ON THE STRUCTURE AND UNDERSTANDING OF POETIC OXYMORON*

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main thrusts of theories of poetic language, since the early works of the Russian formalists, has been the attempt to draw a distinguishing line between poetic and non-poetic language, that is, to define those characteristics of poetic language that make it "poetic," as opposed to "non-poetic."

It would seem reasonable to assume that theories of figurative language whose main concern is the investigation of figures of speech, try to distinguish between the poetic and non-poetic: between poetic and non-poetic metaphors, poetic and non-poetic oxymora etc. The fact is, however, that this question is relatively rarely addressed within theories of poetic language. Their main concern has been the discussion of problems such as the definition of figurative language and particular instances of figures of speech (metaphor, simile etc.) and their interpretation (cf. Black 1962 and Beardseley 1958, whose work makes up most of the very many books and papers on the subject). Among those which have addressed the poetic/non-poetic distinction, the most extensive treatment has been dedicated to the theory of metaphor. Generally, a distinction can be made between two different approaches to the distinction between poetic and non-poetic metaphors. The first assumes that the distinction between poetic and non-poetic metaphors is based on the criterion of "petrification."

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Whereas the petrified or "dead" metaphors are usually prevalent in non-poetic texts, it is rather the "living" metaphor that is prevalent in poetic texts.

The second approach relies on the distinction between various "understanding procedures" which are used in the comprehension of metaphors. Thus, for example, Culler (1976) claims that there are unique procedures which constitute what he calls "Poetic Competence," for the comprehension of poetic texts. These are distinguished from those involved in the comprehension of non-poetic texts. Another example can be found in Reinhart (1976) which distinguishes between two procedures involved in the comprehension of metaphor—focus interpretation vs. vehicle interpretation. She suggests that whereas the former procedure may be common both to the processing of poetic and non-poetic metaphor, it is the second procedure that is involved in understanding poetic metaphors.

Without considering the issue extensively, it is evident that both approaches share the assumption that what distinguishes poetic from non-poetic metaphor has nothing to do with the internal semantic structure of these two types of figures, but rather with their *use*. This common assumption suggests that, in principle, the same metaphor can be defined as a poetic metaphor in one context and as a non-poetic metaphor in another; or to put it differently, that external considerations (that is, external to the metaphor itself) determine whether or not it is a poetic metaphor. Consequently, the implication is that the poetic metaphor does not have a unique internal structure which distinguishes it from non-poetic metaphor. Extrapolating from this position to other figures of speech which are commonly held to be sample metaphors, such as the oxymoron, synesthesia, personification etc., it is commonly held that the same attempt to distinguish between the poetic and non-poetic figure obtains, namely, that the internal structure of poetic figure is not different from that of the non-poetic figure.

Such a position is one that we would agree to accept only as a last resort. The preferable theory (all other things being equal) is the one attempting to distinguish poetic from non-poetic figures in terms of an internal semantic structure, rather than in contextual terms. Only if we are convinced that there is no internal semantic structure of a given poetic figure which can be distinguished from the non-poetic figure in question, can we resort to the above solution.

In light of the above, the line of the argument to be developed in this paper can be outlined. Its central aim is to make a

first step towards the construction of a framework for handling the poetic/non-poetic distinction in terms of the *internal semantic structure* of the figure in question: the oxymoron. First, a distinction between two types of semantic structures will be suggested. Both of these can, in principle, be exploited by any oxymoron, i.e., the "direct" oxymoron vs. "indirect" oxymoron. Second, these two structures will be compared with respect to their frequency of use in a specific poetic corpus. This corpus consists of examples from Hebrew poetry as well as of several prototypical oxymora from English poetry. Comparing the frequency of use of the above "direct vs. indirect" oxymoron in our poetic corpus, it will be argued that it is rather the "indirect" oxymoron's semantic structure that is statistically dominant in the corpus, whereas the "direct" oxymoron's structure is statistically very infrequent. Since the "indirect" oxymoron is the most frequent in our poetic corpus, it may be characterized as the "poetic" oxymoron's structure, whereas the "direct" oxymoron will be characterized as the "non-poetic" oxymoron. Subsequently, an accounting for this difference in use will be suggested. The dominance of the "poetic" oxymoron structure within the poetic corpus can be accounted for by the more complex processing or understanding procedure(s) which this semantic structure requires compared to the other structure.

