

Lausungist lausumiseni ja vastupidi. Multidistsiplinaarsed vaated deiksisele. De l'énoncé à l'énonciation et vice versa. Regards multidisciplinaires sur la deixis. From utterance to uttering and vice versa. Multidisciplinary views on deixis. Ed. by D. Monticelli, R. Pajusalu, A. Treikelder. Tartu: Tartu University Press, pp. 271–285 (Studia Romanica Tartuensia IVa).

REGARDING PRAGMAPOETICS: DEIXIS*

Arne Merilai

1. Dear audience, deictically here and there in the middle of snowy nowhere! I would like to introduce today some main results concerning deixis in my monograph *Pragmapoeetika. Kahe konteksti teooria* (“Pragmapoetics: A Theory of Two Contexts”, for the English summary see Merilai 2003: 192–234). I will also be discussing some of its fascinating theoretical implications.

Pragmapoetics: A Theory of Two Contexts is a study of figurative language usage in literary discourse. It also tries to contribute to our understanding of ordinary language usage. The term ‘pragmapoetics’ suggests a new disciplinary branch. The book is guided by the assumption that poetic language usage constitutes the object of analysis above all for a theory of poetics considering data provided by linguistic pragmatics. As an area of research, pragmapoetics links Roman Jakobsonian poetics, as part of literary studies and rhetoric, with the study of language in general, in other words, with semiotics: the study of syntax, semantics and pragmatics — with an emphasis on the latter.

The theory of poetics introduced here is primarily based on analytic language philosophy, its logical method, conceptual framework and perspectives. Although an approach based on analytic methods is not essential to pragmapoetics at all, it offers sound advantages regarding methodological rigour and transparency extending as far as the possible affirmation of Immanuel Kant’s postulate of grounding the research in mathematics, i.e. logic.

The book consists of four parts. For the purpose of a theory of poetics, it introduces and elaborates on theories of deixis or indexicality, speech acts, implicature, and fictionality. Throughout the book, the poetry of Artur Alliksaar, in particular his shorter poem “Where to, where to, ugh!!!” (see Appendix 1), serves as a case study. Alliksaar is a particularly appropriate choice since his extraordinarily imaginative language poetry with

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its sonorous prosody, associative as well as paradoxical comical semantics, aphoristic and conversational properties provides an exceptionally representative and rich subject matter for both the study of rhetoric and language philosophy in general.¹

2. So what is deixis and how does it work in poetry, in fiction, or particularly in fictional poetry like Alliksaar's?

By definition the deixis was a basic element of discourse which related the pragmatic to the semantic field. It was an apparatus of linguistic orientation which encoded in utterance the speaker's personality, subjectivity, the spatio-temporal and linguistic contexts from the self-referential perspective of the utterance. Contrary to the opinion of many theorists, deixis appears to be less egocentric and correspondingly more utterance-centred. By analogy with the speech act, one may refer to the usage of deixis as an orientation act which simply expresses the deed of relating the speech act with its context. Semantic deixis consists of indexical vocabulary and indexical grammatical means; the actual analysis of poetry also calls for the notion of deictic implication because, on the level of contextual inference, a large part of the poetic deixis works on the hidden non-

¹ Artur Alliksaar, one of the greatest Estonian poets of all time, was born on 15 April 1923 in Tartu, the Republic of Estonia, as the son of a railwayman. In 1941–1942 he studied law at Tartu University where was recruited to the German army. After the war he earned his livelihood as a railway official, but was made a criminal by the Soviet authorities because of a deficit. He spent several years in the labour camps. After 1957 he lived in Tartu and devoted himself mainly to literary activities. He was very poor and persecuted, nevertheless intellectually independent and widely imitated by the younger generation (Andres Ehin, Henn-Kaarel Hellat, Jaan Kaplinski, Viivi Luik, Paul-Eerik Rummo, Aleksander Suuman, Mati Unt, et al.). His best friends were physicist Madis Kõiv, today a well-known Estonian playwright and philosopher, and Rein Sepp, a translator of Icelandic and Germanic epics. Alliksaar translated German and Russian poetry (Rainer Maria Rilke, Sergei Jessenin), did odd jobs. He died of cancer in Tartu on 12 August 1966.

