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Narrative Discourse as a Multi-Level System of Communication: Some Theoretical Proposals Concerning Bakhtin's Dialogic Principle

Abstract

This article attempts to show that the dialogizing of narrative discourse is a way of de-naturalizing the fictional process and its associated textual activities by reconstituting the material interplay of voices (in Bakhtin's pioneering sense). It is this interplay which is suppressed by the convention of a single, univocal narrative position. This corresponds to Bakhtin's notion of monologic discourse, which implies an already given, objectified identity lying behind the text. Dialogic discourse restores to textual practice the material interplay of frequently opposing and contradictory semantic and ideological positions which actively constitute the formation of discourse. These voices which are constantly re-interpreted and transformed in dialogic discourse will help to show that the Subject is not external to discursive practices, but it is continually re-constituted and transformed within specific discursive formations. The second part of this article contains a detailed analysis of an excerpt from Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Ada*. Following this are a number of proposals or strategies for understanding the processes of dialogic interaction which take place across levels in the narrative text.

Keywords

dialogizing, narrative discourse, Bakhtin, dialogic principle, monologic discourse, identity, discourse, dialogic discourse, Subject, Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada*

NARRATIVE DISCOURSE AS A MULTI-LEVEL SYSTEM OF COMMUNICATION: SOME THEORETICAL PROPOSALS CONCERNING BAKHTIN'S DIALOGIC PRINCIPLE

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1. Introduction.

1.1 Theoretical Orientations.

The generic conventions that assign priority to a single, univocal position in narrative discourse (typically the narrator) presuppose a particular set of assumptions about the nature of narrative discourse itself. The principle convention at work here says that the use of the pronominal deictic form "I" requires the re-construction of a fictional referent which functions to orient the reader (as external addressee) in relation to the narrative text. Roland Barthes' notion of the referential or cultural code as a reading strategy is related to this. This particular convention is a means of guaranteeing the authority of the narrator-I in terms of the I-you relationship between addressor and addressee (narrator and narratee) in the discourse situation. This presumed authority depends on a coded convention which allows the discourse participants to build into the narrative context of situation the assumption that the narrator-I narrates events which refer to some notion of extra-textual authority. It is a way of naturalizing the fictional process itself. In this paper, I hope to show that the dialogizing of narrative discourse is a way of de-naturalizing the fictional process and its associated textual activities by re-constituting the material interplay of "voices" in Bakhtin's pioneering sense (*Problems* 150-

227). It is this interplay that is suppressed by the convention of a single, univocal narrative position. This corresponds to Bakhtin's notion of monologic discourse, which implies both an already given, objectified identity lying "behind" the text and its correlative of a stable, "centered" locus of knowledge and power in discourse. These absolutist, referentially motivated claims are not readily observable in practice in socio-semiotic systems where manifold ideological positions each have their own "subjective" integrity which challenges and re-interprets that of the norm social structure—or in fiction like that of the monologic author-narrator. From this perspective, the dialogic principle can be seen as a means of interrogating those ideological practices through which the monologic narrator is maintained. The conventions which produce and maintain these practices say, in effect, that the use of the pronominal deictic form "I" requires the re-construction of either a social or fictional referent which functions to orient the reader (as external addressee) in relation to the narrative text. What is presumed in this convention is a mode of reading that takes this referent as already given. The dialogic principle functions to interrogate the construction of this narrator-I as a particular mode of textuality which is itself constituted (enacted) by certain ideological practices. The implicit epistemological assumption in this convention is that social reality itself is something that exists prior to language. Language is taken to be the reflection of an already given social reality. Dialogic discourse restores to textual practice the material interplay of frequently opposing and contradictory semantic and ideological positions which actively constitute the formation of discourse. These "voices," which are constantly re-interpreted and transformed in dialogic discourse, will help to show that the Subject is not internal to discursive practices, but it is continually re-constituted and transformed within specific discursive formations. In dialogic discourse, the notion of character as a subject exhibiting an inner core of psychological essences (McHale) is challenged by the reality actively constituted by the text in which character is a set of ideological and textual practices. The conventional modes of narration work to silence questions concerning the practices that constitute textual activity. Third-person narration functions to bring together and unify diverse features of the narrated world into a single overall perspective by means of the "omniscient" narrator who is able to know and observe everything. In the "omniscient" mode any questions concerning the origins of the text are suppressed. First-person narration presents actions and events from a

particular subjective point of view. The first-person mode of narration also suppresses questions concerning textual practices such as the status of “voices” like “I” and “he” by maintaining a univocal claim to authority and authenticity in the fictive world of the text. These two conventional modes of narration seek to efface the socio-semiotic practices through which they are produced. Both modes rely on the assumption of an authority that governs these modes as conveying an already given extra-textual reality. The dialogizing of narrative discourse shows that they are discursive practices used to produce and maintain a particular, ideologically motivated version of “reality.”

2. The Material Interplay of “Voices” as Textual Practice.

2.1 Voloshinov on the Interpenetration of Reporting and Reported Speech.

In section 2, I shall be concerned with a detailed analysis of a brief excerpt from Vladimir Nabokov’s novel *Ada* (164) in order to explore the construction and transformation of “voices” as positions for Subjects in narrative discourse. It is worth considering the following words of Voloshinov before going on to our analysis: “The productive study of dialogue presupposes, however, a more profound investigation of the forms used in reported speech, since these forms reflect basic and constant tendencies in the active reception of other speakers’ speech, and it is this reception, after all, that is fundamental also for dialogue” (117).

The main point discussed by Voloshinov has to do with the relations between authorial context on the one hand and the reported speech of characters on the other. Voloshinov goes on to propose a line of stylistic tendencies in reported speech which range from the maintaining of a rigid separation between authorial speech and character speech to means by which language may devise ways of infiltrating reported speech with authorial comment although the fundamental commitment remains the preservation of individual “voices” (discourse Subjects), though without the rigid hierarchical separation proposed earlier. Finally, Voloshinov refers to a mode of writing which he calls *quasi-direct discourse*, in which the narrator’s and the character’s language intermingle to such an extent that it is impossible

to determine with any certainty the precise orientation at any point within this type of discourse. This mode of textuality (generally referred to as *free indirect discourse*) is an internal perspective in which language representative of a character's discourse (e.g. deictic markers of here and now) and world-view (lexis and idiom typical of a character's social register) is interwoven with language representative of the narrator's discourse (e.g. past tense) and world-view (e.g. lexis which stresses the narrator's analytic or interpretative stance; verbs of action rather than cognition or perception). The anti-authoritarian interplay of "voices" within the text functions to problematize the text itself. It is no longer a matter of relations between one utterance and another. The dialogic principle asserts that there may be contradictory tendencies *within* utterances as well as problematic relations between utterances. The authoritarian text presupposes a unity between speaking Subject and utterance, whereas the non-authoritarian or dialogic text itself constitutes the multiple interplay of "voices" that are conflicting and unresolved.