This methodology of distinguishing between the "poetic" and the "non-poetic" oxymoron should by no means be interpreted as implying that the non-poetic form characterizes the use of oxymora outside poetic texts, that is, in non-poetic discourse (although such a possibility is not excluded by the present argument). Rather, the label "non-poetic" simply means that its frequency in the poetic corpus is very low. However, the label "poetic oxymoron" means exactly what it says, that it is that semantic structure which is the dominant structure in the poetic corpus in question. Obviously, this is a more moderate claim than that which correlates the distinction between poetic and non-poetic structure with poetic and non-poetic language, and should, therefore, be considered as a first step towards the definitive solution of the problem.

2. THE SEMANTIC STRUCTURE OF THE POETIC OXYMORON

2.1. Semantic Features

Provided that our aim is to draw a distinction between the semantic structure of two types of oxymora (i.e., the "direct" vs. "indirect"), the starting point should be a definition of the object of research, the oxymoron.

Theories of poetic language usually define the oxymoron as

a figure of speech consisting of two elements (or members) which stand in "opposition," i.e., are antonymous to each other (cf. Preminger 1975, Leech 1969, inter alia). (For an entirely different approach cf. Hrushovski 1984.)[1] Since the relation of "opposition" is a semantic one between the meanings of two lexical items, let us consider briefly the way it is handled within a lexical semantic framework. One of the well-known semantic theories which has been developed in the last 15–20 years, is *Componential Analysis*. This theory postulates that meanings of lexical items which form a large and theoretically infinite set, are, in principle, reducible to a relatively small set of "atoms of meanings" called semantic features or components (cf. Lyons 1977, inter alia). These semantic features are conceptual units, the combination of which can define the "meaning" of a given lexical item. Thus, for example, the lexical item "man" is defined as a combination of semantic features: "... +animate, +adult, +male," whereas the lexical item "woman" is defined by the same semantic features, except that the sign "+" is replaced by "–" for the last feature ("male").

The main characteristic of this analysis is that the semantic features are structured, that is, they are not randomly listed, but rather are organized within an hierarchical structure in which some of the semantic features are higher than others. This hierarchical structuring is significant, since the semantic features of a given lexical item do not equally represent the meaning of that item. It is rather the lowest semantic feature(s), which is(are) the "distinctive" one(s) and bears most of the "semantic load" in that its function is to distinguish the lexical item in question from its neighboring item. Thus, what distinguishes "man" from "woman" is the lowest feature, i.e., the "+/– male" and not the other semantic features which are identical.

Two basic semantic concepts which emerge from this theory are significant for the following discussion: the *antonym* and the *hyponym*. Two terms are *antonyms* when they share all their semantic features save for a change in the "+/–" sign of their distinctive feature, e.g., "man"—"woman." A term is a *hyponym* of a given superordinate if its feature list includes another one which is its distinctive feature, in addition to all the semantic features of the superordinate term. Thus, the feature list of "bachelor" is derived from that of "man," namely, "+animate, +adult, +male," to which the feature "–married" is added. Such hierarchies are assumed to have some psychological reality, as indicated by experimental research (cf. Collins and Quillian 1972, Clark and Clark 1978, Malgady and Johnson 1980).[2]

1. An entirely different approach to the definition of metaphor which can also be applied to other figures of speech is developed in Hrushovski (1984). Hrushovski's main proposals rely on the assumption that notions like metaphor (and presumably the oxymoron, as well as other figures of speech) should be analyzed not as a linguistic units, but rather as patterns which belong to the "textual semantics" level.

The meanings of *antonym* and *hyponym* being understood, a distinction can be drawn between three semantic structures:

1. The "direct oxymoron" structure which consists of two terms which are antonyms, namely, whose only difference consists of a change in the "+/–" sign of their lowest, distinctive, feature, all others being identical.[3] Examples of this structure are "a feminine man," "living death" etc.

2. The "indirect oxymoron" structure in which one of its two terms is not the direct antonym of the other, but rather the *hyponym of its antonym.* Consider, for example, the phrase "the silence whistles" (taken from the Hebrew poet Nathan Altherman's *Summer Night*) which is usually considered by Israeli critics as a prototypical oxymoron in Hebrew poetry. Its two terms are "silence" and "whistle." The feature list of the first term,[4] "silence," can be defined as (this is only a partial list): "+noun, +sensual, –count, ... –sound." The

2. Another point should be added regarding the psychological reality of the "feature analysis." Various studies have raised arguments, supporting the "feature analysis" claim for psychological validity. For example, an impressive correlation was found (cf. Malgadi and Johnson 1980) between the number of features that two items share and the amount of similarity which subjects tended to find between these items. This point also pertains to the present paper in that it substantiates the validity of the use of such notions as "availability" and of "cognitive distance" which are central to the semantic structure of oxymora.