Shortly before his death he managed to publish a parabolic play *The Nameless Island* (*Nimetu saar*, 1966), which contributed much to the innovation of Estonian drama of the 1960s. Three posthumous selections, compiled by his young follower P.-E. Rummo, contain the poems Alliksaar left in manuscript: *Nonexistence Could Well Remain Nonexistent* (*Olematus võiks ju ka olemata olla*, 1968) and *Poetry* (*Luule*, 1976), also *A Small Book of Verse* (*Väike luuleraamat*, 1984). In 1997, *The Sun Squanderer* (*Päikesepillaja*), his collected poems, was eventually published.

The literary critic Endel Nirk writes: “An author with an exceptional destiny was Artur Alliksaar /.../ Having started by writing verse more or less in traditional style, he soon developed his own individual manner of improvisation dominated by the poetic logic of associative ideas and sounds. This verse was occasionally fantastic in the way it played with words, sometimes frenzied as to its moods and images, at times devoutly reverent and then ironical, in some places aphoristically precise, volcanically exuberant elsewhere. It was in this way that the poet succeeded in producing a multi-dimensional and dynamic picture of the world, a feeling of everything being in a state of change and flux. In the final stage of his life, terminally ill, Alliksaar sought a new synthesis in more disciplined form. At the same time he strove to move on from meditative verse to the reflection of intuitive sensations and he introduced certain surrealist elements into his rendering of elegiac resignation and the tragedy of destruction. (NIRK, Endel 1987. *Estonian Literature. Historical Survey with biobibliographical Appendix*. 2 Ed. Tallinn: Perioodika, p. 333) (Merilai 1999)

literal level. Therefore the Gricean implicatures with deixis, especially as regards place and time and modality, are particularly surprising but always something expected.

The two main characteristics of the deixis are: 1) its explicit pragmatic context-dependency and 2) its implicit semantic self-referentiality. As John Searle puts it in his *Intentionality* (Searle 1991: 221 ff):

In uttering indexical referring expressions, speakers refer by means of indicating relations in which the object referred to stands to the utterance of the expression itself.”

So the expression ‘I’ refers to the person uttering that expression ‘I’. ‘You’ refers to the addressee of the person uttering the expression ‘you’. ‘Here’ refers to the place of the utterance of the expression ‘here’. ‘Now’ refers to the time of the utterance of the expression ‘now’. “Yesterday” refers to the day before the utterance day of the expression ‘yesterday’. And so on. The utterance of indexical expressions, therefore, has a form of self-referentiality which is similar to the self-referentiality of certain intentional states and events (for example visual experience etc).

As a result the left side and the right side of the definition of the meaning of the indexical expressions overlap yielding a *circulus vitiosus* (Figure 1 and 2).

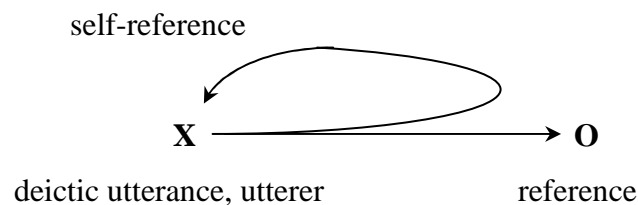


Figure 1

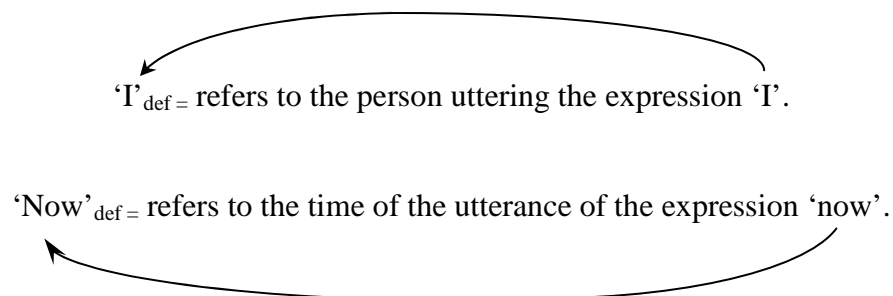


Figure 2

In a word: deictic expressions are not only pragmatically demonstrative but also semantically fundamentally self-referential. More than that: one may assume that deictics can function referentially only due to their basic self-referentiality which is therefore their most interesting peculiar feature.

Similar to deixis, the poetic expressions reveal self-referentiality, too, only they foreground their linguistic qualities more clearly and background their referential contents (Figure 3; Merilai, Saro, Annus 2003: 23)².

