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One or Several Trees? Visual Metaphors and Taxonomies

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Abstract
This paper addresses Umberto Eco's critique of how traditional semantic models employ the metaphor of the tree to describe the taxonomic structure of language. Eco's theory of unlimited semiosis is based on the comparison between two conceptions of the organization of semantic knowledge, the dictionary and the encyclopaedia. They are considered not only two distinct methods of storing information but also approaches to text interpretation. The dictionary is a closed system structured like a hierarchical tree of knowledge that organises lexemes in genera and species, which derives from Porphyry's tree, while the encyclopaedia is a multidimensional network in which the connection between lexemes is not predetermined. Starting from these two models Eco elaborates a theory of metaphor that contrasts with the traditional view of substitution and supports the idea of metaphor as a "condensation" whose goal is to extend the already existing categorizations, rather than confirming them. My aim is to point out how Eco uses the "semantic tension" of metaphors as the basis for a critique of the taxonomic tree and to sketch a new form of organization of semantic structures. Nevertheless, the metaphor of the tree is not completely abandoned by Eco. It is reinterpreted as a provisional map to build a tentative categorization to find orientation in the labyrinth of all possible text interpretations.

Keywords
Metaphor, Encyclopaedia, Taxonomy, Metalanguage, Interpretation

According to Eco, when studying linguistic competence, shifting the axis of interest from dictionary-based model to encyclopaedia-based model, entails a loss in formal perfection. The goal of the semiotic model he developed throughout his career is not that of idealising language to find its hidden structure, but rather that of recognizing the insurmountable incompleteness of linguistic research. Eco exhibits the contrast between linguistics with the aspiration to assimilate natural-historical languages to formalised languages, and linguistics with far more limited pretensions, that attempts to observe ordinary language from the inside of the semiosic event, without the aim of discerning its undeniable primary constituents (Eco 1975, 1984).

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The debate around different conceptions of the background knowledge shared by all linguistic users had largely already unfolded before Eco's stance.[1] The two alternative stances can be critically resumed as a shortsighted scepticism on the one side and a formalistic structuralism on the other. Eco's speculation resolutely proceeds beyond this opposition. His conception of metaphor stands as a focal point where the specificity of his model of unlimited semiosis leaps out. Eco doesn't focus exclusively on the semantic shifts of metaphors, but also on their heuristic function in the elaboration of the taxonomic structures that describe language and its pragmatic relation to the world.

Eco illustrates how the creation of a scientific taxonomy of language in the classical tradition was made possible by the elimination of the legitimacy of metaphorical discourse (Eco 1984). The ambiguity of this tradition lies in the fact that its foundation is based on a metaphor that compares the structure of linguistic lexemes to that of a tree. Thus, Eco uses the metaphor of the tree both as an explanatory tool for the taxonomic thinking and as the picklock for its critique. This enables him to elaborate an alternative semiotic model based on another metaphor, that of the labyrinth. On the one side there is the classical tradition that eliminates the possibility of metaphorical meanings (or at least, as we will see, some forms of them), but lays its foundations on the metaphor of the tree; on the other side, there is Eco's conception of the semiotic event.

According to Eco the background knowledge we use to interpret a text is better described by the metaphor of the labyrinth. We do not decode texts based on a previously formed taxonomy of lexemes. We highlight the connection between some lexemes to build the heuristic tools of our interpretative route, that is one between many possible paths entwined in a labyrinthic arrangement (Eco 1979). Metaphors rely on this process to build a connection that transgresses already given taxonomies and to sketch new taxonomies.

Addressing the question of metaphors "means to speak of rhetorical activity in its complexity" (Eco 1984, p. 87). The classical tradition assigned metaphor a pivotal role within the rhetorical figures, even considering it as the genus into which all other figures fall.[2] Eco highlights the inconsistency of the typological divisions of rhetorical figures. He defends the idea that it is impossible to define metaphor without using another

[1] See De Mauro 1993.
[2] See Ricoeur 1986.

metaphor. Addressing the "scandal" of metaphor means exposing a flaw in the efficacy of the tree model and advocating for a different approach to using metaphorical thinking in structuring speculative discourse on language.

