

Language as Literature: Action, Character, and Plot in Conversation

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[DRAFT, PLEASE DON'T QUOTE]

Abstract. There are several linguistic phenomena that, when examined closely, give evidence that people speak through characters, much like authors of literary works do, in everyday discourse. However, most approaches in linguistics and in the philosophy of language leave little theoretical room for the appearance of characters in discourse. In particular, there is no linguistic criterion found to date, which can mark precisely what stretch of discourse within an utterance belongs to a character, and to which character. And yet, without at least tentatively marking the division of labor between the different characters in an utterance, it is absolutely impossible to arrive at an acceptable interpretation of it. As an alternative, I propose to take character use seriously, as an essential feature of discourse in general, a feature speakers and listeners actively seek out in utterances. I offer a simple typology of actions in discourse that draws on this understanding, and demonstrate its usefulness for the analysis of a conversation transcript.

Keywords: action; dialogue; literariness; meaning; polyphony.

I hear *voices* in everything and dialogic relations among them.

Bakhtin (1986x, 169)

It is commonplace to approach literature as a specific form of language use, applying to it the tools and categories of linguistics. More recently, literature has also been studied from a cognitive perspective (e.g., refs.). In this chapter, however, I will follow the reverse of these trajectories. That is, I will be considering language (and, by implication, cognition) in literary terms. More specifically, I will be looking at the use of *characters* in ordinary language, and at the attendant literary categories of action and plot. Below, I will be bringing some (admittedly partial) evidence to support the claim that whatever it is that makes it possible for us to entertain characters in fiction belongs to the cognitive and social infrastructure of language.

Works of fiction have *characters*, who perform *actions*, which make up the *plot* of the story. In this paper, I will adduce evidence to show that character, action, and plot are also relevant to utterances in everyday language. Moreover, this fact potentially has significant implications for natural language semantics.

If there is one feature that is the hallmark of literature, or rather of fiction, it is the use of *characters*. Literary works tell us about the lives, words, and actions of these fictional individuals. Moreover, we are not only told *about* what characters say and do, but actually *hear* them speak. But character use is not limited to literary works. Indeed, it is ubiquitous in all forms of discourse. There are several linguistic phenomena that, when examined closely, give evidence that people speak through characters, much like authors of literary works do, in everyday talk.

Such a “literary” approach to language and cognition is, in a sense, an established tradition in Cognitive Linguistics. The most famous case in point is the extensive work on conceptual metaphor (following Lakoff and Johnson 1980), where the poetic category of metaphor is extended well beyond poetics and given a role in accounting for cognitive processes and processes of linguistic change.

While this work on metaphor (and see also the work on metonymy in ref., among others) focuses on poetic categories, my argument here will concern categories associated with prose fiction, and so with the handling of personal perspectives, not just concepts. In this I will also be relying on work in Cognitive Linguistics—particularly work on intersubjectivity in grammar (Verhagen 2005) and on fictive interaction (Pascual 2002; Pascual 2014; Pascual and Sandler 2015).

Now, these literary features of ordinary language are an interesting phenomenon to examine, to be sure, but my focus on them here has ulterior motives. Namely, I want to show that examining ordinary talk as having a plot, with characters performing actions, helps substantiate a general approach to linguistic meaning (a version of radical enactivism), which grounds meaning in action and interaction. As I will explain in more detail below, a “literary” perspective on language, along the lines discussed in this paper, allows to extend an action-based account of the meaning of full linguistic utterances to also cover utterances’ *content*.

In what follows, I will first recount some of the extant evidence for the presence of plot and characters in ordinary language (section 1). I will then present the conception of linguistic meaning that this evidence supports (section 2). In section 3, I will discuss the notions of action, character, and plot in greater depth, and offer a preliminary analytical apparatus for applying them to the analysis of utterances. This apparatus will be put to use in section 4, following which, in the concluding section, I will discuss some of the possible consequences of the whole exercise.

1. Evidence from Cognitive Linguistics

Consider the following fragment from a conversation transcript:

(1) SBC035: 193.319–210.246¹

GAIL: Yeah you have to go,
[you have to go <X out and visit and then X>].
PATTY: [you feel like,
.. hey I] like this place
I think I could belong,
or you think,
(H) .. I don't I don't feel [comfortable here.
GAIL: [I don't feel comfortable here].
PATTY: (H)] And that's what has to be your final goal.
STEPHANIE: Oh yeah,
I know [that].
PATTY: [A place] that has what you want,
but you feel good a[bout it].
STEPHANIE: [But],
PATTY: You walk on campus and you think,
hey there's something about this [place,
MAUREEN: [<X I'll X> dump this outside],
PATTY: (H) that,
.. that] speaks to me,

Several things are being said and done in this conversation. On the surface level, Gail, Patty, and Stephanie are talking to one another. From the context of this fragment we can also tell that Gail and Patty are giving Stephanie advice on how to choose a college to study in. This is what they are *doing* here. But Gail, Patty, and Stephanie are not the only ones doing things, and not the only ones talking, or at least, what they are saying and doing as participants in the recorded conversation is not the only thing said and done there. Thus, when Patty says “You walk on campus,” she addresses Stephanie, who is not walking and is not on campus. The words “hey, I like this place” and “I don’t feel comfortable here” are uttered by Patty, but Patty is not the speaking “I.” And in the words: “hey there’s something about this place that, that speaks to me,” we have, again, Patty speaking, but she is not the “me” to whom that “something” speaks, let alone the one

¹ Transcripts marked SBC are taken from the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (Du Bois and Englebretson 2004; 2005). The transcription conventions are as used in the corpus (and described in its annotations file), with slight simplification. Lines in the transcript correspond to intonation units (Chafe 1993). Other common symbols are: “@” (laughter), “=” (prolonged syllable), “(H),” and “(Hx)” (audible inhaling and exhaling respectively). Several dots indicate a pause, proportional in length to the number of dots. Square brackets indicate overlapping talk and angular brackets indicate voice quality (e.g. <@ ... @> for laughing while speaking). The heading includes the filename and the location of the cited segment in the audio file.

that speaks to that “me.” Patty’s and Gail’s utterances thus appear to have a *plot* telling us about *characters* that perform *actions* (and also *showing* us such actions being performed).

Now, this point may appear trivial. After all, even the most overused example sentences (“Jim hit Bob”), under the most standard semantic analysis, feature actors (Jim) and actions (hitting Bob) that are distinct from the current speaker and the action (asserting) performed by her. Why use all that literary jargon to describe this? The reason these literary terms are useful is that they cover and generalize across much more than standard grammar-school syntax and semantics would allow. There is a rich body of recent research, especially in cognitive linguistics that shows evidence of plot, action, and character being relevant to a great variety of linguistic phenomena.

[Integrate from this point on]

One example is mimicry. Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen (1996), examining the prosodic differences between quotation and mimicry in conversation, found that in mimicry, the quoted words are not prosodically integrated into the speaker’s utterance, because the speaker tries to retain the absolute pitch of the quoted words. Thus the person being mimicked becomes a *character* which appears in the speaker’s talk.

Next, in their analysis of privative adjectives, such as “fake,” Seana Coulson and Gilles Fauconier (1999) found that understanding them requires implicitly postulating a character. To call some object “a fake gun” (their example), is, on the one hand, to claim that it is not really a gun, but on the other hand, to envision *somebody* who is fooled to believe it is.

Or consider the analysis of (sentential) negation proposed by Arie Verhagen (2005). According to Verhagen, a sentence such as “Mary is not happy” negates not merely a proposition, but an actual view attributed to a character (or to an “onstage conceptualizer,” as cognitive linguists sometimes call it). We actually entertain and consider the negated claim as something somebody thinks. To illustrate the point (Verhagen 2005: 31), in the sentence: “Mary is not happy. On the

contrary, she's depressed," the connector "on the contrary" denies not the proposition that Mary is *not* happy, but the view that she *is* happy.

It would be weird for me to say something like: "Mary is sad. On the contrary, she's depressed," just as it would be weird if I said: "Mary is happy. On the contrary, she's depressed." But if *someone else* says: "Mary is happy," then it makes perfect sense for me to *reply* by saying "On the contrary, she's depressed." Thus the negation in "Mary is not happy" denies a claim attributed to a character.

Of course, the use of characters in everyday discourse does not necessarily require sophisticated analysis to notice. It often appears right on the surface. A broad category of such linguistic phenomena was described and analyzed by Esther Pascual (2002; 2006; 2014) under the heading of "fictive interaction." Fictive interaction happens when a speaker quotes a fictive, imagined, utterance. This happens all the time in mundane discourse, and serves a broad variety of discourse functions. For example, fictive interaction is used by speakers to refer to entities that are not immediately accessible in their environment (Sandler, 2012).

Thus, in Transcript 1, you see Patty and Gail using fictive interaction to refer to various emotional states: "hey, I like this place," "I think I can belong," "hey, there's something about this place," or "I don't feel comfortable here"—these are all emotional reactions *attributed to Stephanie as a character*. Fictive Interaction here makes it possible for Patty and Gail to pinpoint the exact emotional states they have in mind, with far greater precision than our usual vocabulary of emotion labels would allow.

2. Theoretical Assumptions

As I noted above, there is a general conception the nature of meaning, and, by implication, of both language and cognition, that underlies the sort of framework I am outlining in this paper, a conception within which an analysis of utterances as containing plots with acting characters makes

sense. The central pillars of this conception are that meaning inherently belongs to *actions*, involves *simulation* or *reenactment*, and that *intersubjectivity* is indispensable to it. Let me briefly discuss these theoretical assumptions, and some of their consequences, which will be relevant to the discussion later on.

Action Speaks Louder than Words

A few years back, I travelled to Finland for a conference, and, while taking a bus from the Helsinki airport, witnessed the following scene: at one of the stops along the way, a lady with a child got off the bus. The driver came out with them. He opened one of the luggage compartments of the bus. Both he and the woman looked inside. Then he closed it. Then opened another compartment. Then the third. The expressions on their faces grew perplexed. Then the driver opened the first compartment again, looked at a different spot in it, and took out a bag, laughing. Now, all that time they spoke to each other in Finnish—a language I literally don't know a single word in—but I did not need to understand any words at all. What was going on was perfectly clear.

What this anecdote demonstrates is that we find human *action*, and the communicative *exchange* of actions to bear *meaning*. Indeed, an action-based conception of meaning has much more than anecdotal support. In various ways and from different directions and disciplinary perspectives, scientists have been reaching conclusions about the notion of meaning that coalesce to form a very similar picture.

One approach to meaning—itsself the synthesis of research in biology, neuroscience, cognitive science, robotics, and several different traditions in philosophy—has been developed under the headings of enactivism and embodied cognition. A broad view of this synthesis (Harvey 2015, §2.1.1; E. Thompson 2007, 70–75, 154–55 [*Mind in Life*, Harvard UP]) defines meaning for things and events in an organism's environment in terms of that organism's affordances and the values they create for it. Another branch of the same field emphasizes the role of active *simulation*

in people's grasp of the meanings of linguistic expressions (Bergen; reuse some refs from the reenactment paper). A distinct approach to meaning can be found in the field of conversation analysis (Sacks 1992), where what a turn-of-talk does (and thus means) is determined by looking at the way it is responded to in the subsequent turns (see, e.g., Bilmes 1985). Within the analytical tradition in philosophy, the analysis of non-natural meaning offered by Grice (1957) defines this notion in terms of an utterer's intention to elicit a response.

