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## **AMBIGUITY IN POETIC TEXTS: DEFINITION, TYPES, AND FUNCTION**

*Ambivalence refers to the simultaneous combination of two opposite attitudes, ideas, etc., towards a person, a thing, etc. this study attempts to prove not only that ambiguity is a semantic-pragmatic device, but also that it is a result of certain stylistic deviations from the norm of the Linguistic levels of Language. The study also hypothesizes that ambiguity in poetic texts highly affects meaning, semantic deviation is the most frequent type which creates different types of ambivalence. Furthermore, the article focuses on the pivotal place of ambiguity that modernist critical theory ascribed to ambiguity in the definition of meaning and structure in poetry. In particular, we consider the way in which the category of experience is deployed in the discourse of ambiguity but is limited to only certain narratives of so-called experience. We argue for a contemporary practice less focused on ambiguity and more on notation and provisional structure, demonstrating key elements in poems.*

*Keywords: ambivalence, literary device, metaphor, poetic discourse, poem*

### **Introduction**

Directly or indirectly, literary ambiguity has been a subject of commentary and concern since Aristotle. Since the nineteenth century, it has received more concerted attention, particularly with the advent of Symbolisme, stimulated by the re-framing of the question of the literary in Poe's «The Philosophy of Composition» (Poe passim), and reaching a key point in Mallarmé's «Crise de vers.» The matter was re-approached by the New Criticism in the early twentieth century, most notably in Empson's Seven Types of Ambiguity, and taken to further levels with the coming of deconstruction.

When different readers read and think about the same poetic text, their interpretations are often different from each other. It doesn't matter if the reader is a professional (for example, a literary critic or other poet or a person who is simply interested in poetry. This happens not only with poetry: any text, starting with simple remarks in a conversation, can be understood in different ways, but only in poetry the ambiguity of interpretation is not an accidental failure, but an important and necessary feature.

The larger the poetic text, the less likely it is that different readers will understand it the same way. A poem that allows for various deep interpretations or cannot be interpreted unambiguously is often considered good. At first glance, such a poem may not seem particularly complicated: it can accurately convey difficult-to-describe emotions and states, relate to controversial ethical issues, and can be read in a special way against the background of other verses, including classical ones. Such a poem cannot be understood in any predefined way.

An untrained poetry reader sometimes asks the question: what did the author want to say? It is important to understand that when we interpret a poetic text, we do not answer this question: firstly, we will never know what considerations the poet was guided when writing a poem, and secondly, a poem only makes sense when we try to interpret it, based on our own reading or life experience. It is impossible to say what the author had in mind: in poetry words often do not correspond to their direct meanings, and what the author had in mind is already expressed in a poem and cannot be retold in other words.

### **Materials and methods**

Theoretical analysis of special literature on the research problem; linguistic methods, including the analysis of the dictionary definition of terms and their equivalents, the analysis of terms by the methods of term formation, the descriptive method, and the method of sampling English terminological units.

### **Results and discussion**

There are many modes of literary ambiguity. Any attempt to define such a thing, as if it were a thing, will find itself either shutting out several others or dealing with many that it might not at first have intended to deal with. Even at the very outset, we must consider that there are two terms to be addressed, separately, before we try to bring them together, but even this is a simplification. I shall approach the matter in two parts, examining firstly the question of textual ambiguity and its essential relation to reading, and then the manner in which this operates within and is further refined by the literary. We might say, for example, that ambiguity is inherent in the text, but even here we will have to determine at the outset whether what we mean is that it is an effect produced by certain tropes or textual practices, or whether it is somehow inherent in textuality itself. We might say, on the other hand, that ambiguity is an effect of reading, if for no other reason

than that nothing can be known about a text until some attempt has been made to decipher it. But each of these avenues begs the question of the literary itself: whether by “literary” ambiguity we are referring merely to textual, as opposed to such other modes of ambiguity as the visual or the aural, or whether we are referring to modes of ambiguity particular to a certain kind of text, as opposed to other kinds. Do we need, for example, to consider at the outset where one mode of text – the «literary» – stops and other modes start?

Poetry has powerful means of imposing its own assumptions, and is very independent of the mental habits of the reader; one might trace its independence to the ease with which it can pass from one to the other of these two sorts of meaning. A single word, dropped where it comes most easily, without being stressed, and as if to fill out the sentence, may signal to the reader what he is meant to be taking for granted; if it is already in his mind the word will seem natural enough and will not act as an unnecessary signal [1, 9]. Once it has gained its point, on further readings, it will take for granted that you always took it for granted; only very delicate people are as tactful in this matter as the printed page. Nearly all statements assume in this way that you know something but not everything about the matter in hand, and would tell you something different if you knew more, but printed commonly differ from spoken ones in being intended for a greater variety of people, and poetical from prosaic ones in imposing the system of habits they imply more firmly or more quickly.

Words in a poem exist in relation, never in isolation.