Eco's perspective is not limited to the use of metaphor to construct as convincing and well-structured an argument as possible. It also lays the groundwork for questioning the function of metaphor in the categorization process. In other words, when Eco uses the tree and the labyrinth metaphors, he simultaneously outlines two antagonistic theories of the function of metaphor in the text. If the dictionary model entails a traditional theory of substitution, the encyclopaedia model leads towards a different reading of the function of metaphor in language, which, rather than relegating it to a marginal or anomalous phenomenon, makes it a pervasive device in the interpretative process. Metaphor is reconsidered as the tension between word and text that redefines the epistemological scope of any form of linguistic taxonomy, without eliminating it.

In the first part, I will summarize the characteristics of the three semiotic models proposed by Eco. Then I will show the way Eco gradually developed a comparison between these models by presenting them through two different pairs of metaphors (dictionary-tree and encyclopaedia-labyrinth). This reflection allows Eco to take a stand against the structural linguistics advocated by Hjelmslev. Finally, I will map out the affinity of Eco's theory of metaphor with some of the theories that have contrasted the idea that metaphor is a marginal and occasional phenomenon of language and that it can be translated into literal meaning. The untranslatability of metaphor highlighted by many authors (Black, Blumenberg, Davidson) is considered by Eco as a consequence of the limitlessness of interpretation, that derives from the way metaphors create a form of tension. Eco reframes this tension as a "condensation" (1984) of the sensible properties carried by words that creates a visual hybrid that requires an interpretative engagement to derive a general rule out of it. I will compare this way of considering a particular image as the bearer of an abstract interpretant of reality to the Kantian notion of hypotyposis.

Eco's theory entails that metaphors perform the function of reactivating the relationship between word and text on the one hand, and between language and the world on the other. The specificity of Eco's theory lies in the idea that metaphors constitute the ideal locus for articulating the tension between two interpretive regimes: the taxonomic constraints of the model-dictionary and the open-ended process of unlimited semiosis, which ensures the text's

perpetual re-interpretability through its pragmatic indeterminacy. This tension is what determines the *fictional ground* that makes the set-up of new taxonomies possible.

1. *Model KF, Model SR, Model Q*

Eco criticises two semiotic models, both based on the tree metaphor, and proposes a third, the Q-model, exemplified by the encyclopaedia and described by the labyrinth metaphor (1975). The first one is the model inspired by Katz and Fodor's theory (Model KF). They elaborate a semantic theory by asking how it is possible for speakers to understand sentences they have never heard. The grammatical characterisation of a sentence is completely insufficient to provide an explanation for this phenomenon, as sentences with different meanings can occur with the same grammatical structure. The thesis underlying the KF model is that sentence construction is the result of the infinite potential to recombine finite elements; therefore, speakers who encounter new sentences are only confronted with an unprecedented configuration of already known basic elements (Katz & Fodor 1963, p. 171). The ability to understand an utterance is that of finding the place of each term in the tree structured dictionary that every user share, and finding the right interpretation, by looking at the syntactic structure of the utterance.

Katz and Fodor state that a "complete theory" capable of accounting for the way in which the setting influences the semantics of a sentence is impossible. They do not rule out that the setting, understood as both the linguistic and non-linguistic context in which an utterance takes place, can influence the meaning of the sentence. However, they state that sentences whose meaning is determined by the setting are idiomatic, thus dependent on exceptional instances of implicit rule stipulations. Subsequently, they hypothetically extend the influence of the setting to all kinds of sentences but show the impossibility of a theory that explicatively discusses its role in the signification process. If one admits that the setting is the non-linguistic context of the sentence, one will have to consider the whole social and physical environment of the speakers as such, without omitting any natural and historical fact. Any possible theory would therefore be incomplete, it will not represent all the information that determines the way speakers understand a sentence. The same problem of incompleteness would occur when considering only the linguistic context, as one would have to consider every existing utterance as part of the signification process.

For this reason, it is necessary to postulate that the comprehension of a sentence takes place through the decipherment of its constituent elements.

