of experiences with individual proverbs and situations, what is correspondingly symbolized.

$P_{1,2,3,...,n}$	≡	[Proverb variations, variants]
↘ ↓ ↙		
P invariant	≡	[Model]
		⇕
RS invariant	≡	[Model]
↖ ↑ ↗		
$RS_{1,2,3...,n}$	≡	[Situational variants]

At closer sight, we rather seem to be concerned with two different abstraction processes: first, it has been argued, a general (paremic) meaning is abstracted from the denotative text of the *proverb situation*, and the term *model situation* has been suggested to denote it; and second, the individual and unique *reference situation* as a situational *token* a proverb refers to must be sub-categorized under, or attributed to a general *type* (or class) of situations, which might be termed *situation model*. The resulting schema might thus be illustrated as in Figure 4.6:
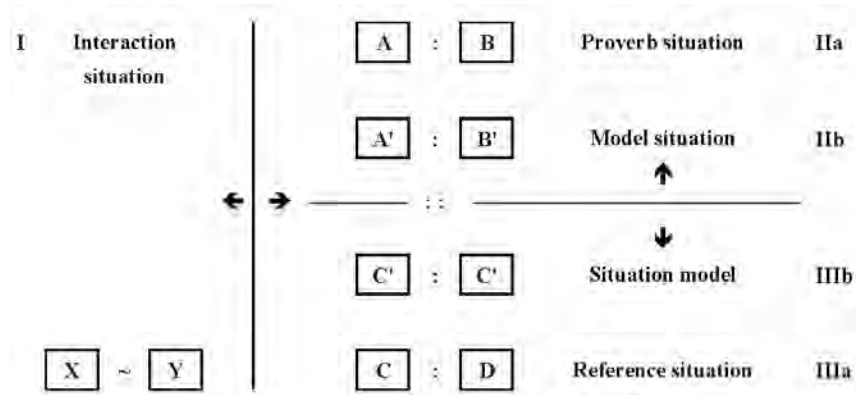

Figure 4.6: Additional distinctions of proverbial situation types

The schema represented in Figure 4.6 does not contain (any more) the previous (at least implicitly contained) assumption of a single abstraction process, represented above by the relation $p : q$ (Figure 4.5). Rather, Figure 4.6 expresses the idea that we are concerned with two (different) abstraction processes.[37]

Comparing the basic implications of the conceptions illustrated in Figs. 5 and 6, one may say that the relation $p : q$ is related to the proportional analogy of

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37 It may be appropriate to bring up some restrictions and caveats here. First, the assumption of two processes of abstraction does not necessarily imply that these take place simultaneously during any cognitive processing of a proverb; also, there is no need to discuss here in detail the complex (and controversely seen) interrelations between abstraction and analogy, i.e. to analyze the role of analogical reasoning in abstraction, or abstraction processes in analogy processing.

A' : B' :: C' : D', which might as well be expressed in terms of the relation of two distinct sets of related objects, i.e.: $\{R_1(A',B')\}$ R $\{R_2(C',D')\}$. Seen from this perspective, $p : q$ would but express the ground of the similarity between two relations of the sets (A', B') and (C', D'), along with the assumption of at least one common feature between these sets, determining in what respect(s) A' is to B' (as C' is to D'), the feature(s) resulting from an interpretative process. In other words, if (and only if), within a process of proverb usage, such a proportional analogy is drawn, on the basis of and resulting from some interpretive process, one can speak of successful proverb usage.