One possible reason that ambiguity is so important to art and literature is that it offers us the chance to be innovative in our interpretations. Faced with a work that has multiple meanings or seems vague, we have to actively use our own ideas and judgments to find meaning. In this sense, studying how people respond to ambiguity is also a way to study creativity.

In the ‘Poetry Beyond Text’ project, we have been exploring whether ambiguity functions differently in images and in texts and how readers understand the role and function of ambiguity in art and literature. Do images seem less ambiguous than words, or vice versa? When images and texts are placed next to one another, do they disambiguate one another or serve to make one another more ambiguous? What is the role of ambiguity in aesthetic experience?

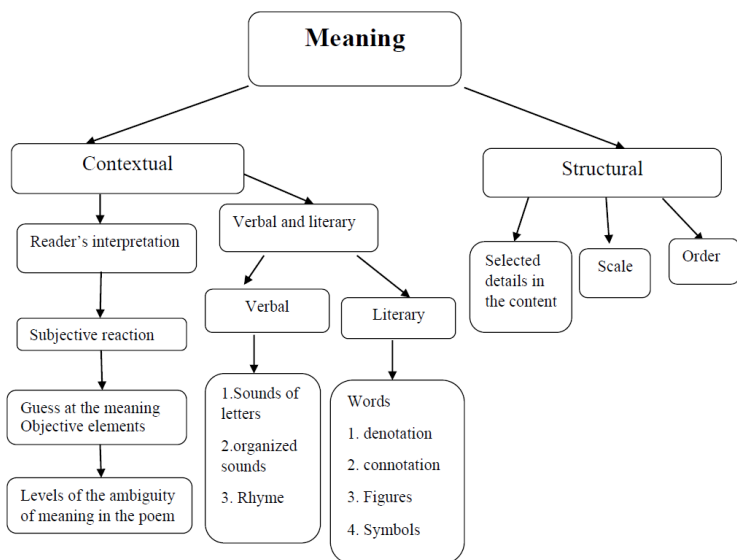


Figure 1 – Meaning in a poetic text

An ambiguity, in ordinary speech, means something very pronounced, and as a rule witty or deceitful. William Empson proposed to use the word in an extended sense, and shall think relevant to subject any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language.

The definition of ambiguity occurs when one word, expression, or sentence, or context has more than one meaning. In his *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, William Empson [2, 142] thinks of ambiguity as «indecision as to what you mean, an intention to mean several things, a probability that one or other or both of two things has been meant, and the fact that a statement has several meanings.»

According to Percival Gurrey, implications in poetry have got certain significance owing to the notion that those implications «give precision and reality to general ideas and to amorphous states of mind.»

Ambiguity is a pervasive phenomenon in human languages, and is fundamentally a property of linguistic expressions. There are two basic interpretations of ambiguity: i) the capability of being understood in two or more possible senses or ways; ii) uncertainty

Uncertainty means lack of sureness about something and has to do with the writer's and reader's knowledge of the background. The issue of uncertainty will not be considered in this paper; here we use the first interpretation of ambiguity.

A word, phrase, sentence, or other message is called ambiguous if it can be reasonably interpreted in more than one way. It is difficult to find words that do not have at least two possible meanings, and sentences which are (out of context) several ways ambiguous are the rule, not the exception. Ambiguity gives natural language its flexibility and usability, and consequently it cannot be eliminated.

### *Types of Ambiguity*

#### *Semantic Ambiguity*

This kind of ambiguity is present when a word is «polysemous,» or, it has multiple meanings.

#### *Syntactic Ambiguity*

This refers to the presence of two or more meanings in a sentence or phrase. A reader will interpret these different meanings due to the structure of the sentence rather than the content.

#### *Narrative Ambiguity*

The vaguest of the three is narrative ambiguity refers to a story or idea that has different meanings. The distinction is not made clear by the writer.

The fundamental situation, whether words in the poem or prose deserve to be called ambiguous or not, is that a word or a grammatical structure is effective in several ways at once To take a famous example, there is no pun, double syntax, or dubiety of feeling, in

*Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang,*

but the comparison holds for many reasons; ruined monastery choirs are places in which to sing because they involve sitting in a row because they are made of wood. These and many other reasons all combine to give the line beauty, and there is a sort of ambiguity in not knowing which of them to hold most clearly in mind.

Ambiguity covers almost everything of literary importance. The poet will mean more to you when you have had more experience of life. That you will be more experienced in the apprehension of verbal subtleties or of the poet's social tone, that you will have become the sort of person that can feel at home, or imagine, or extract experience from, what is described by the poetry; that you will have included it among the things you are prepared to apprehend. There is a distinction here between the implied meanings of a sentence into what is to be assimilated at the moment and what must already be part of your habits; in arriving at the second of these the educator (that mysterious figure) rather than the analyst would be helpful. In a sense, it cannot be explained in language, because

to a person who does not understand it any statement of it is as difficult as the original one, while to a person who does understand it a statement of it has no meaning because of no purpose. For poetry has powerful means of imposing its own assumptions, and is very independent of the mental habits of the reader; one might trace its independence to the ease with which it can pass from one to the other of these two sorts of meaning.