The second model, called MSR (reformulated semantic model), takes seriously the slippery proposal of the KF model to include setting within semiosis. In order to avoid the regress to infinity, the model elaborates a tree that includes circumstantial and contextual selections that are only conventional and therefore statistically more probable. In other words, this model constructs a more extensive and inclusive tree, which incorporates a network of cultural units within the componential analysis. External circumstances are also treated as a necessary semiotic background reflected in the model. As a result, the tree branches into a series of circumstantial cultural universes in which the semiotic components acquire more specific semantic marks. This model fails to escape a critical point: these cultural units are posited, like the terms of the KF model, as metasemantical tools that explain a wider universe of signs. We still fall into a model in which some basic elements must explain others without themselves being explained.

The model proposed by Eco, the Q-model, addresses this problem by proposing a theory in which sememes analyse other sememes, which, potentially, can in turn be explained by other sememes and so on. Hence, he draws inspiration from Quillian's idea of "semantic network", a decentralized system where each node can at any time become the 'type' that explains a certain 'token' without ruling out the opposite process. This is the semantic labyrinth where each step is part of an interpretative journey that every language user makes when trying to comprehend a text. In this encounter not only the text and its context cooperate, but also the users, that apply their personal knowledge (encyclopaedia) carried in memory.

2. *Dictionary and Encyclopaedia: an Interplay*

The dictionary descends from medieval glossaries, lists of terms bound to a text that associate lemmas ordered in various ways with synonymous glosses or short explanatory formulas. We can speak of a dictionary when lists cease to be tied to a specific text and aim to collect all the terms of a given field, of a textual universe, of language in general. The encyclopaedia derives from the ambition to unify the body of knowledge in a single tool, as well, but its purpose, rather than to clarify the meaning of a word by comparing

it to the meaning of other words, is to provide the reader the basis for a complete education. The main difference between the two devices, which is also rooted in common sense, is that the dictionary provides the explanation of language terms, while the encyclopaedia contains any type on knowledge (usually scientifically verified, but, as Eco claims, potentially even disproved or superstitious).

Eco shows how there is a structural ambiguity in this division. Even the dictionary cannot ignore the fact that the correctness of its definitions relies on their referential dimension. To put it differently, even the dictionary, although starting from a different representation of knowledge, cannot disregard the reference to the world. Whether we should conceive the 'world' as the pragmatic instances of discourse delivered by context (Eco 1976, 1984) or the operational dimension that makes human beings capable of metaoperative thinking (Garroni 1977), the claim is that the non-semiotic is implied in the hierarchical organization of linguistic terms. Defining primitives as object-words entails a theoretical ambiguity: they should justify a linguistic competence that is independent from the world, but without prior knowledge of the world it is not possible to determine these primitives. Thus, we are faced with an overlapping of scientific taxonomy and the inventory of the content of language (Eco 1984, p. 84).

The dictionary is ruled by a model that organises semantic knowledge in biunivocal correspondences that associate each term with its definition. It stipulates that each lemma is linked to a set of necessary and sufficient analytical properties, therefore structuring an unequivocal collection of concepts, each referring to a specific field of reality. The archaeological source of this model is, according to Eco, Porphyry's tree (Eco 2014). Eco analyses the historical processes that led what in Porphyry was merely a metaphor to become the model for the construction of schemes that determined the advent of the modern dictionary. Porphyry's tree is a metaphor that describes the relationship between linguistic terms by implementing a visual diagram. The three is constructed by placing the *genus generalissimum* at the top, and drawing two lines that depart from it. These lines are the two species that derive from this genus, which in turn will each be the genus of two other species, and so on. This is the simpler form of tree, but there are different variants depending on how one conceives the relationship between genus and species that derive from it. For instance, if one accepts the Aristotelian position according to which to define a thing is to identify the genus to which it belongs and the specific difference that distinguishes that thing from others belonging to the same ge-

nus, each genus can be subdivided into a larger number of species, without compromising the regularity of the model. Historically, the multiplication of branches in various directions has produced many different patterns, resulting in trees so complex that they resemble more the intricate pattern of a labyrinth than the 'cascade of beings' of Porphyry's tree (Lima 2014).