3. Such a definition of the opposition relation can account for both the following common intuitions as to the meaning relations between two opposite terms: a) The intuition that behind this opposition there is the largest possible similarity; this is explainable by the fact that two opposites share all their semantic features, save one. b) The intuition that despite the great similarity, the contrast between the opposed terms is the highest possible; this is accounted for by the fact that the "essence" of the "semantic load" is carried by the lowest semantic feature(s).

4. The following point, regarding the issue of the "first and second terms" of a given oxymoron, should be considered. "First/second term" are functional terms. The first term of a given oxymoron is the starting point of the analysis, i.e., it is the first term whose antonym is looked for. The method that has been used throughout the analysis took the "comment" or "vehicle" of the oxymoron (usually the adjective) as the first term, provided that it had a simple and straightforward antonym in the language, and the "topic" or "tenor" (usually the noun) as the second term. In those cases where the "comment"'s antonym was not lexically realized, or that there was no straightforward path to it, it was the adjective (the second term), which was considered as the second term. A case in point is the phrase "the silence whistles" in which the adjective "whistles" does not have a straightforward antonym, and therefore the noun "silence" was analyzed as the first term. However, in most of the samples analyzed in the paper, the first term does have a straightforward lexicalized antonym.

antonym of "silence" is lexically realized by the word "sound" whose feature list consists of the same features for "silence" save for the replacement of the "+" sign of the distinctive feature "silence" (namely "–sound") by the "–" sign. Note, however, that the second term of the oxymoron is not "sound" but its hyponym, i.e., "whistle"; the feature list of this latter term adds the feature "+sharpness" to those of "sound," and this addition turns "whistle" into a hyponym of "silence." Other examples from the Hebrew as well as English corpus are:

— "sacred garbage" (taken from the Israeli poet Gabriel Preil 1978). In this case the second term, "garbage," is a hyponym of the category "defile entities" which is the direct antonym of the first term "sacred."
— "cold fire" (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*). "Fire" is the hyponym rather than a direct antonym of the category "warm entities," which is the antonym of "cold."
— "bright smoke" (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*). In this case the second term "smoke" is the hyponym of "dim" which is the direct antonym of "bright."
— "sweet sorrow" (a typical oxymoron mentioned in Preminger 1975). Here the second term, "sorrow," is conceived of as an example (that is, a hyponym) of the category "bitter entities"; the term "bitter" is the antonym of the first term "sweet."
— "traitorous trueness" (Francis Thompson, *The Hound of Heaven*). Here, the second term, "trueness," is not the direct antonym of the first term antonym, "faithful," but rather its hyponym.

3. The "metaphor" structure, since it is, roughly, common to all metaphors. Here the two terms which comprise the phrase do not differ in the sign "+/–" of the distinctive feature, or in an additional feature, but in their "upper," that is, their "less" distinctive features. Thus, one of the differences between "silence" and "going" in the phrase "the silence goes" lies at the upper level of the feature list: a higher level feature of the term "going," "+movement" is not shared by the term "silence."

2.2. *The Semantic Structure of Poetic Oxymoron*

In order to find which of these three semantic structures characterizes the "poetic oxymoron," a random and large set containing 100 samples of oxymora collected from the writings of ten Israeli poets from the modern age of Hebrew poetry was examined.[5] They were judged by a number of native speakers as being samples of oxymora. Although this corpus seems relatively small to represent the "poetic phenomena," the following three points should be considered:

1. The samples were taken from poets who belong to two distinct periods of modern Hebrew poetry. Fifty samples were composed by poets of the Revival Period while the others belong to the Modern Period. The samples were, however, randomly chosen, to avoid contextual restriction or biases, be they of a particular text, poet, school of poets or of a given poetics. It can therefore be assumed that these samples are indicative of extensive use of the poetic oxymoron.

