# A Coserian Outlook on Textual Meaning –
# With Some Observations Regarding the Process of Translation

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## 1. Introduction

**1.1.** Starting from the second half of the 20th century, Eugenio Coseriu elaborated a comprehensive conceptual scaffolding meant to ensure the coherent investigation of all the forms and aspects of speaking as a cultural activity, i.e. as a free, purpose-oriented construction of meaning, for which the term 'Integral Linguistics' has gradually gained international acknowledgment[1]. This framework, organized on three levels and with three points of view (see Table 1), constitutes the general map in which all the disciplines and subdisciplines of linguistics will find their legitimate place. In the present paper we will focus on Level III, that of speaking as an individual activity in determined contexts, and examine the specificity and originality of Coseriu's outlook on the nature of textual meaning (sense), as well as its topicality on the scene of contemporary trends in the disciplines of discourse/ textuality.

| VIEWPOINT / LEVEL | Activity *enérgeia* | Knowledge (Competence) *dynamis* | Product *ergon* | Type of meaning & {Evaluation} |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **I. Universal** Speaking in general (universally-human activity) | Speech in general | Elocutional | Empirically infinite totality of utterances | Designation {Congruence} |

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[1] A concise outline of the dimensions and tasks of "Integral Linguistics" can be found in Coseriu (1981/1984). For the justification of this term and an analysis of its implications, see also Kabatek, Murguía (1997), Ch. 7, esp. p. 158–163.

| II. Historical Particular languages (idiomatic traditions) | Concrete language | Idiomatic | [Abstract language] | Signification {Correctness} |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| III. Individual Discourse / Text (individual speech) | Discourse | Expressive | Text | Sense {Adequacy} |

**Table 1:** Eugenio Coseriu's model of the levels and forms of language, with their associated evaluations

**1.2.** The discipline which takes as its proper object of study the text/discourse is "text linguistics as a hermeneutics of sense", already foreshadowed in Coseriu (1948), and then delineated as a specific field of linguistic inquiry in Coseriu (1955-1956)[2]. Developed over the course of the next decades and partially presented in various publications, it would finally be outlined in full form in Coseriu (1981: 51–153), then placed in the global theoretical edifice in Coseriu (1988). This outline, comprehensive though it is, is in fact, not a finished product, but the blueprint of a vast project that Coseriu left as a task for future development, and towards the fulfilment of which numerous researchers continue to bring important contributions. What we are interested in is this ongoing process of clarification, elaboration, and concrete substantiation of the conceptual framework through relevant textual analyses, a path we ourselves have also tried to contribute to for over 30 years now. Hence, the title of this contribution: not "*E. Coseriu's outlook* on textual meaning", but "*A Coserian outlook* on textual meaning", that is, not an inventory of Coseriu's tenets on the issue, but, rather, our own interpretation and constructive proposal built on Coserian foundations. In particular, we intend to show the inextricable connection between integral text linguistics and Coseriu's view on translation as "speaking raised to the power of two", which can therefore perform the role of a touchstone for attesting the dimensions and strategies of sense construction in genuine texts.

## 2. Units of sense and their relation with units of textual expression

**2.1.** "Text linguistics as a hermeneutics of sense" (Coseriu 1981: 151) focuses on the specific units and strategies which serve to create and articulate textual meaning (sense) as a functionally autonomous type of linguistic content. The foundation of this discipline is the idea that the text – *any* text – is more than the sum of its parts, and that we are not dealing with a mere quantitative effect of accretion or 'added value', but with a genuine leap – the passage to a different

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[2] The functional autonomy of textual sense is clearly posited in this early work: "[…] en todo momento, lo que efectivamente *se dice* es menos de lo que *se expresa* y *se entiende*." (Coseriu 1955-1956: 308, emphasis in the original). It is in this paper that the domain of text linguistics "as a linguistics of sense" is first defined as autonomous but complementary to the study of language as a generally human activity and the study of particular languages as historically constituted traditions of speech.

semantic level. Technically this is expressed in the principle of the "double semiotic relation" at Level III.

According to this principle, language-specific *significata* and their associated *designata* function as semiotic expression for textual sense (Coseriu 1981: 48)[3]; the latter thus presupposes and integrates the former two types of linguistic content, while at the same time expanding beyond them, mainly due to the contribution of a wide spectrum of contextual knowledge manifested in the "evocative relations"[4] of the signs which constitute the text. On this point, however, we need to go one step further, and develop Coseriu's framework by integrating numerous suggestions that can be derived from his textual analyses. Thus, besides the actual *significata* and *designata* of the linguistic units employed in a text, which themselves need to be understood on the backdrop of Coseriu's account of Levels II and I, and not as mere dictionary meanings and acceptations, we have proposed in several previous contributions[5] an open list of elements that can be conceived, in a text-linguistic model of Coserian descent, as composing the expression of texts (*Textkonstitution*): 'text-constitutive units' and 'text-constitutive procedures / devices', dissociated according to the way they are situated in relation to the *individual* text in which they appear.

