



# The componential analysis of literary meaning

## El análisis componencial del significado literario

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### Abstract

The present paper aims at showing the importance of understanding English literary texts via the semantic analysis. Understanding literature as being a specific and more or less decompositional language is to rely on a lexico-semantic interaction which establishes meaning from different relations between words' components because the latter hold meaning not clearly seen in the words of the text. The semantic analysis of literary texts enables the reader to establish a network of relations between terms and settles on a meaning that other semantic theories may not reach. This research provides a semantic analysis based on the lexical decomposition of the word into major and minor components whose semantic interaction yields meaning systematically. The application of the componential analysis on English literary texts can establish a lexical interaction based on semantic interrelations between words at the deep level because the minor components are not seen at the surface level. The interrelations between components can therefore yield the meaning enclosed at the surface level. The componential analysis is a way to getting into the deep surface structure of words through establishing semantic interrelations between words. This task enables the reader to find meaning in the possible components words may have, and makes him/her checking it by logical inference that stands primarily on the utterance as source of meaning projection.

*Keywords:* componential analysis, decomposition, literary meaning.

### Resumen

En este artículo se plantea la importancia de la comprensión de los textos literarios ingleses a través del análisis semántico. Entender la especificidad de la lengua literaria basada en una interacción léxico- semántico que establece relaciones semánticas entre las palabras y sus componentes ya que el significado de este último no siempre está claro en el texto. El análisis semántico de textos literarios permite al lector a establecer una red de relaciones entre los términos. Esta investigación ofrece un análisis semántico basado en la descomposición de la palabra *léxica* con los componentes principales y secundarias de su interacción semántica tuvo la sensación de forma sistemática. La aplicación de los análisis de la composición de textos literarios ingleses podrá establecer una interacción léxica basada en las relaciones semánticas entre las palabras del nivel más profundo, porque los componentes de menor importancia no son visibles en la superficie. Por las tantas interrelaciones, léxicas pueden dar significado implícito en la superficie. Análisis de la composición es una manera de entrar en la estructura de la palabra de la superficie a la profundidad a través de la semántica *interrelacionarle*. Esta tarea permite al lector encontrar significado en las palabras posibles que pueden tener **componentes**, y permitir al lector para verificar la deducción lógica que se encuentra principalmente en el estado es una fuente de proyección semántica.

*Palabras clave:* análisis componencial, descomposición, significado literario

### Résumé

Le présent article soulève l'importance de la compréhension des textes littéraires anglais à travers l'analyse sémantique. Comprendre la spécificité de la langue littéraire s'appuyer sur une interaction lexico-sémantique qui établit des relations sémantiques entre les mots et leurs composants parce que le sens de ces dernier n'est pas toujours claire dans le texte. L'analyse sémantique des textes littéraires permet au lecteur d'établir un réseau de relations entre les termes. Cette recherche fournit une analyse sémantique sur la base de la décomposition lexicale du mot ayant des composants majeurs et mineurs que leur interaction sémantique fait obtenir le sens systématiquement. L'application de l'analyse compositionnelle sur des textes littéraires anglais peut établir une interaction lexicale basée sur les interrelations sémantiques



entre les mots au niveau profond parce que les composants mineurs ne sont pas visibles au niveau de la surface. Les interrelations lexicales peuvent donc donner la signification sous-entendue au niveau de la surface. L'analyse compositionnelle est un moyen d'entrer dans la structure des mots de la surface à la profondeur grâce à la sémantique interrelationnelle. Cette tâche permet au lecteur de trouver un sens dans les composants possibles que les mots peuvent avoir, et permettre au lecteur de le vérifier par la déduction logique qui se trouve principalement dans l'énoncé étant source de la projection sémantique.

*Mots clés:* analyse componential, décomposition, sens littéraire.

## Introduction

The literary text has a special type of compositionality extending words' meaning in a connoted way, and resulting in a fascinating form yet difficult to understand. This task has been coined by literary critics whose literary knowledge provides a priori competence which is different from linguistic competence. Literary language can, however, define within the linguistic analysis because the latter's tools are more systemic than the literary analysis. Understanding literature needs to rely on a model which adopts a certain level of generality yet not strictly scientific as the openness of the literary text may not define under restricted rules as do the ordinary language. Different theories of literary meaning provided a solid basis for analysing and understanding this type of meaning as most of them follow logical inference and reach meaning by processes of semantization that make the utterance the centre of attention. They bring to this task other features and activities from other disciplines and seems to load the task of the reader because the studies done either restrict the task of understanding to the pure syntactic analysis as it is the case of functional semantics or bring pragmatics as a substantial feature as it is the case with intentional and possible-worlds semantics. The literary text, however, is a poetic language to read inside its utterances by means of a semantic analysis which aims principally to deliver the way words are realised in the text.