However, although this schema is much more elaborated and differentiated, it still contains a major problem, primarily to be seen in the alleged symmetry it expresses: this symmetry is, however, but a final state of successful proverb usage, and it might give rise to the (wrong) assumption that one might reliably arrive at the abstract meaning (i.e., the model situation) starting from a proverb's verbal surface, or without taking account of the reference situation (or rather the situation model related to it). Abstracting proverb meaning from the verbal surface of a proverb's text seems to be possible, particularly to persons enculturated in a given culture; after all, semantic potential and indefiniteness are increasingly reduced by any further (successful) proverb usage. Actually, however, such interpretations are based on previous encounters and experiences with usages of the given proverb – de facto, they are (more or less) reliable only a posteriori, knowing all (pragmatic and semantic) conditions and restrictions of usage and reference, that is, only if both some situation model and some model situation have repeatedly been related to each other. As a matter of fact, even paremiologists may fall (and have repeatedly fallen) into this meta-genetic trap, interpreting proverb texts by way of a (conscious of subconscious, correct or incorrect) transfer and extrapolation of proverb knowledge from their own culture(s).

Figure 4.7 is an attempt to schematically represent not only the synchronous final state, but the process of model generation in its genesis.
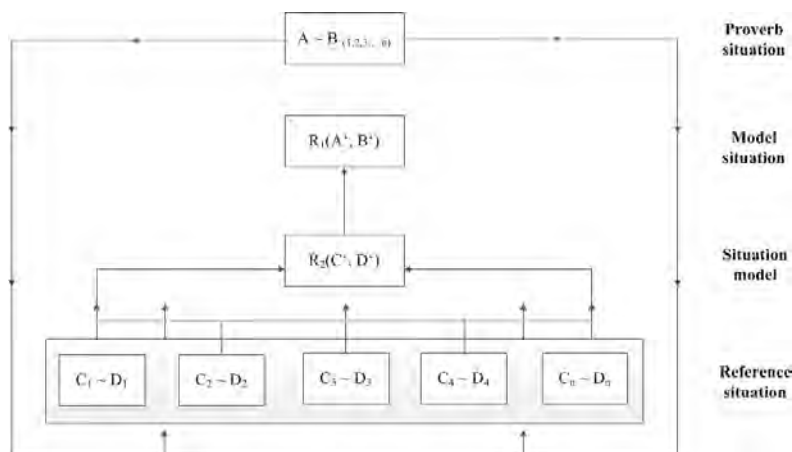
Figure 4.7: Genesis of proverb meaning – integration of heterogeneity, polyfunctionalilty, and polysemanticity

This schema illustrates, among others, that a semantic interpretation (and classification) of proverbial utterances is not reliably possible without knowledge of the culturally accepted contexts and admitted reference situations (i.e., the situation models). It also illustrates the close interrelation between pragmatics and semantics, emphasizing that the reliable generation of a model situation is impossible without the (repeated) exposure to adequate reference situation, i.e., the without repeated processes of referentialization (or the semiotically mediated knowledge about them).

Referring to the model-theoretic assumptions dealt with above, it is thus possible to derive an important aspect of a proverb definition in general, which might be phrased as follows:

> *A proverb is a model of some situation denoted by it, if – eventually within a given* Interaction Situation *(I) – such a* Model Situation *(IIb) can be derived from a given* Proverb Situation *(IIa), that stands in isological relation to some* Situation Model *(IIIb), derived from a concrete* Reference Situation *(IIIa) and eventually previous ones.*

Given these assumptions, it is obvious that for participants of a given culture, scholars of paremiology among them, the description of model situation and situation model seemingly coincide or are identical – in principle they are, however, heuristically speaking, two faces of a double-faced coin called *successful proverb usage*. The illustration in Figure 4.7 does not only make it clear that it is not, or not necessarily, possible to derive the abstract proverb meaning from its verbal surface form; it also makes clear that a semantic description cannot be based on verbal information alone.

As a consequence, it seems plausible to claim that a semantic description – and, as a consequence, of semantic classification – of proverbs ultimately asks for the description of situations, or of model situations, to be more exact. The concentration

on modeled situation for the semantic classification has extensively been discussed by Permjakov whose conception still today provides one of the most elaborate systems for the semantic classification of proverbs.