The 'units' are 'pre-textual' building blocks, in the sense that their identity is established *prior to* the construction of the individual text: they are found at the elocutional and idiomatic levels of linguistic organization (Levels I and II), in the historical tradition of languages, or in the historical tradition of texts (text genres, species, types), and are taken up as such, in the quality of raw material, for the construction of a new text. 'Procedures / devices', on the other hand, capture what is being done with those units at the individual level of speech (in the individual text) and nowhere else. These are specifically textual, they operate on the units and are not reducible to devices, procedures or strategies from the elocutional and idiomatic levels of linguistic organization.

Starting from Coseriu's theoretical considerations and text analyses, I have systematized the following tentative list, open to further expansion[6], of the elements that may qualify for the status of text-constitutive units and procedures.

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[3] With its roots in the semiotics of culture (Y. Lotman, R. Barthes), the idea of the double semiotic articulation of textual sense is not new, but Coseriu's view stands out, in comparison with other authors, by the fact that this principle is placed at the very foundation of text linguistics, as a basis for investigating all texts, not only "poetic" or creative texts. At the same time, Coseriu clarifies the semantic nature of the units of textual expression, and situates the whole issue in a coherent framework which aims to capture and explain the speaker's own intuitive knowledge for text construction. In Tămâianu-Morita (2016), Coseriu's outlook is examined in comparison with four other conceptions pertinent to the problem of the double semiotic relation in discourse (É. Benveniste, Y. Ikegami, P. Charaudeau and F. Rastier).

[4] For a definition, classification and examples, see Coseriu 1971/1977: 202, 1981: 68-101, 1987a: 25–29.

[5] Tămâianu (-Morita) 2001: 40, 125–133; 2002: 126-150; 2014.

[6] To this end, operational concepts and descriptions from other models of textuality, from transphrastic grammars to cognitive and pragmatic accounts of discourse, could be re-valued and included in the overall framework of integral text linguistics. Elements such as textual markers, macrostructures, isotopies, narrative functions or actants etc. will also fall into one of these two categories. For example, isotopies are in fact abstracted – or 'disembodied' – forms of certain evocative

**A.** Text-constitutive units: (a) Idiomatic signs, ranging over all the strata of idiomatic structuring and comprising all the five types of *significata*, with the constellation of all their paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations at the idiomatic level. Not only the structure, but also the architecture of the historical language has to be taken into account here, and, in the case of multimodal texts, signs from other semiotic systems will also be included in this category. (b) Traditional means for realizing specific textual functions (for example, formulae for the beginning and end of given text genres). (c) Previous (fragments of) texts taken up as such and used as raw material for the constitution of a new text.

**B.** Text-constitutive procedures: (a) Evocative sign relations. (b) Textual functions[7], among which an important role has to be assigned to metaphorical strategies as textual functions, as defined by Zagaevschi Cornelius (2005). (c) Forms of suspending (*Aufhebung*) incongruence and incorrectness[8] through the value of adequacy. (d) Expression "gaps" (*Ausdruckslücke*)[9].
The illustrative analysis in Section 3 will show one instance of how such elements of textual constitution are articulated in a genuine text to the effect of triggering the process of sense construction and interpretation.

**2.2.** Coseriu conceives the sense of texts as also being susceptible to analysis into "units", that is "units of sense" (*Sinneinheiten*), precisely on the basis of their correlation with the elements of textual expression, in such a way that the overall multi-layered organization from small-scale units up to the whole text is actually an "articulation of textual sense" (*Gliederung des Sinns*) (Coseriu 1981: 123).

Regarding the nature of "sense units", we need to turn to Coseriu's own textual analyses, as the issue is not pursued on a conceptual level in his published work. As pointed out in Tămâianu-Morita (2012), in these analyses we can see that sense units do not necessarily correspond to discrete material segments of the text; to be sure, there might be cases in which such a correspondence exists, contingently, but more often than not the expression of sense units is found at the level of what we have called text-constitutive "procedures" (for example the "evocative sign relations" or the "expression gaps"). This may explain the appearance of 'floating content' sometimes associated with the level of sense, in contrast to the more obviously 'embodied' level of idiomatic *significata*. However, each and any sense unit does have a correspondent in the textual constitution, and it is only through this connection that they can be validated as such, as objectively present in the text.
It must be stressed that the "units of sense" identifiable in (integral) text linguistics are not coextensive with *the whole* sense of a text, which remains, by definition, a subjective construction which we might call the 'experience of sense'. Text