All these views of meaning form a similar picture, one aptly summarized in Bakhtin's remark: "By meanings I understand *answers* to questions. That which answers no question is meaningless to us" (Bakhtin 1986x, 145; translation modified). In one way or another, all these views of meaning link the meaning of objects, events, utterances, to the *action* that a subject (or, more broadly, an organism) may take in *response* to them. Expressing oneself, making oneself meaningful to another, then involves *action* that would aim for a particular kind of response.

Meanings in this sense are relational (which is not the same as "private"), i.e., they are always meanings *for* somebody at a given time and situation. They are not objective in any absolute sense, and if they are shared (to an extent) within a community, this sharedness is an intersubjective accomplishment, not a natural given. One can be wrong about what something means in a variety of ways—by misjudging the consequences of an event, the shape of an object, one's own capacities to react, or the import of an utterance in the context of a conversation. Such errors usually become apparent as interaction proceeds. In modern literate human societies, there is also the possibility of one being wrong about the conventional (socially regulated) signification of a symbol. Nevertheless, such a conventional signification is not really the meaning of the symbol as such. More generally, meanings cannot be reduced to entities, either physical, mental, or abstract. There is nothing that *is* the meaning of an event or an utterance. Rather, what the event or utterance means (for someone at a given time and place) is an aspect of an action one takes, or considers taking, in response to it.

As you might have noticed, the conception of meaning I just laid out is very much at odds with how philosophers and linguists have traditionally been speaking about the meaning of words, sentences, and such like. And yet, it is this action-based view of meaning that I take to be fundamental—also as a conception of *linguistic* meaning. This paper offers an argument in support of this claim.

Utterances and Their Content

My argument, in a nutshell, is that by looking at people's utterances as having a plot with characters performing actions, we can extend the reach of the action-based conception of meaning from the level of the actions people exchange when they interact to the level of linguistic content (and see a complimentary argument to this effect in Sandler 2012). The content of what one says involves characters (inter)acting, and the action-based conception of meaning can also be applied to this depicted (inter)action.

However, before I can proceed with the argument, there is one issue to settle—the question of units. What constitutes a single action-in-language, whose content we might then examine?

Speech act theory, in its traditional form (Searle 1969) attaches an illocutionary force to the syntactic unit of a sentence. This implies each sentence one utters is an action. In the embodied cognition literature there have been attempts to assign enactive meaning directly to words (e.g., Galesse and Lakoff 2005)—though this literature typically does not imply that each word is a full action of its own. Be that as it may, neither the word nor the sentence is a unit of analysis that fits in well with an action-based view of meaning. These units originate in a different conception of language and carry its semantic commitments with them—a lexeme, in the final account, is a unit of reference, and a sentence is the unit that is meant to carry a proposition. If we couple actions-in-language to one of these units we will also unwittingly import their native notion of meaning into our account. We will remain open to the charge that action-based meaning is at most a pragmatic

add-on that comes on top of the propositional and referential semantics that defines the boundaries between our basic units of analysis.

Is there an alternative? Yes. For simultaneous oral interaction, a proper solution to the problem of units has been found in conversation analysis, where the basic unit is the turn-of-talk, defined by speaker transition.² The same principle can be extended to all forms of language use: an action-in-language is a unit of discourse defined and delimited by the change of speaking subject (in the case of a written text, this would most commonly be the whole text, whose author is the “speaker” throughout). This is precisely the definition of an *utterance* in Bakhtin’s “The Problem of Speech Genres” (1986a).³ Examining the plot of an utterance thus amounts to examining the “faint traces of changes of speech subjects that have furrowed the utterance from within” (Bakhtin 1986a, 99).

Characters vs. (Mental) Spaces

One more preliminary theoretical issue needs to be addressed before I can move on. Many of the cognitive-linguistic accounts I cited above (e.g., Pascual 2008?; Verhagen 2005) use the theoretical framework of Mental Space and Conceptual Integration (MSCI) theory (Fauconnier 1994; Fauconnier and Turner 2002). My account, while occasionally referring to this framework, mostly works outside of it. Why?

² Originally (SSJ 1974), conversation analysis did try to define the turn—or more precisely, the Turn Constructional Unit (TCU)—in terms of where a sentence is expected to end. Later research (Ford, Fox, and Thomson 1996; Ford 2004) has shown that the TCU is not primarily determined by syntax.

³ Note that this usage differs from the more common sense given to the term “utterance” in linguistics, viz., the act of uttering *a sentence*. An utterance in Bakhtin’s sense (which I am adopting here) is a unit of dialogue, independent of syntax.

The thing is that while MSCI offers a useful framework and theoretical vocabulary for talking about characters, the terms I am using imply making a stronger (i.e., more specific) claim. Characters are (imagined) persons. They have a perspective on the world. They can perform actions, respond to actions, speak. A scenario involving characters (a plot) can in principle be extended. We may wonder how the story goes on, how a character responds to actions and events we are not explicitly told s/he reacted to.

Mental spaces, as such, are not persons. We can speak of a character as occupying a mental space, but even then, it would be weird to speak of the mental space itself (rather than the character) as doing something or as speaking, or even as itself having a viewpoint.⁴ By speaking of mental spaces, rather than of characters, I would have masked the actional and interactional nature of the approach I am proposing here.

To illustrate the difference, consider again Verhagen's (2005, pp) analysis of negation. For Verhagen, the negated statement occupies a mental space, but this mental space in fact stands in for an "on-stage conceptualizer," i.e., a character. A slightly different analysis might have avoided introducing a character, with the intersubjectivity it brings with it (the negated statement can still occupy a mental space, but one that is abstractly rejected by the speaker, without entertaining another person's perspective. What such an analysis would have missed is beautifully illustrated by the biblical quote in (2).

⁴ Although there is a rich literature on viewpoint spaces (Dancygier and Sweetser), but these are mental spaces embodying a (character's) viewpoint, not mental spaces that themselves look at the world from a certain viewpoint. In this context it is somewhat unfortunate that Dancygier (2008) makes use of the term "abstract viewpoint." Viewpoints, by definition, have to belong to somebody; there are no viewpoints in the abstract. If we cannot identify the concrete persons or character whose viewpoint is presented to us, we have to posit a character to whom this viewpoint belongs (this might be the implied reader, as in the analysis in Perkins 2013).

(2) [Deut 30]

The negations “not in heaven” and “neither [...] beyond the sea” imply a mental space for the negated propositions: “the commandment *is* in heaven,” “the commandment *is* beyond the sea.” But the biblical text goes one step further: it makes the characters occupying these spaces *speak* and *respond* to the denied state of affairs. A simple negation thus unfolds into a plot.

3. Actions, Characters and Plots

In this section, I would like to discuss the notions of plot, action, and character a bit further, as well as to note some of the kinds of actions, of plots, and of characters there are. Unlike in typologies, taxonomies, or classifications of the traditional sorts, the kinds and categories I will be speaking of below are not meant to be mutually exclusive, and I am making no claim to cover the whole field of possibilities in any of the lists here. Even where one may speak of types in a more traditional sense (as with the three levels of action), the boundaries between the categories are fuzzy, in the best traditions of Cognitive Linguistics (Langacker; Rosch). The lists of kinds I make here are very much work in progress, but even if, or when, my work on them is done to my own satisfaction, they will not be exhaustive. The nature of the phenomenon is such that exhaustive typologies are impossible to compile. The reason I engage in this whole exercise despite all these caveats is that I want to build up a theoretical vocabulary to be put to use when analyzing texts and transcripts (as in the following section). This nomenclature is being created for the benefit of the analyst, not as an attempt to force a classification on the underlying phenomena.

Levels of Action

The distinction between levels of action, which I am proposing here, serves as the basis for the rest of the argument. It is not a typology of actions as such, but rather a list of levels at which action

may figure in discourse and in interaction more generally. Actions can be *performed*, *demonstrated*, or *described*.

A *performed* action is one of the actions exchanged by the interlocutors themselves when they converse. Thus, if John meets Mary on the street, and Mary says “Hi”, her action of greeting John will be a performed action.

Demonstrated and *described* actions are performed by characters as part of the plot of an utterance. The difference between the two is that characters are *shown* performing demonstrated actions, but we are only told *about* them performing described ones. Thus, if Mary tells John: “Peter says hi and Paul sends his regards”, Peter’s action is being demonstrated (we hear his voice uttering “Hi”), while Paul’s is described.⁵

Note that both these actions occur *simultaneously*, in the very same words, with Mary’s performed action of conveying Peter’s Paul’s regards. More generally, there is no limit to the number of actions, on all levels, we may say are going on at the same time in a stretch of discourse. Note also that actions with clear labels identifying them (such as “greeting”) are rather the exception than the rule, and even in these exceptional cases, the label only reflects one aspect of what is being done. Actions are idiosyncratic in principle, relative to the context in which they are performed, differing in their impact (and hence their meaning) on different individuals. They are

⁵ In earlier work (especially Sandler 2012), I used the terms “reenactment” and “reenacted action” instead of “demonstrated action.” I opted for the term “demonstrated” here following Clark and Gerrig (1990). It has the advantage of not implying (wrongly) that the action in question always repeats another action performed in the past (and see Leuschner, forth). Most often, demonstrated actions are not meant to refer back to any action in particular, as is the case in all the multifarious forms of fictive interaction (Pascual 2014). Still, the category of demonstrated action is broader than that of fictive interaction: for example, genuine quotations, which *do* refer to an action performed in the past and are not fictive, are demonstrated actions too. As for the term “reenactment”, I would now reserve it to refer to an aspect of the *audience’s* actual and/or anticipated (planned-for) reception of actions, involving simulation of the actions found in the utterance (see also Prinz 2005). Demonstration and reenactment are thus closely related (as explained in Sandler 2012), but not quite the same.

better approached by providing “thick” descriptions of what is being done than by reducing them to labels or symbols.

There is a hierarchy between these three levels of action, with performed action on top: what an utterance means is, in the final account, decided on this level, in the context of an audience’s response to the *performed* action. The exchange of performed actions makes up any kind of communication, including animal communication and infant-caretaker communication (cf. Trevarthen). It comes, trivially, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically prior to action on the other levels.

Much less trivial is the claim that demonstrated action, in a similar sense, comes prior to described action. Toward the end of this paper, I will make some remarks in support of this claim (and see Sandler 2012 again), but I am well aware that these will be far from conclusive. My argument does not depend on this hierarchy being in place, though taking a broader view, this claim is important for further establishing the conception of linguistic meaning that I am arguing in support of.

Finally, while the distinction between actions on the three levels is, hopefully, clear, these categories do have fuzzy boundaries, so it is not always obvious to which level an action belongs. Again, the distinction here is made for the benefit of the analyst, and should not be seen as necessarily reflecting some underlying qualitative difference between the actions themselves.