The tree corresponds to a book model that imitates the world and becomes its perfect double according to a "law of reflection" in which "the One becomes two" (Deleuze & Guattari 2013). A centralised logic in which the whole world is traced back to the hierarchical image of the branches with the claim of replicating its structure without any deviation. The usefulness of this biomorphic symbol lies in how it outlines the processes of progressive specification of the objects that make up reality from a simple structure based on a binary and oppositional logic.

The dictionary does not contain evidence of the existence of something, it does not collect and organise all the information that a culture possesses on each lexeme (Eco 2014). It structures the lexemes on the basis of their definition, which is determined by their position within the hypothetical tree that coincides with knowledge necessary for linguistic competence. According to this model, to understand an utterance, it is necessary for the listener to know how to position each component element within the general knowledge tree. It is not possible to know a lexeme without knowing the genus in which it falls. However, since each genus is itself a species of something else, it is necessary to go back from genus to genus till the entire lineage is reconstructed.

Eco states that the dictionary model was co-opted by 20th century linguistics to postulate a semantics based on units, whose aim was to elaborate a closed system of fundamental figures in oppositional relationships, which would identify the elementary components of language.[3] The aim was to define the meaning of each word without the need to refer to the external world, relating exclusively on the structure of the system. Eco considers Hjelmslev the most influential representative of this line of research. Just as in phonology one searches for the fundamental minor phonological units, what is called *figures*, Hjelmslev wonders whether there are figures at the level of content as well as at the level of expression (1961). This approach avoids treating language as a system of signs and advances the claim of analysing it in the abstract as a system of metasemantic figures. For Hjelmslev, to comprehend the indefinite,

[3] See also De Mauro 1993, 1995.

ever-extendable variety of linguistic expressions, it is necessary for it to be decomposable into a finite, manipulable number of 'non-signs' whose interaction generates infinite expressive possibilities.

What allows this analysis is the metalinguistic capacity of our language, the fact that it cannot only refer to the world, but also to its inner architecture. A linguistics of this kind, provided that the reconstruction of the system of primitive semantic figures is possible, would make it possible to eliminate certain ambiguities in language, including cases of synonymy. The dictionary would therefore pursue the ideal of perfection by economizing the sememic representation of each lexeme (De Mauro 1995). The goal of the dictionary is to order everything that can be expressed by language in a totalising and genealogical system, rooted in a nomenclature of primitive ideas.

The dismantling of this hierarchy and its opening to a more dynamic model of organisation has occurred historically and theoretically because of the failure of the project to distinguish between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world (Eco 2014). Indeed, Eco argues that a semiotics of meaning cannot avoid dealing with the way in which the content of the sign determines the categorical organisation of the world.[4] One must therefore include the demands of pragmatics within the questions of semantics: the problem of content is inseparable from that of perception.

The claim to formalize language studying it in a vision from above requires it to become the object-language of a more extended metalanguage. If, however, the language in question is a natural-historical language, this leads to a paradoxical condition, since the metalanguage that should carry out its formalisation coincides with the language-object to be treated (Garroni 1986). The dictionary attempts to overcome the paradox by eliminating it (without succeeding), while the encyclopaedia shows the possibility of continuing to think of a metalanguage that remains paradoxical; that does not dominate its language-object from above, but stands, so to speak, alongside it, in the chain of interpretants.

In the Middle Ages, the model of the *Arbor porphyriana* was progressively discarded in favour of alternative solutions to establish the relationships between the different sciences, so the metaphor of the labyrinth emerged to the detriment of that of the tree (Eco 2014). The labyrinth is a model with multiple paths that develop without a unified criterion, whose itineraries are sometimes ambig-

[4] See also Garroni 1977.

uous or even without an exit. The function of the encyclopaedia is not to assign a regular organisation to language, but to collect within an easily usable tool the labyrinth of all information. While the dictionary must be consulted whenever a user does not know a part of the language tree and must therefore fill a gap, the encyclopaedia need not—and indeed cannot—be known in its entirety to fulfil its function. Its aim is that of supporting an original apprenticeship journey traced by the demands of the individual reader.

