

# New Theory in Polyphonic Analysis: How to Polyphonically Approach Discourse?

Dr. HASSANI Rima Aida<sup>1</sup>, Dr. GHAMRI Sara<sup>2</sup>, Dr. LAOUAR Souhila<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>ILLAAC laboratory, University of Khenchela (Algeria).

<sup>2</sup>ILLAAC laboratory, University of Khenchela (Algeria).

<sup>3</sup>Iccempll laboratory, University of Khenchela (Algeria).

**The Author's E-mail:** [hassani.rima@univ-khenchela.dz](mailto:hassani.rima@univ-khenchela.dz)<sup>1</sup>, [ghamri.sara@univ-khenchela.dz](mailto:ghamri.sara@univ-khenchela.dz)<sup>2</sup>, [souhila.laouar@univ-khenchela.dz](mailto:souhila.laouar@univ-khenchela.dz)<sup>3</sup>

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## Abstract:

In the realm of scientific inquiry, a constant and pervasive theme is that of change, and the field of linguistics is emblematic of this perpetual transformation. Over the last two decades, the concept of polyphony has not only gained traction but has evolved into a pivotal element within both literary and linguistic studies.

As delineated in the preceding chapter, it is the inherent adaptability of polyphony that has reinstated its prominence, signaling a renaissance fueled by its capacity to mirror certain facets of reality. However, delineating the essence of polyphony proves to be as elusive as attempting to contain water within the confines of cupped hands. A cursory examination of its application exposes a rich tapestry of interpretations, each varying with the perspectives of the scholars engaged.

**Keywords:** comparison, rhetoric, figures of speech, linguistic theory, discourse analysis, multiplicity of voices.

## Introduction:

The concept's 'chameleonic nature' has necessitated a robust collaboration between literary scholars and linguists, united in their endeavor to decipher this multifaceted notion that pervades both domains. Despite drawing from Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal works as a common wellspring of inspiration, it has become apparent that the interpretations of polyphony diverge significantly between these two scholarly communities, leading to notable misunderstandings and, consequently, a pressing need for theoretical clarity.

Addressing this gap, linguist Henning Nølke, alongside a cohort of colleagues, has been instrumental in developing a linguistic theory of polyphony named ScaPoLine over the past decade. This initiative, while ambitious, encounters intrinsic challenges, primarily stemming from fundamental discrepancies in methodology and the subjects under scrutiny.

ScaPoLine is founded on two principal tenets. The first is a commitment to preserving the semantic coherence of statements to prevent the diversification of meanings from fragmenting

the unity of expression. This theoretical framework, meticulously crafted by ScaPoLine, strives to sustain a controlled yet multiplex dialogue, epitomizing a model of 'mastered multiplicity' that is particularly noteworthy for its persistence and coherence.<sup>1</sup>

The second cornerstone of ScaPoLine is its approach to linking the internal polyphony within individual statements to the broader polyphonic context of the originating texts. This strategy has effectively bridged the gap between the micro-level polyphonies, typically the focus of linguistic analysis, and the macro-level polyphonies, which are generally explored within literary studies. Through this synthesis, ScaPoLine enables a nuanced exploration of how 'minor' perspectives within statements can illuminate the 'major' discourses permeating a text.<sup>2</sup>

This concerted effort to integrate various polyphonic elements within statements signifies ScaPoLine's potential to occupy a vital and enduring role in research aimed at marrying the spoken word with textual analysis. We outline the operational framework of a theory designed to foster such interdisciplinary collaboration: ScaPoLine, a model accounting for distinctly linguistic polyphonic phenomena and anticipating their impact on discourse interpretation.

### **Independence and Autonomy from Ducrot:**

While ScaPoLine embraces a polyphonic framework that remains as faithful to Ducrot's seminal theories as possible, it notably diverges in its approach by extending the analysis of polyphony beyond the linguistic layer to encompass the dimension of speech itself. This expansion into the interpretative realm facilitates a unique collaboration with literary scholars, highlighting the distinctive trajectory ScaPoLine has taken from Ducrot's initial frameworks.