Characters

A character is the carrier-out of a demonstrated or described action. Characters are imagined or “conceptual” (in the Cognitive-Linguistic sense of the word) persons, not biological organisms. If I am telling a story about my next-door neighbor, the neighbor who is a character in my story is not the flesh-and-blood neighbor who lives next door, even if the story is true and I am telling it to inform my audience about something this neighbor actually did. Moreover, there is no ontological

limit on who or what, if anything, can function as the real-world “prototype” of a character in what people say (cf. Cooren 2010). The important thing is, as I explained above, that we cognitively and communicatively *personify* characters, treat them as *acting* and perceiving persons within a plot.⁶

For present purposes, one may draw distinctions between different types of characters along several axes. A character may range from *concrete* to *generic* and from *explicit* to *implicit*. On top of that, a character may be identifiable as the *implied utterer* or the *implied audience* of the utterance in which it figures, may or may not be the current *topic*, and has functions in the context of the particular plot in which it figures and its frame(s). On that latter point, I will elaborate below, but I should note that typically, characters will be either addressers, addressees, or bystanders in an interaction presented in the plot (cf. the notions of fictive speaker, fictive addressee, and fictive bystander in Pascual 2014). In addition, in many instances, there will be an evaluative stance the (implied) utterer attaches to the character and its actions.

To attach some substance to these labels, consider the following sentence (originally part of an art review, posted on a now-defunct website):

- (3) In part, Minna Pyyhkala’s installation “Hi Die” is a fuck you to the how are you fine approach to life (Pascual 2014, 45).

In (3) we see several different plots, with a nice collection of characters. One of these characters is Minna Pyyhkala, who is both very *explicit* and very *concrete*. She is a named individual, about whom we can potentially find a body of information in the utterance and/or outside it. This makes this character *concrete*. Concrete characters can thus persist across plots and utterances. Of course, there are degrees of concreteness: for example, a character may be identified as a member of a certain group, but not any one individual in particular. Also, being named, Minna

⁶ See, e.g., [characterization refs] on the status, including the cognitive status, of characters (though this literature mostly limits itself to characters in literary fiction).

Pyyhkala is an *explicit* character. She is the creator of “Hi Die”—an art installation. The installation itself is also an explicit and concrete character, for basically the same reasons (again, not being human, or even animate, is no hindrance to being a character), and this character delivers (or embodies) a vulgar message to a recipient: “the how are you fine approach to life”—another explicit character, also on the more concrete end of the spectrum.

Now contrast these characters with the characters who exchange greetings in the name “Hi Die” and in the fictive interaction modifier (Pascual *et al.* 2013; Pascual 2014, ch. 3) “how are you fine.” These *are* characters, they speak and act, but who are they? We don’t know, and it doesn’t matter. These characters are *generic*, they are not meant to be anybody or anything in particular. On the other hand, they are still relatively explicit: while they are not named, their actions and utterances are explicitly demonstrated in the text, we “hear” their voices in the utterance directly.

One part of the text in (3) I have not yet touched on is the “In part” at the beginning. It plays the role of a mild concessive—the author of the review uses it to signal a less-than-full commitment to the claim that follows. Now, this concession itself is part of a dialogue that occupies a plot. The concession is made *to* somebody, to a potential critical reader, perhaps, who would object to the statement that follows if made if made without qualification. This critical reader is also a character, and this time an *implicit* one: we cannot “hear” what it says in the text, and are not told about it in so many words, but we can sense its presence through the effect it has on what other characters say and do (cf. Bakhtin 1984, pp.), we have to assume its presence because what other characters do implies so.

Another question to ask here is: who is the character who utters the concessive? We may say it is the author of the review, but perhaps not quite, just as the implicit skeptical reader character is not any reader in particular. Adopting from literary theory the terms “implied author” and “implied reader” would be more apt, though since the notions apply to any utterance, not just a

written text, I would prefer the terms “implied utterer” and “implied audience.”⁷ These are characters that reenact the interaction between utterer and audience, occurring on the level of performed action, within the plot of the utterance, typically through demonstrated action. They play an important role in linking these levels of interaction, in guiding the factual audience’s response to the utterance and its plot(s). Another character I have already mentioned—the “Hi Die” installation—occupies another key position for linking between these levels, the position of *topic*. It is what the utterance is about (in this case, both locally—in this sentence—and globally—in the review as a whole).

At another level, we can also note that the different characters I mentioned play the different roles of (fictive) speaker (Minna Pyyhkala), fictive addressee (the how are you fine approach to life), fictive message (the installation), and fictive bystander (the implied audience) in the several interaction scenarios we find in (3).

Plots and Their Functions

A plot, in the sense I am exploring here, is a (mental) space where demonstrated and described action takes place. Different actions (and characters performing them) could be said to be in the same plot if they are presented or conceived of as interacting with one another, as having dialogic relations (Bakhtin 1984, pp; 1986x, pp) among them. Utterances may have (indeed, typically do have) multiple plots. These may follow each other sequentially or be nested within one another in several different ways. Thus, in (3) above we may speak of a top-level plot (implied utterer argues a point against objections by critical readers, possibly identified with the implied audience) within which there is another plot (the artist delivers an obscene message to an approach to life) narrated

⁷ The term “implied listener” (*podrazumevaemyj slushatel’*) is already used, in the same sense I intend here, in Bakhtin’s “Discourse in the Novel”, written in the mid-1930s (though this part of the text was not part of the early edition that exists in English translation; for the Russian original see Bakhtin 1996–2012, 3.100).

by one of its characters. This plot in turn contains two plots that stand alongside one another (the exchanges “– Hi – Die” and “– How are you? – Fine”), though these plots are contained in the name or identifier of two characters, rather than being told by one of them. There is no limit, in principle, to such nesting (cf. Clark & Gerrig 1990, p).

Earlier, I discussed the conception of meaning this paper relies on, where meaning belongs to actions and is an aspect of how the action is responded to. In this context, meaning-making in a plot happens on two levels: internally and externally. Internally, actions within a plot may receive a response from characters (explicit or implicit) belonging to the same plot. Externally, such actions are evaluated (with potential responses to the utterance as *performed* action in mind) by the addressee(s) of the utterance in which the plot figures (if plots are nested, there can also be in-between external evaluations, by addressees who are themselves characters in a higher-level plot).⁸ It is in connecting these two levels, i.e., in marking the contribution of demonstrated and described actions within an utterance to the meaning of the utterance as a whole, that the notion of plot is particularly useful.

In linking between internal and external meaning-making, the implied utterer and implied audience characters may be said to play a special role. First of all, we may speak of an *overarching* plot in any utterance, which consists of the dialogue between these characters. This plot sums up the *intended* impact of all other plots in the utterance on the utterance’s addressee(s) and shapes the utterance’s internal structure, delimits it from within (cf. Bakhtin 1986x, p.).⁹ Secondly, the implied audience can be said to be present as a character in *all* plots within an utterance, in the role of a

⁸ In a strict sense, the actual utterer and addressee(s) are responsible for both the external and the internal evaluation, with the internal level of meaning-making done while assuming the relevant characters’ perspectives. But see Cooren (2010) for an argument against adhering to such a strict-sense approach.

⁹ In this respect, speaking of a single implied audience character is an oversimplification. Utterances are understood differently by different audiences, and sometimes intentionally aim to achieve a differential effect on different audiences.

bystander or overhearer (cf. Goffman [yr]; Pascual 2014, pp), of somebody witnessing the interaction in the plot. This change in perspective (from addressee to bystander) reflects what I would putatively conjecture makes plots intelligible in the first place—the fact that we can understand the actions and behaviors of other persons and form a (potential) response to them, even as we merely observe them interact.¹⁰ This ubiquitous presence of the implied audience character forms a connecting thread between the different plots in the utterance, tying all of them to the overarching plot.

Plots (like utterances, like actions, like people) are unique. Each one is different from any other, each one is put to use in a unique setting and for its own unique purpose. That said, we can still make some distinctions between kinds of plots, and especially kinds of uses they can be put to, which have heuristic value in interpreting their import to the meaning of the utterance they are part of. In the rest of this section, I would like to make a few such distinctions.

In terms of its content, a plot typically follows one of many culturally established scripts or scenarios, belonging to a frame (cf. Fillmore [yr]), usually linked to an established type of human activity and interaction. Bakhtin (1986x) used the term *speech genres* in this context.¹¹ There is a great variety of such frames/genres and there is no point in trying to list them (indeed, there can be no closed list), but two more general comments should be made.

First, the frames/genres a plot uses (to say it uses a frame/genre would be more precise than saying it belongs to one; a plot can combine elements from different frames/genres or be

¹⁰ This implies the precedence of demonstrated action to described action, which I mentioned above.

Demonstrated action puts the addressee in the position of an observer almost directly, while described action requires more complex (and presumably more recent and derivative) devices for telling about actions and events.

¹¹ Cf. also his notion of primary speech genres that are types of real-life human activity, which can then be embedded within secondary speech genres (such as literary genres), so, in our terms here, become the genres of *plots* within utterances (Bakhtin 1986x, pp). As we shall see later, such embedding regularly happens not only in genres of complex written discourse, which Bakhtin singled out as “secondary”, but also in mundane turns of talk.

interpretable with different frames/genres in mind as a model) are often an important key to identifying implicit characters within the plot. Thus, the term “Not happy? Money back! Guarantee” (see Pascual 2014, 65) includes within it a plot where we hear the (demonstrated) voice of one speaker—a salesperson. But from the type of interaction portrayed (salesperson and customer negotiating a purchase), we can deduce the presence of another character—the customer. We can then reconstruct the implicit character’s missing turn in the demonstrated conversation, confirming s/he is not happy after the salesperson’s question “Not happy?”

Secondly, one frame—the frame of face-to-face conversation (cf. Pascual 2014; Pascual & Sandler forth)—has a privileged status. This is not only because one sub-variety or other of this frame is used by many plots, especially where demonstrated action appears, but also because the overarching plot of utterances in general, the dialogue between implied utterer and implied audience(s), is framed as a face-to-face conversation, almost by definition, even in written texts.

Coming back to the question of what kinds of plots there are, I would now like to look not at their content, but at their *functions*, i.e., at the ways in which they contribute to the dialogue in the overarching plot, and ultimately to the meaning of the whole utterance they figure in. The list of functions below is meant to be the first draft of a descriptive toolkit for the analyst. I make no claims to it being complete or to it reflecting any sort of “underlying” structure. Each of the functions listed below is really a somewhat arbitrary heading covering many kinds of more specific functions and usages and the lines could have been drawn otherwise. Also, as a matter of course, plots are multi-functional, used to do many things at once, so the list below should not be used as a classification of plots themselves. Each plot will be combining functions in different ways and to varying degrees.

With that made clear, here is a list of five types of functions a plot may have within an utterance:

1. Evaluative functions. A basic feature of the approach to meaning advocated here is that action establishes values (even in a relatively trivial sense, as when traveling to a particular destination

sets up a value order from the perspective of the one travelling, such that different places will be seen as either lying ahead or behind, as either near or far from one's destination, etc.) and meaning-making, consequently, involves evaluation. This is a position held by radical enactivists (refs). The same insight has been central to the linguistic theory developed by Bakhtin and his circle already in the 1920s (see, e.g., Voloshinov 1983, pp; Bakhtin 1993, pp), where it was also applied to the content of utterances and to what I here call demonstrated action (see Sandler 2013).

Another way to present the idea that we evaluate the content of utterances is to speak of evaluation as a kind of function that plots have: the actions demonstrated and described in the plot establish some values for the characters performing them, but these actions and characters are in turn themselves subject to evaluation by the (implied) utterer and audience. Parody (as discussed in Bakhtin 1984, pp) is a case in point. The object of parody appears as a character, whose voice we hear through demonstrated action, coupled with (typically) a negative evaluation by the implied utterer and audience. The values attributed to the character visibly clash with those the utterer assumes she shares with her audience.