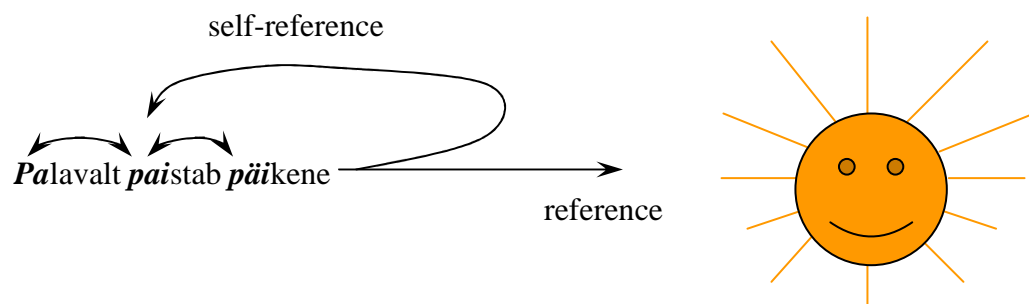


Figure 3

So it can be said by way of generalisation that language fulfils two main functions: referential and self-referential, where the latter is usually an implicit, although especially characteristic of indexicality and rhetorics, the former an explicit one (q.v. Searle 1991: 218–230). Roman Jakobson, of course, speaks of six functions (Jakobson 1960), but these can be philosophically reduced to two: emotive, referential and conative to referential, poetic, phatic and metalingual to self-referential or poetic (Figure 4).

Considering poetics it seems to be clear that the expressive speech acts tend to satisfy mainly the emotive function (i.e. lyrics), while the assertives mainly the referential one (epics), whereas the directives and the commissives lay stress more on the conative role (dramatics). However, the most essential property of the art of poetry is certainly the fact that it poses self-referential function as primary, while the mimetic referential function recedes. Literature boosts linguistic self-referentiality that is relatively covert in ordinary speech, and turns the seemingly or actually referring utterances into an aim in itself, e.g. often shifting the attention from the content of the expression to the linguistic nature of the expressions themselves.

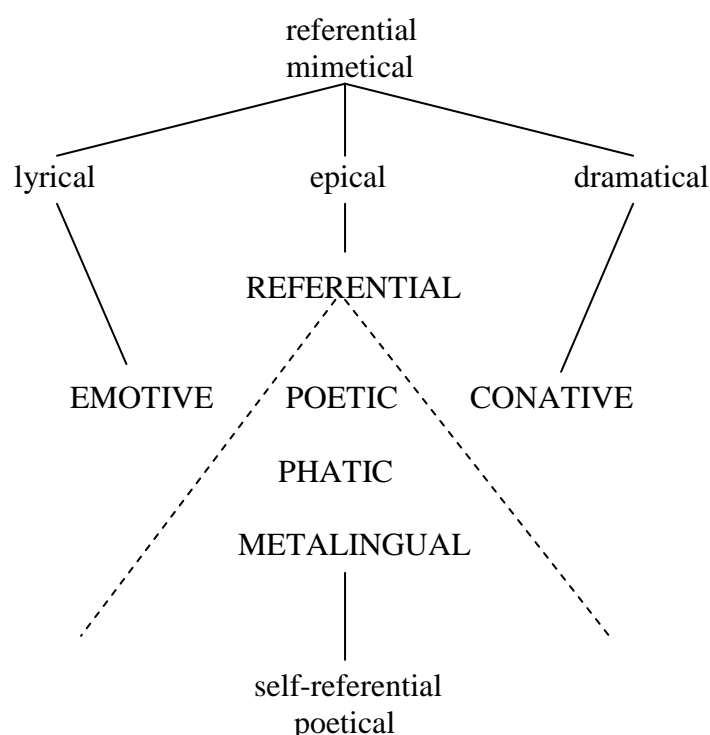


Figure 4

Unfortunately there is no proper mathematics to formalize the phenomenon of self-referentiality as such because it leads up to the set-theoretical paradox if a set by definition can be a member of itself. Bertrand Russell, studying the egocentric particulars, tried but failed, of course, and simply evaded the possibility in order to prevent the wires from short-circuiting. Although a set as its own subset has its intuitive plausibility it is mathematically still unacceptable. But without any appropriate formalism the chances of developing a theory in a serious manner were pretty slim. As Jurji Lotman said once on another semiotic occasion: “*My taptajemsja na meste*” — we stamp around on the same spot, unable to move ahead or dive in deeper. That will be a fate of the theory of deixis, too, sooner or later, unless a proper solution is discovered by a beautiful mathematical mind. But nobody can predict today from what direction of mathematics or logic the formal breakthrough might come.