4.9 From Proverb Semantics to Semantic Proverb Classification

In his *Grammar of Proverbial Wisdom*, Permjakov (1979: 317) claims proverbs to be "signs and at the same time models of various typical situations". Consequently, he postulates that "a classification of the situations themselves" has to be worked out, if one wants to categorize proverbs on the basis of their meanings (Permjakov 1979: 306). Since the distinctions suggested above were not made at the time when Permjakov developed his ideas, his notion of *situation* was not as specified as in the differentiations above. On the one hand, this has led to a variety of misunderstandings and misinterpretations of his ideas (Schveiger, Kanyó, Švydkaja and others), which can and need not be discussed here in detail (see Grzybek 1984a); on the other hand, this led to inconsistencies in Permjakov's own classifications, some of which were rather based on the denotative, rather than the connotative level of signification (i.e. on the proverb situation, not the model situation).

Nevertheless, given the descriptions above, Permjakov's claim out to be completely reasonable and still today of high relevance, as long (or as soon) as we take into consideration neither the proverb situations nor the extra-linguistic reference situations as the basis for the semantic description and classification of proverbs, but the model situations of the second level of signification. With this in mind, it is a tempting question to ask, which situations, or what kind of situations, are modelled in proverbs, and how these situational models can be described.

Permjakov's approach can be seen as a specification of what has been symbolized as the relation R (A',B') above. From his early writings on, Permjakov distinguished four different *Higher logico-semiotic invariants*, as he termed them. Two of them model the relationships between objects or between objects and their properties, the other two are more complex, modeling the dependence between the relationships of things and the relationships of their properties. In detail, we obtain the following four invariants:

Type	Description	Example
I A	Every object has a particular quality or property.	*Water always flows downhill.* *Each flower has its own flavor.*
I B	If there is one object, there is (will be) another object.	*No smoke without fire.* *Rain is followed by sunshine.*
II A	The relationships between the properties of objects depend on the relationships between the objects themselves.	*Like father, like son.* *The cat's death is holiday for the mice.*
II B	The interrelationships of objects depend on (the existence of) particular properties of these objects.	*If two quarrel, the third will laugh.* *A sparrow in the hand is worth two in the bush.*

The logico-semiotic classification is more complex than the examples above can show, and the system has been elaborated over the years by Permjakov himself; in its latest version in the *Grammar of Proverbial Wisdom*, each of the four types above is sub-divided into seven further categories (and allowing for further specifications and sub-classifications).

This logico-semiotic categorization is then necessarily complemented by a thematic classification: analyzing three proverbs such as (i) *No smoke without fire*, (ii) *No rose without thorns*, and (iii) *No river without bank*, all three would belong to invariant IA, each of them containing the statement that one of the two objects mentioned cannot exist without the second one. Still, the meanings of these three proverbs differ completely – the first (i) maintains that there can be no indication of an object unless the object itself exists; the second claims that there can be no good things without faults; and the third says that no whole can exist without any one of its obligatory parts. Consequently, a proverb's meaning is principally described by the two-fold reference: (a) to one of the logical categories, and (b) to a thematic pair (or a combination of pairs) such as *good – bad*, *cause – reason*, *hot – cold*, *male – female*, etc., on the other.

The resulting proverbial model[38] may additionally be submitted to what Permjakov termed *paremio(logical) transformations*; according to this view, the basic paremiological model like *Own is good* may be logically transformed in various ways, the results belonging to one and the same proverbial type; this concerns first-order transformations (*Own is bad*) as well as second-order transformations (*Foreign is bad*), from which a number of further subtypes may be derived. Within this framework, not only explicit negations (*The face is no index to the heart* vs. *The face is the index of the heart*; (Norrick,

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38 Only in Permjakov's later writings, like his *Grammar of Proverbial Wisdom* (1979) the model is a two-fold complementation of separate logical and thematic components, whereas in his earlier writing (as his *From Proverb to Folk-Tale*, translated into English in 1979), both components were fused into logico-thematic classes.

1985: 162)) can be theoretically covered, but also proverbial synonyms (*Strike while the iron is hot* vs. *Make hay while the sun shines*) and antonyms (*Out of sight, out of mind* vs. *Absence makes the heart grow fond/er*).