Among Eco's references for this model, we find the metaphor of the 'rhizome' proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1980). The rhizome is an ever-developing system of connections without lineages or deep structures that determine its form a priori. The organization of the rhizome is immanent to the practice that 'makes it', its form is only given within the connections that establish the links between its components.

In the encyclopaedia, there is no marked path. Although there is an implicit hierarchy between the sciences, the reader can freely move from higher to lower levels and vice versa. Thus, the encyclopaedia can be conceived, even considering its universalist goal, as always expandable and revisable: the encyclopaedia avoids 'filling in' and it is constantly open to new configurations. Moreover, no real encyclopaedia can ever coincide with the ideal encyclopaedia, which, like the famous *Library of Babel* in Jorge Luis Borges' story, should contain all possible books with all possible combinations of characters, and even other kinds of signs and pragmatic instances like gestures. Encyclopaedias are always incomplete. However, they can be expanded by adding or modifying entries without compromising their unity. Furthermore, each reading, by constructing an intertextual itinerary, modifies the meaning of the encyclopedia itself. Because every interpretation is a collaboration between the text and the reader's linguistic competence, which is itself a virtual encyclopedia.

All the difficulties that the dictionary encounters in justifying the adequacy of its tree model faces the three problems we have seen: 1) the impracticality of including both semantics and pragmatics; 2) the impossibility of realising a bi-univocal correspondence between term and definition; 3) the paradoxicality of including entirely a natural-historical language within a wider metalanguage. This leads Eco to postulate the inevitability of encyclopaedic representation, as it can easily incorporate the componential analysis of the dictionary still considering terms as text-oriented instruction capable of multiple signification processes (Eco 1979). The encyclopaedia is therefore maintained as a "regulative hypothesis" (Eco 1984, p.

80) that ensures the possibility of linking in creative ways the fixed lexemes of the tree-structured dictionary.

It is, therefore, not a question of two mutually exclusive alternative systems. There are two descriptive models, the first, the tree system, is theoretically insufficient if considered as definitive; while the second, the labyrinth, is preliminary, but needs to organise itself in many tree forms in order to fulfil specific needs. There is no opposition as long as one recognises that each tree is a random selection of a structure within a non-hierarchical multidimensional network capable of reabsorbing it through semantic interaction processes. These interactions come to light in a specific form of discourse, namely metaphorical ones.

3. *Fiction paves the way for Taxonomy*

The *lectio facilior* of metaphorical utterances considers them as a shift (transfert) in the meaning of a term from the literal to the figurative. If we follow Grice's conversational maxims, metaphorical discourse involves the creation of infelicitous assertions, as they transgress the maxim of quality: "Try to make your contribution one that is true" (Grice 1991, p. 27). Understanding metaphor involves interpreting discourse implicatures through the lens of pragmatics. This standpoint underlies a conception according to which the literal sense of the sentence is computed first; hence, the non-literal sense is optional, only considered if the first is not satisfactory (Searle 1993, p. 103).

To show the epistemological scope of metaphor, it is necessary to detach oneself from two alternative theoretical positions that have limited the study of metaphors for centuries (Berggren 1962). The first position holds that they are stylistic ornaments, hence not bearers of cognitive value, but merely accessorial, not essential to the meaning of the utterance, or at most carriers of emotional efficacy. The second, even if it argues that metaphors can convey knowledge, holds that they make sense only if dissolved into a literal statement. Berggren argues that these traditional arguments imply that every metaphor can and should be eliminated, as it overcomplicates the process of communication.[5] The assumption here is that the knowledge necessary to decipher the meaning of the metaphor is always already contained in the semantic equipment of the users (Searle 1993, p. 95). These views are coherent with the dictionary

[5] See Davidson 1978 for a similar critique.

model. They propose a reductionist perspective that claims for the possibility of converting every metaphor into a literal form, without losing any of its semantic value.