3. The first chapter of *Pragmapoetics* (partly published already ten years ago, q.v. Merilai 1995) deals with deixis as such and its manifestations in Alliksaar’s analytic Whitman-like poetry in free verse (Alliksaar, however, is totally language-oriented, his poetry

² The Estonian alliterative expression “palavalt paistab päikene” is roughly translatable as “the sun is shining scorchingly”.

paradoxically punning and fictional). It is analytic in a sense that the aphoristic utterances in his texts reveal strong self-sufficiency. They frequently do not rely so much upon the whole of the texts, i.e. they are not so dependent upon the larger structures, as is common with the verses of the synthetic poems. While in synthetic poetry the deictic orientation acts are committed on the level of the discourse as a whole, in poetry of the analytic kind the orientation acts tend to be committed separately on every utterance level. So the time deixis of the utterances that follow one another can be inconsistent instead of being in accordance. In a situation where each utterance can code a different context, expressing linear time on the level of discourse may turn out to be problematic. Different utterances can express different times which may be incoherent which is not a proper basis for regular poetry.

The time deixis of the text as a whole resembles rather a plural conglomerate of separate time icons or sets, defined by different utterances. It is possible to play various games and create paradoxical time situations, using the time deixis and implicatures with it. An icon can represent the common time sequence (H = past, P = present, F = future), but also the movement from the future to the past (F, P, H): if not in actuality or even in psychological reality, time can move backwards at least in a realm of make-believe. It can be internally complete (H, P, F), but just as well incomplete — (H, F), (P), and so forth.

The deixis of place and time in Alliksaar's poetry is characterised by the explicit application of the models of parquet (Figure 6), cascade (Figure 7), deck of cards (Figure 8) and containers (Figure 9), the movement itself as a place is essential. Time in his poetry is not an unbroken linear series but instead presented in analytically separated units, which can, or need not, exclude one another, serve mutually as one another's backgrounds or be a cosmically overwhelming paradoxical kairos. It is namely characteristic of Alliksaar to concentrate the time paradoxically into ecstatic time, where the past, the present and the future merge, lose their pure identity, and make up an ecstatic time of the supratemporal (H=P=F). So, for example, a fictional character of one of his poems typically asks (Figure 5):

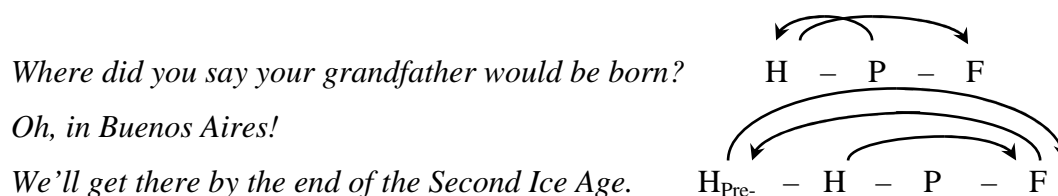


Figure 5

As a rule, Alliksaar then replaces the solipsist first person singular I/me-origo as his poetic persona with the extremely inspirational we-origo, a kind of Argonauts of intellectual aristocracy characterised by a notably high level of mental co-operation.

In Alliksaar, the analytic time moments can form tiles or parquets. Symbolically this could be described as $T_i \cap T_j = \emptyset$ in which $i, j = 1 \dots n$; graphically as follows (Figure 6):

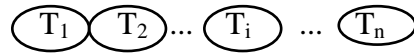


Figure 6

The moments can also make cascades in which the intersections of the time sets are not empty: $(\exists i) T_i \cap T_{i+1} \neq \emptyset$, where $i = 1 \dots n-1$. Graphically (Figure 7):



Figure 7

Time icons can be localised parallelistically against the background of one-to-one correspondence, but the accessibility relation among the time icons need not exist. The parallelistic equality condition of time moments is not unavoidable either. This can be presented by the model of a pack of cards (Figure 8):