2.2 The Dialogic Principle as Material Interplay of Voices Constituting a Mode of Textual Activity: Analysis of a Text.

The extract that I shall analyze here may be divided into a number of sections which will informally be referred to as frames. Frames may be said to comprise one or more basic units roughly corresponding to clause bound units of meaning in linguistic structure. A frame will be indicated thus //, and the more basic sub-frames by (). Frames will be numbered with Roman numerals and sub-frames with Arabic numerals.¹

Torode and Silverman (164) posit a distinction between the "transcendent" realities portrayed within stories and the reality of the discourse within which these stories are told and apprehended. It seems likely that this distinction corresponds fairly closely to that between *histoire* and *discours* as these concepts appear in the work of Benveniste and later French structuralist theories of narrative.² *Histoire* and *discours* are modes of enunciation which correspond to the degree of interpersonal commitment in language. As the basic modes of narrative discourse, they could be said to correspond to the representation of narrative content and the organization of this

content in the text. However, this formulation neglects to take into account that all instances of discourse imply an interpersonal commitment. There is always an addressor-addressee relation which helps to structure the communication situation. The presumed opposition between narrated content (*histoire*) and narration (*discours*) might be more satisfactorily resolved if no such absolute distinction is maintained. Such a distinction implies an opposition between ideational and interpersonal meanings in narrative discourse. This thinking results from a commitment to a restricted view of meaning as ideational content or "what is said." The sheer difficulty of maintaining this distinction in practice should be enough to show that the speaker's commitment (interpersonal meaning) and what is said (ideational meaning) can not be abstracted away from each other without distorting the study of language in context. What needs to be realized is that elements of both types of meaning are congruently realized in the structure of the discourse according to the selections made in the narrative context of situation. The artificial separation of *histoire* and *discours* needs to be subordinated to the need to examine the co-functioning of these as elements of narrative discourse in some determinate context. In other words, we can not understand how these function together while refusing to go "higher" than the level on which they occur. The distinction posited by Torode and Silverman to which I referred earlier may be conveniently aligned with the distinction in structuralist theories of narrative between *histoire* and *discours*. *Histoire* abstracts away from its own situation of utterance to a "transcendent" realm of referential meaning which is seen as existing "beyond" the text. *Discours* is concerned with the situation of utterance and its conditions of production and reception. This distinction is invalid, for it would seem to be yet another manifestation of the form/meaning dichotomy that pervades Western thinking about language.

In the text to be analyzed shortly it will be shown that the interplay of "voices" in Bakhtin's sense continually interrogates the validity of this distinction. The distinction itself implies fixed positions for Subjects within or "behind" discourse that the material interplay of voices may be said to be continually calling into question. The dialogic interplay of voices is a discursive (textual) strategy which works to de-construct notions like authorial authority and referential transparency. I am not suggesting that the Nabokov text to be analyzed here maintains commitment to the notion of a dominant, authorial and referential authority.

I should like to begin this analysis by segmenting the relevant excerpt from Nabokov's *Ada* according to the criteria defined above:

/(“There’s one downstairs in the hall,”)1

(said Van,)2/I

/(assuming,)1 (or feigning to assume,)2 (that the unfortunate fellow had stomach cramps or nausea.)3/ II

/(But Mr. Rack only wanted)1 (“to make his farewells”)2/ III

/(- to Ivan Demonovich)1 IV

/(accented miserably on the second “o”)1/ V

to Fräulein Ada, to Mademoiselle Ida, and of course to Madame.)1/ IV

/(Alas, Van’s cousin and aunt were in town,)1

(but Phil might certainly find his friend Ida writing in the rose garden.)2 /VI

/(Was Van sure?)1/ VII

/(Van was damned well sure)1 /VIII

I shall begin this analysis by suggesting that in /I1/ the use of direct discourse locates this sub-frame within a “transcendent” realm in relation to the remainder of the discourse in our extract. This claim is based on the relation of *quoting* (direct speech) which is used here. This may be defined linguistically as the combination of parataxis with projection. The notion of projection is defined by Halliday (*Introduction*) as the projection of a secondary clause through a primary clause that presents it as a quote or a report. The reporting relation means that the proposition is introduced as having truth value only in the world of the person who verbalized it. Reports are introduced as having no truth value in the world shared by addressor and addressee. You cannot argue about it with the narrator, though you could (hypothetically speaking) argue about it with Van. James R. Martin has pointed out that reports are similar in meaning to modalized predications and have a truth value of “maybe” in the world shared by addressor and addressee. This modalized status appears to be sufficient grounds for locating /I1/ in a “transcendent” realm of reality that is distinct from the deixis of story-telling: the here and now of narration itself. /I2/ is the quoting frame which functions here to maintain a clear distinction between the transcendent realm of /I1/ and the immanent realm of /I2/. In terms of voice structures we can say that these two sub-frames maintain their own separate voices as the single reality to which each voice belongs. The first voice corresponds to character-Van and the second to the narrator. These two voices are maintained as distinct within the one local frame struc-