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relations.
[7] For the definition of textual functions in the perspective of integral linguistics, see Coseriu (1981: 45–47, 170–174), as well as the clarifications and conceptual developments proposed by Zagaevschi Cornelius (2005: 124–126).
[8] For the concept of "Aufhebung" in this sense, see Coseriu (1988: 122–125, 176–179).
[9] According to Coseriu (1987b), these are text-constitutive parts posited as 'missing' and in need of 'recovery' by virtue of what is actually present in the expression of the text, as a necessary step before the actual interpretation of the text can begin.

linguistics finds the vectors that guide and give momentum to the sense construction process, the concrete dimensions which configure the experience of sense. The text linguist takes it upon him/herself to pursue these dimensions and the principles that justify the articulation of sense up to the maximum possible level for the given text in the given historical / cultural circumstances – well aware that this may imply going beyond the material limits of the given text, especially in cases where intertextual evocative relations play a crucial text-constitutive role.

**2.3.** We hold that one privileged methodological path for attesting the objectivity of textual sense in genuine texts is the process of translation, specifically through the comparative analysis of different translated versions, in multiple languages, of the text in question. Why is it that translation can be used as a touchstone for the identification and verification of textual sense vectors?

Coseriu views translation "a peculiar form of speech": "speaking by means of another language and *with a content that is already given*". Thus, the translator acts as the creator of a new text (the translated text), but s/he does so with the knowledge that "the content to be expressed is given beforehand, *up to its very details*"[10] (Coseriu 1977b: 215, 223; emphasis mine – E.T.-M.).

The essence of this outlook lies precisely in the idea that the sense to be expressed in the translated text is given beforehand, in the original text, *up to its minute details*. In other words, what is at stake in translation is not the transmission of a 'disembodied' content, but a *re-constitution* of the original text, with the materials of the target language, in such a way that the target-language reader is prompted to construct the overall textual designation and interpret the sense along the same lines as the original. Analyzing the source text *as a text*, and not as a 'sample' of the source language, involves identifying the text-constitutive units and strategies that serve as vectors guiding the hermeneutic process of sense construction. It is these units and semantic vectors that need to be replicated or approximated in translation, and it is the extent to which this goal is achieved that can serve as a benchmark for assessing the appropriateness of the translated version. Given the complexity of the semantic decisions involved, we have argued elsewhere that the translator's endeavour cannot be considered to be merely *secondary* to the primary act of producing the original, but can justly be characterized as a process of "speaking raised to the power of two"[11].

### 3. Illustration and discussion

**3.1.** Let us illustrate the ideas put forward in the previous section by one textual example in English, considered in a twofold perspective. On the one hand, it will be analyzed in the framework of integral text linguistics with a view to identifying the units of sense and the relevant elements of textual constitution connected with them. On the other hand, it will be discussed from the angle of a cross-linguistic contrastive examination, taking into account several Spanish, French, Italian and Romanian

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[10] "una forma particular del hablar" (Coseriu 1977b: 215), "un hablar por medio de otra lengua y con un contenido ya dado" (1977b: 223); "el contenido para expresar le está dado de antemano hasta en sus detalles" (1977b: 223).

[11] See Tămâianu(-Morita) 2001: 144–149; 2013–2014: 73.

versions.

At the core of our example lies the phrase "Good night". In English discourse, this phrase can be used as a fixed formula traditionally orientated towards fulfilling a particular textual function, that of "greeting upon parting[12] at the end of the day", perhaps with the added implication that the interlocutor is expected to take a rest / go to sleep for the night, which gives rise to a special variant-in-use: the function of «bidding restful sleep». As such, this phrase represents a possible text-constitutional (= pre-textual) unit from category (b) listed in sub-section 2.1. (traditional means for realizing certain textual functions). Needless to say, this traditional orientation towards specific textual functions rightly pertains to Level II, to the historical language, more specifically to the layer of the norms of usage and variants-in-use (what Coseriu calls *Sprechbedeutungen*), and therefore differs, in principle, from language to language. Consider, for comparison, the Romanian phrase "Noapte bună", which can be used as a greeting analogous to the English expression, but can also fulfil a metaphorical textual function, that of a "signal of curtly breaking off an interaction, or refusing further discussion", as in "I-am spus clar ce are de făcut și noapte bună!" or "I-am spus ce are de făcut, da' dacă nu vrea, noapte bună!".

What can be done with this unit at Level III, in a genuine text, in the process of sense construction? In texts belonging to a practical or factual modality, where the sense tends to coincide with the signification and designation of the linguistic units employed[13], the unit will predictably appear in dialogues precisely with one of its traditional functions known beforehand and actualized 'at face value', so to speak. If we are dealing with "greeting upon parting at the end of the day", proper equivalents will be Ro. "Noapte bună", Fr. "Bonne nuit", It. "Buona notte", Sp. "Buenas noches"[14].