The seeds of this quest for theoretical independence were sown in 1985 when Henning Nølke published his influential article on the subjunctive mood, which proposed elements foundational to a new theory of polyphony. This theory was distinct in its focus on embedding polyphonic effects at the level of individual statements, positioning polyphony not merely as a descriptive tool but as a robust analytical instrument with substantial explanatory power.

Central to this innovative approach is the principle that the polyphonic dimensions of meaning within statements should be directly correlated with their linguistic forms—this includes the meticulous examination of lexical choices, morphosyntactic constructions, and prosodic features. As part of its development, ScaPoLine has introduced a range of new terminological conventions aimed at refining and expanding the analytical capabilities of polyphonic theory.

This endeavor, however, has not been without its challenges; the drive towards terminological independence sometimes led to misunderstandings, particularly as the new terms diverged from established Ducrotian vocabulary. For instance, the traditional term "enunciator" was replaced with alternatives that better aligned with ScaPoLine's revised theoretical focus, although this shift occasionally resulted in conceptual ambiguities.

<sup>1</sup> Oswald Ducrot, 2004, Foreword of ScaPoLine, pub: Kimé.

<sup>2</sup> Henning Nølke & Kjersti Fløttum & Coco Norén, 2004, ScaPoLine: Scandinavian Theory of Linguistic Polyphony, Paris, pub: Kimé, p: 03.

Despite these challenges, the relationship between the Ducrotian approach and ScaPoLine has remained one of conceptual compatibility and continual dialogue. From the outset, the Scandinavian group of polyphonists, under Nolke's leadership, invited Ducrot to engage in an ongoing exchange of ideas—a proposition he accepted with enthusiasm. This collaboration was particularly evident during a significant meeting in March 2001 in Paris, where Ducrot and Nolke convened to discuss and hopefully standardize their terminological framework. Ducrot's contributions during this period not only reaffirmed the foundational principles shared by both approaches but also enriched ScaPoLine's ongoing development.<sup>3</sup>

Today, ScaPoLine is poised to evolve into a comprehensive linguistic theory of polyphony that aims to lay a robust theoretical foundation for the analysis of polyphonic phenomena across languages. This theory not only signifies a maturation of Nolke's initial propositions but also embodies a commitment to fostering a deeper understanding of how polyphonic effects manifest and interact within both language and speech. The enduring dialogue with Ducrot underscores a collective aspiration towards a cohesive and stable theoretical terminology, reflecting a shared dedication to advancing the study of polyphony within the linguistic community.<sup>4</sup>

### **Object and Task:**

ScaPoLine's primary objective is to articulate the linguistic foundations essential for text analysis, thereby creating "an operational apparatus for textual analyses." This endeavor fosters a synergistic relationship between linguistic and literary studies. Literary scholars often provide linguists with a wealth of examples featuring nuanced interpretations, unveiling new dimensions of text for linguistic scrutiny. Conversely, linguists elucidate the systematic significance of linguistic details, thereby enriching the literary scholars' interpretations and discoveries of textual meanings.<sup>5</sup>

ScaPoLine's dual tasks involve, firstly, preserving the semantic unity of statements and, secondly, analyzing the texts constructed from these statements. The theory addresses what are termed 'polyphonic structure' and 'polyphonic configuration'. The polyphonic structure refers to a constellation of directives informed by linguistic forms, whereas the polyphonic configuration pertains to the interpretation of aspects within a statement's meaning.

ScaPoLine distinguishes itself by focusing initially on the polyphonic configuration before delving into the linguistic forms themselves. This approach prioritizes the examination of four fundamental elements that constitute the polyphonic structure: the speaker as constructor (Loc), viewpoints (pdv), discursive beings (ê-d), and enunciative links (liens). These elements

<sup>3</sup> Henning Nølke & Kjersti Fløttum & Coco Norén, 2004, *ScaPoLine: Scandinavian Theory of Linguistic Polyphony*, Paris, pub: Kimé, p: 20.

<sup>4</sup> Henning Nølke & Kjersti Fløttum & Coco Norén, 2004, *ScaPoLine: Scandinavian Theory of Linguistic Polyphony*, Paris, pub: Kimé, p: 21.