ture, i.e., /I/. In /II/ the re-formulation (transformation) of this perspective goes some way to closing this initial gap, but only by introducing further discontinuities in the process. /II/ can be characterized as free indirect discourse because we can observe the intermingling of character speech and narrator speech. /II₁/ is a mental process verb *assuming* which indicates internal character perspective. We might say that /II₁/ effectively dramatizes Van's internal consciousness. In /II₁/ it is very much a character voice which is mapped onto this frame. In this case, Voice 1 in /I/ has been transformed or re-formulated so that it is now located in the immanent world of narration through its occurrence in free indirect discourse. The use of the present tense form in *assuming* maintains the character deixis, but at the same time a previously transcendent perspective is now subjected to the channels of narrative mediation and interpretation. In /II₂/ this Voice 1 is further re-interpreted by mapping two voice structures on to the one local sub-frame. The voice structures of /I₂/ and that of /II₁/ are both mapped on to /II₂/. /II₂/ analyzes the character's internal state rather than dramatizing it as in /II₁/. The verb *feigning* seems much more likely to be a narrator's word used to analyze Van's internal state rather than a character's self-dramatization. This indicates that in /II₂/ two voices are re-formulated in terms of one voice. This is not the same as saying that two voices have now merged into one. Rather, two voice structures have been mapped onto the one local frame structure. /II₂/ is not the equivalent of any one or both of these voices. The voice structure in /II₂/ has now been explicitly formulated in terms of both narrator and character-Van voice structures. The local effect of this frame is to assimilate two preceding voices into a new voice structure which is dialogic in function. This dialogic function means that in /II₂/ we have opened up an interlevel communication across narrator and character levels. The use of *feigning* here creates a further series of ambiguities which I believe to be fundamental to the process I am describing. First, the present tense maintains character deixis while preserving a narrator's more analytic stance on a character's internal perspective—this helps to reinforce my contention that two distinct voice structures have been shaded (transformed) into a new structure. Secondly, the use of *feigning* functions as a meta-communication of the narrator on the character's act of *assuming*. This enables the relationship between /II₁/ and /II₂/ to be more clearly seen as dialogized, for /II₂/ can also be read as a meta-communication about /II₁/ as well as about itself. In

the terms proposed by Torode and Silverman the transformation of /II₁/ into /II₂/ constitutes an interruption of a conjunction of appearance (language) and (extra-linguistic) reality which is presupposed by *assuming*. The meta-communication constituted by *feigning* (i.e. “pretending”) opens up the gap between appearance and reality in language so that the formulation of this relationship is seen to be constituted within the play of voices in the text. Further, we might note the ambiguity seemingly inherent in *assuming* itself, for it too can be reformulated in terms of an external perspective of a narrator (i.e. assume = pretend; take upon oneself an aspect or air) or the internal perspective of a character (i.e. assume = take for granted). From the point of view of this first meaning of *assuming* the voice structure in /II₁/ has two aspects. *Assume* in this sense may be a conscious act (cf. pretense) by a character or it may characterize the external analysis of a narrator who observes this pretense or role playing from the outside. From the point of view of the second meaning we are talking about an internal mental state. The complexities of this analysis may suggest to us that /II₁/ itself comprises both communication and dialogic meta-communication because the ambiguity opens up the gap between internal and external perspectives. Neither voice, following Torode and Silverman (310), functions to assert its own version of “reality” as opposed to the mere appearance contained in the other voice. Rather, this mutual interplay of perspectives both textually and meta-textually enables the practices which constitute this relation to be explored. /II₃/ may be syntactically dependent on either of the two preceding sub-frames. This suggests that this sub-frame is shared in common by the two preceding sub-frames. More precisely, it is formulated in terms of two distinct appearances. Syntactically, /II₃/ is a clause which may be hypothetically projected through either of the two preceding sub-frames so that it can enter into a reporting relation with either of these two preceding elements. /II₃/ is a report rather than a fact. Both facts and reports are linguistic phenomena. As Halliday says “a fact as a semantic phenomenon is closer to the real world. A fact has been processed only once whereas a report has been processed twice over—first in the semantics as a configuration of meaning, and then re-processed in the grammar as a pattern of wording” (*Introduction*). A report may be verbalized, but a fact is semanticized and is not verbalized in any way. Reports belong to the class of metaphenomena and are more remote from the real world because they are first processed semantically as a configuration of meaning and then re-

processed in the lexico-grammar as a pattern of wordings. Unlike facts they do not participate in clause processes. This is significant because the relation of hypotactic projection which defines the reporting relation (“indirect speech”) in /II₃/ means that Van’s cognitions, perceptions (etc.) are here seen as participating in the immanent realm of narrative transmission by maintaining the status of /II₃/ as a dependent clause in the clause complex. This contrasts very much with the transcendent perspective of /I₁/ which is defined by the quoting rather than the reporting relation. The syntactic indeterminacy which is highlighted by the use of non-finite elements in /II₁/ and /II₂/ supports the view that /II₃/ presents alternative formulations of the appearance/reality relation as this is formulated in the two preceding sub-frames. In these terms, /II₃/ re-formulates the perspectives of both /II₁/ and /II₂/ in such a way that the appearance/reality distinction is seen as entirely constituted by the interplay of voices within the text. It is not dependent on some extra-textual presuppositions concerning the interpretation of appearances. The contrastive use of *but* in /III₁/ provides evidence that this perspective is still internal to narrator-Van and that it is Van who is analyzing Rack’s own perspective. The formal tenor³ relationship of *Mr. Rack* helps reinforce the suggestion that we are still within Van’s internal perspective. This voice is transformed by /III₂/ which includes a segment of Rack’s own speech within the larger frame of Van’s internal perspective. The use of quotation marks here maintains an ironic dissociation between Rack’s voice which is included here and Van’s own perspective. In other words, the evaluative orientations of both voices can be said to “clash” in precisely the way that Voloshinov described multi-accented or polyphonic discourse. A mimetic interpretation might insist that Van’s consciousness is “quoting” a fragment of Rack’s speech. I would argue that /III₂/ (i.e. the quote from Rack) re-formulates Van’s speech in the preceding sub-frame. This transformation of voice structures here re-formulates Van’s internal perspective in /III₁/ by embedding Rack’s voice within Van’s speech. The use of dissociating quotation marks helps to foreground the dialogic orientation to the Other which is especially marked here. This has to do with the fact that the formation of the Subject in discourse is always oriented towards the Other which is itself constituted in discourse. The process is fundamentally dialogic in nature. /IV/ continues in Rack’s own perspective which is signalled by the highly idiosyncratic modes of address (i.e. the tenor relationships) which are attributed to him. In /IV/ we have shifted from the embedding of Rack’s perspec-