More generally, actions are purposeful, and a purpose, as already explained, establishes values. If understanding the demonstrated and described actions that make up a plot involves simulating them (cf. Bergen [yr]), it *eo ipso* involves an appreciation of at least some of their purposes and the value order these create. A response to these actions (both within the utterance, in a higher-order plot, and outside the utterance, on the level of performed action) happens from within the value order established by the responding character's or person's actions, and thus again involves evaluation.

2. Informative functions. Action of any kind bears information.¹² We learn something about the person or character performing it, about the very fact the action has been performed, about how

¹² The word "information" is used here in a loose sense. In particular, bearing information in this context should *not* be equated with carrying representations or embodying propositions of any kind.

such actions can be performed, etc. This is also the case with demonstrated and described actions in a plot: they bear information that we may learn from them. For some plots, this informative function may be central to the utterer's purpose in recounting it, as when an utterer tells us about something that happened to her the other day.

3. Analogies. Plots are not usually meant to be self-sufficient. Rather, there are links connecting them, in a variety of ways, with actions and events outside them—in the real world or in other plots. I am using the term “analogy” here to cover all such links. Analogies can be used to make the plot reflect on what is linked to it, or, conversely, to make familiar events and patterns outside the plot to reflect on the plot itself, or both. There are many ways to draw analogies, which, in addition, may be combined in the same plot in a variety of ways. For present purposes, I would only like to highlight three particularly common sub-types.

3.1. True-story analogies. One common type of analogy involves a simple mapping of characters and events in the plot to persons and events in the world (or perhaps in a fictional world created by other plots). If the plot is presented as a true account of real-world events, this implies an analogy linking characters and actions in the plot to people and things they did in the real world (as construed by the utterer). Of course, it is rarely that simple, and such analogies are often not meant to be as direct, nor to provide a complete mapping from elements of the plot to the outside world. Also, note that while the question of whether what a plot relates about the world is true or not may be an important practical concern in many circumstances, it is—on the approach advanced here—mostly irrelevant to the question of meaning. We understand a story relating events that did not actually happen (be it a fiction or a deliberate lie) in the same way we understand a story that is indeed true.

3.2. Exploratory analogies. This last point hints to another kind of analogy, where analogical links are used not to relate elements in the plot to things in the world, but to *construct* an imagined event or sequence of events. This sub-category of analogies can be dubbed “exploratory” and covers

anything from a simple conditional or hypothetical statement to the elaborate world of a fiction novel.

3.3. *Metonymies*. A significant subtype of analogy is *metonymy*, where a character or action in the plot stands for a whole type of people or actions outside it. To come back to an earlier point, if a plot is recognizable as using a frame/speech genre, it is because of such metonymic links (as when “How are you?” in (3) above metonymically stands for a type of politeness exchanges in real-life social settings). A metonymic analogy is generally present in fictive interaction of all sorts (Pascual and Sandler forth). Metonymical links also allow plots to be used to establish reference to entities or designate categories of objects (Pascual 2014, pp; Pascual, Królak and Janssen 2013, pp; Sandler 2012, pp). Thus, the advice on choosing a college in (1) above employs plots (“hey, I like this place I think I could belong”, “I don’t feel comfortable here”, etc.) to designate certain kinds of feelings.¹³ This involves a metonymic analogy between a particular (fictive) utterance and a shade feeling that this utterance is merely one way of many to express.

3.6. *Plot connectors*. A simple but useful kind of analogy marks the plot of one utterance as a continuation of the plot of another, so that dialogic and causal relations that exist in that other plot extend to the current one. A common form this analogy takes is when a speaker tells a story extending over several turns of talk. It is understood that after an audience rejoinder, the speaker resumes, and the events recounted belong to the same sequence as before. One can also set a plot in the known context of a historical narrative or the fictional world of a published literary work, etc. It is also possible for a plot to thus inherit some connections with another plot but not others, as when

¹³ And note that these feelings are not easy to designate by other means. There is no name-tag in our language to pinpoint the exact feeling thus described. Instead, a potential *expression* of this feeling by a *character* in *demonstrated action* (a typical case of fictive interaction) is used as an impromptu naming label. Had we had to rely on our vocabulary alone to refer to states of mind, such a level of nuance as we have here would have been impossible to communicate.

a new plot proposes an alternative sequence of events within a known narrative (as is common in fan fiction and alternative history novels).

3.5. Other analogies. Analogies can also be more elaborate. Consider parables and allegories, where there is a link connecting elements in the plot to people and events outside it, but the connection itself is mediated or deliberately obscured. Intertextual allusions of all sorts involve another kind of analogy, from one plot to another. For those familiar with Blending Theory (Fauconnier and Turner 2002), one way to think of analogies more generally (with some caveats I will note later on) is to view the plot as providing one of the inputs to a conceptual integration network.¹⁴ This implies that the almost endless richness of conceptual integration forms, which Blending Theory describes, can potentially be brought to bear on a plot.

4. Rhetorical functions. Like all elements of the whole that is an utterance, plots play a role in the utterance's rhetorical organization (understood in the broad sense of how it is designed to effectively convince, persuade, or otherwise move an audience). Thus, a plot may be used to support a point that an utterer wishes to make or to present a contrary view to her own, which she aims to refute, etc. For example, the character in the plot set up by a (sentential) negation construction, as analyzed by Verhagen (2005), expresses a view that the (implied) utterer rejects. The skeptical reader, whom we identified as an implied character addressed by the "In part" opening (3) above, has a different, more complicated, role to play in the rhetorical structure of the text s/he figures in. a plot may bring evidence in support of what an utterer is trying to say, or what

¹⁴ One disadvantage of the term "analogy" in this context is that it introduces a terminological clash with Blending Theory, where "analogy" is just one of several types of vital relations. I nevertheless prefer to use the word *analogy*, with its long history in the humanities, in the more loose sense presented here, instead of any narrower term of art.

someone else is saying and the utterer reports.¹⁵ Stories may *illustrate* a point one is making. Plots are (as noted above) used to present hypothetical or conditional scenarios, construct straw-men (or less unfair representations) in arguments against competing positions, etc. These are all rhetorical functions performed by plots.

One subtype of rhetorical functions involves structuring the information flow and the internal divisions of an utterance, identifying the topic of discussion, etc. A good example is fictive questions (or question-answer pairs) used to introduce a new topic in a text or a discussion (Pascual 2014, pp; [yr]). Here the question is posed by the implied audience (or another character), and the utterer is now, in a sense, legitimized to address the topic asked about; her contribution is made pertinent, relevant, by the question calling for it. It is common to use such fictive questions as titles for book chapters or whole essays and treatises—as in the titles of such philosophical classics as “How to make our ideas clear” (Peirce), “What is metaphysics” (Heidegger), and *How to Do Things with Words* (Austin). In some genres (e.g., the medieval scholastic *quaestio*, the church catechism, or the FAQ page), the entire text is organized as a fictive question-answer exchange.

Interestingly, plots as discourse-organizing devices often tend to develop over time into grammatical constructions (see, e.g., Geluykens 1992; Jarque and Pascual forth; Leuschner forth). The left dislocation construction in English, which features a topic followed by a full clause or sentence as comment, as in: “Steve, he likes beans” (Geluykens 1992, 1), is an instructive example in this context, because it takes some insight and analysis to see that there is a plot there. The analysis has been performed by Geluykens (1992), who demonstrated that the construction as found in monologues and written texts reflects a common structure in conversational exchanges, where one speaker would introduce a new topic, her interlocutor would acknowledge it (with a brief question calling for elaboration, or, more commonly, a minimal response or a silent movement of

¹⁵ Cf. the analysis in Cooren and Sandler (2014), where characters (figures, in Cooren’s terms) are used to lend support to a speaker’s position: “Being right or justified means, by definition, being able to position [oneself] as *not the only one* who says what he or she says” (Cooren and Sandler 2014, 234).

the gaze), and the first speaker would then continue speaking about the new topic. When this construction appears in a written text, we only seem to read the words of one speaker, but in fact there is an implied audience character's response hiding in the dash or comma separating the topic from the comment.

5. Affective functions. Finally, plots can also be means of expressing and/or inducing emotions and other states of mind. Jokes (typically assuming the form of a short story, and thus a plot) are a good example. Another case in point is the use of phrases such as "Get away!", "You're kidding me!", or "I don't believe it!" to express surprise or disbelief in a conversation. Here the utterer plays out (i.e., employs demonstrated action) the sort of response one would have made after discovering her interlocutor had just willfully deceived her, in order to express how surprising (and therefore worthy of telling) is the news she had just heard.

4. Applying the Theory

Having elaborated an initial analytic vocabulary, in this section I will test-drive the proposed framework on two conversation transcripts, for which I shall provide a very cursory analysis along the lines suggested. The focus on conversation reflects its status as the primary and original site of language use (refs.), so testing and explicating ideas about language is best done, initially, using conversational materials. I should, however, add that the role of these analyses in the present paper is limited. They serve me as a means for clarifying the approach to linguistic meaning defended here, and as a sort of initial feasibility test for the analytic apparatus proposed, but the transcripts do not constitute a proper sample of empirical data, that could be used to validate any claims.

Space does not permit me to run into very fine detail in this analysis. But even given unlimited space, I would not have been able to provide a definitive or complete analysis of these transcripts, because no such thing exists. In a sense, to state how many characters are there in a stretch of discourse and what actions they perform is like stating the length of a shoreline (to use a

famous example from fractal geometry): it depends on how fine a resolution you are descending to. With most human utterances, it is almost always possible to make an analysis even more fine-grained.¹⁶ An action-based analysis can be extended down to the level of grammar (along the lines suggested in Sandler 2012), may take into account ever finer shades of prosody and gesture (where relevant and available), trace ever fainter allusions and resonances (cf. Du Bois 2014).

Moreover, the more fine-grained an analysis is, the more likely it is to become a highly subjective take on the utterance. To repeat, meaning is relational, and the particular position (including personal history, bank of possible associative connections, currently activated memories, etc.) of the person understanding and responding to an utterance plays a significant role in what the utterance means to that person at that time. To the extent we may speak of *shared* meaning, or even quasi-objective meaning, this has to be meaning painted in relatively broad strokes.

In the end, an analyst is yet another person responding to the utterance she analyzes, and the nature of her analysis, including the depth to which she is willing to pursue it, depends on her own goals. My goals here are, first of all, to illustrate the points made in the previous sections and offer a simple example of how the theoretical nomenclature outlined above can be put to use. I will also have one more specific goal: I will be paying particular attention to demonstrated actions by characters, which are not marked as such by syntactic or other “explicit” means. These places in the transcripts offer a strong argument against some traditional forms of semantics, and in favor of the approach I am arguing for here.

And now, without further ado, let me move on to the analysis itself. My first subject for analysis is the brief conversation in (4), which I recorded in 2005.¹⁷

¹⁶ Cf. Cooren’s (2010, pp.) point on unfolding implicit (folded) figures in analysis (see also Cooren & Sandler, p.).