There are, however, other, more complex and more spectacular possibilities of sense construction when this pre-textual unit is employed in poetic texts. Our illustration is a famous poem by Dylan Thomas composed in the villanelle form: *Do not go gentle into that good night* (Thomas 2000: 148), which begins with the stanza: "Do not go gentle into that good night,/ Old age should burn and rave at close of day;/ Rage, rage against the dying of the light." The following four stanzas take up lines 1 and 3 specifying them in reference to the subjects "wise men", "good men", "wild men" and "grave men", and the poem ends with the stanza: "And you, my father, there on the sad height,/ Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray./ Do not go gentle into that good night./ Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

The poem has been a favourite object of literary analysis, especially in didactic contexts, where content-related questions are asked and tentatively answered, usually based on what we might call the 'outer rings' of sense

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[12] By contrast, for instance, "Good evening" can be used as a greeting both upon meeting and parting with someone during the evening hours.

[13] For a full discussion on the basic modes of discourse in an integral text typology, see Tămâianu (2001: 92–99).

[14] To be sure, each of these may have a different repertory of usages in the respective languages. For example, "Buenas noches" can also be used as a greeting upon meeting someone, like the English "Good evening".

interpretation – events attested in the empirical biography of the real-life author, or direct testimonies of the author. The poem is thus said to be 'about' Dylan Thomas and his father's illness and progressing blindness, to derive its imagery from his own alcohol-induced visions and so on. On this backdrop, it is claimed that "that good night" refers to death, "my father" is Thomas' own father, and the poem on the whole expresses a sense of rebellion against the inevitability of death. To be sure, even without taking into account the accidents of Dylan Thomas' life, it can safely be said that the poem *may* refer to the reactions to physical death old people have or should have, and that darkness and the dying light *may* refer metaphorically to blindness, to loss of sight – at least if the constitutive elements are interpreted straightforwardly on a surface level of the sense. Such considerations, however, do not address crucial issues regarding the actual choice of textual units. For instance: Why do we have "wise men", "good men", "wild men" and "grave men" and not other types of "men"? Why is "you, my father" presented as separate in characteristics from these four types? What kind of place or spatial structure is "the sad height"? In what sense can it be said that "dark is right"? – and the list can go on. Furthermore, the 'outer rings' do not really account coherently for the units of sense in their complete articulation, and fail to unravel the mystery of the strange effect of insistence generated by the demonstrative in the key phrase "*that* good night". An analysis in the framework of integral text linguistics will try to answer these questions by focusing in great detail on the text-constitutional units and procedures themselves; the empirical circumstances of the author's life will be set aside as a matter of principle, treated as trivial or, at best, as subsidiary sources, should supplementary corroboration become necessary.

**3.2.** Our analysis starts with the observation that, in the text, the phrase "good night" appears to be *not* the fixed form of the greeting, but the free form, a syntagm qualifying the "night" as "good". However, in that case, an expression gap (*Ausdruckslücke*) is immediately recognized: the demonstrative "that" implies that a specific "good night" is referred to, one already mentioned in the text or known by deictic reference. Thus, the text starts with an explicit instruction, or, rather, a warning ("Do not go gentle"), but simultaneously requires the reader to recover a missing content (*Which* "good night" ?!) before the actual interpretation can begin. This is the first sense unit (a mysterious "good night" that is tricky and should not be easily accepted). The very next constitutive unit, "old age", is specified in the last stanza by the unit "you, my father". Together with the concrete request "curse, bless me now with your fierce tears", they generate a higher sense unit that might be labeled 'the relation between fathers and sons, especially when faced with "that good night"'.

To a careful interpreter – or to the text linguist as a maximal interpreter – these elements are sufficient to conjure up an undeniable intertextual evocative relation to another text about dangerous "good nights" and fathers and sons – in fact, to the most fundamental text in the realm of the English language where these sense vectors are fully developed: Shakespeare's plays[15]. With Shakespeare, a frequent

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[15] Incidentally, for those concerned with the outer rings of the poem's interpretation, literary history confirms that Dylan Thomas was exposed to Shakespeare's work from early childhood, under his

textual procedure is that of taking fixed (stereotyped) formulae such as "Farewell", "Let [it] be", "All is well", or "Good night", submit them to a process of semantic revival and then ascribe to them peculiar sense functions, endowed with text-typological relevance (i.e. markedly different in tragedies vs. comedies vs. the 'problem plays'). For instance, as demonstrated in Tămâianu-Morita (2005), "All is well" ceases to be a mere reassuring statement and becomes a magic command to *make* all things well (a command which can be felicitous or not according to the typological nature of the respective play).