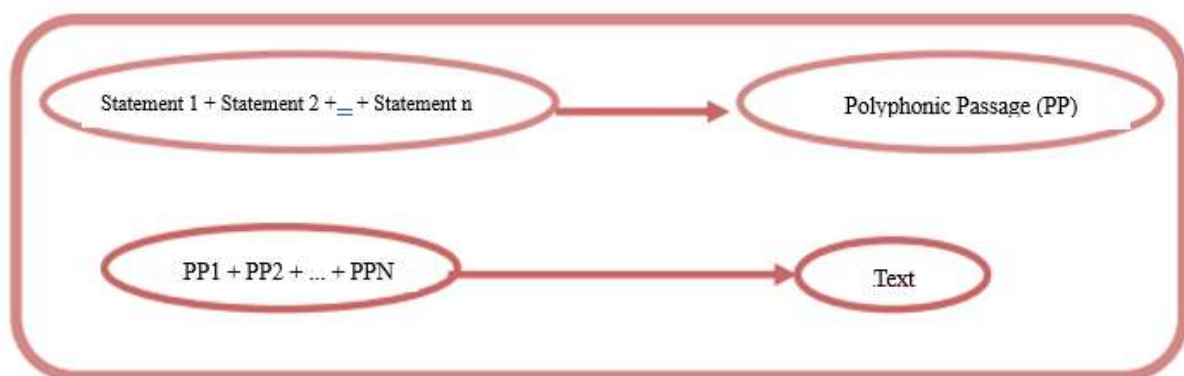
<sup>5</sup> Henning Nølke & Kjersti Fløttum & Coco Norén, 2004, *ScaPoLine: Scandinavian Theory of Linguistic Polyphony*, Paris, pub: Kimé, p: 23.

form the scaffold upon which polyphonic readings are based, allowing the theory to dissect how specific linguistic forms predispose certain interpretations.<sup>6</sup>

ScaPoLine is fundamentally concerned with the analysis of utterances—discrete segments of discourse that together weave the fabric of larger texts. The theory has evolved to include a broader analysis encompassing entire texts through the examination of micro-texts or sequences. This extended scope enables ScaPoLine to explore polyphony not only at the level of individual utterances but across entire texts.

The Scandinavian theory, represented by ScaPoLine, employs a methodological approach that prioritizes the analysis of interpretation. Its object of study is the semantic description of language structures, aiming to illuminate the constraints imposed by specific linguistic forms that favor particular meanings. Essentially, it addresses the question: how does a specific form give rise to a specific meaning?

In its entirety, ScaPoLine is a theory that focuses on the analysis of utterances, meaning segments of discourse. Over time, it has expanded to analyze texts through the lens of micro-texts or sequences. Consequently, it aims to study polyphony at the level of individual utterances and extend this analysis across the majority of the text. The following schema illustrates its general approach:



**Figure 1:** Concept by Henning Nölke

This theory conducts its analyses by acknowledging the distinctions between language and speech, as well as between utterance and polyphonic passage. This indicates that it explores two domains: the non-extended domain, which involves analysis at the language level, and the extended domain, which addresses the entirety of the polyphonic passage.

Unlike Ducrotian polyphony, which focuses solely on phenomena relevant to language, ScaPoLine addresses polyphonic manifestations at the level of speech, where interpretation takes place. Ultimately, it is at this stage that literary analysis comes into play.

<sup>6</sup> Henning Nölke & Kjersti Fløttum & Coco Norén, 2004, ScaPoLine: Scandinavian Theory of Linguistic Polyphony, Paris, pub: Kimé, p: 31.

ScaPoLine pays detailed attention to the meaning effects produced by linguistic forms, examining how these forms influence and shape the interpretation of texts. This holistic approach allows ScaPoLine to bridge the gap between linguistic structure and literary meaning, offering a nuanced understanding of how language constructs and conveys complex layers of meaning within discourse.

### **Objectives and Ambitions:**

The ScaPoLine project, underpinned by a synergistic framework between linguists and literary scholars, sets forth ambitious objectives rooted in theoretical innovation. Central to ScaPoLine is its role in furnishing the linguistic underpinnings for utterance analysis essentially, this theory delineates the linguistic constraints that shape the polyphonic interpretation of discourse.