tive in that of Van's voice structure to a more "direct" representation of Rack. This shift in perspective is quite decisively signalled orthographically by the use of a dash immediately before it. Frame /V/ resumes the perspective of /III₁/ and as a parenthetic aside it functions as a further meta-communication by narrator-Van on Rack's speech. Once again the effect is ironic and dissociating. Once again the interlevel process of communication can be seen to operate even at the micro-level of lexico-grammatical realization /IV₁/ continues the shift so that dialogic exchange between narrator-Van and Rack has been transformed into one between character-Van and Rack. In /VI₁/ the ejaculation *alas* operates as a lexical index that it is Van's reply to Rack on the character level which is represented here. This sets up a dialogic relation with /IV/, but in this case the interaction occurs on the same level rather than across textual levels—it is not a meta-communication across levels. The same perspective is maintained in /VI₂/ and we might note a further shift in tenor relationships. From the perspective of this internal representation of character-Van's speech, Rack is now referred to quite informally as *Phil*. This contrasts with the more formal tenor of *Mr. Rack* as formulated in the perspective of narrator-Van in /III₁/. If we see the voice structures and their various transforms as the loci for the continually shifting positions of Subjects in narrative discourse, then these lexical shifts in tenor relations mark shifts in the degree of formality and therefore the types of role relations between participants (Subjects) in discourse. These shifts imply a semantic shift from one type of discursive formation to another. More accurately, they presuppose by intertextual reference different types of discursive formations. These discursive formations are configurations of meaning determined by the socio-semiotic codes and they function to de-limit the likely positions which the Subject may occupy in a given type of discourse. The tenor shifts here seem to foreground this potential for the position of the Subject to shift according to the particular discursive formation into which the Subject is inserted. /VII/ is from Rack's perspective. It can be seen as a response to the preceding frame which was in character-Van's perspective. This frame is in the form of a question. This fact is interesting for the present analysis because questions are one of a set of speech functions in English (others include offers, statements, commands) which are addressee oriented and which typically evoke a response and so set up an adjacency pair. In terms of conversational acts it is these adjacency pairs which constitute one of the fundamental

structures of dialogue. We are, clearly enough, not concerned with “real” dialogue for we are considering an instance of free indirect discourse which is internal to Rack’s perspective. What this voice structure achieves here is the opening up of a gap between appearance and reality in the previous discourse of /VI/ which was formulated in terms of Van’s voice. In other words, Rack’s voice in /VII/ questions the very possibility that the correspondence between Van’s speech and the reality that it purports to sustain can actually be upheld. The representation of discursive interaction between the two voices should not be taken as an indication that Van’s voice in /VI/ refers to an already given “reality” external to or prior to speech. Rack’s question is not simply asking for verification of any such “reality”—even if this were a logically tenable position in the represented world of narrative fiction. Rack’s voice poses the possibility of an alternative formulation of “reality.” The modality of certainty here formulates the possibility that there is no single correspondence between appearance and reality in language. The reply in /VIII/ completes this dialogic structure by re-entering the internal perspective of Van. The use of colloquial lexis in *damned well* supports the view that this frame is a representation of Van’s speech, even though the use of the self-referring nominal *Van* seems more characteristic of the narrator’s discourse. This suggests that two voices are mapped onto the same frame structure. Unlike quoting and reporting relations of the type referred to earlier, frames /VII/ and /VIII/ are non-projected phenomena. They do not stand in relations of parataxis or hypotaxis with another clause. This means they have the status of direct representation and may be argued with in the world shared by addressor and addressee. On the surface, Van’s reply in /VIII/ may appear to close off Rack’s voice so that Van’s own formulation of reality is dominant. A more subtle reading will keep in mind the transcendent perspective in which Van’s voice was formulated in /I/. In appearing to close off Rack’s speech, Van’s own voice has in part been re-formulated by Rack’s voice. The colloquial lexis *damned well* has appropriated some of the semantic properties typically associated with Rack’s name in the narrative. These include associations of illness, pain, torture, and hell. Rack’s question in /VII/ has opened up the gap between the formulation of a transcendent reality in Van’s speech and the hellish vision associated with Rack in the narrative.

3. Dialogic Discourse.

3.1 Dialogic Structures and the Dialogic Principle.

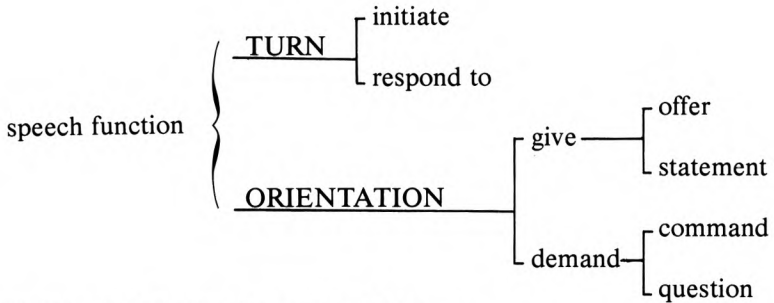
Roger Fowler has suggested that from a compositional point of view the dialogic process in fiction may be seen as one of the techniques of defamiliarization in just the way intended in Victor Shklovsky's theory. Graham Pechey interestingly raises this problem when he asks if it is signifier, signified, or referent which is said to be defamiliarized according to Formalist theory. However one might like to resolve this problem, it seems to me to be yet one more manifestation of the form/meaning dichotomy referred to earlier. This kind of dualistic thinking in the Formalist's notion of defamiliarization indicates a belief in the real lying "behind" language, and hence knowable to the clever analyst if not to the "ordinary" reader. The psychologistic bias implicit in the Formalist notion of perception here further compounds this "vice of the device" by abstracting from the communication situation and reverting to a more reified, individualistic concept of "perception." The reversion is precisely monologic in Bakhtin's perjorative sense of the word. According to Shklovsky's theory, the thickening of prose texture impedes perception. What is not clear is what is actually perceived and hence defamiliarized. In the above analysis we have seen how this works in the shifting tenor relations between Van and Rack and also in the use of subjective lexical register to suggest peculiarities of both characterization as well as antagonism between Van and Rack. This demonstration of certain inadequacies in the Formalist position need detain us no longer, for I should like to approach the problem from a rather different angle by referring to Jan Mukarovsky's concept of "de-automatization." In order to clarify the relevance of this notion for dialogic processes in fiction I shall need to say a few words about the nature of conversational dialogue and its function in everyday social life. Berger and Luckman have spoken of the "reality generating power of conversation" which is largely implied in dialogue structures and so helps to maintain an intersubjective social reality. According to Michael Halliday (*Language as Code*), the structure of dialogue is defined according to the assignment of roles to speaker and hearer in the process of exchange. This process may be characterized by four *elementary* speech functions. The speaker may be either giving or demanding. He/she may be giving information or

giving goods-and-services; or demanding information, or demanding goods-and-services. I do not have time to go very far in this discussion of the elementary structures of dialogue, but these four elementary speech functions have been schematized in the following manner by Halliday:

	goods-and-services	information
GIVE	offer	statement
DEMAND	command	question

Halliday (1977): The Four Elementary speech Functions.