¹⁷ I have originally analyzed this conversation (and another fragment recorded on the same occasion) in some detail in Sandler (2009), and am also using this conversation as an example, though without a detailed analysis, in Sandler (forthcoming). I am providing (a transliteration of) the Hebrew original and an English gloss, but no interlinear

(4) Family dinner (Modern Hebrew)

- 1 S: anakhnu nuchal laazor be mashehu?
'Can we help with anything?'
- 2 R: lo aval tsarikh lashevet ki haokhel itkarer kar hayyom.
'No, but it's time to sit down cause the food will be getting cold
it's cold today.'
- 3 S: oy [@@@ [im lo nokhal lo nigdal?
'Oy, if we don't eat up we won't grow up?'
- 4 R: [ma she [ma she tov she-
'the... the good thing's that...'
- 5 (0.5)
- 6 R: bidyyuk. . ma she tov she ani yoshevet levad. @@@
'Exactly. The good thing's that I'm sitting alone.'

To add relevant information on the setting, R is the host of a small family gathering (traditionally taking place on weekends). Her guests are her two adult children and her son-in-law, S. The conversation takes place as R is about to finish setting the table for the meal. S approaches the kitchen, while R's two children are in another room.

The utterance in line 1 is not particularly interesting, but there is still enough to say about it. On the level of performed action, S is offering R assistance. He employs a set phrase that is standardly used for this purpose. But looking at the level of plot, we can still add some detail to the analysis. In this plot we can envision (simulate) characters identified as S and the other guests (true-story analogy) joining a character likewise identified as R in placing dishes on the dinner

gloss, as I will not be touching on morphology and syntax in the analysis. Transcription conventions are consistent with those used in transcripts throughout the chapter. A methodological point to note is that I myself am one of the two interlocutors here (S). While in principle this may introduce distortions in an analysis, it is unlikely to be an issue with the sort of points I am making in the analysis here, pertaining to general matters of semantics. The recording was also conducted almost a decade ago, long before the proposed form of analysis I am testing was devised. On the other hand, "insider" knowledge I have as a participant in this case helps provide important supplementary information for interpreting the things said.

table and in some related tasks. These are described actions.¹⁸ This activity is presented as *evaluated* positively by the implied audience (identified as R). This positive evaluation supports the rhetorical function of the plot as part of an offer of assistance. Note as an aside that while S does not spell out in so many words exactly what he is offering to help with, or on whose behalf (who are “we”), the plot can be more specific (even if not fully explicit) on these points, reflecting contextually salient information and (for S) S’s particular intentions. It may be that R, or someone else interpreting the utterance, constructs an image of the offered activity that differs in some significant details from S’s, or from ours (which could, in principle, lead to a misunderstanding later; misunderstandings happen).

Let us move on to line 2. On the performed action level, first of all, R has just been offered assistance, and the preferred response (ref.) for such offers is to reject them. R indeed begins her turn with a “No,” which is, however, followed by “but” (cf. the analysis of “but” in Verhagen 2005, pp <check>). This frames what follows as an alternative suggestion, another way for S to be helpful, and thus also alternative sequence of actions that would be positively evaluated by R. The Hebrew word *tsarikh* (which I’ve glossed, in this context, as “it’s time to”) supports this reading. The *tsarikh*+infinitive construction in Modern Hebrew is used to mark the action that follows as something that should be done, or needs to be done (specifying the actor is optional, and none is mentioned in our case), so something evaluated as preferable by the person or character uttering it.

The alternative plot that R suggests involves the described action of “sitting down” (*lashevet*). Again, the actual image created, given the situation, is that of the guests taking their seats around the dinner table and starting the meal—everything’s ready (my English rendition of *tsarikh* as “it’s time” thus spells out some of what is not put in so many words in the original). But,

¹⁸ While this is probably not the case here, there might still be a distance between the utterer’s position and the position expressed by the set phrase offering assistance (e.g., if the offer is insincere). In that case we might see the whole set phrase as uttered by a character on the level of *demonstrated* action, from whom the implied utterer keeps himself distinct. This then becomes a plot encasing the described-action-level plot I’m focusing on in the main analysis.

also given the situation, there's another thing that needs to take place before the meal can begin as proposed: the other two guests have to come in, which they are not expected to do on their own. Someone has to go to the other room and call them—just the right task for S, who offered assistance in the previous turn! So, a character identified as S calling the other guests in is in fact a described action that forms part of the plot of R's utterance, without her "naming" this action with a word she utters. Instead, it is part of the plot because the *inner logic of the sequence of actions in the plot* requires it to be there. This, of course, also relies on a true-story analogy between the starting point of this plot and the current state of affairs, as I described it above. Such an analogy also means that the *information* conveyed in the plot—that dinner is ready and served—applies to the actual situation at hand.

But then, R follows this up with what is, on the face of it, a justification for her request: "cause the food will be getting cold it's cold today."¹⁹ On this level, we may see the cooling off of the dishes on the table (with the food itself, possibly, as character) as an alternative scenario, this time a *negatively* evaluated one, to the previous plot. The food will be getting cold not only because of the ambient temperature (which was not in fact particularly low, but can be used to urge greater haste), but also because the guests are not there to eat it. The rhetorical function of this plot is to serve as a negative scenario to avoid, and thus reinforce the point made before.

This would have been it, if not for the slight trace of an *allusion* that can be sensed here. Is it R herself who is worried about (=negatively evaluates) the cooling off of the food? Perhaps not quite. An ear trained in the relevant cultural codes may be able to identify this concern as coming from a character. English speakers might identify this character, embodying a cultural stereotype, as "the Jewish Mother"—the slightly neurotic and not-so-slightly overweening parent figure that is the subject of an array of jokes and TV and cinema routines. Hebrew speakers are familiar with that same figure as *ima polaniyya*, 'Polish mother' (the prototype, in both cases, being an Ashkenazi-

¹⁹ The lack of punctuation before "it's cold today" reflects the way R pronounced this in the original. To save space, I will not get into speculations for what this reflects.

Jewish middle-aged woman; R, it should be noted, is a middle-aged Jewish woman of Polish ancestry, acting in the role of a mother to grown-up children in the situation at hand). Many Hebrew speakers would also be likely to associate this character with an array of set phrases expressing exaggerated maternal concern, passive-aggressive guilt tripping, and bitter irony. Examples to take into account in our analysis include (in English translation): “Just leave me here, sitting alone in the dark,” “If you don’t eat up, you won’t grow up,” and, for the turn in line 2, “The food is getting cold.”

If indeed the Jewish mother character is present in the utterance, we should analyze the concern expressed about the food getting cold as demonstrated action, performed by this character. R seems to be aligning herself with this character in terms of evaluation (i.e., they both see the situation in which the guests are coming in as desirable, and the one in which the food is left to cool off, untouched, as undesirable).²⁰ The allusion to the Jewish mother’s repertoire of set phrases would be an analogy. Other plot functions remain as analyzed above.

Now, how can we tell whether the Jewish mother character has been placed in this utterance intentionally by R? Well, we can’t really, but there are clues. Worrying about the food getting cold while still finishing to set the table is a bit over the top.²¹ Besides, exchanging Jewish mother jokes, with R cast as the mother, are a family tradition. So we can mark the possibility that the Jewish mother character appears in the utterance as a possible reading, but we cannot (yet) be sure it was put there on purpose. And neither could S, but, being there and then, S could test this hypothesis, which is exactly what he does in line 3.

As noted above, “If you don’t eat up, you won’t grow up” (*im lo tokhal lo tigdal*) is a set phrase from the Jewish mother repertoire (the exclamation “Oy,” while less specialized, fits in as

²⁰ In Bakhtin’s (1984, pp) terms, this would be a case of uni-directional double-voiced discourse.

²¹ R seems to find an excuse for this urgency by citing the cold weather, but, to add more context, even it was relatively cool by local standards that day, the temperature was not much lower than 20°C (or about 70°F).

well). Of course, this is not exactly what S says. S inserts a few modifications, which are important for sorting out the plot structure of the utterance. These include the strong emphasis (with falling intonation contour) on “Oy,” the laughter that follows, the use of first person plural instead of second person singular for the set phrase (“If *we* don’t eat up, *we* won’t grow up”), and the rising final intonation contour (indicated by a question mark in the transcript).

The phrase “If you don’t eat up, you won’t grow up” brings up a scene (plot) in which the Jewish mother pressures her child to eat more during a meal. Nested within this plot are the two plots (with described action) making up the conditional: one in which a character identified as the child fails to eat enough at present and the other in which a character again identified as the child fails to achieve normal growth in the future. Both are negatively evaluated from the mother’s (in-plot utterer’s) perspective; the latter is also evaluated negatively from the perspective of the child (who is the implied audience for the mother’s utterance). Both are counterfactual (exploratory analogy), with the second plot designed to convince the audience (rhetorical function) to share in the utterer’s negative evaluation of the situation described in the first plot and, subsequently, to avoid reproducing such a scenario by eating more.

But we don’t hear the Jewish mother’s voice directly. Recall the shift to first person plural and the exaggerated stress on “Oy.” What we hear here is rather a parody of the Jewish mother, which, however, is itself put into the mouth of a character—one we can identify as the Jewish mother’s child. This creates a multiple nesting of plots. One plot has the Jewish mother’s child ridiculing the Jewish mother’s excessive worry over feeding her children (demonstrated action). Like any parody (See Bakhtin 1984, pp), it has within it an imbedded plot in which the parodied character (the Jewish mother) is speaking (again, demonstrated action), but her utterance receives a negative evaluation from the perspective of the uttering character (the child). What the Jewish mother says is “Oy! If you don’t eat up, you won’t grow up,” with the two plots embedded within this, as analyzed above.

Then, there is also the overarching plot, which wraps all of this structure from the outside. Here it is especially important to note the rising contour in the end, and the laughter (which could also be seen as expressing the child-character's ridicule of the Jewish mother, but I'd characterize it as too good-natured to convey ridicule). Recall that our analysis of R's previous utterance indicated the Jewish mother's character is possibly present on purpose, but this conclusion relied on relatively thin evidence. It also indicated, much more robustly, that R had made a request for S to go call the other guests to the dinner table. The response S offers ignores the practical request entirely. Indeed, it wouldn't make much sense as a *bona fide* response to the request, unless perhaps we read it as a blunt and sarcastic refusal, but this reading too relies on the Jewish mother character having been present in R's preceding turn. Instead, S profiles the Jewish mother voice. The rising intonation contour in the end, in Hebrew, as in many other languages and dialects, indicates an appeal to the audience, prototypically in questions, but also in, e.g., offers and guesses. If indeed we interpret this rising contour to mark the whole utterance as a guess, it would be a guess made by the implied utterer, for which a confirmation is expected from the implied audience, and what is being guessed is not anything that has to do with eating and growing, but rather that R's previous utterance used the Jewish mother character deliberately.

The laughter is also significant in that it points to the affective function of the plots we found in this utterance. As I noted above, S's rejoinder could be interpreted as a rather rude rejection of R's request, and the child's attitude toward the Jewish mother within the plot is somewhat caustic. The laughter frames the whole rejoinder as a good-natured game, rather than anything face-threatening.