Permjakov's approach owes, of course, very much to structuralist approaches of the 1970s. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that, according to Permjakov, not more than 64 of such semantic oppositions – which are very similar to those found to be relevant in the semiotic analysis of culture in general –, are sufficient to describe ca. 97% of a culture's proverbial stock. Permjakov's system has suitably been called a *Mendeleevian Proverb Table*, and the question has been raised if his conception is kind of a *hocus pocus system* (Krikmann, 1971, Kuusi, (1972), comparing it to Kuusi's classificational schema as a *God's truth system*. Such a view might seem to be justified referring to Permjakov's claim to describe not only all actually existing, but also all possible (conceivable) proverbs with his model. The juxtaposition of these two kinds of system originates in linguistics, where it was brought into discussion by Householder (1952: 260): "On the metaphysics of linguistics there are two extreme positions, which may be termed (and have been) the 'God's truth' position and the 'hocus pocus' position. The theory of the God's truth linguists [...] is that language has a structure and the job of the linguist is (a) to find out what the structure is, and (b) to describe it [...]. The hocus pocus linguist believes that a language (better, a corpus, since we describe only the corpus we know) is a mass of incoherent formless data, and the job of the linguist is somehow to arrange and organize this mass, imposing on it some structure [...]." It was Jakobson (1962: 276) who repeatedly pointed out the futility of such a controversy; Householder (1952: 260), too, admitted that ultimately it seems to be rather a question of ideological-philosophical differences in approaching one and the same question, partially arriving at identical results, and confessed, "it may be that these two metaphysical viewpoints are in some sense equivalent." The direct relevance of these observations for Permjakov's and Kuusi's models has been pointed out by Voigt (1977: 167): "Kuusi directly departs from the given material, and he tries to arrive at the same results as Permjakov has, with the help of the deductive method."

As has been pointed out above, Permjakov's notion of *situation* was not as specified as this has later been suggested. As a consequence, his own semantic classifications are not void of interpretations which to the first, denotative level of signification, rather than the second, connotative level, i.e., the proverb's abstract meaning. In fact, his system might theoretically be used to describe both levels, although he ultimately had in mind the abstract *proverb idea* as a basis of his semantic classification. In illustrating the problem at stake with reference to but one example, it may be helpful, by way of a comparison, to refer to the Kuusi system (Lauhakangas, 2001). In the Lauhakangas-Kuusi system, the internationally broadly distributed proverb *One hand washes the other* would fall into the general category H *Social Interaction*, more specifically, category H3 (*Group Solidarity*), or H3A, respectively (*Solidarity to one's own people*). Permjakov attributed it to the invariant IB (see above), and within it into a sub-category entitled *Tendency of things to be close to each other; Friendship*

– *Hostility* (9LA), in combination with the semantic opposition of *Left – Right*; quite obviously, it is rather the concrete spatial relation of two hands, which is in the focus of this classification, both with regard to the logical and thematic classification. As compared to this, Grzybek and Chlosta (Grzybek & Chlosta, 2000), in their attempt to consequently apply Permjakov's system to the second level of signification, suggest to attribute it to the sub-category *Existential dependence of a thing or an action on another one* (8KA) of invariant IB, combining it with the semantic pair *Action – Reaction*, *If there is an action, there is / will be a reaction.* As can be seen, no statement as to the quality of action or reaction is included into the model, what makes clear, how difficult it is to take account of possible culture-specific pragmatic restrictions: for cultures which would use this proverb to refer to good favors as a reaction to good favors only, the addition of the thematic pair *good – bad* might be necessary. Quite evidently, this is related to the fact that semantic descriptions of proverbs – and neither Permjakov's nor Kuusi's systems are exceptions to this rule – principally cannot but provide metalinguistic descriptions of the given proverb's semantic potential in Krikmann's terms; further semantically relevant information – be that of functional, pragmatic, situational, deontic, modal, or other kind – at least to data cannot adequately be mapped onto the paremiological model.