By advancing beyond Ducrot's semantic framework, which views language as independent from actual speech, ScaPoLine aims to establish a robust operational tool for textual analysis. The focus on examining how linguistic elements anchor polyphonic effects is deemed critical.<sup>7</sup>

ScaPoLine's approach goes beyond cataloging linguistic processes that trigger specific enunciative effects. It seeks to elucidate, through meticulous linguistic analysis anchored firmly at the language level, the reasons underlying the functional specificity of these processes and why certain linguistic forms foster particular effects. The theory probes into the extent to which language offers cues about the identities of 'enunciators'.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, ScaPoLine extends its analytical reach to define the linguistic constraints on the saturation of discourse sources, challenging the Ducrotian notion that speakers merely construct enunciators to represent viewpoints. Instead, it posits that speakers construct a variety of discourse entities, including discursive beings perceived as potential sources of distinct viewpoints.<sup>9</sup>

The integration of literary and linguistic dimensions is fundamental to the methodology of ScaPoLine, with a stress on maintaining controlled complementarity between the two fields. This integrative challenge, as highlighted by Kjersti Fløttum at a conference in Paris in March 2001, involves navigating significant epistemological and theoretical hurdles, given the distinct starting points of linguistic analysis (language level) and literary analysis (speech level). This distinction underpins ScaPoLine's tripartite analytical model, which seeks to harmonize these levels to foster a holistic understanding.

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<sup>7</sup> Coco Norén, 2004, *ScaPoLine: Scandinavian Theory of Linguistic Polyphony*, Paris, pub: Kimé, p: 21.

<sup>8</sup> Henning Nølke & Kjersti Fløttum & Coco Norén, 2004, *ScaPoLine: Scandinavian Theory of Linguistic Polyphony*, Paris, pub: Kimé, p: 21. (Note: This is a duplicate of footnote 7.)

<sup>9</sup> Henning Nølke & Kjersti Fløttum & Coco Norén, 2004, *ScaPoLine: Scandinavian Theory of Linguistic Polyphony*, Paris, pub: Kimé, p: 22.

### General Theoretical Framework:

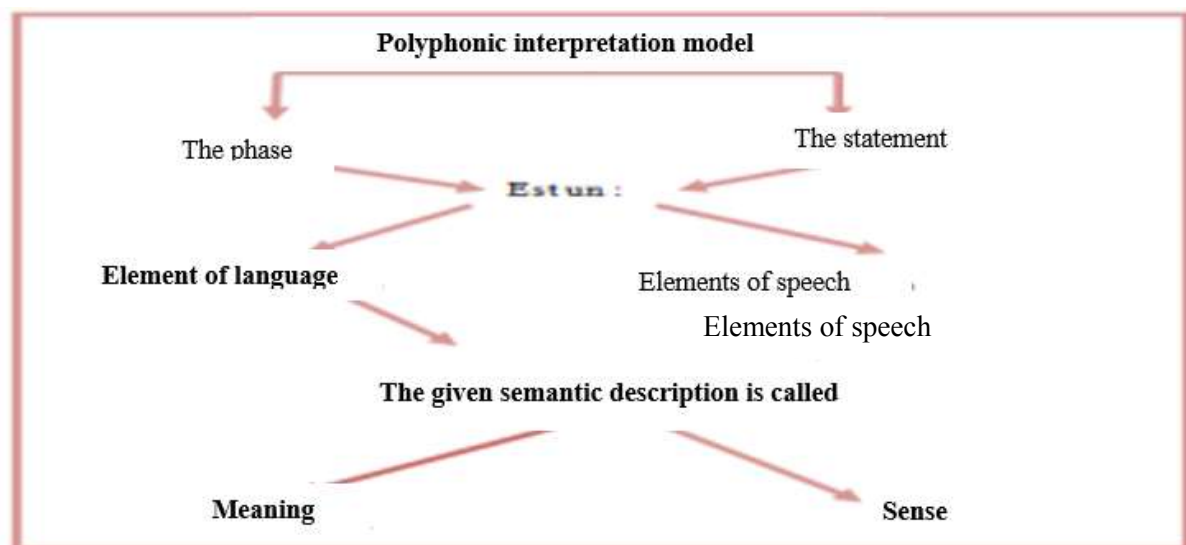
At its core, ScaPoLine is devoted to the semantic exploration of language, striving for a nuanced comprehension of the mechanisms and phases involved in the interpretation process. While actual interpretation falls outside the primary focus of the Scandinavian linguists' theoretical domain—firmly situated at the language level—the essence of ScaPoLine is to decipher the interpretive effects engendered by the intricate interplay of linguistic processes.