2. To support the conclusions drawn from this corpus, 43 well-known samples collected from three literary dictionaries (Cuddon 1977, Shipley 1953, and Leech's Guide to English Poetry [1969]) were examined. These samples are stated by the authors to be the most typical samples of the oxymoron used in poetry; moreover, as in Hebrew oxymora, these samples were not restricted to a specific poet, poetics, or period. These characteristics reduce the risk of drawing too general conclusions from a small set of data. It should be emphasized in advance that the general tendencies revealed by the Hebrew corpus are found also in the small corpus of English samples.[6]

3. The analysis presented here indicates the *dominance* of a certain structure of the oxymoron in our corpus; it does not impose a dichotomy between the poetic and non-poetic oxymoron, since the possibility of what might be characterized as a "non-poetic" oxymoron appearing in a "poetic" text is by no means precluded. Accordingly, the conclusions to be drawn from this analysis should not be viewed as definitive or exhaustive, but rather as preliminary and initial indications in support of a general direction of research still in progress.

This paper aims at drawing general parameters by means of which the structure of the oxymoron should be described, regardless of its specific context of appearance. A more detailed study will have to examine how a specific context, e.g.,

5. The Israeli poets from whom the samples were taken are: H. Bialik, David Fogel, Ya'acov Steinberg, Ya'acov Fichman and Ester Raab who belong to the Revival Period and Nathan Altherman, Yocheved Bat-Miriam, Alexander Penn, Gabriel Preil and Leah Goldberg who belong to the Modern Period.

6. Although there are certain differences between the Hebrew and English data, the latter reveal the same tendencies as the former. These tendecies are even more impressive considering the fact that the authors of the dictionaries from which these samples were taken, define the oxymoron as consisting of *antonyms*. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that their selection of typical oxymora was guided, *a priori*, by the tendency to look for examples which generally confirm their definition.

a given school of poetry, would determine the use of these parameters.

The main finding from the data was the following: contrary to what might be expected, only 16% of the oxymora in our corpus were of the "direct" structure type, namely, that which combines two antonyms. The most frequent structure was the "indirect," namely that in which the second term is the hyponym of the first term's antonym, which characterizes 84% of the corpus.

3. A STRUCTURAL-COGNITIVE ACCOUNT FOR THE SEMANTIC STRUCTURE OF THE "POETIC OXYMORON": THE TWO CONSTRAINTS

3.1. The Problem

The problem is how to account for the fact that of the three possible semantic structures, it is the "indirect oxymoron" that is prevalent in the poetic corpus.

I will propose a general explanation for this phenomenon which satisfies two (sub)questions: 1. Why is the "indirect" oxymoron more frequent than the "direct" oxymoron? 2. Why is the "indirect" oxymoron more frequent than the metaphor?

It will be argued that these two questions can be answered by the fact that the "indirect" oxymoron structure (rather than the other two structures) meets two constraints: 1. It is conceived of as an oxymoron (and not as a metaphor or as another figure of speech). 2. Among the possible structures which are conceived of as oxymora, it is the structure which requires the most complicated processing.

The first constraint refers to the fact that the "indirect" oxymoron is an *oxymoron*, and it answers the second (sub)-question by excluding the third structure (the metaphor) from those possible in an oxymoron. Obviously, only the other two structures (the "direct" and "indirect" oxymoron) meet the first constraint.

The second constraint pertains to the fact that the "indirect" oxymoron is *poetic*, which in this context means that it requires complicated processing. The idea of equating complexity of processing with "poeticality" is commonly shared by theories of the poetic text, and its roots can be located in the early works of the Russian formalists. Thus, the "indirect" oxymoron rather than the "direct" oxymoron meets the second constraint since, as will be demonstrated below, it is the former that needs a more complicated processing. Hence, this constraint answers the first (sub)question formulated above.

To understand the notion "complexity of processing" certain cognitive considerations should be taken into account.

3.2. Some Cognitive Considerations: the "Availability Scale"

The association task is one of the main techniques used by psychologists in order to obtain information concerning the storage of lexical information in semantic memory. A subject is presented with a stimulus word and is required to say the first thing that comes to mind. His response is limited to a single word (cf. Clark 1977). The relevance of these association tasks to the present paper is that they enable us to construct the semantic relationship between lexical items on a scale of "relatedness," based on their cognitive representation in semantic memory. Accordingly, it can be argued that the higher the "availability" of a given response, "b," in the context of stimulus "a," namely, the probability of "b" being produced as a response to a stimulus word "a," the "smaller" the "cognitive distance" between these two words in semantic memory.[7]