This analysis of line 3 now requires further support from an analysis of the utterance that responds to it immediately, which we find in line 6.²² R starts her utterance with the word *bidyuk*

²² Lines 4 and 5 are a simple case of a "false start," dealt with extensively in the conversation analysis literature (see already Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974). R tries to start speaking (evidently intending to say what she eventually says in line 6) twice at transition relevance points in S's turn, but S keeps the floor. When he finishes, R

(‘exactly’) with a falling intonation contour. This is a standard means of expressing agreement with a statement or of confirming a guess. On the level of performed action, then, we have R confirming S’s guess in line 3, and consequently indicating she indeed understands this utterance to be a guess.²³

This is followed by saying “The good thing is that I’m sitting alone” (*ma she tov she ani yoshevet levad*). Knowing what we already know about the nature of the conversation so far, we would now be fully warranted in recognizing in the words “sitting alone” an allusion to the all-time Jewish-mother classic: “Leave me here, sitting alone in the dark.” This phrase itself is already quite complex in terms of the voices it contains, as it embodies bitter irony, and a very peculiar attitude toward the child character that is part of the cultural stereotype. The Jewish mother here does not simply lament having been left alone. The phrase belongs to a context in which she actively encourages her child to go on and have fun, while she’s left behind, alone in the dark and suffering (or alternatively, induces guilt by chiding the child for having done just that); the child is meant to get the message indirectly, and to feel guilty either way.²⁴ All this convoluted scenario is brought to the mind of a person familiar with relevant cultural codes by this one phrase.²⁵ It also explains the ironic use of the phrase “The good thing is” (*ma she tov she*). Irony, like parody, is a form of vari-

needs to modify the beginning of her prepared response, which results in the pause in line 5. For present purposes, we can skip straight to line 6.

²³ We can also consider this confirmation to be, simultaneously, made by the Jewish mother character (so, on the level of demonstrated action), who agrees that indeed, if her children don’t eat up, they won’t grow up.

²⁴ If the child stays with the mother, the mother is now left feeling guilty for the deprivation imposed on the child, and the child is then left to blame for the mother’s guilty feelings, at which point the mother again offers the child to go, and the cycle resumes.

²⁵ Cf. the mnemonic role of phrases (or “communicative fragments”) in the theory developed by Gasparov (2010).

directional double-voiced discourse (Bakhtin 1984, pp), and so relies on a character (usually a generic one) assuming the position that we would view the ironic comment as expressing if made without irony (the ironic comment is thus made as a demonstrated action). The implied utterer then aligns herself in terms of evaluation against this character, implying a rejection of the position the character expresses.

There is an additional reading for the whole utterance, however, in which the utterance features a plot with a character identified as R (through a true-story analogy) dining on her own (described action), while the guests she invited for dinner are not joining her. This is a hypothetical scenario (exploratory analogy) which clearly receives a negative evaluation, and can be again seen (on the rhetorical function level) as part of an attempt to get S to call the other guests in. Both analyses of the utterance dovetail with each other. Sitting alone, in both senses, is a negatively evaluated situation, which S is called upon to prevent. R seems to align herself with the Jewish mother character again, and repeats her previous request for S to go call the other guests in the Jewish mother's voice.

Finally, as a reflection of his understanding of R's utterance here, S does not say anything, but does *perform* an action. He leaves, and a few seconds later in the recording, we already hear the voices of the other guests as they approach the table. The meal soon begins.

A few points to sum up the analysis. First of all, I should note the coherence of this conversation depends on us being able to recognize the Jewish mother theme that binds the turns together. Line 3 in particular makes no sense if we fail to recognize the plot featuring the Jewish mother and her child as a theme that runs through the conversation, and we miss a lot of the nuance in R's two utterances as well. And yet, neither of the turns had any explicit markers to indicate the presence of these two characters, and to mark demonstrated action as such. An audience sensitive to the relevant cultural codes would be able to recognize the tell-tale turns of phrase in the right places (cf. Gasparov 2010), but these are subtle hints. A semantic theory that relies only on the explicit verbal content of sentences as its starting point (truth-conditional semantics, for example),

would not have any access to this entire level of analysis, because the Jewish mother plot rides on phrases that are intelligible on their own, with nothing within such a semantic theory to prevent us from reading them naïvely, as direct literal utterances by the current speaker.

Secondly, the analysis has shown the speakers to accomplish their performed actions *through* the demonstrated and described actions that make up the various plots in their utterances. R makes her request to call the other guests intelligible by painting scenarios in which this is not done (this holds even if we put aside the Jewish mother references). S does not mention the Jewish mother when he wants to clarify whether this character was deliberately used by R, but instead uses a demonstrated rejoinder made to the character (rather than directly to R herself), and thus finds out what he wanted to without stepping out of *character*.

Which brings me to the last point I want to address (also see Sandler forthcoming): this entire little conversation can be described as a case of improvised role-play both speakers engage in. R *impersonates* a Jewish mother and S—her child. There is, however, one word of caution about how such role-play should be accounted for in the framework I am proposing here. We may say the Jewish mother's and child's *actions* are demonstrated by R and S. We may also note analogies (allusions) between things R and S say and typical Jewish-mother phrases. What would not be warranted is positing an analogy between R herself and the Jewish mother and between S himself and the child. Moreover, we may perhaps try to draw such an analogy *ex post factum*, as analysts, but not posit one from the speakers' own perspectives at the time of utterance. The reason is that the speaking self in the here-and-now is not accessible to herself as an image (Bakhtin 1990), as a piece of content, as an input for mental operations.²⁶ Playing a role, for the one playing it, is unlike

²⁶ You may recall that I did speak about true-story analogies in which R and S are identified with characters in their own utterances, but note that these were all characters acting in hypothetical situations. So it is not the speaking self in the here-and-now that is identified with the character, but the self if placed in the hypothetical scenario. Similarly, in a story about one's past self, it is the self in a past situation that is what the character is analogous to, not the speaking self in the here-and-now.

drawing a comparison or making an identification. It involves accomplishing things through action, rather than mapping one set of content onto another. This is made especially clear in the analyzed conversation when we see the role-play being *negotiated* by the interlocutors on the fly (recall the guessing intonation in line 3 and the “Exactly” in line 6).

Let me now briefly move to analyzing a much longer conversation segment, this time in US English. Given the fragment’s length, my analysis will be much more superficial, and will not attempt an account of each utterance in turn, but I still hope to touch on some interesting points.

In this conversation, a middle-aged couple, Sean and Bernard, have two friends over for dinner. One of the friends, Fran, is a New Yorker. She and the other friend, Alice, have not met each other before. The segment we’re looking at may be said to begin with Alice asking Fran: “Do you like living in New York?”—a question that itself makes good sense in this sort of setting, when the two new acquaintances are trying to get to know each other. Fran replies that she *loves* it, and then launches a story sequence (cf. Sacks 1992, pp):

(5) SBC051: 373.472–406.048

FRAN: .. Yeah.
... (H) And the new buildings are=
... I don't like the new buildings.
ALICE: Do you like living in New York?
FRAN: ... Yeah.
I love it.
... (H) We traveled all over.
We looked around.
We thought,
(H) my husband and I stayed out on the road,
... fo=r two years.
... And we went all over the United States,
and we d-,
... we didn't find any place we liked [better].
ALICE: [So you] went from New Orleans to New York?
FRAN: ... Yeah.
Oh that I did years ago.
... That I did,
ALICE: ... But it's the new.
That ... part [XXXX].
FRAN: [God knows,
s-] nineteen si- sixty something.
.. Sixty-three.
... Thirty [years ago].
ALICE: [So you've lived] in New York all this time?
FRAN: Mhm?
.. Thirty years.
Except,
(H) I did take five years off.

In my analysis, I will focus on the story sequence itself, a “preview” of which Fran produces in (5), and which continues to unfold in the turns that follow, and will skip turns that interrupt the story (such as the brief mention of New Orleans in (5) or the sub-sequence discussing Fran’s house in Florida a bit later on). There is much to analyze in these turns as well, of course, but I only have so much space. So, for now, let us examine Fran’s relatively long turn at the center of (5).

Starting the analysis from the level of performed action, we already noted the setting and the question Fran is answering. “I love it,” in the given context, answers the question in the affirmative, and emphatically so. Alice’s question contains a plot (described action) in which a character identified as Fran (true-story analogy) lives in New York and feels good about it. Fran’s answer then returns to the plot posited in the question (that is, the plots are *connected*), but modifies it. The first modification involves the intensity of the character’s feelings: she not merely likes living in New York, but *loves* it. But then further elaboration follows. First or all, the character identified as Fran is no longer alone. Fran’s plot is about a “we,” which soon turns out to involve the Fran-character and a character identified as her husband, and the two of them are described as having spent two years looking for another place to live, eventually returning to New York.

In terms of its rhetorical function, note that the story *illustrates* Fran’s attitude toward New York. Saying that she loves living in New York is one thing; describing how her husband and she spent outstanding efforts to find another place to live, and couldn’t find any better place than New York—that’s another thing altogether. The (described) action thus also allows Fran to give more specificity and greater intensity to her attitude toward living in New York. Instead of a vague positive feeling, we have a tried, tested, and experience-based preference. While doing that, Fran is also telling Alice about her life (informative function),²⁷ and the detail thus provided is interesting, worthy of telling, keeps the conversation going on friendly terms (affective function).

²⁷ I should note that the question of whether the information thus conveyed is correct or not is irrelevant to the analysis. Fran might as well have invented the whole thing, for all we know, but this would not affect the meaning of

After a brief digression, Fran comes back to her story of leaving New York and returning to it, introducing the return with “I did take five years off.” Let us now have a look at how the story unfolds:

(6) SBC051: 408.945–437.076

FRAN: ... I did take five years off.
.. I went to= uh=,
... Florida,
which was a terrible mistake.
... We needed a vacation,
and we accidentally moved instead.

ALICE: Oh=.

FRAN: .. And then,
we realized that,
... @Well,
<@ The first year we were there,
we visited New York six times,
and we looked at each other and said @>.

BERNARD: @@@

FRAN: .. <VOX God,
we certainly do go back up there a lot,
what do you think that's about VOX>.
You know,
and we were just getting increasingly bored down there and,
(H) you know,
.. you- .. get .. occupied .. fixing up a house,
and that's kinda fu=n,
and the[n],

ALICE: [Wh]ere in Florida were you.

First of all, as I said, Fran here continues to tell the story she started in (5), i.e., the plots in Fran’s utterances throughout (6) and (7) below, are all connected to one another, and to the earlier turn in (5).²⁸ Here, too, we have true-story analogies linking the characters in Fran’s plot with her

what she says, unless and until any of the conversation’s participants raises a concern about the story’s correspondence to other events. It would be correct to say, however, that the information conveyed by Fran is taken by her audience by default here as correct (cf. Sweetser [yr]) whether or not it actually is. More generally, true-story analogies imply a presumption of such correctness.

²⁸ The connection becomes clearer and more explicit in (7), where Fran and Sean (who appears to know the story) repeat some of the descriptions in (5). At this stage I am stating the plots are connected mostly with the wisdom of hindsight. Alice, as a member of the audience, may not have been aware at this stage that Fran comes back to the same story. Indeed, as you recall, earlier she had linked this story with a different occurrence she knew of—Fran moving to New York from New Orleans.

past self and with her husband. Note, by the way, that these two characters are, at this point, not entirely specific. Many of the described and demonstrated actions are here attributed to both without differentiating between what each did or said, even where the nature of the action requires one actor. In terms of the informative, affective, and rhetorical functions of story, there is not much to add to what I already noted. The only difference is that the rhetorical function becomes less prominent, while the other two come to the fore. In terms of the evaluative function, we may note that Fran clearly labels moving to Florida as a mistake, and more generally creates in the plot of her story a space in which New York is an axiologically privileged location, the right place to live (for the plot's characters, at least), moving away from which implies negative evaluation.