The structuralist linguistic poetics theoreticians Jan Mukarovsky and Roman Jakobson have argued that poetic language is a deviation from normal everyday language. Thus Mukarovsky writes: ‘The violation of the norm of the standard, its systematic violation, is what makes possible the poetic utilization of language; without this possibility, there would be no poetry. In a similar vein...’ [4, 17].

Roman Jakobson writes about poetry in relation to the selection of words and their combination in texts:

The selection is produced on the basis of equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymity, and anonymity, while the combination, the build-up of the sequence, is based on contiguity. The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination [5, 95].

In other words, the poetic effect is created by using equivalence in ways in which normal, standard language does not – that is, as a principle for combining items. Again, the poetic is essentially produced by a deviation from the norm.

### **Conclusion**

Generally, Ambiguity is the phenomenon of natural language. It means the capability of being understood in two or more possible senses or ways. Identification of ambiguous words and phrases is a crucial aspect in text processing applications and many other areas concerned with human communication.

Thus a word may have several distinct meanings; several meanings connected with one another; several meanings which need one another to complete their meaning; or several meanings which unite together so that the word means one relation or one process. This is a scale that might be followed continuously. ‘Ambiguity’ itself can mean indecision as to what you mean, an intention to mean several things, a probability that one or other or both of two things has been meant, and the fact statement has several meanings.

The words of the poet will, as a rule, be more just words, what they represent will be more effective a unit in the mind, than the more numerous words with which I shall imitate their meaning so as to show how it is conveyed.

As a way of conclusion, it might help us to determine a little more about the nature of this ambiguity to contemplate briefly the question as to where the devices we normally identify with the poetic function assonance, say, and alliteration, repetition, return, permutation, paronomasia, etc., and perhaps, more importantly, the metrical and rhythmical events that underpin and extend these come from.



They may have their origin, as many have speculated, in an oral culture, in mnemonic devices, devices to enable people to remember the text in the first place.

They may have and this is not an either/or matter their origins in music, and represent an ekphrasis-like desire within every text at one and the same time to admit and to stretch the skin, the limits of language. But the origins of at least some of these devices may be even earlier and more primal.

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## ПОЭТИКАЛЫҚ МӘТІНДЕРДЕГІ АМБИВАЛЕНТТІЛІК: АНЫҚТАМАСЫ, ТҮРЛЕРІ ЖӘНЕ ҚЫЗМЕТІ

*Амбиваленттілік деп бір-біріне қарама-қарсы екі көзқарастың немесе идеяның бір мезгілде қосылуын айтады және бұл адамға, затқа және т.б. қатысты болуы мүмкін. Мақалада поэтикалық мәтіндердегі амбиваленттіктің анықтамасы, қызметі мен түрлері берілген. Бұл зерттеуде көп мағыналылықтың тек мағыналық-прагматикалық құрал ретінде ғана емес, белгілі бір әрекеттердің нәтижесі екенін дәлелдеуге талпыныс жасалған. Зерттеу сонымен қатар поэтикалық мәтіндерде амбиваленттілік түсініксіздік мағынаға қатты әсер етеді сондай-ақ семантикалық ауытқу амбиваленттіктің әртүрлі түрлерін тудыратын ең жиі кездесетін түрі болып табылады. Сонымен қатар, мақалада модернистік сыни теория поэзиядағы мағына мен құрылымды анықтаудағы екіұшытылыққа жатқызған негізгі орнына назар аударылады. Атап айтқанда, біз тәжірибе категориясының екіұшытылық дискурсында қолданылатын жолын қарастырамыз. Біз өлеңдердегі негізгі элементтерді көрсете отырып, оның құрылымына көбірек көңіл бөлеміз.*

*Кілтті сөздер: амбиваленттілік, әдеби құрылғы, метафора, поэтикалық дискурс, поэма.*

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## **АМБИВАЛЕНТНОСТЬ В ПОЭТИЧЕСКИХ ТЕКСТАХ: ОПРЕДЕЛЕНИЕ, ВИДЫ И ФУНКЦИИ**

*Амбивалентность относится к одновременному сочетанию двух противоположных установок, идей и это может быть по отношению к человеку, вещи и т. д. В статье дается определение, функции и виды амбивалентности (двусмысленность) в поэтических текстах. В данном исследовании делается попытка доказать, что двусмысленность является не только семантико-прагматическим приемом, но и результатом определенных действий. В исследовании также выдвинута гипотеза о том, что двусмысленность в поэтических текстах сильно влияет на смысл, семантическая девиация является наиболее частым типом, который создает различные виды амбивалентности. Кроме того, в статье акцентируется внимание на ключевом месте двусмысленности, которую модернистская критическая теория отводит определению смысла и структуры в поэзии. В частности, мы рассматриваем способ, которым категория опыта развертывается в дискурсе неоднозначности, но ограничивается лишь определенными нарративами так называемого опыта.*

*Ключевые слова: амбивалентность, литературный прием, метафора, поэтический дискурс, поэма.*

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