Adopting the lexical decomposition of words into components and then establishing relations between these components can make words in the literary text more revealing of meaning than treating them as independent entities. This analysis works beyond the

syntagma taking more flexibility in searching meaning since it stands on the view that words or texts are meaningful not necessarily for their compositionality but for a significant textual unit<sup>1</sup> giving sense to the occurrence of words. The componential analysis enables the reader to analyse words into different components and establishes then their interrelations which is a systemic interactional approach working vertically in the search and analysis of relatable attributes.

## Semantic analysis of literary texts

The first attempts linguistics took in the study of literary texts dated back to the Russian formalists<sup>2</sup> who were influenced by the Saussurian School. The formalists considered literature as part of linguistics. Their main focus was the scientific study of literature for the prevailing view that the literary text is a system of signs serving for particular functions. The literary text is believed to have devices out of which meaning obtains. The formalists' structural tendency gave to the narrative structure a semantic shape to facilitate the task of reading. This had not been widely accepted in the beginning as it was thought to restrict the literary creation but later investigations gave interest to the semantic contribution as the literary text has a systemic aspect characterised by the interdependence between its elements.

Semantics studies word content which can be types, occurrences, and textual and non-textual signs, and defines as a sub-discipline of semiotics. The literary text is a group of textual signs to which the

1 The Moscow Linguistic Circle.

2 A textual unit is more than a word ranging from a short sentence to a long paragraph.



semantic analysis is of paramount importance if the analyst can establish a network of relations between terms and settles on a more or less one meaning. Todorov (1981) argues that semantics of literature is concerned with two main questions: “how does a text signify? [and] what does a text signify?” (p.16). The former is the concern of linguistic semantics while the second of substantial semantics (Todorov, 1981). Linguistic semantics studies the compositionality aspect of the word and is more concerned with literal meaning. Substantial semantics, however, studies the variable distance between the signifier and signified and tries to establish semantic relations despite the indeterminacies of signs in the text.

The semantic analysis of literary texts is much more concerned with explaining literary meaning systematically relying on the utterance as holder of meaning. However, different theories approach the literary text with different methods. The present section reviews the semantic theories that have theoretical and empirical description of literary meaning and define under substantial semantics being functional semantics, possible-worlds semantics and intentional semantics. Other semantic theories contributed to a certain degree in the study of literary meaning but are not the center of attention in this section because of their interdependence with other disciplines, and their lack of a pure literary semantic analysis.

## Functional semantics

Text linguistics is based on the systemic school of linguistics and all its contribution to text study is from the functionality of grammatical items. Systemic linguistics stands on the rational that items in the text (words, phrases, expression) hold systemic relations inherent in the language. Working with the expectation of unusual language in literature, systemic linguists treat the literary text from ‘signaling’ areas whose grammatical direction is thought to hold meaning. Halliday (2006)<sup>33</sup>, for instance, analyses W. B. Yeats’ poem “*Leda and the swan*” as having a nominal group which assigns a particular meaning:

3 Halliday analyzed the poem the first time in 1964.

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still  
Above the staggering girl, her thighs  
caressed  
By the dark webs, her nape caught in  
his bill,  
He holds her helpless breast upon his  
breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push  
The feathered glory from her loosening  
thighs?  
And how can body, laid in that white rush,  
But feel the strange heart beating where  
it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there  
The broken wall, the burning roof and  
tower  
And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,

So mastered by the brute blood of the air,  
Did she put on his knowledge with his  
power  
Before the indifferent beak could let her  
drop?

Halliday calculated the number of nominal groups in the poem and contrasted it with its counterpart in another poem by W.B. Yeats –His Phoenix-, arguing that the dominance of nominal groups is unusual and signals therefore something in the poem. Besides, the fewer number of verbalized forms refers to a potential of these forms: “the more powerful the verbal lexical items are items of violence; and it is precisely these that perform nominal rather than verbal roles (...). These are not verbs at all or are themselves verbs but subordinated to the nominal elements in clause structure” (Halliday, 2006, p.13).

The limited focus on nominal groups does not provide explicitly a one meaning to the poem but rather “a supposed meaning”. Other words or items may contribute to the meaning even if they are not part of the nominal group. As far as Yeats’ poem is concerned, *Widdowson* (1975, p.10) argues that though the text analysis provides us with a way of getting into the poem and serves as a very effective



means of initial assault, it does not give a proper description of the poem but a proper description of the linguistic features of the text. Furthermore, the text analysis approach picks up some linguistic features or patterns in the text but does not say or confirm that these patterns contribute to a special understanding of the poem as a whole. Besides, there is no surface or deep evidence saying that the nominal pattern holds the poem's meaning.