The assigning of roles for the speaker also presupposes the complementary assigning of roles to the hearer. The interpretation of speech functions in the above diagram is one which is derived from the grammatical system of the language—these are semantic re-labellings of categories defined by the mood system which is an aspect of the “lower” level of lexico-grammatical realization. What is required is a level of coding at the semantic level. This is a level intermediate between the lexico-grammar and the socio-semiotic context. At this level of interpretation the semantic categories of speech function are seen as both *realizing* the socio-semiotic options of role assignment and information or commodity exchange and *realized by* the grammatical system of mood options. Halliday (*Language as Code*) characterizes the semantic system of dialogue in the following way:



Halliday (1977): The Semantics of Dialogue.

According to the above formulation, it is the semantic options that encode the system of role relations in dialogue. As we have seen, the dialogic process involves the creation of a polyphony of alternative “voices” or, more accurately, a polyphony of alternative semantic and ideological positions in discourse. This has to do with the reality-generating power of conversation as described by Berger and Luckmann. In their terms we might argue that the dialogic process is concerned with the creating of alternative partially differing realities which are defined by the dialectical oppositions among the constitutive “voices.”

3.2 Dialogic Discourse as the De-automatization of Textual Practice(s).

The creation of a partially differing or antithetical social reality requires, at least to some degree, the de-automatization of language in the terms originally suggested by Mukarovsky and Halliday (*De-automatization*). As Halliday explains it, a fully automatized use of language means that the lexico-grammatical options which are selected are seen as realizing the semantic options in an unmarked way. They encode the higher-level semantics without taking on any distinctive patterning of their own. The de-automatization of language allows for the “lower” levels of structural realization (i.e. the lexico-grammar)

to be relatively independent of determining choices made at higher levels of semiotic activity. The lower-level of structural realization is seen as a partially independent area of selection. This means that the specifically linguistic resources at the lower-level of structural realization have the potential to form distinctive global (textual) patternings which do not merely enact the lexico-grammar's "automatic" function of realizing the determinate choices made at the semantic level. These global patternings themselves constitute the resources by means of which language can form patterned relationships in its own right in order to enact (or "create") a quasi-independent semiotic "reality" or a distinctive patterning of textual meanings. The specifically *linguistic* resources of the system directly encode this semiotic "reality" by bypassing the potential for making selections at the semantic level. This potential in artistic uses of language for encoding "new" possibilities in the semiotic without realizing determining choices from the socio-semantic level may well say something about the quasi-autonomous means by which artistic texts create their own immediate context of situation. Artistic uses of language need not be "automatic" realizations of semantic choices from a given social situation. This is not the same as saying that these uses of language are divorced from their social context or from their communicative situation. The functioning of the lexico-grammar as an area of choice in its own right allows us to see more clearly how the interplay of "voices" described in the earlier analysis is fundamentally textual in nature. On a higher level of analysis, the ability for structure directly to encode a higher-order semiotic reflects on the play between transcendent and text immanent "voices" in the dialogic process. A transcendent reality in these terms can be seen as the direct realization in the lexico-grammar of a particular position ("voice") in the social semiotic which is inscribed in the discourse and which is not accessible to other "voices" in discourse at the text immanent level. At this level, a "voice" might be seen as the product of *textual* play rather than the encoding of a position in the socio-semiotic system. It is the interplay among these possibilities in the process of dialogic interaction that constitutes the practices whereby the relations between "appearance" and "reality" are continually formulated and re-formulated. I'd like to suggest that this activity at the lower level of lexico-grammatical realization feeds-back⁴ into higher-level (systemic) organization, so that voices in the dialogic process may be continually transformed or re-formulated in the ways we have seen in the preceding analysis. This

process of feedback in turn generates higher-order activities in the socio-semiotic system itself. This is important to make clear for it allows us to see that transformations of voices in the dialogic process suggest that notions of self and Other are constantly created and modified in an interactive orienting process. Actions behave *as if* there are roles which they continually create and modify in the dialogic process. In part, this arises because of the system's morphogenic tendency towards structural elaboration. It is an important corrective to any suggestion that roles in dialogic interaction correlate with fixed positions for the Subject in the socio-semiotic system. The residual psychologism in Bakhtin's own account of voices in Dostoevsky suggests that these voices are already given socio-semiotic positions corresponding to "real" psychological entities which have been transmitted through the "filtering" mechanism of the narrating process. The residual psychologism merely confirms some kind of independent reality for each voice. It fails to characterize the constitution of voices in textual practice itself (McHale 270).

I think we can begin to understand this a little more clearly if (taking our earlier analysis as an example) we keep in mind that the de-automatization involved in the dialogic process does not simply foreground the clash of antithetical positions among Subjects in discourse. What is also foregrounded is the nature of the dialogic process itself—the interactive process in which such antithetical positions are defined and constantly re-defined. If we take the view that *dialogue* structures are implicit in all modes of discourse including the narrative function, then it seems likely that it is the structure of dialogue that is de-automatized in the process of dialogic interaction. The text itself functions as the site of the productive activity in which voices are constituted. It is these textual strategies which are Other-oriented that are celebrated and foregrounded in dialogic discourse. Halliday's formulation showed us that dialogue structures are not functions of the individual or his/her position in the social system, but arise in the exchange of symbols. These symbols may both mediate in the exchange of goods-and-services, or themselves constitute the exchange of information. The point is that the resources in the linguistic system for creating dialogue are not merely referring to fixed, already defined roles in the social system: roles, social identities are actively produced in the discursive activities which constitute dialogue. Dialogic discourse in Bakhtin's sense is the foregrounding of the textual practices which construct and transform this dynamic interrelation of "voices" in discourse.