Most of the time, Fran advances the story using described action, but at one point (for now) she switches to demonstrated action, where the characters reflect on their frequent visits to New York. At this point we hear them speak (again, without pointing out which of the two is the speaker): “God! We certainly do go back up there a lot. What do you think that's about?” This is a typical case of fictive interaction. The quote is not brought to cite anybody's words. Fran or her husband may have actually uttered these exact words at some point, or (more likely) they haven't. This is anyway not the point. The demonstrated utterance is meant to express the characters' motives and state of mind (see Pascual 2014, pp) at that point in the narrative, not to quote their words. We learn about how the plot unfolds at this point not from what Fran says the characters did, but by making our own inferences from the conversation between them that we “overhear.”

One last point to note before we move on is the intonation unit “you get occupied fixing up a house” and the rest of the turn that follows. This is a separate plot, where a relatively generic character is engaged in settling in a new place. The character could be anyone, but is connected by analogy with the two characters of the main plot (Fran and her husband, while in Florida) and with the implied audience (appealing to her own experience in similar situations, as it were). The analogy in both cases is *not* a true-story analogy, but is rather a kind of weaker parallelism, of the kind you might find in allegories and parables. The rhetorical function this subplot plays is that of

offering an account for the amount of time the two characters in the main plot do spend in Florida, before they decide to move out.

But let us move on. After a slight digression, in which Fran mostly tells Alice about their stay in Florida, the main sequence of the story resumes in (7):

(7) SBC051: 461.297–494.152

FRAN: But,
w=e didn't like it.
At all.
And so,
that's when we said,
.. well let's not do anything precipitous,
like we did moving down here,
(H) before we race back to New York,
... let's look around a little bit.
... So we= hit the road.
And we stayed out for a couple [years,
SEAN: [Two years they'd been looking].
FRAN: looking all over].
SEAN: ... [for other places].
ALICE: [Looking .. round],
... Really?
And --
FRAN: Unhunh?
... Round the US=.
ALICE: ... Wow=.
FRAN: .. And we,
.. kept finding these nice places.
FRAN: And we'd say,
(H) <VOX isn't this place nice VOX>?
And,
... Larry would say,
<VOX yes,
it's lovely.
Look at these beautiful homes.
Isn't that nice?
%Yes?
Isn't that nice?
Isn't that nice VOX>?
... <VOX<P Yeah,
but it's not New York P>VOX>.

Fran's first turn in (7) again uses demonstrated action, and fictive interaction more specifically. The same points made above apply. Note that here the rhetorical function is noted more explicitly (the quoted utterance is followed by the connector "So," indicating the quote provides the *reason* for the action described next). Fran briefly returns to described action, basically repeating what she described earlier in (5), with Sean joining in. Note, by the way, Alice's "Wow,"

which expresses her appreciation of the story being told (performed action) and also reflects the affective function of the plot in Fran's story.

Fran's last turn in (7) returns to demonstrated action, and is worth analyzing in a bit more detail. First of all—a minor but noteworthy point—Fran mentions a character by the name of Larry. It is immediately clear to us that Larry is her husband. And one might wonder how come. After all, the name has not been mentioned earlier in the conversation, and Alice—the direct addressee—was not expected to know who Larry was.²⁹ But once we treat the story as one continuous plot, with characters performing actions, the puzzle is easily resolved. We already knew Fran and her husband are the *dramatis personae* of this plot, and in terms of the action attributed to Larry, it is clear that he is one of these two characters, namely Fran's husband (cf. Sacks 1992, [baby cried/the guy stops him]). We know who Larry is *because we follow the plot*.

Another point to note is that Fran's turn contains a whole sequence of demonstrated actions (indeed, a plot nested within the main plot, and a clear case of fictive interaction too). Consider in particular the last sequence: “Isn't that nice? Yes. Isn't that nice? Isn't that nice? Yeah, but it's not New York.” There is no explicit marking to divide this sequence up into turns-of-talk, and yet we can tell that this is not a sequence uttered by the same character. Instead, we easily recognize one of the two as saying “Isn't that nice?” and the other answering “Yes,” the whole thing being repeated upon seeing different homes in different places and times,³⁰ and then the rejoinder “Yeah, but it's not New York” as the couple's conclusion. We need, again, to follow the plot, and also to follow the logic of the demonstrated action (in this case, the rules of turn-taking in conversation), to tell which character says what and when.

²⁹ This is the first time the name “Larry” appears in the recording. Some 20 minutes later (SBC051: 1540.605–1542.440) Fran says to Alice: “Larry. That was my husband's name,” from which we can deduce that indeed Alice did not know who Larry was in advance.

³⁰ This sequence is thus also a good example of a conversation as a fictive entity (ref.), used to achieve compression (in the blending theory sense).

The main story sequence basically ends here.³¹ As in the previous conversation I analyzed, the main plot of the story, with the demonstrated and described actions that make it up, is what drives the action. This shouldn't be surprising—this is a story sequence, after all. But, again, we have seen that the audience has to follow (i.e., simulate) the action making up the plot to understand what Fran is saying (e.g., to identify Larry as her husband, or to correctly parse the sequence “Isn't that nice? Yes. Isn't that nice? Isn't that nice?”); a literal interpretation of Fran's words would not suffice. We also saw, again, that the story is eloquent (cf. Cooren 2010, [pp]), in the sense that it is through the story and its plot that Fran pursues her communicative aims in this conversation. She lets the story speak for her.

This last point is particularly conspicuous when we consider Fran's use of demonstrated action in the story. While most of Fran's narrative progresses through described action (“I went to Florida,” “we stayed out for a couple of years,” etc.), there are three points at which she switches to demonstrated action, in all three cases relating a (fictive) conversation between characters identified as Fran and her husband. Non-coincidentally, these three points at which Fran switches to demonstrated action represent the three main turns in the narrative. First, when Fran and Larry reflect on their frequent visits to New York (“God, we certainly do go back up there a lot. What do you think that's about?”), this reflection serves as Fran's account for their decision to move out of Florida. Next, their decision to go traveling in search of a new home is accounted for by the fictive utterance: “Well, let's not do anything precipitous, like we did moving down here, before we race

³¹ While Fran hasn't quite finished (for example, she says nothing about the concluding stage in the narrative—they moving back to New York), in subsequent turns (SBC051: 494.152–525.381) Bernard and Alice take over, already providing the audience's response that sums up the story. There are several very interesting things going on in this audience response. For example, Bernard and Alice reframe Fran's account in terms of addiction (which was also a central theme earlier in the conversation): the characters in her story are now described as addicts trying, unsuccessfully, to abstain from the drug that is New York. The new plot thus generated is linked by analogy to the plot of Fran's story, but with evaluations reversed. I could add several other interesting observations here, but the analysis is running too long as it is, so this will need to wait for another occasion.

back to New York. Let's look around a little bit.” Finally, the decision to settle back in New York after all is explained by the fictive conversation in the end (“... Isn't that nice? Yeah, but it's not New York”). It is thus the *demonstrated* action in this plot that drives the narrative forward, while the described action merely fills in the missing information to set the stage for the demonstrated action to play out. The demonstrated action as such does not require any gloss to make it meaningful.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I suggested a framework for (qualitative) semantic analysis for natural language utterances based on the assumptions that meaning is both simulation-based (lots of refs) and intersubjective to the core (refs, inc. Bakhtin). What made such a framework possible was applying the literary categories of action, character, and plot to ordinary language. I have outlined the terms in which such semantic analyses can be conducted (see also Sandler 2012) and provided sample analyses of two conversation transcripts to illustrate how they may proceed.

In the few pages I have left, I would like to touch on a few questions that come up following the proposed approach and mark some avenues for further research.

[Action and Meaning Revisited. {A recapitulation of main points and a discussion of how described and demonstrated actions contribute to performed ones using the examples analyzed (one direction to develop in future research)}]

[Fictivity and Fiction. Full-fledged fiction develops demonstrated and described actions into a whole (usually interconnected) fictional reality and does so *at the expense* of the performed action, which the author accomplishes (or tries to accomplish) *vis-à-vis* the readers.³² The latter is

³² The performed action need not be identified with the author's subjective intentions. Indeed, that would be equally true of everyday utterances, where a speaker may intend to perform one action, but inadvertently achieve a very different effect.

either reduced to some generic affective function (e.g., *to entertain*), or is made the subject of speculative interpretation. {Recall the mostly-affective purpose of role-play in the JM example. R does have practical motives, and *performs* actions, but in truth, she need not have invoked the JM in pursuing those. She seems to conduct the role-play (and S cooperates) for its own sake, to entertain, laugh, bond}}

[**Showing and Telling.** {Recall “Jim hit Bob” from earlier} Now, this subject-predicate version of semantics can be viewed as a special case (for a simple class of *described* actions, mostly *specific* characters, and, with a few exceptions, plots using *true-story analogies*) of the approach to meaning presented here: The subject identifies a character, the predicate (and objects) identifies a described action, and perhaps the illocutionary force or mood signals the performed action. But you might wonder, isn’t it the other way around? Don’t we need to first get our subjects and predicates right before we can spot any actions of any sort in a stretch of discourse? Here are a few arguments to indicate action in fact comes first.]

[1. Demonstrated action can be used to refer, create categories, form words {recall analysis of college advice; cite my 2012 and Esther’s ch. 3 and paper; recall also the relevant literature on grammaticalization, also cited above}.]

[2. On the other hand, subject-predicate analysis is no good in accounting for demonstrated actions {cite my paper in the CF volume, and maybe recapitulate the argument; also note the presence of prosody, gesture, indirect speech acts (e.g., in Deut. 30) within FI; also recall the points in the analyses where we had to follow the logic of the action (both demonstrated and described) to be able to identify the speaking character—without which the semantics would not make any sense}.]

[3. Just like in good fiction, in conversation too, showing works better than telling. Demonstrated action is more convincing, rhetorically effective, than described action (and cf. Brandt and Pascual, forth.). The latter is more often used to set the scene for the real thing {use

climax point in the leaving NYC story to illustrate}. On the other hand, demonstrated action can very well stand on its own {"I'm a New-York-a-holic!", JM}.]

[All this seems to indicate that demonstrated action is more fundamental than described action, may underlie traditional grammatical and semantic categories. This suggests, as I claimed earlier on, that the right order in which to examine the levels of action in discourse, is from performed to demonstrated to described, and not the other way around.]

[**The Hermeneutic Circle at Work.** A point I highlighted in the analyses is that we keep track of who's talking (also see earlier point in the concluding remarks), we need to follow plots in the utterance, with the actions described and demonstrated in them, as they unfold, in order to identify at every point who is talking {on this—follow the old text of the talk}. This implies a kind of hermeneutic circle at work in understanding conversational utterances: we begin with some preliminary expectations regarding the *whole* of the utterance we are about to hear (as *performed* action). We then keep a watchful eye on how the plot unfolds, to revise our understanding. Finally, we take this understanding as a starting point for our own action, performed in *response*.]