The overarching aim, as stated by Nolke, is to "illuminate meaning through theory-internal hypotheses regarding the semantic contributions that are strictly linguistic." This endeavor hinges on unraveling how interpretive meanings are constructed by individuals engaging with spoken or written language, setting the stage for a detailed exploration of the ScaPoLine model of interpretation.

### ScaPoLine Interpretation Model:

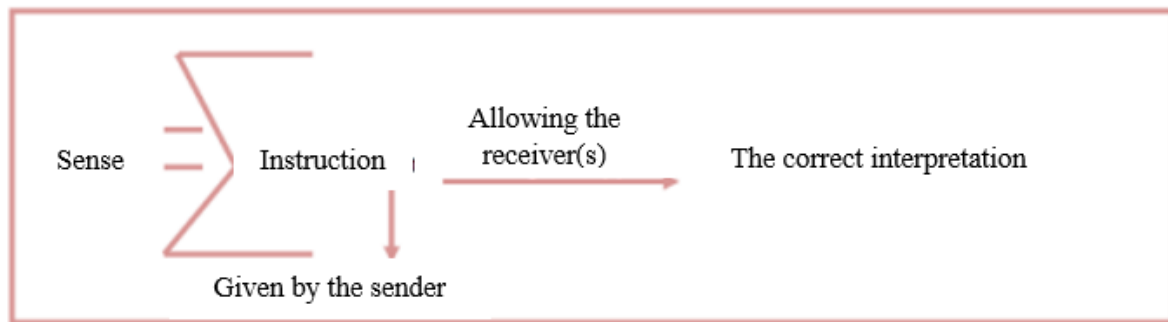
According to this model, polyphonic interpretation primarily involves saturating the variables provided by the instructions conveyed by the linguistic form, while adhering to the general rules or principles that guide interpretation.

To elucidate these relationships, Scandinavian linguists adhere to Ducrot's conception and terminology. The following diagram clearly demonstrates this:



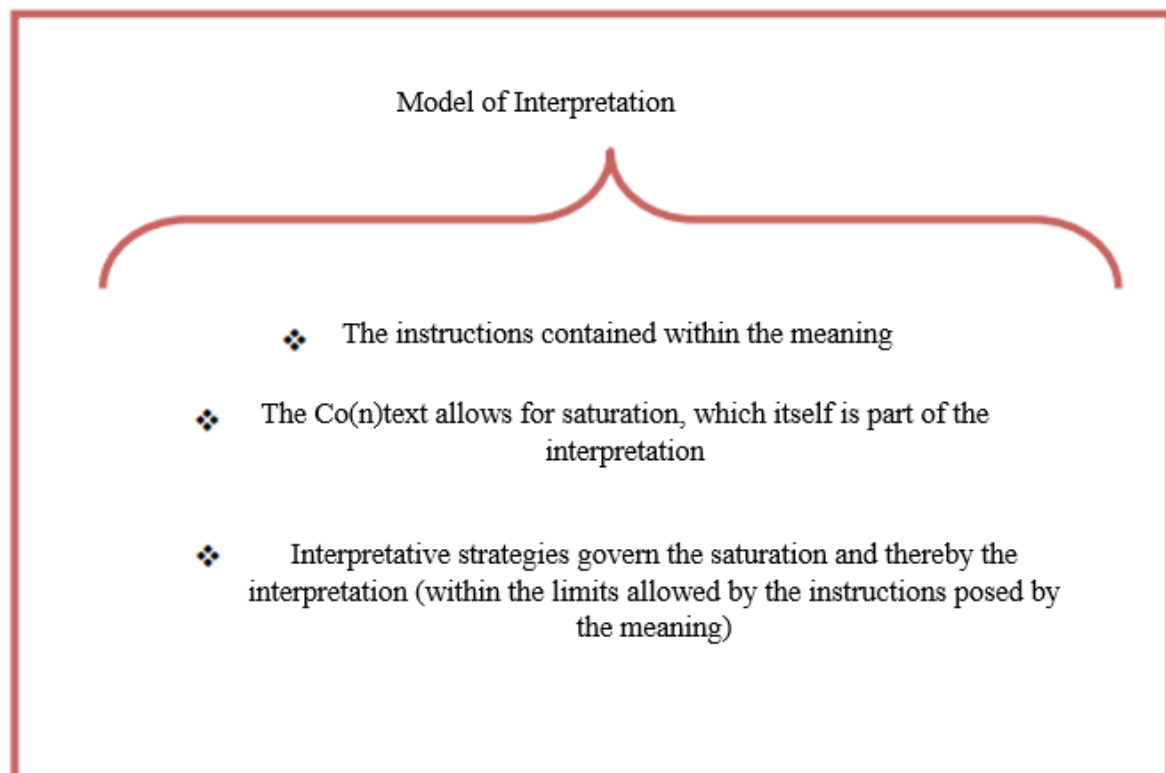
**Figure 2: Interpretation Model**

In the following figure, ScaPoLine goes beyond Ducrot's conception; it views meaning as a series of instructions presented by the speaker with the intention of enabling the interlocutor(s) to reach the correct interpretation.



**Figure 3 :** Construction of Meaning

Henning asserts in the following figure that the model relies on three elements for its implementation:



**Figure 4:** Constituent Elements of Interpretation According to Henning

The figure above outlines the pathway of the three elements that govern interpretation according to the ScaPoLine model. The first element involves the relationships between type variables (i.e., variables associated with restricted domains) set by the instructions contained in the meaning, which give indications regarding their saturation. This is the Co(n)text, found as the second element, enabling the saturation of the variables posed by the meaning. The third element consists of the interpretative strategies adopted by the interlocutors that govern the saturation of the instructions posed by the meaning.

Like Ducrot, the founders of ScaPoLine conceive of the statement as both the product and the reflection of the enunciation. As such, the statement encompasses the essential and



indispensable indications used by the interpreter during the interpretative strategies, whose ultimate principle is clearly pronounced by Henning as follows: "Seek to saturate, as far as possible, all the variables conveyed by the meaning."

Building upon Ducrot's foundational ideas, ScaPoLine advances the concept that meaning consists of a sequence of instructions issued by the speaker. These instructions are designed to guide the interlocutor(s) towards an accurate interpretation. The model delineates a tripartite pathway governing the interpretation process:<sup>10</sup>

### **The "Default" Notion:**

Central to the interpretation process within the ScaPoLine framework is the "default" notion, pivotal both to understanding values and their saturations. This concept applies to the interplay among different textual components, where the default value emerges from the typical saturation of the variables articulated by the sentence's meaning. In turn, default saturation reflects a reasoning process predicated on differential structuration, encapsulated in the premise: "...in the absence of any contrary information, assume (consider established) that..."

This construction of the default value mirrors what is often referred to as the minimal sense of the utterance. To elucidate the operation of this model, consider the example:

"Elle est belle." (She is beautiful.)