According to Clark's paper, the principle that underlies a large number of responses produced by subjects can be defined as the "simplicity of production rule":

"Paradigmatic responses,[7] therefore, appear to be produced by a fairly homogeneous set of rules, perhaps ultimately by one general rule. This simplicity of production rule might be stated as follows: 'Perform the least change on the lowest feature, with the restriction that the result must correspond to an English word.' Expanded, this rule defines 'least change' in such a way that the operations of (1) changing the sign of a feature, (2) deleting a feature, and (3) adding a feature, are of increasing difficulty" (Clark 1970, pp. 280–281).[8]

7. Generally, Clark classifies the responses into two types, namely, paradigmatic vs. syntagmatic responses. The former are those in which the output word maintains the syntactic category of the stimulus (for example, "woman" which is a noun as a response to "man," also a noun), whereas the latter involve a change in the syntactic category (for example, the response "nice" to the stimulus "man"). In the present paper however, only the principles underlying the paradigmatic responses are referred to because the majority of the responses fell into this category.

8. The following quotation summarizes the general characteristics of the linguistic and cognitive assumptions underlying the various semantic theories based on the idea of "decomposition," i.e., the idea that a meaning of a lexical item can be decomposed into semantic primitives: "In general ... Literalist approaches (i.e. those based on the decomposition assumption—Yeshayahu Shen) involve the following core claims (whose precise nature varies with the particular model): Primitive elements (e.g., features, concepts, propositions) are said to exist in memory—the elements postulate. Words are representable in memory as a static collection (i.e., a dictionary) of elements—the dictionary postulate. The elements are related in terms of links or paths bearing labels describing the nature of the relationship (e.g., case relation, part-whole) and varying in their

The relationships between the stimulus and response in the association enable us to distinguish between three options, each of which represents an increasingly complicated processing procedure. The least complicated in the "complexity scale" is the changing in the sign of the feature. The next is the deletion of a feature, and the most complicated option is the addition of a feature. Marshall's theory (Marshall 1969) can explain this scale, since it shows that it is easier to delete a semantic feature than to add one because there is only one candidate for the deletion, i.e., the distinctive feature, whereas there are several candidates for addition. Thus, the construction of "animal" from "dog" requires a deletion of only that feature which distinguishes dogs from other animals, whereas the construction from "animal" to "dog" is more complicated because there are several potential responses (dog, cat, cow, horse etc.).

These procedures are characterized by being based on one "processing move" (a change in the sign, a deletion or an addition of a semantic feature). Analyzing the data reported in Clark and Clark (1977) it is possible to add another option to these three: the most complicated one, namely, that one based on two processing moves (such an option is not described by the authors). In such a case, in order to construct the response out of its stimulus, the speaker changes the stimulus term from "+" to "–," or vice versa, yielding a list of semantic features to which he makes an addition or a deletion. For instance, if one moves from the stimulus "man" to the response "girl," one uses the above option: first, the sign of the lowest feature of "man," i.e., "+male" is changed into "–male" producing the distinctive feature of "woman"; then an additional lowest feature is produced: "–adult," which is the distinctive feature of "girl." As the data clearly indicate, the least frequently occurring option is the fourth one. Thus, in the case of the stimulus "man," the response "girl" occurs only in 3% of the total sum, whereas "boy" occurs in 8% and "woman" in 62% (this order

directionality—the link postulate. Words that are semantically similar are "closer together" in memory than are disjoint words, that is, distance is a direct junction of elements overlap—the distance postulate. The labels or descriptions on the paths place restrictions upon possible element combinations—the restriction postulate. Elements combine in a compositional, non-Gestalt manner—the compositionality postulate. Remembering constitutes an attempt to match input elements or element structure with those already stored; stored elements are usually content-addressable, and matching is a matter of compatibility of input element structure with memory element structure—the matching postulate. Outputs (recall, true-false judgments, etc.) reflect knowledge as a verification process— the verification postulate (the ultimate form of the verification view is procedural semantics which replaces the proposition as the basic element or sense of a linguistic unit, with mental procedures for deciding when the unit applies to an event ...)" (p. 129).

is maintained in other examples used in the association task reported by Clark [1977]).