An alternative perspective departs from the idea that what sets language comprehension apart from a mere decoding process is the inherent ambiguity of each utterance, which compels readers to engage in abductive inferential processes (Eco 1984).[6] Each time we interpret a metaphor we must face its resistance to be reduced to a paraphrase that tempers its poetic charge. The vectors of this untranslatability have also been called "absolute metaphors" (Blumenberg 2016). They are not forms of discourse explicable in the form of similitude, as they always say something more than the abridged expression that should clarify them. Metaphors do not express an idea within a fictitious envelope that condenses its outward appearance within an effective formula. The semantic contribution of metaphor is realised exclusively within the discursive event that produces it, which cannot be translated into a different, clearer language. But defending untranslatability is not a way to claim the existence of a set of fundamental, or at least conventional and stored in long-term social memory, metaphors.[7]

Metaphors use the semantic interaction of words in the interpretation of the text to revitalize the relationship between sign and world. The efficacy of metaphor lies in the irreducible "semantic tension" (Wheelwright 1968) that results from the interaction between words that creates a new meaning (Black 1962). This instance of reformulation would not be possible without the reflective capacity of our language, the fact that it is able to treat as referent its relationship to what exists, to what is other than itself (Garroni 1977, 1986).

One of the consequences of the encyclopaedic model proposed by Eco is that such an operation can no longer be understood as an explication of a content that remains unchanged, but as a *translation*. Metaphors are a phenomenon of breach in which a short circuit is generated between the meaning of the word and its discursive use within the text. The dictionary model is supported by a linguistics of the sign in which each unit of meaning is treated separately. It is for this reason that metaphors cannot be included in the taxonomy of the dictionary. They are a discursive phenomenon whose semantic unit is the text, but they accomplish

[6] This is what leads Richards to claim that there is not a precise rule capable of distinguishing between a word being used literally or metaphorically (1965, p. 119).

[7] These are what we might call "dead metaphors" (Ricoeur 1986), that could be easily included in a reformed tree of knowledge.

their function by transgressing the rules imposed to a word by its definition in the dictionary (Eco 1979).

Eco analyses Aristotle's classification of metaphor in a four-type division (1984). The first two are a form of synecdoche, a generalizing and a particularizing one. They establish a relation between a lexeme and another that is either up or down in the same lineage in the tree of knowledge. The third type is produced when the two terms of the metaphor are both species of the same genus, sharing, therefore, some properties. In these first three types we can still reduce metaphor to a form of substitution, and we can still trace the movement it follows inside the tree. The fourth type of metaphor in one by proportion. It produces a "visual hybrid" (p. 96), that is a form of productive *condensation*, that, just like a dream, needs a process of interpretation in order to be understood.

According to Eco, the dictionary can juggle the first three types of metaphor, but is unable, without making argumentative somersaults, to account for the fourth type. Since the fourth type consists of a relationship of semantic contiguity, it is not possible to grasp this relationship by tracing a line in the dictionary tree following a precise rule. But the problem is not only graphical. The central point emphasized by Eco is that while the first three types of metaphor can be explained as an analytical relation (although they are not necessarily so), the fourth type is necessarily a synthetic relation, it points to a likeness we would not otherwise recognize. The encyclopaedia is therefore a more suitable model to explain the four types of metaphors, because it includes not only the necessary properties of lemmas, but any kind of information associated to it. The question of metaphor is no longer how to explain its operation from a prior structuring of lexemes, but how it renews our understanding of this structure by relying on the unlimited encyclopaedic background. While, in the dictionary scheme, interpretation is a form of calculation, in the encyclopaedia, one must weave each time the threads of meaning together to produce a new pertinence, precisely because the encyclopaedia does not establish a division between correct and incorrect pertinences.

What is the semantic process that makes the tree image capable of describing linguistic competence? When Kant discussed the symbolic hypotyposis in the paragraph 59 of the *Third Critique*, he entailed that figurative language could be used as a means to carry out the *esprit de système* by rendering visible a 'universal' through the 'particular'. Symbolic hypotyposis is the way a concept of reason, thus an idea not capable of being presented in a sensi-

ble intuition, becomes graspable by the analogy of the rule of reflection of a different object. For example, every anthropomorphic representation of God is symbolic, as it does not make God itself visible, but employs an analogy that makes us reflect, through an intermediary, on something we cannot encounter in our experience. In this case, the representation serves as a tool for imagination not due to shared sensible properties between the idea and the object, but rather because they engender a specific type of reflection. (Kant 2000, pp. 225-228). The metaphor of the tree and the labyrinth are similar figures, they aim to convey a 'totality', that of the background knowledge shared by each linguistic user, through a visual representation.