[{Use within the "we keep track" block:} There is one crucial question I did not really touch on in this paper, and that is the question of how do we know. How do we know which functions does a given plot carry in an utterance? How do we know whether we hear the voice of a character, and if so—which, and what analogies link this character to which person or entity (if any) in the world? Even given the relational nature of meaning and the fact that there is, normally, no single correct analysis for which plots, characters, and actions are to be found in an utterance, it is still clear we *are* able to discern voices and actions. Otherwise, we would badly misunderstand most of what people tell us.]

[Still, as we have seen, we cannot always rely on explicit cues to mark plots or actions and the words spoken by this or that character. In some cases we may have such explicit cues {"This is when we *said*, let's not do anything precipitous"}. In other cases there is no such marking {e.g., the New-York-a-holic sequence}. There might be, perhaps even must be, some other cues to tip off

audiences that they should expect a plot to appear or a shift of character, etc., but we have no remotely complete list of such cues. Instead of looking for special cues, though, I'd suggest the possibility that as audiences we constantly keep track, ask ourselves, "Who (i.e., which character" is talking?" at any point in the utterance]

[A travelling circus of voices and characters follows us wherever we go, and it stages an act whenever we open our mouth to speak. At times the act is a respectable solo performance, but even then—watch out!—you never know when one of the other clowns may pop up and start talking.]

So, to sum up, we all regularly and prolifically use characters when we speak. But this fact raises some theoretical issues. Most approaches in linguistics and in the philosophy of language leave little theoretical room for the appearance of characters in discourse. Thus, philosophical semantics tells us that the meaning of an utterance is grounded in the literal meanings of the words and sentences that were uttered, and that various pragmatic factors, affecting our actual understanding of it, only come into play once the literal meaning has been calculated (Stanley 2000 and Bach 2005 are two typical representatives of this attitude). These pragmatic factors, presumably, would include some sort of treatment of talk attributed to characters.

But, of course, as a minimum, such an approach would require some kind of clear marking in the "text" of the utterance, telling us when each character is speaking, so that we know when to apply these pragmatic add-ons. Indeed, such marking *can* often be found in actual conversational discourse. For example, in Transcript 3 (part of the conversation segment that appears in the appendix), Fran uses the verb "say" in her story to mark what, technically, are direct quotations, and some of the quotations themselves are even prosodically marked. Of course, those are not *really* quotations, and Fran brings them not in order to report what she and Larry said – they most likely never pronounced the exact words Fran uses – but rather to explain what motivated their

traveling in search of a new house, and their subsequent return to New York. But at least we see where the extra pragmatic mechanisms, whatever they are, are supposed to kick in.

Transcript 3 (SBC051: 461.297-494.152)

FRAN: But,
w=e didn't like it.
At all.
And so,
→ that's when we said,
.. well let's not do anything precipitous,
like we did moving down here,
(H) before we race back to New York,
... let's look around a little bit.
... So we= hit the road.
And we stayed out for a couple [years,
SEAN: [Two years they'd been looking].
FRAN: looking all over].
SEAN: ... [for other places].
ALICE: [Looking .. round],
... Really?
And --
FRAN: Unhunh?
... Round the US=.
ALICE: ... Wow=.
FRAN: .. And we,
.. kept finding these nice places.
→ FRAN: And we'd say,
(H) <VOX isn't this place nice VOX>?
And,
→ ... Larry would say,
<VOX yes,
it's lovely.
Look at these beautiful homes.
Isn't that nice?
%Yes?
Isn't that nice?
Isn't that nice VOX>?
... <VOX<P Yeah,
but it's not New York P>VOX>.

However, this is not always the case. In Transcript 4 (which follows shortly after Transcript 3 in the same conversation and in the appendix), when Alice pleads: “let me outa New York”, “Gotta get outa this place”, she devotes her full turn of talk to this. She does not announce what she’s saying as a quote in any way (and prosodically, unless you count laughter as a quotation marker, these utterances are not marked as belonging to a character either). And yet, she does not in fact express a desire to get out of New York. Rather, these words belong to the character she herself names as “the New-York-a-holic”.

Transcript 4 (SBC051: 508.078-525.381)

ALICE: [Do they have New York AA?

FRAN: ... to ludicrous rents],
ALICE: .. <X You know X>,
@@
(H) or maybe] they've been to New Y[ork,
BERNARD: [Well,
ALICE: @]
BERNARD:
they] do.
ALICE: .. (H)
BERNARD: Don't they.
They have their own ver- --
.. They- --
→ ALICE: [@(Hx) <@ Get me outa] New York @>.
BERNARD: [They do].
→ ALICE: <@ Got- .. [gotta get] outa this place @>.
FRAN: [We have so-] --
... We- --
.. What --
ALICE: ... I'm a New [York-a .. holic].
FRAN: [<X Weren't we saying X>],
BERNARD: [No she's s-] --
She's asking if they have,
th=ey should have an addiction to New York.
SEAN: Or --
FRAN: Oh,
New Yorkers Anonymous.

Another option could be to propose, following Paul Grice (1989), that we first try to understand utterances literally, and then, if something doesn't work out, we go back to reinterpret the utterance. To be sure, initially misunderstanding utterances, realizing you've got it wrong, and reinterpreting them is something we all do sometimes, but not all that often. Usually we understand character use straight away, without experiencing initial difficulties. Moreover, often there's no clear violation of Grice's maxims involved.³³

Some of the Cognitive Linguists, who described and discussed the phenomena I listed earlier, appeal in their work to Gilles Fauconnier's Mental Space Theory (Fauconnier 1994; Fauconnier & Turner 2002). Characters use in discourse, under this construal, involves attributing a mental space to each character. Now, as a *descriptive* device this is a great step forward, and the

³³ This can be said to be the case with R's first utterances in Transcript 2, although they can also be analyzed as providing superfluous information, from the point she utters "the food is getting cold" on. Nevertheless, such an analysis already presumes the utterance is in need of additional explication, and it is by no means clear that a violation of Grice's maxim of quantity would be apparent to a listener who does not already recognize the Jewish Mother character in R's words.

connection to cognitive linguistic theory is important, but we are still left with the question of how to assign what part of the utterance to which mental space. Despite some valuable observations about particular words (such as “fake”) and constructions (such as sentential negation), this question remains, in general, unanswered. So, in explaining the interpretation of utterances that use characters, referring to the different characters’ positions as “mental spaces” doesn’t add much to simply noting that characters are used. Plus, mental spaces, *qua* theoretical abstractions, and unlike characters, don’t have perspectives, goals, beliefs, motives. They don’t *do* things.

So, what do I propose? Well, instead of trying to explain the phenomena of character use in discourse by reducing them to something else, my suggestion is that we should recognize character use as a *basic* feature of all discourse. To be more precise, I suggest that the use of characters is a straightforward extension of the dialogic nature of language itself. This is, essentially, a restatement of Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981; 1984) notion of inner dialogicity.

6. Appendix

Excerpt from the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (Du Bois and Englebretson 2005), conversation no. 051:

FRAN: .. Yeah.
... (H) And the new buildings are=,
... I don't like the new buildings.
ALICE: Do you like living in New York?
FRAN: ... Yeah.
I love it.
... (H) We traveled all over.
We looked around.
We thought,
(H) my husband and I stayed out on the road,
... fo=r two years.
... And we went all over the United States,
and we d-
... we didn't find any place we liked [better].
ALICE: [So you] went from New Orleans to New
York?
FRAN: ... Yeah.
Oh that I did years ago.
... That I did,
ALICE: ... But it's the new.
That ... part [XXXX].
FRAN: [God knows,
s-] nineteen si- sixty something.
.. Sixty-three.
... Thirty [years ago].
ALICE: [So you've lived] in New York all this time?

FRAN: Mhm?
 .. Thirty years.
 Except,
 (H) I did take [five years off].

BERNARD: [@@ .. @@]@@

ALICE: †Thirty years [in New] York†?

BERNARD: [@(H)]

FRAN: Yeah.

ALICE: Wow.

FRAN: ... I did take five years off.
 .. I went to= uh=,
 ... Florida,
 which was a terrible mistake.
 ... We needed a vacation,
 and we accidentally moved instead.

ALICE: Oh=.

FRAN: .. And then,
 we realized that,
 ... @Well,
 <@ The first year we were there,
 we visited New York six times,
 and we looked at each other and said @>,

BERNARD: @@@

FRAN: .. <VOX God,
 we certainly do go back up there a lot,
 what do you think that's about VOX>.
 You know,
 and we were just getting increasingly bored down there and,
 (H) you know,
 .. you- .. get .. occupied .. fixing up a house,
 and that's kinda fu=n,
 and the[n],

ALICE: [Wh]ere in Florida were you.

FRAN: ... On the Gulf Coast,
 Fort Myers Beach.
 We had a nice house,

((segment omitted))

FRAN: But,
 w=e didn't like it.
 At all.
 And so,
 that's when we said,
 .. well let's not do anything precipitous,
 like we did moving down here,
 (H) before we race back to New York,
 ... let's look around a little bit.
 ... So we= hit the road.
 And we stayed out for a couple [years,
 SEAN: [Two years they'd been looking].
 FRAN: looking all over].

SEAN: ... [for other places].

ALICE: [Looking .. round],
 ... Really?
 And --

FRAN: Unhunh?
 ... Round the US=.

ALICE: ... Wow=.

FRAN: .. And we,
 .. kept finding these nice places.

FRAN: And we'd say,
 (H) <VOX isn't this place nice VOX>?
 And,
 ... Larry would say,
 <VOX yes,
 it's lovely.
 Look at these beautiful homes.
 Isn't that nice?
 %Yes?

Isn't that nice?
 Isn't that nice VOX>?
 ... <VOX<P Yeah,
 but it's not New York P>VOX>.

BERNARD: [It's] --
 FRAN: [@]@@@ [@(H)=]
 ALICE: [You w-] --
 .. Wow.
 FRAN: And so we'd ... drive on.
 .. We found lots of places that we like to sp[end] --
 BERNARD: [Oh,
 if] New York's under your skin,
 watch out.
 FRAN: % Yeah,
 [it's like a drug].
 BERNARD: [You can't get out].
 ... It --
 .. It [i=s.
 FRAN: [You're finished].
 BERNARD: .. It] ... i=s a drug.

FRAN: ... That's it.
 .. You're consigned,
 the r[est of your life,
 ALICE: [Do they have New York AA?
 FRAN: ... to ludicrous rents],
 ALICE: .. <X You know X>,
 @@
 (H) or maybe] they've been to New Y[ork,
 BERNARD: [Well,
 ALICE: @]
 BERNARD: they] do.
 ALICE: .. (H)
 BERNARD: Don't they.
 They have their own ver- --
 .. They- --
 ALICE: [@(Hx) <@ Get me outa] New York @>.
 BERNARD: [They do].
 ALICE: <@ Got- .. [gotta get] outa this place @>.
 FRAN: [We have so-] --
 ... We- --
 .. What --
 ALICE: ... I'm a New [York-a .. holic].
 FRAN: [<X Weren't we saying X>],
 BERNARD: [No she's s-] --
 She's asking if they have,
 th=ey should have an addiction to New York.

SEAN: Or --
 FRAN: Oh,
 New Yorkers Anonymous.

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