### Intentional semantics

The idea behind intentional semantics is the philosophical view that words may contain multiple senses as part of their semantic structure. Meaning is cast upon its real use which assigns sets of readings. Jerrold J. Katz was the first linguist to talk about projecting meaning from underlying structures and paved the way for undertaking interpretation of ambiguous meaning within the linguistic description. This pragmatic view to meaning as being produced by many meanings was further developed in other more accountable models. In particular, Stanley Fish (1980) views the sentence in the literary text as an event to which he gives a particular meaning from a semantic analysis proceeding first from raising possible meanings and then expanding the analysis to the limitation and assertion of a one meaning which is established from the coming words in the text. Fish's semantic analysis is shown in the following example he took from *Paradise Lost* of John Milton:

Nor did they perceive the evil plight.

Fish analyses the sentence by first raising two slots: "they did perceive" and "they didn't perceive". He evoked the rule of the double negative but he found that the internal logic of the grammatical utterance opposes the logic of reading experience. His method took him to see the sentence as an occurrence which has meaning to be found by the reader's mental analysis and that meaning is not put in the sentence as such. Turning the sentence from the interrogative "did they or didn't they" into the affirmative state "they did

and they didn't" widens the reader's analysis into two senses of perceive: they perceive the physical situation and they do not do so with the moral situation as they do not perceive the evil plight.

Fish's evokes to the word in the literary text a set of activities identifying its meaning through an "in time" experience of reading based primarily on the reader's responses. He says:

The projection of syntactically and/or lexical probabilities; their subsequent occurrence or non-occurrence, attitude towards persons, or things, or ideas referred to; the reversal or questioning of those attitudes and much more. Obviously, this imposes a great burden on the analyst who in his observations on any one moment in the reading experience must take into account all that has happened in the reader's mind at previous moments each of which in its turn subject to the accumulating pressures of his predecessors (p.74).

To find the meaning of an utterance in the literary text is to not to ask the question "what does x mean?" because this question cannot have a direct answer from the words or utterances. Rather, "what does x do?" is a primary proceeding step among others coming subsequently in the reader's responses.

### Possible-worlds semantics

Words in the common or literary usage belong to given worlds and have meaning by virtue of this affiliation, and as such define beyond the mere lexical affiliation of the lexicon. The possible-worlds semantics is a competing theory to compositional semantics calling for considering the word in the literary text in its real occurrence rather than analysing it in isolation. Thomas L. Martin (2004) further says:

The strategies of coming to understand language therefore need to take into account not just systemic variation within a system of language or syntax,



but also the various possible meanings that the language may project as those meanings clash, converge, diverge, dissolve, and aggregate far beyond the borders of the lexical features of their linguistic expressions. A possible world analysis will be interested in plotting the interaction of all sorts of alternatives, from the small to the grand. The extension to the complexities of native, fictional space, and poetic language in a natural one (p.90).

Possible-worlds semantics opens the door for possible meaning that the analyst comes to from all possible alternatives including the small and big details that a given world can signify to a given word because “the literary work is not about this world, but about the way the world might be, that is, any world” (Martin, 2004, p. 149). The literary work is a fictional creation free from the restrictions of scientific discourse and is therefore read with building a new world which may not cope with the writer’s world and thus questions the integrity of the text’s intended meaning.

Possible-worlds semantics is a multi-dimensional approach taking into account all the relevant instances from the possible occurrences in reality that can be of interest from near and far to the projection of words’ meaning. As Rouen (1994) argues, “Possible worlds create a heterogeneous paradigm that allows various conceptions for possible modes of existence” (p.21).

## Bridging the gap

Common to all the previous theories is the recurrence of the concepts “alternative”, “multiple senses”, “complexities”, “interaction”, “possibilities” and “relations”. These are used, however, according to the theoretical orientation of each theory. Functional semantics focuses on group structures and sees their recurrence in the text as a signal or attribute of meaning. The reverse of this claim can decrease the value of this approach: how to analyse a literary text in the absence of a group structure? Besides, the presence or repetition of some similar categories is

not necessarily an indication of a particular meaning to the text. Birch (1989, p.140) says on Halliday’s analysis of *Leda and the Swan* that it is not independent as a semantic analysis and forms part of literary analysis. Taking the recurrence of a grammatical group as an important attribute of meaning neglects other items in the poem that can be rather of substantial interest in the analysis. Moreover, subordinating the verbal forms vis-à-vis the nominal ones may not be intended by the poet who puts several nominal forms in one poem and avoids in another. This argument is modest in terms of theoretical adequacy as it cannot be generalised as a ‘reading technique’ since several texts lack the recurrence of similar grammatical patterns.