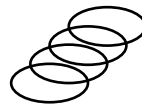


Figure 8

Finally, Alliksaar is also fond of time containers. There $T_1 \subseteq T_2 \subseteq \dots \subseteq T_i \subseteq \dots \subseteq T_n \subseteq U$ (where U is the time universe), or graphically (Figure 9):

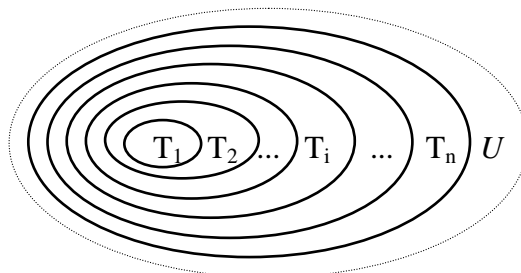


Figure 9

Alliksaar's personal deixis is unusual, too: instead of the solipsistic I-utterance a number of essential utterances in his poetry are based on the we-origo. We-polylogue hints at a certain amusing Pickwickian group which, together with the fictional author, is acting and conversing within the poem, thus forming also the social deixis. The reference to 'we' often has a different structure and genesis, even within one and the same poem, thus requiring indexication. This lessens the number of anaphora or repeated reference as well. We-deixis has a positive rigid designation, related de re with all possible worlds, the third person is at the mercy of irony and associative chance; emotional deixis being directly connected to it.

Modal deixis is very characteristic of Alliksaar. It is even less epistemic than intensive deontic modality, which manifests itself in the abundant use of directive and commissive dramatic speech acts — not a common feature in lyrics at all. It is also possible to consider negation as a kind of modal deixis. Like time and modality, it can be formally interpreted by means of predicate logic. Due to different levels of deictic activity, mixed deixis is often used.

4. On the stylistic level of a poem (as opposed to the content level) something like discourse deixis always appears to be amplified, as the mutual referentiality of multiple phonetic, verbal, syntactic and semantic similarities takes place (besides the occasional before-and-later textual references). This is essential to the parallelistic linguistic structures which the poems most genuinely are. It can be illustrated by the following figure where the rich mutual referentiality of linguistic equivalencies on different levels in a single simple stanza of a poem (by another poet Hando Runnel) is demonstrated (Figure 10; Merilai, Saro, Annus 2003: 36).³

³ A translation of the stanza: "A mill stands upon the waters / but the millwork is not done / as the millman is tired / and the millstones are dull" (Hando Runnel, "A Mill Stands upon the Waters", 1972).