What can we say about the peculiar sense function of the greeting "Good night" in Shakespeare's plays? Isolated (one or two) occurrences can be found in various plays (*Meas. for Meas*., *Tp*., *Much Ado, Lr.* etc.), but a significantly higher frequency foregrounds the following plays: *Hamlet* (13 occurrences), *Romeo and Juliet* (9), *Othello* (8) and *Macbeth* (4). Beyond the mere material frequency, however, other arguments, related to the functional status of the unit "Good night", can be brought to substantiate the evocative relation that constitutes the backbone of Dylan Thomas' poem. Thus, in Shakespeare the following characteristics in the use of the unit can be noted: (a) obsessive repetition in the same scene (e.g. *Rom.*, II: ii, *Ham.*, III: iv); (b) emphatic position in the scene (e.g. Hamlet to Gertrude after he spoke to the Ghost and made his mother repent: "Good night; but go not to mine uncle's bed", *Ham.*, III: iv, 159); (c) marked textual syntax, signalling the semantic revival (e.g. "The goodness of the night upon you, friends!", *Oth.*, I:ii, 35); (d) co-occurrence with other matching key phrases (e.g. "to want [= lose, miss] thy *light*", *Rom.*, II: ii, 155; "mine *eyes* do itch", *Oth.*, IV: iii, 59; Hamlet characterizing Polonius, whom he had just killed, as "most *grave*", *Ham.*, III: iv, 214).

The phrase "Good night", with its traditional function of greeting upon parting at the end of the day, is thus used as semiotic expression for a higher-ranking function – a sense function. Clues as to what exactly this sense function is can be derived from taking into account who utters it to whom, and in what situation, more precisely what happens before and after its utterance. Let us give just a few examples: Lady Macbeth and Lennox in the banquet scene (*Mac.*, III: iv, 117-121); Gentlewoman to the Doctor in Lady Macbeth's madness scene (*Mac.*, V: i, 86), in which the Doctor had diagnosed the malady of the mind, "Unnatural deeds/ Do breed unnatural troubles" (*Mac.*, V: I, 79-80); Juliet to Romeo in the parting scene after they discuss their ill-fated love (*Rom.*, II: ii); Lady Capulet to Juliet before the latter drinks the Friar's potion to feign death (*Rom.*, IV; iii, 12-14); Othello and the Duke before the night of revels that would trigger the play's tragic chain of events (*Oth.*, I: ii, 35 and I: iii, 290); Iago and Cassio after the former gives his treacherous advice (*Oth.*, II: iii, 342-343); Desdemona to Emilia before dying (*Oth.*, IV: iii, 59, 107-108); Guards after seeing the Ghost of Hamlet's father (*Ham.*, I: i, 11, 16, 18), Hamlet to Gertrude after seeing the Ghost and killing Polonius (*Ham.*, III: iv, 159, 170, 177, 217); Ophelia gone mad, addressing imaginary ladies, before dying (*Ham.*, IV: ii, 72-74); Horatio after Hamlet's death (*Ham.*, V: ii, 373).

It thus becomes apparent that the phrase "Good night" is used by characters in situations involving a vague apprehension of the danger posed by forces beyond

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father's influence, thus acquiring both extensive knowledge of it, and an enduring passion for it.

*individual* (rational) control or utterly beyond *human* control, such as blind rage, madness, ghosts and all sorts of entities and actions that are described as "foul", "unnatural", "unholy", "unruly", etc. The characters attempt to hedge or circumvent the danger by verbal 'magic': they unconsciously assume that by asserting the night will be good, it *will actually become so*. This magic discourse act, of course, is infelicitous, nothing more than a trick played by language itself. In retrospect, the reader/spectator will realize that the utterance of the phrase "Good night" had functioned as a premonition of unholy death.

**3.3.** Let us now return to Dylan Thomas's text. By virtue of the evocative relation between units from the poem with units from Shakespeare's plays such as the ones exemplified above, three main interpretive paths are opened, providing the following units of sense. First of all, "*that* good night" can be interpreted as the (well-known) Shakespearean "good night", which is not mere biological death, but the ultimate confrontation of the human soul and mind with the 'otherwordly' – with ghosts, madness, murder, unholy death. Secondly, an intertextual evocation to *Romeo and Juliet* from one scene where the unit "light" is co-occurrent with "good night" serves to endow the unit "the dying of the light" with the meaning of 'separation from loved ones': "Jul. A thousand times good night!/ Rom. A thousand times the worse, to want thy light" *(Rom.*, II: ii, 154-155). It will be noted that the Shakespearean sequence is constructed with the same strategy of interplay between "good night" as the fixed form of the greeting and its revival as a free form, when Juliet's abridged multiplied greeting is transformed by Romeo into a hyperbolized antithetic qualification of the "good" night as "a thousand times the worse" because the "light" of Juliet is gone. Thirdly, "you, my father" will cover all the multifarious hypostases of fatherhood (/ parenthood) explored in Shakespeare's plays, including father figures such as the slain King in Macbeth (explicitly referred to as "the old man" by Lady Macbeth in the sleepwalking scene, co-occurrent with "good night") or a father that may already be dead biologically, like Hamlet's, but is held to keep vigil on the (living) son, to effect not blind revenge, but, rather, repentance of the guilty and a consummate reconciliation.