Traditionally speaking the main feature of metaphors of hypotyposis is that of bringing something before the eyes with vividness. Eco intends to define the relationship between visual metaphor and the object it is supposed to describe by means of a sophisticated notion of similarity, whose root is Peirce's notion of iconism. The icon is not a transposition of relevant features from the object to the sign, it is rather what Eco defines as a "transformation" (Eco 1976, p. 264). The icon is not a reproduction in the same way that a reflection in the mirror is a resemblance of a form. On the contrary, it is the transcription into the sign of non-entirely arbitrary "cultural properties" that are attributed to an object. Eco concludes that icons are "contiguous signs", that is, a sign in which a part of the referent is used as a signifier (p. 275). Therefore, the icon involves a "change of medium" (Black 1962, p. 222), in which a web of relationships present in the original object is withdrawn by the sign and reinterpreted in an abstract form. It is a way to overcome the impossibility of a complete representation of something by *using an image as a surrogate*. Following this idea, the tree and the labyrinth perform the function of transposing a selection of features of the semiotic process into a spatial representation of its structure.[8]

The validity of the metaphor that compares linguistic competence with a tree rests at its foundation on the fictional capacity of metaphor, that is, its ability to produce a "semantic innovation" (Ricoeur 1986) that generates a framework where an image is used as the type to interpret other tokens. It is only by using the image realised by the process of condensation that one is able to grasp the complexity of all language under a certain light. When a metaphor forwards the view that something should be included under the

[8] See Ricoeur's idea of a "picturing function" (1978, p. 144) of metaphors.

class of something else, it transgresses the limits imposed by the strict biunivocal meaning imposed by the dictionary and lays the foundation for a new articulation of meaning.

This does not mean that the scientific model of the dictionary is based on poetic discourse. It rather demostrates how taxonomy, such as that of the dictionary, is conceivable only by presupposing an unlimited semiosis in which the metaphor is used as an "*heuristic fiction*" (Black 1962, p. 228) to ground a speculative discourse. Thus, Eco's critique of the dictionary model does not eradicate taxonomic thought in general. It is rather a survey around the *conditions of possibility of taxonomy*, which are identified in the poetic tension enacted by metaphorical discourse intended as part of the chain of interpretants. If the condition of possibility of taxonomy is the closure brought about by the correspondence between term and definition, this closure is the result of the way metaphors establish a fictitional ground where the relationship between words and meanings is framed from a defined viewpoint.

4. *Conclusions*

Metaphors, analysed from the perspective of their framing effect, can be used as a critical tool against any form of metalanguage that attempts to establish a taxonomy. But this does not lead to the impossibility of taxonomy. Quoting Vico, Eco describes the relation between metaphorical and conventional language as a "cyclical activity" (1984, p. 108). We could repropose this idea regarding the relationship between metaphor and taxonomy. Metaphors are the means for sketching a map for orienting within the encyclopedia, as they establish relations of dependence in which a type becomes the interpretant of a token. This orientation is attained when the metaphor creates a framework that enables us to perceive reality within a specific organization, therefore making it possible to recognize common patterns, making divisions, categorizing. For Eco, it is not so much a question of giving space to "loose talk" (Sperber & Wilson 1986) as a preliminary stage in the formation of complex reasoning, but to show that the mechanism of metaphorical tension between word and text is the locus where the fictional ground that designs the taxonomy of the tree of knowledge takes place. Linguistic competence can be described by the metaphor of the tree only if it is understood as a partial hypothesis, which points towards a certain reading, rather than describing a deep structure. Accord-

ingly, the tree metaphor regains its functional role in a model of unlimited semiosis by becoming the provisional cartography in the labyrinth of interpretation.

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