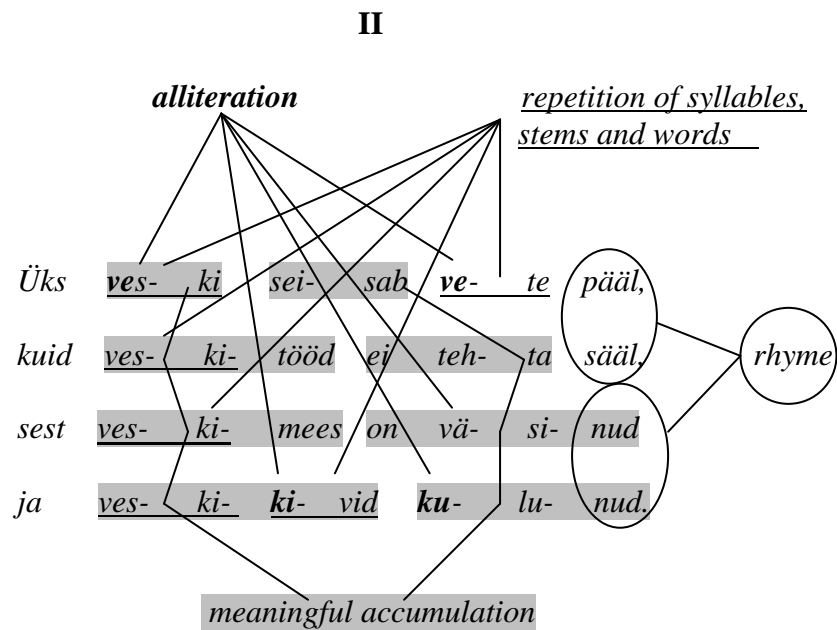
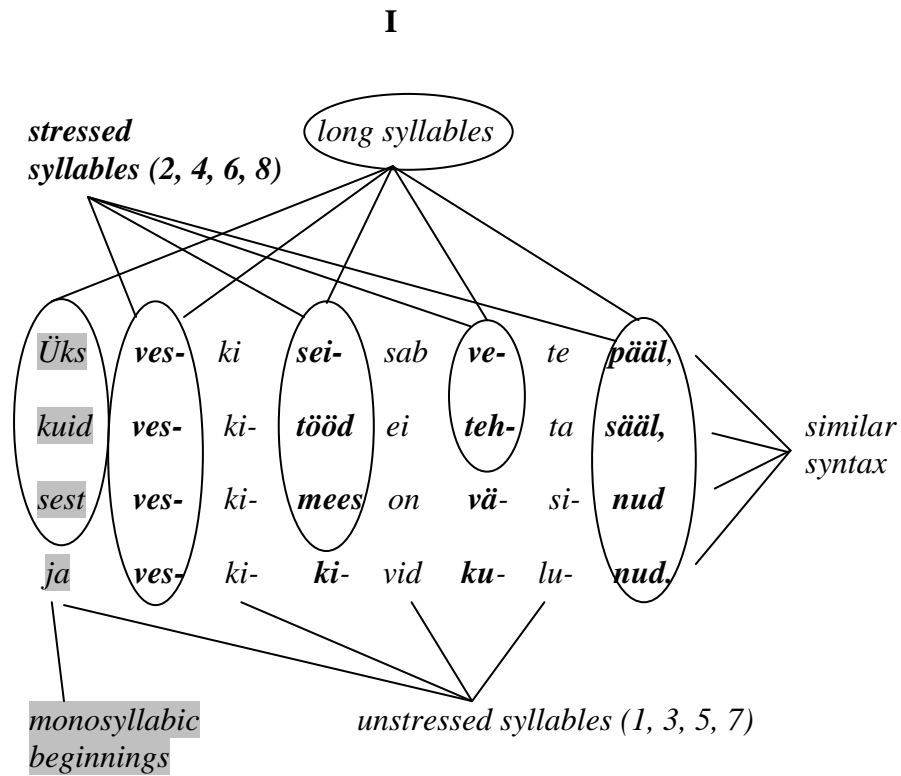


Figure 10

It is tempting to call this kind of poetic auto-referentiality among the linguistic and semantic equivalencies also deictical. Should we do so? I think it would be a mistake. Deixis does not work everywhere pan-deictically, instead the more basic self-referential function of language reveals itself in different ways, either deictically or non-deictically.

Not everything self-referential in language usage is automatically deictical, there is no such implication. On the contrary: one may claim that everything reflexive in language is also poetical, at least implicitly. Both phenomena have fundamental self-referentiality in common which is merely a more general and deeper feature of the language they reflect. This is why the self-manifestation of the poetic expressions looks pretty much like discourse deixis and vice versa: although stemming out of the same root, they are certainly different.

5. A central idea of *Pragmapoetics* consists of a model of the two contexts of literary perception: the aspects of the content or the narrow context, and the expression or the broad context. Hypothetically, all linguistic communication takes place on two contextual levels simultaneously. In the narrow (linguistic-semantic) context the type of the utterance is interpreted generally, against the background of possible or virtual worlds, while in the broad (semantic-pragmatic) context the particular meaning gets fixed according to actuality. Figurative language usage explicates the difference of the contexts, by practising the imaginative referential (de re) function of language in the former (often in a self-defeating manner); as well as amplifying the actual self-referential (de dicto) function of language in the latter, a real rhetoric context of the author and the reader (Figure 11 and 12).