Correlating all these elements offers a very different perspective on the sense of the instructions/ warnings "Do not go gentle into that good night" and "Rage, rage against the dying of the light". These do not express anger against biological death or fear in the face of it, but quite the opposite: unbending human will to resist and oppose inhuman, unholy forces or the deadly emanations of the irrational and the unknown.

A supplementary argument to this point can be brought here, based on two evocative relations with the "thematic context" constituted by the triad "old age – blindness – madness" as found in *King Lear*, where prototypical relations between fathers and sons/ daughters are explored. The lines "wise men at their end know *dark is right*" and "you, my father, there on *the sad height*"[16] can be directly connected with Gloucester's fate and his belated reconciliation with his son Edgar.

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[16] An intertextual evocation of another of Dylan Thomas' late poems, *Elegy*, which is thematically related to the one under analysis, provides the image "the crucified hill" towards which the dying soul, however, is advised to "go calm". Therefore, it seems to us that "the sad height" is posited as a textual opposite to the evocative cluster centered around the Christian Golgotha.

Having had his eyes plucked out (*Lr.*, III: vii), Gloucester finally comes to terms with the inner awakening that outward blindness brings about: "I have no way, and therefore want no eyes;/ I stumbled when I saw" (*Lr.*, IV: I, 20-21), and it is in this sense that "dark" is, indeed, "right". When the old man intends to end his own life, Edgar, disguised as a mad beggar, simulates Gloucester's suicide by taking him to the edge of "a cliff" that he depicts in chilling words (truly "a sad height"), but which does not exist in reality – and thus saves his life for the moment, and his soul for eternity (*Lr.*, IV: vi). At the very end, when both Gloucester and Lear are dead, Edgar, the one empowered to bring peace and unity to a kingdom ravaged by divisions, will also effect a final reconciliation, with all-accepting insight: "The oldest hath borne most: we that are young,/ Shall never see so much, nor live so long" (*Lr.*, V: iii, 325-326).

To conclude this brief sketch of textual analysis, we can attempt to formulate the overarching principle of sense-construction in Dylan Thomas' poem. We believe it to be the synergy (and tension) of two concurrent interpretations anchored in the same point at the beginning of the poem. On the one hand, "that good night" interpreted as the free form generates a first – superficial – level of sense: 'although physical death is absolute peace, humans rebel or should rebel against it'. This is associated with a dominant emotion of despair at the loss of the father and at the transience of life in general. On the other hand, "*that* good night" interpreted as the greeting, semantically revived, is the Shakespearean "good night" (the 'otherwordly' – ghosts, madness, murder, unholy death). In the face of this threat to the human soul, the text advocates an unrelenting fight through reason, understanding, rationality, awakening of inner sight (and thereby reconciliation with the father figure, as well as bestowal of human significance to even the most inconsequential "frail deeds").

It is worth noting that this type of semantic synergy is similar to the "articulatory" functioning of trans-linguistic (poetic) metaphors, as defined and illustrated by Zagaevschi Cornelius (2005: 127-128), in particular, to their "capacity to connect 'vertically' two or more levels of sense construction, generating a plurality of sense values" (*ibidem*: 175).

How did it become possible to uncover the sense function of "Good night", which turned out to be the fundamental principle of sense articulation that justifies all the individual units and procedures in Thomas' poem? We took the text as an integral whole, up to the maximal identifiable limit of text-constitutive relations[17], which objectively made it necessary to connect the poem to several Shakespearean plays. Metaphorically, one might say that Dylan Thomas wrote his poem not simply with the units of the English language, but modulating his poetic message on the voice of – and, more importantly, taking up actual text-constitutional building blocks from – Shakespeare's work.

**3.4.** Let us now examine how faithfully can this text-constitutive principle be replicated in the process of translation. It is evident that the crux of the matter is the

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[17] Without, however, having to rely on any external factors such as the accidents of the poet's empirical life, which can nevertheless be later brought to bear in confirming or reinforcing the textual analysis.

status of the unit "good night" in the target language and its associated discursive tradition. Italian, for instance, lends itself easily to maintaining the parallelism with English and thus conveying the synergy of the double interpretation: "Non andartene remissivo in quella buona notte" (D.T./G.I. 2000). So does French, where, however, many translations shift the demonstrative to the equivalent of "this" instead of "that", no doubt in order to achieve a more 'natural' impression in the target language. Just three examples here: "N'entre pas apaisé dans cette bonne nuit" (D.T./L.-E.M. 2012), "N'entre pas sans violence dans cette bonne nuit" (D.T./A.S. 1979), "N'entre pas courtois dans cette bonne nuit" (D.T./T.S. 2020). Not all is lost, because the use of "cette" still generates the function of the expression gap, but perhaps with less impact and less clarity ("that" = 'the one everyone knows about') than the original.