Functional semantics analyses literary texts more at the structural level and ignores other levels such as the interaction between words. The latter have sense in relation to other words occurring in the co-text or the large textual unit. Semantic relations therefore obtain within a more consistent analysis that is dynamic in considering several attributes of meaning.

In the trial to overcome the limitations of compositional or “structure tendency” analysis of literary texts, intentional semantics, as shown above, seems more equipped with possibilities of analysis. “What does a word do in a text” is the basis of literary meaning analysis since it evokes the significance of textual items in relation to others occurring in the text, and calls for a substantial important point in the analysis that a word or an item put in the text is intended to signify something even if the signification is not seen by the naked eye. It is the task of the reader to make sense of all the available signs by extracting the attributes. Intentional semantics stands on the utterance as the key to meaning and goes further to consider the utterance as an event in itself to be understood pragmatically.

Intentional semantics is loaded with the pragmatic characteristics of the event and as such it evokes other tasks than the linguistic. In that, it calls for other approaches since it is open on any and all attributes



of meaning. The reader's task is not specified because this approach cannot specify the direction the reader must take to yield meaning. For example, in Fish's analysis of the verse taken from *Paradise Lost*, the reversing of the two propositions is an inference not subjected to a particular semantic rule. Even if John Milton adopted this technique in his writing of the poem, it may not be at easy reach in the reception and interpretation by the reader. In brief, intentional semantics does not, and in fact cannot, specify the possible readings semantically because in itself it does not settle on one scheme of analysis since it is open up to other points such as questions of genre and history which may take it a bit far from the interest of the semantic analysis (Fish, 1980). There is a free block of analysis left to the reader to understand, and to which the intentional semantic analysis is of less help. Despite these constraints, it is worth recognising the efficiency of this approach at other levels. Seeing the reading task as an 'in time activity' that extracts meaning through raising a range of meanings and then selecting by logical inference a one meaning through projection of syntactical and lexical probabilities is a prospect in this theory as it sets the way to the process of semantization which operates less restrictedly than the functional semantic analysis.

Taking the same realistic aspect as intentional semantics, possible-worlds semantics extends the word's referent to world occurrences and sets its meaning from outside the utterance. This approach is not far different from the previous theories as it shares with functional semantics and intentional semantics the choice-grammar approach whereby any and all words in the text are of interest to the analysis as far as they relate together in reference to a meaning set under the task of semantization. The difference with possible-worlds semantics is its excess with the realistic aspect of the literary text and thus its confrontation against reality.

Possible-worlds semantics was subject to several critics. Literature is a fictional world and it cannot be set to truth tests since in itself it depicts a subjective

discourse. Besides, reality is never complete and thus stands partial. To make real worlds the referents of words is not always consistent and adequate as these possible worlds' variable character weakens the relation between the two. Moreover, the word in the text is to relate to a possible world and, also, to impossible world as the referent is uncertain since it is cast on "a-might-be" world.

With the levelled constraints on possible-worlds semantics, this theory of meaning can be helpful for the reader's task if he/she can select appropriately from the possible worlds those that really relate and define as true referents to words. Sometimes, it happens to read a piece of literature and cast it upon an experienced event or act. This analogy with already occurring events in the real world can facilitate the task of understanding. Besides, the plural form of world is in itself a way out limiting the analysis inside a one world or "supposed world" which proved inefficient in literary criticism.

Words in literature establish relations beyond their lexical aspects, and relate rather as senses. These relations are meant through the superficial form. Halliday (1985) argued that when words are written on the basis of choice grammar they become a realization not of a formal unit but rather for a sense which is itself a realisation. It is then the task of the reader to understand "how words in the literary text are realised?" This is a subsequent question to "what do words do in the text?" Words' values are not always the attributes of meaning because if there are so, they could be rather semantic constituents and lead together to a one meaning. They are instead "form-meaning complexes with (relatively) stable and discrete semantic properties which stand in meaning relations [...] and which interact syntagmatically with contexts in various ways" (Cruse, 1986, p. 49). Their complexity implies for the multiplicity of values and their non-clear distribution in the text.