3.3 Register as Socio-semiotic Potential.

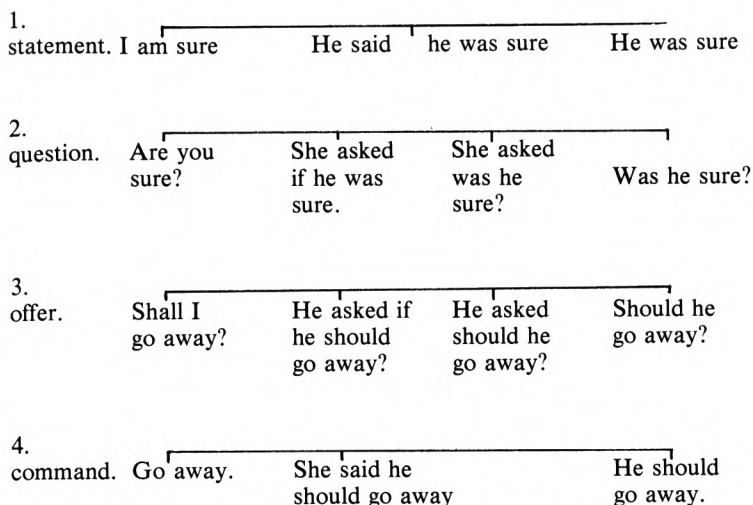
The concept of register as developed in Halliday (*Social Semiotic*) is a useful starting point for outlining how we might develop a semiotically based theory of the dialogic process in narrative discourse. Register refers to the kinds of semantic choices which are selected according to the situation-type. It corresponds very closely to Voloshinov's notion of *speech genres* (20-21). These registers (or discursive genres) define a normative clustering of lexico-grammatical, semantic, and contextual⁵ features according to the determinants of the situation-type. A particular type of register codifies the normative conditions under which particular types of discourse may be produced and transmitted as well as the structural features of a particular type of discourse. Register is a functional concept which is intermediate between the particular semantic options which are activated in a particular text according to the determinants of its situation and the locating of discursive types (registers) within the larger system of meaning configurations which constitute the socio-semiotic system. Register as a normative clustering of meaning features is a normative restriction of the more global meaning possibilities as they are coded at higher levels of systemic organization in the social system. The criterion of situation-type restricts these possibilities according to some normatively defined system of rules. These rules have a generic quality which is an essential condition for the recognition and re-production of text-types. This restriction at the generic level from among the higher-level meaning configurations is achieved by defining some piece of this hierarchy by contextualising it through its redundancy with a context-type. This restriction from the full range of meaning possibilities at higher levels in the system to a given situation-type is achieved by the mediating principle of the code. The full range of meaning options in a social system would appear to correspond to Foucault's (*L'Archéologie*) notion of discursive formations.

3.4 Register and the Formation of Subjects in Discourse.

The kinds of dialogue structures that Halliday has proposed may be taken as a normative codification of the genre (or register) of dialogue-

types, albeit in a highly schematized form. I should like to argue that the dialogic process in narrative discourse is a de-automatization of the semantic potential enshrined in this particular register. We have already seen how the structure of dialogue is determined by particular configurations of meaning in the socio-semiotic system. A normative codification of meanings as in the notion of register makes it possible to propose a general level of socio-semiotic norms which may be transformed or even transgressed at the lower-level of structural realization. As a generic concept a register frames sets of presuppositions which codify what may be said and how it may be said. The partial freeing of dialogic discourse in narrative from the generic determinants of dialogue means that transformations in the norm dialogue structure at the lexico-grammatical level effectively by-pass the semantic determinants of the norm register in order to engender a new range of meaning possibilities at the level of discourse. The de-automatization of the norm register of dialogue-types in the dialogic process is defined by the function accorded to a particular use of language in a particular social context. We need to be careful here that we do not simply ascribe a particular function to a given structure. This type of functional explanation arises when we try to identify the causal mechanisms that underlie linguistic structure according to criteria such as "communicative needs." The problem with this type of definition is that it fails to take sufficient account of the material and institutional conditions under which discourse is produced and transmitted. The problem with a functionalism founded on some notion like "communicative needs" is that the Subject is conceptualized as always occupying an already given external social position in relation to discursive formations. It cannot account for the ways in which the Subject is produced and transformed within specific discursive practices. The earlier analysis should have helped to show that the interplay of power relations among Subject positions in narrative is immanent in the formation of narrative discourse and in the articulation and transformation of the position(s) of Subjects in that discourse. At a very general level the following diagram will help to demonstrate the relations between norm dialogue-types as discussed earlier and the various transforms that may result to derive the structural correlates of the dialogic process in narrative discourse:

TRANSFORMS OF DIALOGUE TYPES.



CC is always the unmarked person: 'I' in offers and statements ('Giving')
 'You' in questions and commands ('Demanding')

CC is the marked person in free indirect discourse.

CC = centre of consciousness.

The main point of this diagram is to show how basic dialogue structures of the type exemplified earlier are semantically related to various transforms of these types. There is no attempt to suggest any formal (syntactic) criteria for deriving any of the transforms from their dialogue prototypes. The main point is that the various transforms from direct speech contain implicit dialogic structures.

4.0 Communication and Metacommunication.

4.1 Levels of Communication.

Following a suggestion in John Frow concerning the metasemiotic use of discourse, I should like to offer some further proposals concern-

ing the notion of levels of communication. Frow characterizes the metasemiotic function as “discourse with a reflexive relationship to the whole realm of meaning systems” (77). This concept implies some notion of levels of communication. Some proposals made by Bateson concerning the logical typing of messages make it possible to clarify how this notion of levels implies the notion of an hierarchy of contexts. In other words, no communication can be understood on the level at which it occurs because it is only at still higher-orders of contextualization that the communicative situation comes to be defined.

Voloshinov’s proposals concerning the uses and various transformations of reported speech indicate that there is a great deal to discover about the dynamics of social meaning systems by a close analysis of metasemiotic discourse. It seems likely that reported speech and its various transformations are the prototype of metasemiotic discourse (e.g. communication about another communication located at a different level). In other words, the addressor, what is spoken about, and the addressee in dialogic discourse are themselves constitutive of the metacommunicative situation by virtue of the immanently social and hierarchical relations in which these textual practices occur. It is also a type of discourse where the function of multiple levels of contextualization appears to be foregrounded. Higher-order contextualization here presupposes the concept of punctuation. I am using this term as it has been defined in Wilden. Punctuation implies levels of communication (and metacommunication) though it must be stressed that punctuation occurs at a relatively low order of systemic organization, i.e. at the level of text (message) itself. Voloshinov’s analysis of indirect discourse into the “referent-analyzing modification” and the “texture-analyzing function” (130-32) indicates how indirect discourse may be punctuated in different ways according to the degree of interpenetration between reported speech and reporting context. A very similar formulation is made by Bakhtin when he says: “The language of the novel is a system of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other” (Holquist 47). However, it seems that these two formulations refer to different levels of systemic organization. Voloshinov is here more concerned with the punctuation of the individual message, while Bakhtin is more concerned with higher-order framing operations in discourse according to such determinants as register (genre) which were considered earlier.