Having obtained the above results we may establish the following "availability scale" of a given lexical item in the context of another: *the most available is the antonym, the second degree of availability is assigned to the superordinate, the third to hyponym, and the fourth to the antonym plus superordinate (or hyponym).*

3.3. Processing Complexity

Let us now turn from these cognitive aspects of processing lexical items to our initial purpose, the construction of a theory that will explain how an oxymoron, that is, a phrase which combines two lexical items, is processed. In order to incorporate the above "availability" scale into a theory of the processing of figures of speech, an additional assumption is required, according to which such processing is based on a "cognitive search" wherein the processor attempts to locate in his "semantic memory" the semantic features shared by both. Having in mind the "availability" scale we may assume that the complexity of processing a phrase which consists of two terms, depends on the "availability" of one of the terms in the context of the other.

The three semantic structures previously discussed can be ranked with respect to their processing complexity:

1. The least complicated processing is required by the "direct" oxymoron, namely, that structure which consists of two antonyms. The reason for this is that in the context of a given term, the most available, and therefore the term which requires the least effort of "cognitive search," is its antonym.

2. The next degree of "complexity" is required by the "indirect" oxymoron, in which the second term is the hyponym of the first term's antonym. This hyponym is of a lower availability in the context of the first term, since it is the antonym itself which is of the highest availability.

3. The most complicated processing is required by the "metaphor" structure, where the second term is the least available in the context of the first one. A case in point is the phrase "a dog-like man" which presents a "metaphor" structure (the difference between simile and metaphor is of no relevance to this case), in which the meaning of the second term (i.e., "dog," in the phrase "dog-like") differs from the meaning of the first term not only in its lowest, i.e., distinctive, feature, but also in the higher ones on its hierarchical list, such as "+/–human."

We are now in a position to return to the initial constraints

we imposed. Because it is not an oxymoron structure, the "metaphor" structure is excluded by the first constraint. The complementary (second) constraint required that from among the other two structures the "poetic" oxymoron should have the most complicated structure to process. Clearly, among the first two structures it is the "indirect" oxymoron which is more complicated to process. In sum, the "indirect" oxymoron is the only structure which meets both constraints, being the most complicated structure to process which can still be considered as an oxymoron.

4. THE PROTOTYPE: ANOTHER SCALE OF PROCESSING COMPLEXITY

4.0. An Introduction

Having outlined the characteristics of the poetic oxymoron in terms of the cognitive and structural constraints which determine its specific semantic structure, we still face the following. It will be recalled that it was postulated that the semantic structure of the poetic oxymoron is characterized as one in which one of the opposed terms is a hyponym of the antonym of the other term. A given superordinate category, however, usually dominates more than one hyponym (or subordinate term); thus, for example, the superordinate category "sound" has several subordinate members which are specific types of sounds, such as "cry," "whistle," "shouting" etc. In other words, the semantic structure of the poetic oxymoron leaves the producer of a given oxymoron a choice among a range of alternatives as to the actual hyponym in the position of the second term.

In order to complete the description of the semantic structure of the poetic oxymoron, we shall have to consider this second aspect of its semantic structure. Since such a description involves a choice between hyponyms, the crucial question is whether this choice is regulated by systematic tendencies. In other words, can some constraint be identified and imposed on the semantic structure of the poetic oxymoron, thus specifying its form? In the following sections this issue is addressed.

4.1. The Poetic Oxymoron and the Notion of the Prototype

The structural regularities to be described, require some cognitive considerations of the notion of the "prototype" taken from Rosch's theory (1978).

Against the traditional approaches to categorical organization in memory (cf. Collins and Quillian 1972), Rosch argues that the members dominated by a given superordinate category are not equally stored in memory: some members are the

"prototype," that is, they are, relative to other members, "good examplars" of the whole set of category members. Consider, for example, the superordinate category "furniture" and the members that comprise this category, e.g. "chair," "table," "footstool," "rug" and "curtain." These members cannot be considered as equal representatives or examplars of the superordinate category: whereas table and chair are considered to be "good," the footstool is a relatively "medium" examplar, and rug and curtain are "very poor" examplars of the superordinate category. These "very poor" examplars are considered as standing on the fuzzy border line which distinguishes the category in question from its neighbors, and sometimes they are not even considered as included within the category in question (cf. Cohen and Murphy 1984, a paper discussing aspects of ranking degrees of typicality or prototypicality of category members according to various scales).[9] Another example is the category "bird" of which "chicken" is a rather poor example; it is argued (see Rosch and Mervis 1975) that some speakers will hardly identify this poor example as a member of the category "bird." (The importance of this fact will be specified in the subsequent discussion.)