A semantic analysis of literary texts needs to have its major focus on the utterance as being a



high attributive of meaning. Rather than evoking external attributes to the word, it is worth focusing the extraction of meaning from the utterances themselves and their semantic interrelations because a word and its sense-components are an entity in the text as altogether form a one meaning. The realisation of words can be revealed by a lexical decomposition of these words into components and the choice of the appropriate relation between the components is within the components themselves and not outside as it is the case of intentional semantics and possible-worlds semantics.

## Componential analysis

The realization of words in the literary text is internal, intentional and thought out of a structured process wherein the writer implies from words to attribute a new meaning often different from the usual one but retains significance and value. The words themselves are not new but their interaction, which is of a lexico-semantic nature, is so since it is creative and lacks clear referents in the text. In that, words interact with a meaning attributing or having correspondence with another word even if their lexical affiliation denies this link.

A lexical unit may have different components relating differently to other components in the same piece of language. It means that the order of attribution is not to know from the lexical unit itself but from the attribution of other words' components occurring in the same textual unit. According to the theory of semantic components, semantic features have positive (marked) and negative (unmarked) values. If we take for example the words women and flower we do not seem to be able to relate their values because lexical semantics establishes the value (+female) to women and (- human) to flower. These two lexical units may have further values such as [(affection), (beauty), (care), (love), (protection)] to women and [(beauty), (love), (smell)] to flower. The recurrent values in both cases are (love) and (beauty). The two can be an exemplification to the lexical units women and

flower instead of (+female) and (-human). In general, lexical units have a lexical creativity not seen in their independent form but retained from the paradigmatic interaction between their values.

When literary meaning is not clear from words' constituency, it is put distanced whereby values of words get represented in a restricted form. If this has to signal something to the understanding of literary meaning it is the necessity to analyse words into different components or what we can call all possible components, whether major or minor, because they set the lexical interaction. As such, meaning obtains from a lexical decomposition which is a pure semantic task free from syntactic constraints. Modern semantic theories stand all on the principle of compositionality despite their different frameworks. For this reason the componential analysis becomes a basis of the semantic analysis:

The meaning of each term can be analysed by a set of meaning component or properties of a more general order, some of which will be common to various terms in the lexicon. There may in the lexicon. There may also be specific restrictions, for instance the nature and structure of features, and the procedures by which they are selected. However, the term componential analysis is often used to refer not only to simple decomposition into semantic components, but to models with much more powerful theoretical assumptions (Violi, 2001, p. 53).

The componential analysis provides a descriptive model for understanding meaning since values of lexical units are not self-contained and have meaning by virtue of other relations which can be either apparent in the text or restricted. The componential analysis was developed in the second half of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s as a more efficient way of analysing meaning. Kempson defines it as "the meanings of words are analysed not as unitary concepts but as complexes made up of components of meaning which are themselves semantic primitives" (1977, p.18). This implies that words are complexes



of a group of meanings and these same meanings can hold other meanings. As such words relate to each other in different ways and according to the components they may take in the text.

Literary meaning does not hold the principle of necessary and sufficient conditions mainly because its lexical attribution is made restricted by the writer and the cognitive link between the signifier and signified is undetermined by the formal reading since words relate to each other in an order not delivered by their referents in the text. Just to illustrate and relate this to feature semantics, the following verses from Cummings' poetry show that there is no necessary and thus sufficient condition relating meaning of at least two words:

all by all and deep by deep  
and more by more they dream their sleep  
no one and anyone earth by April  
wish by spirit and if by yes.  
(Anyone lived in a pretty how town)

Almost no one word relates to the others in the conventional sense of constituency. It is thus impossible that these words have common features from which a given meaning can obtain.

Words have meaning made unclear by virtue of a system different from the linguistic. *Widdowson* calls this system an exemplification to the formal system "The units which the linguist deals with are those of the abstract system of the language, and to analyze texts in terms of such units is to treat such texts primarily as exemplification of the system" (1980, p. 236). There is a distance between the signifier and the signified whereby the latter is sometime a non-referred image or sum of it, making the usual established link hard to draw. This suggests that words' values are not necessarily the lexical units of the text because if they are so, they could be rather semantic constituents and lead together to a one meaning.

Representation in the literary text is such a one that has its values put finite in the production process but infinite in their reception as it is not always possible

for the reader of such texts to work out a finite value. Values of words can obtain paradigmatically with the following features:

- 1) Lexical units in the text lose their primary values; and
- 2) Values to words relate to other words' values occurring in a large vertical context.

If a word in the text is an exemplification of another word, this word bears a meaning somewhere but in the text; that is, if a given word does not hold a particular meaning other items in the text may do so relying on the interaction between their components. The latter are to look for vertically in a large textual unit.

