Bauer, Matthias & Sigrid Beck et al. (2020), ***Linguistics Meets Literature. More on the Grammar of Emily Dickinson***. Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH. (TILSM 329)

A significant share of research into style in recent decades has successfully stressed the importance of connecting linguistics with literary studies, in particular in order to demonstrate the power of interdisciplinarity and to support the more subjective insights into the interpretations that literary scholars usually offer. The authors of the publication under review enter this tradition by mixing formal semantics with literary studies, an approach which serves as a methodological toolkit for analysing in detail certain aspects of Emily Dickinson's poetry. The authors show how important it is to use concrete linguistic apparati to prove some interpretive points made within the area of literary scholarship. The rationale behind the decision to concentrate on Emily Dickinson's poetry lies in the fact that this particular *œuvre* is indicative of the exceptional use of language by the poet, which opens the potential for manifold interpretations of her poems, as well as of Dickinson's linguistic intuition and competence, thus making it possible for a scholar to examine the nature of grammar and semantics, and their impact on the reading of poems.

This publication arose as a result of cooperation between linguists and literary scholars engaged in the project A2 "Interpretability in Context" of the Collaborative Research Center 833 "The Construction of Meaning" (University of Tübingen). The researchers who participated in this project are as follows: Matthias Bauer, Sigrid Beck, Susanne Riecker, Saskia Brockmann, Angelika Zirker, Nadine Bade, Carmen Dörge, and Julia Braun. By considering the intrinsic interrelationship between language and literature, the scholars intend to draw the reader's attention to the possibility of connecting two different methodologies specific to the disciplines of literary studies and linguistics.

The most fundamental goal of *Linguistics Meets Literature* is not only to understand Emily Dickinson's poetry better, but also to comprehend various linguistic mechanisms as used by the poet herself to "learn more about language" (2020: 1). As the authors put it themselves, "Not only do we learn to share her [Emily Dickinson] vision, we also realize how much the poems tell us about language. What is cryptic and elusive is combined with the greatest possible awareness of how language works" (ibid.). The chosen linguistic methods – descriptive linguistics, theoretical linguistics, formal semantics and pragmatics – serve the authors to interpret and understand selected poems, as "linguistics will give a very precise and detailed analysis of a text, unaffected by arbitrary interpretations or conjectures" (ibid.). The approach adopted throughout the publication is referred to as a text-oriented one, meaning that all interpretations of literary content always capitalize on that previously conducted thorough linguistic analysis. This book is divided into three main parts, each grouped into chapters, as well as a foreword, an introduction, a bibliography, and an index. The first part, entitled *Individual Analyses* contains six chapters, each of which pertains to the

interpretation of specific poems by Dickinson. The second part, entitled *Emily Dickinson: The Poet as Linguist, and the Linguist as Poet* is composed of two chapters in which the authors discuss those linguistic mechanisms which are to be often found in the poet's *œuvre*. This part of the book refers to both syntactic and semantic phenomena as employed by Dickinson. The third part, *Benefits of Interdisciplinary Work*, consists of two chapters, in which the authors intend to demonstrate how the findings they obtained can be successfully used to study poetic texts by connecting two diverse disciplinary methodologies, as well as underscoring the benefits that such interdisciplinary endeavor can derive from combining literary studies with linguistics.

The first chapter of the initial part of the book concentrates on the poem "To pile like Thunder", which, according to the authors, demonstrates how cleverly the poet dealt with the logic of language. This poem exploits lexical ambiguities and a logical puzzle. The underspecification used in this poem, as well as the interaction of the local ambiguities, helps the poet to draw the reader's attention to the similarities between love and poetry, and natural phenomena, i.e. thunder. In the second chapter of this part, the poem entitled "You said that I 'was Great'" is discussed, with strong emphasis placed on the semantics of the predicate "you are great". The authors of the publication rightly underline in this the importance of contextual embedment, which needs to be taken into account while interpreting the meaning of a given lexical item and analysing the intricacies of the relationship between the speaker and the addressee. As the authors underline, the vagueness of lexical units frequently leads to difficulties with the communication process. In their own words, ". . . meaning can get lost in communication, either because the phrasing is not precise enough, or because it cannot be precise enough – and that language always expresses a multiplicity of connotations that can be dealt with in a playful, creative fashion" (38-9). The analysis clearly shows that a seemingly precise item can trigger various, oftentimes unpredictable, associations.