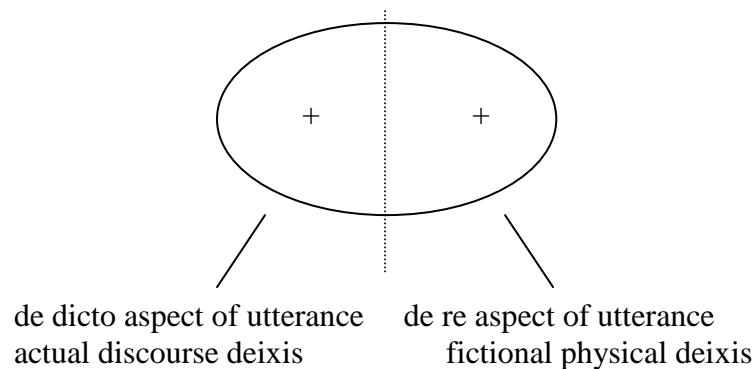


Figure 11

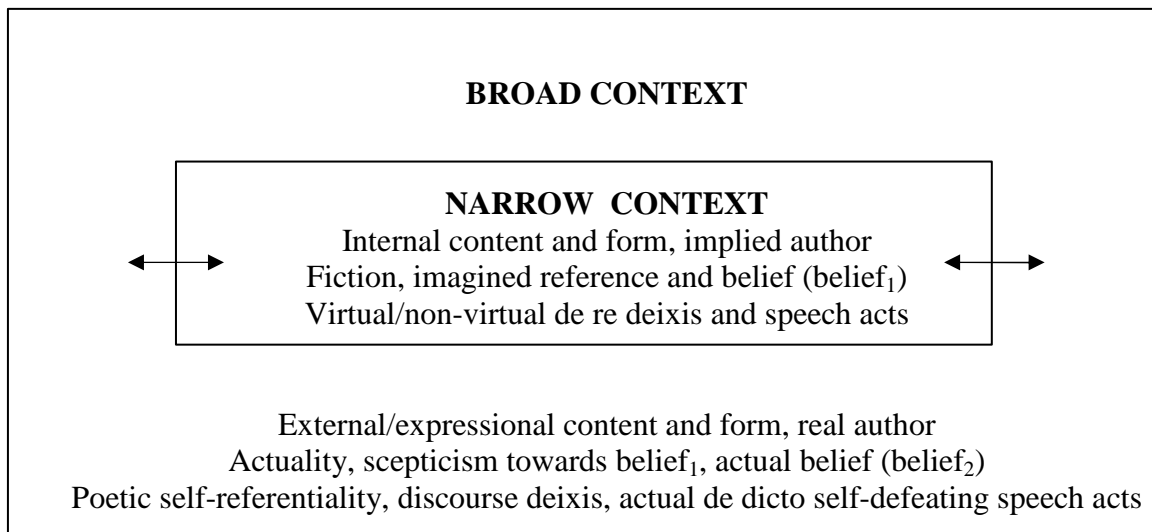


Figure 12

What is valid about the rhetorical speech acts, also holds true for the deixis: the physical, although virtual imaginative deixis (deixis in phantasy space) functions in the narrow context of the work of art, while the actual discourse or textual deixis functions on the broad stylistic level. In the narrow context, the sincerity condition is reduced to imaginary belief; in the broad context, to the actual. The provisional boundary between the contexts can be transgressed, with them merging into each other. Thus, the theory is concerned with poetry and fiction operating simultaneously in two contexts: in the narrow one or in the world of make-believe inside a text (that at times can coincide with actuality), and, in addition, in the broad context or the world of the actual belief of the author-text-reader.

Attention shifts spontaneously between de re and de dicto aspects of utterances, in which the imagined belief (or belief₁) is constantly alternating with the actual belief (or belief₂), the relation of which to the former may often be sceptical. The analogue would be Louis Necker's cube from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and the drawing of the rabbit/duck from his *Philosophical Investigations* (1996: 5.5423; 1953: II, 10; Figure 13). Such mental roundabout traffic could be called a game of literary make-believe — also a game of deictic make-believe accordingly.

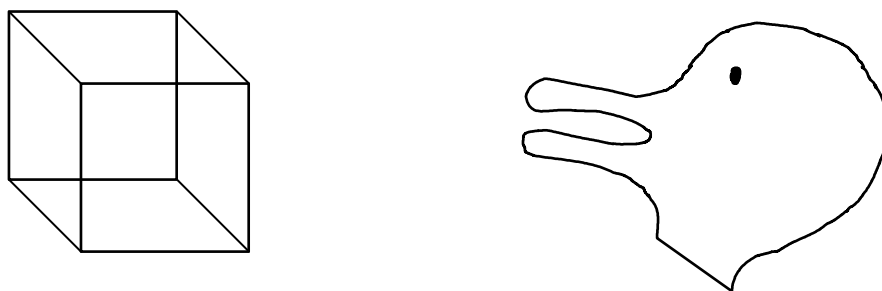


Figure 13

6. To sum up: the hypothesis of the two contexts seems to have a good explanatory power. According to it, poetic activity is concentrated around two elliptical centres: single utterances, but two centres of force, content and contextual orientation. One should learn to follow the game as it is not an inborn capability, but rather a sophisticated system of cultural conventions, i.e. higher language games. Slowing down the process of everyday reception, its defamiliarisation is the very nature of the aesthetic as has been claimed already by the Russian formalists, especially Victor Shklovsky.