Literary meaning is a task of attributing referents to images especially when the language allows 'generating substitutes' to words from others sharing at least lexico-semantic aspects. For example, the words "woods" and "horse" in the following poem by Frost (*Stopping by woods on a snowy evening*, p. 19) do not seem to relate:

Whose woods these are I think I know  
His house in the village though;

According to rules of semantics, these two words do not relate as they are incompatible and lack a "has-relation" (Griffiths, 2006). They belong to two different categories of meaning but if they are here in the poem it is because they relate in a particular way and fall in a semantic scope even if they do not have such a link in usual occurrences because when the writer puts them together it is for a semantic order not clear in the text and yet significant. Words share a semantic feature consisting of associations with its environment. These associations can be that both "woods" and "house" fall in the same location of farming. But if we work out the components of both words and establish their lexical interaction, we can be in front of other meanings:

**Wood:** [-human]; [part of tree]; [free piece]

**House:** [-human]; [inhabited]; [uninhabited]

Examining the order and position of words in the





two verses tells us that the writer is asking questions about something or somebody having left the place, implying for the absence of people. This gets clear from the third component of the word “wood” and the third component of the word “house” because when woods are not used by somebody they are free and useless signifying the absence of life. The same thing for the word “house”: being uninhabited equals empty or no people in. However, what makes this meaning more likely to accept is the whole poem’s significant unit or semantic scope as the writer raises questions falling in the scope of unsaid death and sadness.

Semanticists use the componential analysis for explaining meaning through working out possible semantic traits (Kempson, 1977; Cruse, 1986; Carter, 1998). For example, the word “flower” falls in the semantic trait of “women” because flower takes a female feature in a near context which is generated directly as a substitute from a semantic category or trait. Both words share major components. This same analysis applies to the words “wood” and “house” but with a more detailed search on minor components.

On the whole, the componential analysis works on the basis of establishing components to words as the latter are complexes to be analysed into more simple elements which can be major or minor components to the main word. The lexico-semantic interaction between the components can however point to a one meaning. The componential analysis takes the following features: 1) Meaning resides usually in the interaction between major components; 2) Content words with high attribution are hold meaning more than less attributed words; 3) In the simple usages meaning is horizontal; 4) In the deformat usages meaning is vertical; and 5) words with one meaning do rarely undergo the componential analysis but can direct the analysis and considered as an attribute of meaning.

Applying the componential analysis to the following verses by Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* will show its efficiency vis-à-vis other models:

The studded bridle on a ragged bough

Nimble she fastens: -O, how quick is love!  
The steed is stalled up, and even now  
To tie the rider she begins to prove:  
Backward she push’th him, as she would  
be thrust,  
And govern’d him in strength, though not  
in lust.

W. Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis*

Every word is a complex of meaning with one and/or several components. The signaled words are given their components as follows:

**Studded** 1. To be decorated with small raised pieces of metal.

2..To have a lot of something on it.

**Bridle** 1. A harness, consisting of a headstall, bit and reins, fitted about a horse’s head and used to restrain or guide the animal.

2. A curb or check.

3. A span of chain, wire, or rope that can be secured at both ends to an object and slung from its center point.

**Ragged** 1. Tattered, frayed, or torn.

2. Dressed in tattered or threadbare clothes.

3. Unkempt or shaggy.

4. Having an irregular surface or edge; uneven or jagged in outline.

5. Imperfect; uneven.

6. Harsh; rasping.

**Bough** 1. A tree branch, especially a large or main branch.

**Fasten** 1. To attach firmly to something else, as by pinning or nailing.

2. To make fast or secure.

3. To close, as by fixing firmly in place.

4. To fix or direct steadily.

5. To place; attribute.

6. To impose (oneself) without welcome.

**Quick love** 1. Effective love.

2. Negative value, lust.

**Steed** 1. A horse to ride on.

2. A spirited horse.

**Stalled up** 1. To put or lodge in a stall.



- Tie**
2. To maintain in a stall for fattening.
  3. To halt the motion or progress of; bring to a standstill.
  4. To cause (a motor or motor vehicle) accidentally to stop running.
  5. To cause (an aircraft) to go into a stall.
  1. To fasten or secure with or as if with a cord, rope, or strap.
  2. To fasten by drawing together the parts or sides and knotting with strings or laces.
  3. To make by fastening ends or parts.
  4. To put a knot or bow in.
  5. To confine or restrict as if with cord.
  6. To bring together in relationship; connect or unite.
  7. To equal (an opponent or an opponent's score) in a contest.
  8. To equal an opponent's score in (a contest).
  9. To attach or hold things together with a string.
  10. to link two things together.
- Rider**
1. One that rides, especially one who rides horses.
  2. A clause, usually having little relevance to the main issue, that is added to a legislative bill.
  3. An amendment or addition to a document or record.
  4. Something, such as the top rail of a fence, that rests on or is supported by something else.
- Govern'd**
1. To make and administer the public policy and affairs of; exercise sovereign authority in.
  2. To control the speed or magnitude of; regulate.
  3. To control the actions or behavior of.
  4. To keep under control.
  5. To exercise a deciding or determining influence on.
- Strength**
1. The state, property, or quality of being strong.