The characteristic of the prototype most relevant to our discussion, is its high "availability" in the context of its superordinate category (see Rosch 1978); (henceforth the term "prototype" will refer to the "good" examplar of a given category). Thus, subjects who were given a category name and then asked to provide examples of it, tended to respond with the prototypes rather than the poorer examples, which indicates the higher availability of prototypes in comparison with other members of the category. It may be argued that the "cognitive distance" between a given term and its superordinate category depends on the prototypicality of the former in the context of the latter: the cognitive distance (and hence the processing complexity) decreases as the degree of prototypicality increases.

Returning to our initial consideration regarding the semantic structure of the poetic oxymoron, the foregoing description leads to the construction of another hierarchy in which various (sub)types of "poetic" oxymora can be distinguished according to their processing complexity. We have defined the "poetic" oxymoron as consisting of two terms, the second of

9. Mervis and Rosch (1981) characterize the "goodness" of a given examplar relative to the amount of features that it shares with the other members of the set. Thus, the "prototype" is that member in a given set that shares the maximal number of features with the other members in that set, whereas the "poor" examplar shares a relatively small amount of these features.

which is the hyponym of the first one's antonym. Having the notion of prototypicality in mind, it may be assumed that hyponyms differ in their typicality with respect to their superordinate category.

Three general types of "poetic" (or "indirect") oxymora can be distinguished according to processing complexity.

1. The *unmarked structure*, which is typical of those poetic oxymora in which the hyponym of the antonym of the first term is a prototypical example of the superordinate category. The poetic oxymoron "the silence cries" illustrates this type since the hyponym "cries," the second term, is a prototypical example of its superordinate category "sound," the first term's antonym. A further example is "cold fire" in which "fire," the second term, is a prototypical example of the category "hot" which is the first term's antonym. Due to the highest availability of its hyponym, this structure requires the lowest degree of processing complexity in comparison to the two types below.

2. The *medium structure* requires more complex processing where the hyponym is a "medium" example of the superordinate category, namely, all the examples that are between the prototype pole, on the one hand, and the "very bad examplar" pole, on the other. A case in point is the oxymoron "the silence whistles" in which the hyponym "whistles" is conceived of as a "medium" example of the superordinate category "sound." (The intuitive criteria of ranking a given hyponym as a "medium" example is the question whether better and poorer examples for the category "sound" can be found. Thus, in the case of "whistle" it is reasonable to assume that some "sounds" are better examples of the category "sound," e.g. "cry" and "shout" while others are poorer, e.g., "sigh"; according to the above intuitive criteria, we may classify "whistle" as a "medium" example of the category "sound." Other examples from our corpus are:

— "sacred garbage." In this case the antonym of the adjective "sacred" is something like "defiled" or "impure" (in the religious sense); the second term "garbage" is a "medium" example of "defiled."
— "bright smoke." The noun "smoke" represents a "medium" example of the category "dim" which is the antonym of "bright."
— "sweet sorrow." The noun "sorrow" represents a "medium" example of the category "bitterness."
— "traitorous trueness." The noun "trueness" represents a "medium" example of "faithfulness."

3. The *marked structure*, the most complex structure to process, is one in which the hyponym is a "very bad examplar" of its superordinate category, namely, that there is no poorer example to its superordinate category, or that it is at least very difficult to find one. Thus, in the phrase "the silence sighs," the hyponym "sighs" is a very bad example of the category "sound." Another example taken from our corpus is the oxymoron "the shining (or glamorous) suffering" (taken from Bat-Miriam 1972). In this case the first term is "shining" or "glamorous" which is supposed to be the hyponym of "delight" or "pleasure," the antonym of "suffering." Note, however, that "glamorous" is a very poor example (or even a non-member) of the category "delight." (All the typicality judgments were provided by native Hebrew speakers who were asked to rank these samples.)

On the basis of this scale, those oxymora which were defined as consisting of an "indirect" oxymoron structure were examined. The main finding was that the "medium case" type structure is prevalent in the corpus examined, whereas a relatively small amount of the other two possible structures, i.e. the "marked" and the "unmarked," were found. Out of a total sum of 85 "indirect" oxymora, 57 (67%) were of the "medium case" type, 19 (22%) were of a structure which can be ranked as unmarked, and 9 (11%) were of a typical "marked" structure.