It turns out that attention has to be paid to the important interdependence of three basic categories, which have been termed *polyfunctionality*, *polysemanticity*, and *heterosituativity* (Grzybek, 1984a). Whereas the concepts of *polyfunctionality* and *polysemanticity* refer to the fact that one and the same text may serve different functions and may represent different meanings, the concept of *heterosituativity* covers the fact that a proverb can convey different meanings, depending on the situation in which it is used. None of these three categories, which condition each other in one way or another, can be interpreted in isolation. And it seems to be for this specific interrelation that no ultimate meaning can ever be described to a particular proverb text.

On the one hand, this may sound like paremiological surrender; on the other hand, this corresponds to those degrees of semiotic freedom, necessary for successful proverb usages.

Systems like Permjakov's thus provide a way to theoretically describe and map the paradigmatic inventory of a culture's proverbial stock. In fact, this system is only partly deductively derived, consisting of a systematic extrapolation of initially inductive classifications; in semiotics, it has again been Charles S. Peirce who coined the term *abductive reasoning* to describe this scientific process, oscillating between induction and deduction. In our case, a paremiological system has resulted, in which the individual *slots* represent possibilities, which may be realized or not, within a given culture, thus also possibly containing so-called *empty cells* (as known in the field of phonology, as well), i.e. theoretical models for proverbial utterances, which are not even realized by concrete proverbs within a given culture.

4.10 Theoretical and Empirical Paremiology and the Semiotics of Culture

From the perspective of cultural semiotics, this opens new perspectives to study the (social and cultural) function of proverbs as a genre, allowing to ask the question, which proverbs are realized within a given culture, and which are not. In this respect, paremiology can immensely contribute to the more general study of culture from a semiotic point of view, or in a semiotic perspective.

But culture is a process, a synchronous snapshot, at best, being subject to constant changes. Searching an answer to the profile and size of a culture's proverbial stock, thus is dependent on the previous documentation of proverbs, which necessarily must represent some past, recent or not. Of course, proverbial stocks do not change within a day's time – trying to find an answer to the question outlined, and necessarily relying on (more or less) obsolete documentation, cannot be but paradigmatic by nature: the fact that a given proverb has been realized and documented within a given culture and thus has been part of it, does not mean that it is still used, and thus in function: after all, proverb collections consist of items which either may be current still today, or which were current in some past, but are not any longer, or even never have been used within the given culture, but translated from some other(s).

It is at this point, where empirical work comes into play – empirical paremiography as well as paremiology. Whereas empirical paremiography, in this context, contributes by way of collecting and documenting proverb usage, and the frequency of proverbs' occurrences (including the analysis of current corpora), empirical paremiology studies, by way of empirical methods, familiarity with proverbs, as an obligatory first step for further proverb-oriented studies. This is not the place to discuss relevant methods at some length here (see Chlosta & Grzybek 2004; Grzybek & Chlosta; 2009; Grzybek 2009; 2012a). Yet, Permjakov's attempts to empirically establish what he termed a *proverb minimum* deserves mention here, trying to find out, which proverbs are known by *all* members of a given culture or society. After Western readers were had been made acquainted with this approach (Grzybek, 1984b), which was first tested in 1991 with some language other than Russian (Grzybek, 1991), these ideas were broadly propagated in paremiology (Mieder, 1992); since then, relevant methods have been tested and developed over the last decades, resulting in the modified basic question. As a result, the crucial guiding question of empirical paremiology, from a contemporary point of view, may be phrased as follows: "Which proverbs are known in what (verbal) form by which members of the given culture, and which collective overlaps and intersections exist with regard to proverb knowledge and familiarity?" (Grzybek, 2012a)

Given the assumption that proverbs represent no isolation genre in the semiotics of culture, but are closely interrelated with all other genres, deep insight can be gained into cultural mechanisms from a semiotic point of view. It should have become

clear that theoretical as well as empirical works are necessary to provide a sufficiently broad picture, and that semiotic approaches are able to provide an adequate framework for any study in this direction.

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