4.2 Metacommunication and Higher-order Contextualization.

Metalinguistic use of speech (or metasemiotic discourse) is usually formulated as being a communication about another communication as in Wilden. This type of formulation amounts to the initial stages of a contextualization hierarchy, but it doesn't go far enough "up" the hierarchy to show how these systemic processes are related across levels according to the principle of logical types. John Frow's formulation, which I discussed earlier, concerning metasemiotic discourse's "reflexive relationship to the whole realm of meaning systems" still does not recognize an essential ambiguity as far as levels of communication go that will need to be resolved at still higher orders of contextualization. According to Hjelmslev there is a formal similarity between what he terms a *connotative semiotic* and a *metasemiotic* (114). These are respectively defined as a semiotic "whose expression plane is a semiotic and a semiotic whose content plane is a semiotic." According to my understanding of the relation (R) between a *content* and its *expression*, these two planes are correlated by some realization rule(s) or code(s). This coded relation may be formalized as: E R C. Further, an expression (E') may codify the codification-of-an-expression-by-a-content, i.e. as in E' R (E R C). This would be a metasemiotic use of E'. This is no more than a mere formalism in very general terms so that we can begin to understand the need to resolve a pervasive polysemy ("meaning potential") at higher levels of contextualization. In order to suggest the hierarchical nature of the levels the following formalism will be adopted following the meta-slash notation (/) developed in the important work of both Bateson and Lemke:⁶ (E/C//E'/// . . .). In strictly formal terms this says that E and C are redundant with respect to each other when they occur in combination, and that E' and E/C are redundant with respect to each other when they are combined. This notion of *redundancy* is derived from the work of Lemke. Redundancy is a formal way of describing the patternings of meaningful relationships that constitute the socio-semiotic system. It is a way of specifying just what *types* of clusterings of lexico-grammatical, semantic, and contextual features are likely to co-occur in a specifiable situation-type. In this sense, it is probabilistic because it helps to "predict" from all the possible choices in the meaning system just what sorts of choices at different levels are likely to combine with each other.

Following this formalization let us suppose that E is an instance of indirect discourse and that RS is *reporting speech* and rs is *reported speech*. E is redundant with the redundancy between RS and rs, but RS and rs may be redundant with respect to each other in different ways (RS/rs//E . . .). In other words, as Voloshinov had already made clear they may combine as parts of a whole according to different principles. We need to push the analysis further up this hierarchy of contexts in order to find out what these principles are. Put in more formal terms, this means we need to know according to what principles E defines the redundancy between RS and rs. This comes about because, as we noted earlier, no communication can be defined at the level on which it occurs (Wilden 28). We can ask the question in what *ways* may RS and rs be redundant with respect to each other? In other words, what is the range of possible relationships between reporting and reported speech. This has a lot to do with the two types of modification discussed in Voloshinov and referred to earlier. In the first, the reporting speech governs the ideational organization of reported speech, but in the second it governs the interpersonal and textual organization of reported speech (Voloshinov 132-33). At this early stage of formalization, these distinctions represent very broad categorizations, indeed. At this stage of theoretical development, I would say that the various types of modification proposed by Voloshinov can be seen as different ways or principles (rules?) according to which reporting and reported speech may be combined. The central point is that these different ways by which RS may combine with rs in the context of E correspond to the different ways in which meta-semiotic properties and relations are predicated of metasemiotic discourse (cf. "modes of metalinguistic predication" in Lemke, 1979). These different modes of predication are themselves defined by further contextual and situational constraints. These "modes" are best seen as products of the situation-type, according to which, as already discussed, particular semantic and socio-semiotic options form configurations or codifications of meaning potential which comprise normative (hence generic) instructions for the production of the tokens of a given discourse-type. In turn, various registers (as socio-semiotic potential according to situation-type) are further contextualized by higher-level rules of use (pragmatics) and discursive formations. These further pragmatic rules must tell us something about the contexts and context-types which are relevant for a communication to be "about" another communication according to the various ways in

which RS and rs may be combined. The contextual hierarchy may be extended according to the following representation:

RS/rs//E///metasemiotic/////Pragmatic/////Situation/////Systems of Meaning
predication Rules Type Potential (Discursive Formations)

The fundamental point of this argument is that metacommunication may be about another communication in different ways which require further levels of contextualization.

5.0 Dialogic Discourse and Higher-order Systemic Activity.

5.1 Dialogic Discourse and Meaning Potential.

In an earlier section of this paper we have already seen how the dialogic process is concerned with creating alternatives or even antithetical semantic and ideological positions which are defined by the dialectical interplay among the constitutive voices. The concept of the multi-accented “word” in both Bakhtin and Voloshinov implies multiple, even contradictory value orientations which are implicit in the “word.” I should like to suggest that this function of dialogic discourse is explainable in semiotic terms if we maintain a clear enough theoretical distinction between meaning and meaning potential in a socio-semiotic system. Meaning potential seems very similar to Foucault’s notion of discursive formations which I referred to earlier. This notion refers to the organization of meanings at very high systemic levels in the socio-semiotic system. It is described as a potential because it can only become meaningful when contextualized according to some context-type. This suggests that at very high levels of semiotic organization meaning potential contributes to a rich diversity of “meaning potentials” which are not necessarily *entirely* eliminated by their contextualization at lower systemic levels. These discursive formations are deeply implicit in cultural practice at very high levels of contextualization in such a way that they pervade an entire cultural system. They are immanent in the social practices that

enact the cultural system of meanings. Meaning potential can never be entirely eliminated because each meaningful act may be a token of many different types, according to its codification as a function of register-types, and hence may be contextualized in many different (and contradictory) domains. I should like to propose that multi-accented (dialogic) discourse is a function of this more general semiotic tendency for polysemy at very high levels of systemic organization never to be entirely removed at lower levels of textual realization. This means that global patternings of meanings which are immanent in the organization of the cultural system at all levels can never be entirely reduced to a unique, determinate meaning in some local situation of occurrence or realization.