4.2. An Account for the Hyponym-superordinate Relations in the Poetic Oxymoron

These findings relative to hyponyn-superordinate relations can be accounted for by the fact that the "medium" structure is the only one which meets the two constraints described earlier: 1. It is conceived of as an oxymoron and not as a metaphor. 2. Among the possible structures which are conceived of as oxymora it is the one which requires the most complicated processing.

Note that the first constraint is met only by the first two structures but not by the third, "marked" structure. The reason is that in the case of the "marked" structure, the hyponym stands on the fuzzy border line of the superordinate category, yielding a structure which in turn stands between oxymora and metaphors, and in any case it cannot be conceived of unequivocally as an oxymoron. Support for this claim was found by asking five native speakers of Hebrew for two independent judgments: 1. Whether a given phrase, e.g., "the silence sighs" or "the glamorous suffering," is an oxymoron or a

metaphor, and 2. Whether the hyponym, e.g., "sigh," and "glamorous" respectively, can be considered a member of the superordinate category i.e., "sound" and "delight."

The results indicated a strong correlation between speakers' identification of a given phrase as an oxymoron and their judgment as to whether the hyponym in question is or is not included in the prototypicality scale. Thus, it was found that: 1. The three speakers who judged the hyponym in question as something which is "between a very poor example and a non-member of the category" or that is totally excluded as a possible member of the above category, were those who rejected the definition of the entire phrase as an oxymoron and judged it to be a metaphor; and 2. The two speakers who placed it as a poor member within the above category, defined "the shining (glamorous) suffering" as "something between an oxymoron and non-oxymoron"; they did not see it as an oxymoron *per se*. (Typically, it took them more reaction time to respond to the above question than in other cases in which they were asked to determine whether a given phrase was an oxymoron.) In addition to the data presented in Rosch's work, these provisional and initial findings provide some support to the claim that the "bad examplar" stands on the border line between the given category and another.

These findings support our claim that the "marked" structure stands on the border line between oxymoron and metaphor and that it does not therefore meet the first constraint which requires it to be unequivocally seen as an oxymoron.

As for the second constraint, namely, the requirement that the oxymoron in question be cognitively the most complicated structure, it is evident that among the first and second structures, i.e., those which meet the first constraint, it is rather the "medium" structure which meets it, because, as was previously explained, it requires the more complicated processing.

Our main finding, namely, that within the set of poetic oxymora in our corpus, it is the "medium case" which is of the highest frequency of occurrence, is, therefore, accounted for by our two constraints: 1. The "medium" structure requires the most complicated processing among those structures and, 2. It can be unreservedly conceived of as a "poetic" oxymoron.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The general picture outlined in this paper suggests that the semantic structure of the poetic oxymoron is a structure which can be characterized on two levels of analysis: 1. On the first

(the relations between the two explicitly stated terms of the oxymoron), it is based on "indirect antonymous" relations between the two terms, i.e., a structure in which the second term is the hyponym of the antonym of the first term (and not its direct antonym). 2. On the second level (the relations between the hyponym and the constructed antonym) it is characterized by the fact that the hyponym is the "medium example" of the constructed antonym. In order to account for these structural characteristics, I have suggested, for both levels of analysis, that there are two constraints which are imposed on the semantic structure of the poetic oxymoron.

The two constraints, the reasons for their existence, as well as the way in which they are integrated into the framework of literary theory, should by now be evident. The combination of both constraints implies that the poetic oxymoron is that which requires the most complicated processing possible within the limits of that figure of speech, i.e. that the phrase in question can still be counted as oxymoron. The reason for these constraints is based on the idea, well known in literary theory, that the poetic phenomenon (in our case the poetic figure of speech) requires a more complex processing or understanding procedure than non-poetic linguistic phenomena. Thus, among those structures that can be counted as oxymoron structures, the most prevalent is that which requires the most complicated processing.

The starting point of this paper was an attempt to distinguish between poetic and non-poetic oxymora in terms of their internal semantic structure. It may be stated that this attempt has led us not only to the conclusion that a characterization of the semantic structure of the poetic oxymoron is indeed possible, but also that the high frequency of this structure can be motivated by the very attempt of the poetic utterance to complicate its comprehension and processing. This paper should be viewed as a manifestation, based on advances in semantic and psycholinguistic theory, of the well-known tenet of literary theory that views the poetic utterance as one which aims to impose various complications and difficulties on the reader throughout the comprehension process.

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