2. The power to resist attack.
  3. The power to resist strain or stress.
  4. The ability to maintain a moral or intellectual position firmly.
  5. Capacity or potential for effective action.
- After providing possible components, which range between simple words to long sentences, we proceed now in their lexical interaction which aims principally at delimiting the possibilities to a one convincing meaning. We select those components (or values) which seem to relate with other components in the poem:

- Studded** (Component 2) (To have a lot of something on it)
- Bridle** (Component 2) (A harness, consisting of a headstall, bit, and reins, fitted about a horse's head and used to restrain or guide the animal)
- Ragged** (Component 4) (Having an irregular surface or edge; uneven or jagged in outline)
- Bough** (Component 1) (A tree branch, especially a large or main branch)
- Fasten** (Component 2) (To make fast or secure).
- Quick love** (Component 2) (negative value, lust)
- Steed** (Component 1) (a horse to ride on)
- Stalled up** (Component 4) (To cause (a motor or motor vehicle) accidentally to stop running)
- Tie** (Component 10) (to link two things together)
- Rider** (Component 1) (One that rides, especially one who rides horses)
- Govern'd** (Component 4) (To keep under control; restrain)
- Strength** (Component 5) (Capacity or potential for effective action)

This paradigmatic interaction between words' secondary components will bring a one meaning from the semantic interrelations. Common to all components is the idea that it is about an irregular man who needs control because of his bad tendency towards his lover. The reader has not to look for identifying characters to know what their words mean.



It is principally about navigation on the words and their semantic interrelations.

The first verse contains a thematic introduction situating from the beginning Adonis' relation with Venus. The word "studded" has two components: 1) to be decorated with small raised pieces of metal and 2) to have a lot of something on it. The words "bridle", "ragged" and "bough" have markers relating to the second component of the word "studded", because the word "bridle" means putting something around the horse's head for controlling him. This would set the way for the lexical interaction. The poem can mean that the man is not straight and needs to be controlled like a horse. This meaning is reinforced by the meaning that the words "ragged" and "bough" mean in relation to the first component of the word "bridle", all showing that the context is not straight. The word "fasten" has two components which do not seem to interact positively with the other components. We give it two epistemic components: either fastening for something good or for something bad. The second component is to consider because the proceeding expression correlates with it: "how quick is love". The latter explains a negative value of love since Shakespeare sees it as so rapid. Thus love is interpreted here as lust and not love. This is said back in the proceeding words. The last verse has the words "govern'd" and "strength" sharing both the meaning of protection and affection because the last words "though not in lust" means that Venus expresses love while Adonis expresses lust.

Taking back Cummings' poem would add further arguments on the efficiency of the componential analysis:

all by all and deep by deep  
and more by more they dream their sleep  
no one and anyone earth by April  
wish by spirit and if by yes.

Cummings poetry is one of the well-structured writings with totally speechless textual items. The first reading directs us to lovers meeting's dream though all the words do not seem to settle on a particular meaning.

This glance look needs to be reinforced with more convincing analysis that it is to obtain from the decomposition of the poem's words and which will even bring other images not seen at the surface level.

- All**
1. Being or representing the entire or total number, amount, or quantity
  2. Constituting, being, or representing the total extent or the whole
  3. Being the utmost possible of
  4. Every
  5. Any whatsoever
  6. Being more than one

- Deep**
1. Extending far downward below a surface
  2. Extending a specific distance in a given direction
  3. Far distant in time or space
  4. Difficult to penetrate or understand; recondite
  5. Profound in quality or feeling

- Dream**
1. A series of images, ideas, emotions, and sensations occurring involuntarily in the mind
  2. during certain stages of sleep
  3. A daydream; a reverie
  4. A state of abstraction; a trance
  5. A wild fancy or hope
  6. A condition or achievement that is longed for; an aspiration
  7. One that is exceptionally gratifying, excellent, or beautiful

- Sleep**
1. A natural periodic state of rest for the mind and body
  2. A crust of dried tears or mucus normally forming around the inner rim of the eye during sleep
  3. No one, no person, no body