Laure Hinckel translates into French Thomas' text as it appears in the Romanian translation by Mircea Cărtărescu embedded in one of his novels. The Romanian version preserves the parallelism with the English articulation, but adds, for the sake of rhythm and rhyme, an interpolated phrase which anticipates the unit "the dying of the light": "Nu intra lin în noaptea bună, fără zori" (D.T./M.C. 2015). In the French version, Hinckel keeps the interpolation but leaves out the original collocated adjective "good", key to the dual interpretation: "N'entre pas serein dans cette nuit sans aurores" (D.T./L.H. 2019). Interestingly, however, Cărtărescu translates "against the dying of the light" adroitly as "contra stingerii de sori", echoed by Hinckel as "contre la mort des soleils". The Romanian phrase has the same emphatic and hymnic tonality of the original, in contrast to phrases that keep close to standard non-marked norms of usage, such as "contro la luce que muore" (D.T./G.I. 2000), "lorsque mort la lumière" (D.T./L.-E.M. 2012), and "contre la mort de la lumière" (D.T./A.S. 1979). Moreover, the Romanian version is in fact apt to convey the intertextual evocation to *Romeo and Juliet*, with its well-known metaphor "Juliet is the sun" uttered by Romeo when Juliet appears at the balcony: "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?/ It is the east, and Juliet is the sun" (*Rom.*, II, i: 44-45).

On the other hand, the Spanish language and its associated discursive tradition poses the objective problem that the greeting form ("Buenas noches") is not coincident with the free form ("buena noche"). It is perhaps inevitable that the translator should opt for the latter, for the sake of syntactic cohesion: "No entres dócilmente en esa buena noche" (D.T./A.M. 2022[18]), "No entres con calma en esa buena noche" (D.T./M.A.-M. 2005). The latter translator also adequately proposes an emphatic "el morirse de la luz", which is, however, used only in the first and last stanzas, and changed into differing expressions in the other occurrences ("la muerte de la luz" and "el fin de la luz"). Thus, in Spanish the synergy of the dual interpretation is no longer poignant, but this is an objective limitation resulting from the respective idiomatic tradition. Nevertheless, the lexical structure of the phrase is close enough to avoid the complete loss of the second semantic possibility (that of the Shakespearean greeting)[19]. Inadequate, however, is a modification effected in another Spanish version: "No entres dócilmente en la noche

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[18] The version is found on the translator's website included in the bibliography. The date indicated here is our date of access, for the sake of convenience. The translation was actually made and posted some 30 years ago (personal communication from A. Moreira, 16 January 2022).

[19] Other languages, such as Japanese, where the greeting has a totally different lexical composition than the free form corresponding to "good + night", pose insurmountable difficulties in this respect.

callada" (lit. 'in the silent night', D.T./E.P. 1976). This choice is motivated, without doubt, by the search for a phrase to rhyme with "el fin de la jornada", itself an unfortunate transferral of "at close of day" into the third line, which results in completely deleting the unit "the dying of the light".

What exactly does this exercise in translation analysis tell us about the 'objective' sense of Thomas' poem? We would like to propose an answer in analogic terms inspired by the oracular formulation of the Witches who trap Macbeth in their self-fulfilling prophecy: "When the battle's lost and won" *(Mac.*, I: i, 4). The sense objectively 'there' is the content that is made possible by the textual constitution, with its actual units and procedures, in their multi-dimensional articulation, after we strip away what is "lost" and what is "won" (i.e. gained or added) through the translation process itself. Conversely, such comparative analyses would be impossible if a *benchmark* for assessing that something is "lost" or something is "won" did not exist. This is the text's sense, or, more precisely, the vectors that guide the construction of sense – not quantifiable, but ascertainable within a hermeneutic approach carried up to a maximally achievable extent in the given historical circumstances.

## 4. Conclusions

As shown in the illustrative analysis, text linguistics as a hermeneutics of sense concerns itself only with the actual "units of sense", which are, by definition, 'embodied', i.e. they stand in an inextricable relation with text-constitutive units / procedures in each genuine text. From this point of view, they differ, for example, from 'themes', which are, in a literal sense, *disembodied* – floating contents resulting from the analytical separation and abstraction of a certain strand of sense from various individual texts. Literary theory, comparative literature and cultural studies in general may be interested in finding and interpreting themes across texts, languages and cultures, but this type of approach is fundamentally different from that of integral text linguistics. In text linguistics, the only relevance of themes is the other way round, i.e. the case when they are taken up as raw material (in the form of what Coseriu calls 'thematic context') for the constitution of a new text.