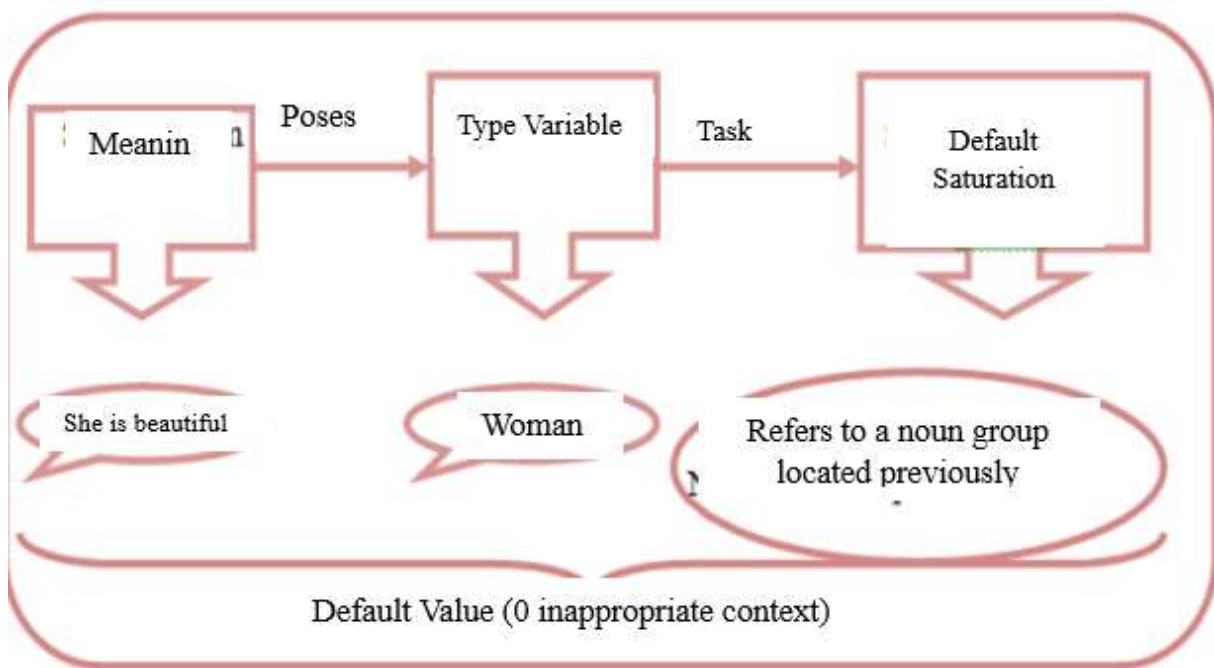
Here, the meaning of the utterance posits a type variable "woman," implied by the personal pronoun 'she', inherently linked to femininity, and suggests as a default saturation that this pronoun references a subject or nominal group from the preceding sentence in the text. This representation, while forming a relatively weak minimal sense, remains susceptible to alteration within a Co(n)text that is foreign to it.

The following figure schematizes the analysis of statement (1) according to the following model of interpretation:

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<sup>10</sup> Raymond Reiter, 1980, A Logic of Default Reasoning, Artificial Intelligence, n°13, p: 81.





**Figure:** Analysis of the Statement According to the Model of Interpretation

The model also specifies that the strength of the default value is contingent upon the degree of inappropriateness or inadequacy of the Co(n)text necessary to modify or nullify the default value, reinforcing that "This default value is very strong in that only a very specific context is likely to favor another reading."<sup>11</sup>

### Conclusion:

The ScaPoLine framework epitomizes a seamless synthesis of literary and linguistic studies on polyphony, uniting these disciplines into a cohesive academic pursuit. This synthesis marks a progression from an initial focus on linguistic analysis, which concentrates on the language itself specifically, its polyphonic structures and inherent meanings—to a broader literary analysis that explores interpretation through polyphonic relationships. These relationships represent phenomena of meaning that, while integral to the literary discourse, are not traditionally regarded as polyphonic from a strict linguistic perspective.

Emerging from a collaborative effort between linguistic and literary polyphonists, ScaPoLine draws heavily from Ducrotian principles, yet it evolves through a distinctly Scandinavian modification. This evolution is characterized by a deliberate terminological shift away from

Ducrot's original polyphonic theory, a shift Henning Nølke attributes to the necessity of operationally linking the polyphonic meaning of utterances more closely to the formal aspects of language, including lexical, morphological, and prosodic structures, as these are manifested at the linguistic level.

<sup>11</sup> Henning Nølke, 2004, ScaPoLine: Scandinavian Theory of Linguistic Polyphony, Paris, pub: Kimé, p: 24.

Adopting a semantic perspective, ScaPoLine serves as a potent analytical tool designed to identify and elucidate polyphonic configurations within the language as it participates in the construction of meaning. The theory posits that "the linguistic form creates the meaning, which provides instructions for the construction of sense." Accordingly, sense emerges within the polyphonic configuration, comprising the SPEAKER and the entities they construct—encompassing points of view, discursive beings, and enunciative links. Our research endeavors to thoroughly explore these polyphonic configurations throughout the analytical process.

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