The next chapter of this part deals with quantifiers (somebody and nobody), which are interpreted as manifesting in Dickinson's poem titled "I'm Nobody". Here again, the authors of the publication emphasize the poet's dexterous language use, as well as her exceptional linguistic intuition, in trying to depict the complexities of the notion of identity. As the authors rightly stress, the playful and creative exploitation of the quantifiers allow for reading the poem alternatively, an approach enabling the reader to see the concept of identity from a fresh and unique perspective, where the items "Nobody" and "Somebody" gain a new interpretive dimension. This way the reader understands the peculiarities of language itself: "The reader is made to think not only about what it means to be nobody or somebody, but also about what the words 'nobody' and 'somebody' mean if considered in general and how they can (or cannot) be employed, and to what ends" (51). Here again a conclusion is drawn that Dickinson's poetry should be interpreted by taking into consideration the global context within which a given poem is embedded, as well as its linguistic structure, as both form and content intertwine to a great extent within the sphere of poetry.

The next chapter focuses on the poem "This was a Poet", whose main idea rests on how the poet and his/her readers interact together and how this type of interaction may lead to different interpretations of the some poetic piece. In this case, a double interpretation of the poem comes into play with the following tools exploited by the poet: ellipsis, fragmentation, presupposition, and anaphora. By concentrating on demonstratives and pronouns, the authors intend to prove that considering the global context of the piece leads to at least two different readings of the work. Interestingly, the two interpretations, somewhat opposing but coherent at the same time, are possible thanks again to Dickinson's playful use of specific linguistic mechanisms which allow for manifesting the reciprocity within the relationship between the author and the reader, the poet and the reader. In the case of this poem, the parallelism of the suggested interpretations discloses the full spectrum of its semantic dimensions.

The fifth chapter of this part revolves around identifying referents manifesting in the poem "If it had no pencil". As the authors of the publication stress, they address the core interpretative problem of this piece by concentrating "on its use of presuppositions in counterfactuals, and the puzzling use of pronouns, especially "it", which seems to lack a referent intratextually" (p. 79). As in the fourth chapter, there is no one specific reading of this poem, and various interpretations interact with each other by creating a coherent whole. By proposing to look at FictonalAssert from a new perspective, the authors draw the reader's attention to both presupposition accommodation and a performative interpretation, which makes it possible for the reader to reach a deeper, philosophical understanding of the content. The authors interestingly conclude as follows: "By employing the question mode and the semantics of pronouns and indexicals, Emily Dickinson creates the impression of a personal situation which may not be fully reconstructed and, at the same time, offers complex thoughts each reader may apply to herself" (97).

The last chapter of the first part of the reviewed book focuses on "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun", "one of Dickinson's most controversial poems" (99). Not surprisingly, this poem triggered two interpretations, "both of which are upheld by the interaction of several coercion mechanisms and semantic mismatches that require reinterpretation" (100). The authors of the book concentrate on the importance of taking into account a third reading, apart from the one more literal and the one of a figurative nature. With the use of "deviant structures" (126) by Dickinson, the reader turns towards a non-literal interpretation of this poetic piece by considering "the coexistence of several threads of interpretation" (127), with the third reading revolving around a linguistic reflection as triggered by the syntactic and semantic structure of the poem.

If the first part of this book oscillates more around detail, then the second part is more focused on the general as extracted from the findings obtained in the analyses referred to in the previous paragraph. In the first chapter, "The Poet as Linguist", the authors discuss in detail those linguistic mechanisms (syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic) that became frequent and which interacted in Dickinson's poetry. As the

authors of the publication rightly underscore, "it is not only the case that Emily Dickinson's poems contain ambiguity, but that this ambiguity is strategic, and establishes a complex structure where a limited number of interpretations arise at the global level of the text" (155), with grammar standing at the very centre of the interpretive process. Grammar here performs a two-fold function: it both restricts a reading, at least to some extent, and also makes it possible for the reader to develop more flexible interpretations of a given poem. The authors of the book conclude as follows, "Emily Dickinson as a poet is revealed to be an intuitive linguist: her main tool to convey complex meanings lies within a linguistic analytic approach to language and text" (ibid.), a statement which also justifies the reason for addressing the specificity of the poet's *œuvre* through a linguistic lens.