It cannot be stressed enough that the proposed perspective of textual analysis, as we understand it on Coserian bases, strictly confines itself to the scope of what can be justified within text linguistics, and does not cross over into the realms of literary interpretation, critical assessment, psychological speculation and so on. In the framework of text linguistics we can only aim at finding the *linguistic*[20] dimensions and vectors which orientate the process of sense construction. In other words, text linguistics can never explain the whole sense of a text, and indeed does not pretend to do so. It is precisely this assumed methodological limitation that underlies the pertinence of its results and ensures the specificity of the contribution that a text-linguistic approach can bring to the global understanding of a given text.

Finally, in the present contribution we have tried to demonstrate that, in the process of identifying text-constitutive components and ascertaining the units of sense they engender, translation and translation analysis can be used as methodological tools.

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[20] *Linguistic* or, more generally, *semiotic* dimensions, if we are to include the case of plurisemiotic texts that have a linguistic and a non-linguistic component.

Thus, in the global edifice of Integral Linguistics, the role of translation transcends its own goals as an autonomous subfield of applied linguistics, meant to mediate between different linguistic, textual and cultural traditions and realities – an objective subsumed to what Coseriu (1992) calls the "principle of public responsibility" of linguistics as a cultural science. Properly understood as "speaking raised to the power of two", translation becomes a powerful aid to the text linguist, truly a 'royal road' for unravelling the objective vectors of sense construction in genuine individual texts.

The framework of integral linguistics allows us to make the point that the objectivity of text-constitutional units / procedures and that of sense units does not mean an identity of historically-determined interpretations, just as the correlation between given units of textual expression and certain units of sense does not imply cross-textual repeatability, but only constancy within the individual text as a global entity. Furthermore, 'objectivity' at the level of discourse (Level III) cannot be equated with the same type of intersubjectivity that characterizes the historical and the universal levels. One might say that the objectivity of textual sense is a kind of asymptotic, maximal 'one-sided' intersubjectivity, in which the text linguist, as interpreter, takes upon him/herself the task of discovering everything in and about the text that is possible within the boundaries of his/her historical situation.

As Aschenberg (2015) points out, the text linguistics envisaged by Coseriu aims to find the devices that make sense construction possible and, at the same time, the conditions of its comprehension: "La linguistique textuelle du sens rend donc compte de la perspective du sujet énonçant et du sujet comprenant" (Aschenberg 2015: 211-212). It is our contention that, true to the spirit of Coseriu's theoretical outlook, both are to be considered in an "exemplary" hypostasis, maximally creative and maximally knowledgeable, and the text linguist is held to act as a representative of both – of the former at the level of intuitive knowledge, and of the latter at the level of epistemic knowledge.

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# Abstract

The paper focuses on Eugenio Coseriu's outlook on the nature of textual meaning (sense), and aims at highlighting the specificity and originality of this theoretical view in the historical moment when it emerged on the international scene of linguistics, in the latter half of the 20th century, as well as its topicality in the context of contemporary trends in the disciplines of discourse / textuality. We begin by discussing a series of fundamental tenets of Integral Text Linguistics, or "text linguistics as a hermeneutics of sense", envisaged by Coseriu as a linguistics of Level III (individual), coherently interconnected with the linguistics of Levels II and I (historical and universal) in his triadic model of speaking as a

cultural activity: the "double semiotic relation" in discourse, the relation between text-constitutive units and strategies (elements of textual expression) and units of sense, the issue of the objectivity of textual sense. We then proceed to demonstrate that a privileged methodological path for attesting the objectivity of textual sense in genuine texts is the process of translation, and especially the comparative analysis of different translated versions, in multiple languages, of the text in question. This approach is based on the fact that Coseriu views translation as a peculiar technique of speech, a 'speaking raised to the power of two', in which the expressive means of another language are harnessed in order to re-constitute a textual meaning that is already given, with all the details of its articulation, in the original text. Using Dylan Thomas' famous poem *Do not go gentle into that good night*, we illustrate how the units and procedures of textual constitution are articulated in a genuine text to the effect of triggering the process of sense construction/ interpretation. If we treat the text as an integral whole and follow the sense-construction process up to the maximal identifiable limit of all its constitutive relations, it becomes objectively necessary to connect Thomas' poem to several Shakespearean plays. Contrastive analyses with the poem's translated versions into Spanish, French, Italian and Romanian serve to substantiate the tenet that, within the hermeneutic approach of integral text linguistics, translation can provide benchmarks for ascertaining the vectors that guide the construction of sense in genuine texts.