- Anyone**
1. A person; anybody
  2. A person of any importance

- Earth**
1. To cover or heap (plants) with soil for protection
  2. To chase (an animal) into an underground hiding place
  3. To burrow or hide in the ground



- Wish** 1. A desire, longing, or strong inclination for a specific thing  
 2. An expression of a desire, longing, or strong inclination; a petition  
 3. Something desired or longed for

- Spirit** 1. The vital principle or animating force within living beings  
 2. Incorporeal consciousness  
 3. The soul, considered as departing from the body of a person at death  
 4. The Holy Spirit  
 5. A supernatural being  
 6. The part of a human associated with the mind, will, and feelings  
 7. The essential nature of a person or group  
 8. A person as characterized by a stated quality

The main words' components lack the intra-relation meaning. In that, it is difficult to find a lexical interaction between the components on the basis of their major components because the words "all", "deep", "spirit", "sleep", "earth", and "wish" have components sharing almost nothing with each other. To make them meaningful, one needs to look for other components to these words.

- All** (Component 3) (Being the utmost possible of)  
**Deep** (Component 3) (Far distant in time or space)  
**Dream** (Component 3) (A wild fancy or hope)  
**Sleep** (Meeting or contact)  
**Anyone** (Component 2) (A person of any importance)  
**No one and anyone** (possible and impossible)  
**Earth** (give plants)  
**Wish** (Component 2) (An expression of a desire, longing, or strong inclination; a petition)  
**Spirit** (something as deep as the soul)

"Deep", "all" and "dream" refer to something hard to achieve. This is meant by component three of the word "deep": "Far distant in time or space"; and,

too, in component three of the word "dream": "A wild fancy or hope"; as well as component three of the word "all": "Being the utmost possible of". The third verse says in unrelated way with the previous words that it is possible and impossible to meet by April because "anyone" refers to the possibility of meeting and "no one" to its impossibility. Earth refers to giving life to something like plants and it is in the poem meaning "big joy". All these attributes are confirmed in the last verse: "wish by spirit" means an inside and yet hard-to-achieve wish as deep as it comes from the person's spirit, possible to achieve "if" the answer is yes.

Cummings' poem is a real speechless piece of language whose main units are absent or turned in a way abstracting the understanding. It is clear that the componential analysis fails in the beginning when relying only on words' components and their interrelations. It is after extending meaning to very minor components that a one meaning could be set from epistemic components worked out far from the words' usual meaning. This includes the words all, deep, anyone and no one, and earth.

The componential analysis on both, Shakespeare' and Cumming's poems, points to the fact that by establishing components and their semantic interaction it is possible to obtain facets of meaning which are absent at the surface level. But this may transcend the linguistic analysis as when we add epistemic components in case the established components resist interrelations. In this respect, Culler (2002) said that the semantic analysis of literary meaning cannot be so systematic.

## Conclusion

The present paper has looked at the importance of understanding literary language from its own language. It stated that analysing lexical units into all possible components (or values) can set a successful lexico-semantic interaction because the latter is the key to the writer's construction of meaning which appears speechless in the text. The semantic analysis



aims at assembling the different meanings of the signalled words in order to obtain the hidden meaning at the surface level. The componential analysis looks for meaning at the deep structure of words unlike the other semantic approaches which operate at the surface level.

The componential analysis is a systemic association between frames of meaning distributed in the literary text in an unknown order. It enables the reader to rely on his linguistic knowledge which is already available in his pre-knowledge. In general, the componential analysis works in a systemic way because it enables the reader to obtain meaning and check it as well. However, its systematicity operates only when there is the possibility of checking meaning against what is already found as the text's meaning. Moreover, the setting of components is sometimes epistemic when a word seems to have a given component in relation to the lexical interaction but does not display it as a minor or major value.

Literary meaning is a task of attributing referents to images especially when the language allows 'generating substitutes' to words from others sharing at least lexico-semantic aspects. In that, some words are more attributable of meaning than others by virtue of two facts. A word may have a high degree of attribution and thus easy to combine with other words not necessarily sharing its meaning (e.g. the word "govern"). A second type concerns those words that have a low degree of attribution and which persist to the lexical interaction. These words are either primitive or one-meaning words. However, in unrelated texts, it can happen that words, whether attributable to each other or not, become related in a very restricted way implying for an epistemic lexical decomposition.

As such, the semantic analysis is free from any particular rule since the decomposition comes out of unspecified lexical relations because the reader

raises questions on why a given word is there in the text and what does it share with other words or their components, and thus sets the possibilities of a detailed understanding.

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