In everyday communication it is referentiality that rules. However, deixis and poetry both reveal linguistic self-referentiality: the first rather implicitly and the second more explicitly. Poetic expression is more complicated than ordinary speech, a language usage governed by numerous artificial restrictions that is often referred to as a secondary modelling system above the primary one (e.g. Lotman 1972: 18–23). These restrictions or rules of the artistic style are all clearly self-referential by nature: art boosts (linguistic) self-referentiality. Sometimes this may even resemble deixis, although it is obviously non-deictic. Nevertheless deixis seems to lie somewhere at the bottom of art. One way or another, “The most important is the game,” as one of the titles by Artur Alliksaar declares.

Thank you for your intense attention, your sympathetic eye and ear.

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ARTUR ALLIKSAAR (1923–1966)

**WHERE TO,
WHERE TO,
UGH!!!**

Time-tables.

Hail-tables.

Gain-tables.

Are the trains still going to hurry to the parties of strikingly struggling joys?!

Breath-nets.

Heat-nets.

Death-nets.

Are the shins still going to spray the blue sparks of spring?!

Hopes are going to turn to rags.

It doesn't matter — we'll sew them up with the thread of dreams stolen from the bushels of midnight.

The charm is going to grow thinner.

It doesn't matter — it can't vanish anywhere from the tight tin cup of our tribulations.

Yet the spell is really going to fade!

With more tension and greater gulps let us drink then its dusky brightness!

The soul is worn to holes like a prehistoric engine.

Never mind — we will race forward in a canoe carved out of the trunk of the future-tree.

You, wind, are a very frolicsome insect indeed!

For ever with us, chasers of captivations, for ever with us, trackers of transfigurations.

Never falling behind.

Look, how many pretend to be dumb!

Look, how respectably they make fools of themselves!

Look, how benightedness is boasted about!

Look, how many take muck for marmalade!

You can understand everything because you can jumble up things, in order to put them in proper order.

A fly is walking on the time-table and believes it is in Bergen and Berlin and Baku.

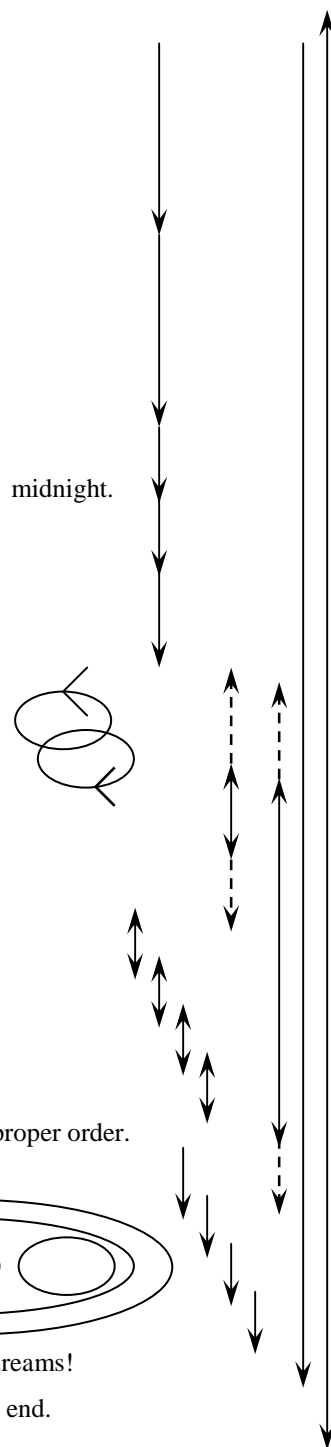
There is no moment when no one feels killed.

There is no moment when no one reaches out for an embrace.

There is no moment when no one is on the road.

Go ahead, go ahead, go ahead wrapped in the clouds of the dandelion-fluffs of your wish-dreams!

The branching out of fingers and toes, of thoughts and memories has neither beginning nor end.



(Translated by A. M. & Ene-Reet Soovik.)