The second chapter of this part of the book, intended to "synthesize . . . findings" (158), tries to answer the question regarding the meaning behind the conscious use of certain linguistic mechanisms by Dickinson in her poetry "as a poetological concept" (ibid.). As the authors of the publication state, "Dickinson systematically uses language and exploits rules of grammar and semantics in a way that results in interpretative flexibility" (ibid.). In this way, the poet makes use of manifold possibilities associated with the linguistic phenomena which occur in the poems analysed. This chapter, then, focuses on how "the different linguistic phenomena foregrounded in them contribute to a poetics of possibility" (ibid.). By looking at the poems discussed in Part 1 of the book from a closer perspective, the authors identify certain patterns which frequently occur in Dickinson's 'philosophy of language'. These include: semantic disambiguation, deep reflection on the meaning of the sign, "the tension between the possible meanings of an expression" (172), (re)interpretation of meanings, the interdependency between the world and the word, and the agency of language. As the authors of the book underline, ". . . her [Dickinson's] poems become expressive of how Dickinson views and imagines the world, and this expression is foregrounded linguistically by means of complex semantic relationships" (175). The authors here reach a rather hermeneutically-oriented conclusion that language is not simply a tool but belongs to the world, being its inherent component.

The third part of the reviewed publication uses two distinct methodologies: linguistic and literary, in order to connect all the findings obtained in the two previous parts of the book. In the first chapter of this part of the publication, entitled "Poetry as a Data Source for Formal Linguistics", the authors underline the importance of poetry in researching the grammar of the human language. As they claim, "Formal semantics and pragmatics, however, have hardly ever included poetry as data that is equally interesting as, for instance, experimental, cross-linguistic, diachronic or corpus data" (180). The authors underscore that the language of poetry should not be viewed as distinct from so-called ordinary language. They argue that "… lyrical texts use a variety of a given language" (198), a variety which can be regarded as "deviant" (ibid.) to some extent but which are deployed by the poet on purpose. Such deviations, as the authors claim, are important for our understanding of the mechanism of the "core grammar" (ibid.).

Yet another crucial conclusion reached by the authors in this chapter is that the specificity of "the pragmatic step" (ibid.) exerts an influence on the functioning of linguistic phenomena which are of a semantic and pragmatic nature. The second chapter of this part of the book, entitled "Formal Linguistics as a Tool in Literary Studies", analyzes the importance of linguistic findings within the interface of semantics and pragmatics for the development of literary studies. For as the authors of the publication rightly underscore, in order to understand Dickinson's poetry better, it is advisable for the researcher to consider the unconventional linguistic mechanisms embedded within the literary structure of a given work. Such an approach to analyzing poetry enables the scholar to interpret the meaning of a poem at both more global and more local textual and semantic levels.

More importantly, however, by taking into consideration linguistic phenomena in analyzing fictional texts, in particular poetry, the interpreter starts noticing the inescapable connection between fictionality and the use of language, and the importance of pragmatics for discovering the meaning of a text. The authors motivate their rationale behind the logic of the use of the pragmatic step in interpreting a fictional text in the following way: ". . . a decisive factor in advancing linguistic theory by considering poetic texts is not just the challenge to interpretability they offer but also the opportunity they give us for establishing a dynamic framework of interpretation" (200). Also, the model adopted by the authors enables a researcher to take a closer look at the semantic and syntactic ambiguities as manifesting themselves in the interpretation process, which are associated with various (re)interpretations of a given fictional text.

The authors' interesting and unique perspective on investigating the grammar of Emily Dickinson not only accentuates the importance of interdisciplinarity (which in this case comes down to connecting linguistics and literary studies), but also underlines the benefits of formal semantics in analysing and interpreting Dickinson's poetry by manifesting the potential of mixing findings obtained within the field of linguistics with those typical of literary studies. Interestingly, the authors show the benefits of such interdisciplinarity from two perspectives: poems as research material for formal linguists, and formal linguistics as a theoretical and analytical framework for literary studies. However, instead of focusing primarily on the advantages of such a mix, they offer new ways of interpreting Emily Dickinson's poetry by considering her unique use of certain linguistic mechanisms whose aim is usually to focus on both semantic and syntactic ambiguities leading to various (often conflicting) readings.

Even though some reflections as shown in the book are hermeneutically-oriented (in particular those pertaining to the specificity and nature of meaning), they are related to issues that have already been tackled by cognitive linguists, pragmaticists, or philosophers of language, to name but a few groups of scholars interested in the relationship between language, text, and meaning. Nevertheless, the authors' fresh perspective on a variety of issues of interest to both linguists and literary scholars (and not only those who focus on Dickinson's poetic *œuvre*) provides insights about the nature of interpretation and about the interpreting process as researched within

the fields of linguistics and literary studies. Even more importantly, the logic and clarity of the argument as presented by the authors of the publication makes the book particularly helpful not only for specialists, but also for prospective linguists and literary scholars, as well as for those representing other disciplines loosely connected with linguistic and literary issues.

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