At the higher (more global) levels of systemic organization these discursive formations constitute an entire culture. The multiple, conflicting "voices" in dialogic discourse are the basis of a social process in which identity, status, and ideology among social groups may serve as a basis for conflict and change in the socio-semiotic system. This arises from a more general observation that a cultural system comprises an ordered system of codes which determine both the distribution of meanings in society as well as ownership and access to the means of production of social meanings (Frow 78).

5.2 Discourse Dynamics and Structural Change.

In an earlier part of this paper, I suggested the possibility of multi-accented, even contradictory "voices" in dialogic discourse. At the "lower" levels of structural realization these fundamentally contradictory interactions take place, as we have seen, through the process of de-automatization which may be said to bring about a condition of relative instability at any given level in the system. The process of communication and metacommunication across levels in the text ensures that dynamic instability at one level is integrated into the system as a whole, so that some principle of self-regulation is maintained. These processes of inter-level communication constitute regulatory processes that ensure through feedback mechanisms that the structural integrity of the larger system of which these dialogic processes are a part is maintained. It is conceivable that a normative

codification of meaning potential as in the concept of register might well be one level at which relative structural invariance is maintained. The dialogic process ensures that differences and conflicts in a state of continual dialectical interplay actually *constitute* the structure. Structural change occurs when these conflicts bring about a resolution or readjustment on some other level in the system. In these terms, it is, I think, possible to argue that structural change, while subject to normative (e.g. generic) regulatory principles at higher levels, may also react back on the system to bring about higher-level change. This indicates the possibility that normative concepts such as register or genre may themselves be subject to structural transformation.

As already suggested, the multiple, conflicting “voices” in dialogic discourse may well serve as a basis for conflict and change in the social system. I have earlier suggested that dialogue structures are implicit in dialogic discourse. This fact along with the multi-accented quality of dialogic discourse allows one to consider: what are the relevant alternatives according to which differing “voices” interact and combine in dialogic discourse? The question arises because of the nature of contextualizing relations and the restriction of meaning potential to a more local and hence functional polysemy. We need to ask questions such as the following: what are the relevant sets of alternative or variants from which “voices” are selected in order to create dialogic discourse; what are the possible combinations of “voices” in a dialogic structure; what are the contexts with which these structures may in turn combine?

These questions strongly imply that dialogic structures must be represented in terms of the relevant contexts that define these structures. This assumes that the system of relations that is constituted by the interacting “voices” obtains its dialogic *structure* because of contextualizing relations at a still higher order than the structure itself. These contradictory operations will ensure that the variability of the dialogic structure is less than the variability of the separate “voices” which constitute it. Perhaps conversely, this also seems to suggest the need to perceive the structure as “seen” from the point of view of the antithetical positions in dialogic discourse. In dialogic discourse the antithetic clash of rival “voices” has the potential for re-defining the relations among “voices,” for re-defining the interpretation of previous “voices,” or even the set of rules according to which the discourse is to be interpreted. In this kind of situation, we have truly entered a metacommunicative situation.

6.0 Conclusion.

The preceding proposals in this paper indicate a number of highly generalized strategies for understanding the processes of dialogic interaction which take place across levels in the narrative text. We have seen that the dialectical interplay of “voices” brings about a constant process of interpretation and transformation of these structures. To suggest that the processes of interlevel textual metacommunication constitute communication about a communication is misleading, for it neglects the function of intermediate levels of contextualization. More correctly, I believe we can speak of interpretative metarules which will let discourse participants know how (i.e. according to what criteria) a communication at one level may be contextualized in relation to the communication on which it comments. These rules will determine the appropriate contextual selections and combinations by means of which the interplay of “voices” is continually revealed (as in the polyphonic novel) to constitute the very conditions of textuality. The processes of dialogic interaction themselves constitute the material “reality” of the text. These “voices” cannot be reduced to the status of referential transparency without doing violence to the continual relativizing of the position of the Subject in discourse. The interaction of antithetical semantic and ideological orientations (“voices”) in dialogic discourse would appear to be a function of the way that different interactants in a culturally defined situation may interpret the culturally defined structures that mediate their relations according to different communicative metarules. These different modes of interpretation, perhaps corresponding to differing evaluative or ideological positions, suggest that there are as many complementary structures as there are “voices” that correspond to different roles in the system. This final point suggests the essentially transactional nature of all cultural phenomena. The dialogic principle shows that dialogue structures are implicit in the narrative function of discourse. It is only through participation in these structures that narrative discursive competence is developed. This notion of discursive competence implies that dialogic structures presuppose and construct notions of “self” and “other” in discourse and that this helps to produce or position the Subject within discursive practice.

NOTES

¹ The use of this classificatory system has been adapted from Brian Torode and David Silverman, *The Material Word: Some Theories of Language and its Limits*, 142-69.

² For a summary of these accounts, see Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse*.

³ For a fuller explanation of this term in systemic-functional linguistics see M.A.K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*, 188-89. According to this theory meanings immanent in the social system are instantiated in a social context. Halliday distinguishes three major functional systems of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. Each of these “macro-functions” constitutes the realization of meanings in the social situation. The components of the social situation to which these realizations correspond are: a “field” of social discourse (the social activity which is taking place); a “tenor” of social relationships among discourse participants; and a “mode” of discourse (the means by which meanings are enacted and exchanged).

⁴ More precisely, I have in mind the notion of “positive feedback” in systems theory. The morphogenic tendency of the system suggests an *increase* in the processes of structural growth and elaboration in the system.

⁵ These three terms are being used here as they are defined in systemic-functional linguistic theory. The lexico-grammar is conceptualized as the formal organization of language, i.e. the wording; semantics is here seen as meaning in terms of its function in the social system; context is the grouping of components of the social situation in order to realize a distinct semiotic situation.

⁶ Jay L. Lemke, “Action, Context, Meaning,” Department of Linguistics seminar, University of Sydney (1979). Informally, this type of notation describes the patterns or combinations or what goes with what in the system of meanings. In formal terms the meta-slash notation (/) says that E is redundant with C (i.e. E combines with C) and that the redundancy of E and C (i.e. E/C) is in turn redundant with E' (i.e. E/C combines with E'). The double-slash at the next order of relationship in the hierarchy refers to a “meta-redundancy relation”: it describes the way the redundancy of two terms (e.g. E/C) is in turn redundant with a further set of relationships (e.g. E') at a still “higher” level in the contextualization hierarchy.

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