REPRESENTATIONS IN LINGUISTICS AND LITERATURE: AN ANALYSIS OF FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE'S AND LEWIS CARROLL'S CONSTRUCTION OF THE OBJECT *LANGUAGE*

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RESUMEN: *Representaciones en Lingüística y en Literatura: Un Análisis de la Construcción del Objeto `Lengua´ en Saussure y Carroll*
Este artículo analiza la forma en que el *Curso de Lingüística General* de Ferdinand de Saussure y los *Libros de Alicia* de Lewis Carroll realizan la construcción del objeto *lengua*. Dicha interacción se caracteriza como una relación intertextual como efecto de lectura que despliega un diálogo interdisciplinario sobre problemas tales como la naturaleza del signo lingüístico, el debate Nomenclaturista/Convencionalista sobre el lenguaje, el concepto de 'sistema' (sus unidades y relaciones) y su naturaleza arbitraria. El Estructuralismo en Lingüística y el Nonsense (Sinsentido/Absurdo) en Literatura se presentan como métodos radicalmente diferentes que interactúan en la aparición de nuevos problemas y matices en el objeto *lengua.*

Palabras clave: Saussure – Carroll – lengua – comparación – nonsense – estructuralismo - objecto

ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the mode in which Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice Books* build towards and interact in the construction of the object *language*. Such interaction is characterized as an intertextual relation, as a reading effect, which displays a cross-disciplinary dialogue around problems such as the nature of the linguistic sign, the Nomenclaturist/Conventionalist debate on language, the concept of 'system' (its units and relations) and its arbitrary nature. Structuralism in Linguistics and Nonsense in Literature are presented as radically different methods which interact in the triggering of new problems and nuances in the object *language*.

Keywords: Saussure – Carroll – language – comparison – nonsense – structuralism - object

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1. Introduction

Some crucial problems in Linguistics find their representation in multiple literary works. Such representation adopts a variety of forms and has specific effects on the construction of the object *language*, as a function of its treatment in Linguistics and in Literature.

The general goal of this paper is to provide a preliminary approach to the specific form of the circulation of knowledge between the fields of Linguistics and Literature and the type of knowledge rendered as a consequence of such interaction.

The epistemological discussion on the nature of the object in these two knowledge areas lies beyond the boundaries of this article. However, it is expected that the observation of the alternative mechanisms for the construction of the object in the instantiation provided by works from each field may contribute to this debate.

In particular, this paper aims at characterizing the mode in which two works, namely Ferdinand de Saussure's[1] *Course in General Linguistics* (CGL) and Lewis Carroll's[2] *Alice Books* build towards the construction of the object *language*. It traces an intertextual[3] relation which displays a crossdisciplinary dialogue around problems such as the nature of the linguistic sign, the Nomenclaturist/Conventionalist debate on language, the concept of 'system' (its units and relations) and its arbitrary nature, treated from a linguistic perspective in Saussure's *Course* and from a literary viewpoint in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (AAIW) and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (TTLG).

The CGL makes use of comparisons and metaphors to accompany the debate on the nature of language. In contrast, the comparison mechanisms in the *Alice Books* seem to align with the nonsense genre for the dramatic accentuation of the characteristics of the object *language*, which contributes to its analysis and redefinition from a singular perspective. The resemantization effect of some language problems allows for the reconstruction of the object, as a consequence of field-specific argumentation mechanisms.

It is sustained here that, while the Linguistics object makes itself available to systematization, opposition, regularity and unicity, the nature of the Literature object defines itself in the coexistence of contradictions, opposites and multiplicity, which results in the construction of objects with radically different characteristics. It is in this construction, which implies the manipulation of different and very specific mechanisms and procedures, that new nuances in the object *language* arise.

These mechanisms operating in the works studied will be the object of the analysis in the next section.

2. Argumentation on Language Theses in the *Course*

A strong use of comparisons and metaphors is attested in the Course, with the purpose of introducing, illustrating, explaining, or expanding some of the most important terms that enter the relations established in the CGL.

The chess game, the 8:45 Geneva-Paris train, the street destroyed and rebuilt, the stem of a plant, the cutting of a sheet of paper, air and water, money, a suit, a column, a machine are some of the comparative instances used in Saussure's argumentation to discuss the concepts of language system, value and identity, synchrony and diachrony, form and substance, syntagmatic and associative relations.

The function of these metaphors and comparisons, present throughout the whole Course, is to provide support to Saussure's arguments by clarifying his theses and to make those arguments more accessible to the linguist.

Non-linguistic examples are used in two alternative ways in the CGL: to show either similarity or difference between the linguistic and the non-linguistic terms. Both procedures will be described next.

On one hand, the use of non-linguistic examples attempts to show equivalence of behavior in both langue and the non-linguistic object: the other term of the comparison operates similarly to langue. Saussure examines the same two properties in language, namely *material identity* and *identity in value*, through the comparison with alternative non-linguistic examples. Language presents the same properties of the non-linguistic term –the train and the street- to the same degree: [-material identity]/[+identity in value].

The specific quotation provided next argues for the notion of synchronic identity despite material difference, in both terms of the comparison:

> Let us examine the problem of identity in linguistics in the light of some non-linguistic examples. We assign identity, for instance, to two trains ('the 8:45 from Geneva to Paris'), one of which leaves twenty-four hours after the other. We treat it as the 'same' train, even though probably the locomotive, the carriages, the staff, etc. are not the same. Or if a street is demolished and then rebuilt, we say it is the same street, although there may be physically little or nothing left of the old one. How is it that a street can be reconstructed entirely and still be the same? Because it is not a purely material structure. It has other characteristics which are independent of its bricks and mortar; for example, its situation in relation to other streets. Similarly, the train is identified by its departure time, its route, and other features which distinguish it from other trains. Whenever the same conditions are fulfilled, the same entities reappear. But they are not abstractions. The street and the train are real enough. Their physical existence is essential to our understanding of what they are. (Saussure: 107)

This comparison relationship, which shows that language behaves like the non-linguistic term, is captured in the following chart:

	Similarity	
	Langue	Train / Street
Material Identity	-	-
Identity in Value	+	+

A similar argumentation strategy and purpose holds for the water/air/waves ~ form/substance comparison: "The correlation between thought and sound, and the union of the two, is like that." (Saussure: 111) And for the sheet of paper metaphor: "Linguistics, then, operates along this margin, where sound and thought meet. *The contact between them gives rise to a form, not a substance*." (Saussure:111)

On the other hand, the comparison may serve the purpose of stating the dissimilarity in behavior between the linguistic and the non-linguistic terms. The *suit* comparison is a token of this function, used to explore the view that material identity and identity in value

are two distinct properties, which may behave differently in different objects. In fact, the CGL discusses the idea that two units may be materially identical (two suits) but not share the same value.

> A quite different example would be, say, a suit of mine which is stolen, but which I find subsequently on a second-hand stall. That suit is indeed a material object, made up simply of various inert substances – cloth, lining, facings, etc. Any other suits, however similar, would not be my suit. Now linguistic identity is not the kind of identity the suit has, but the kind of identity the train and the street have. (Saussure: 107)

The presentation of the *suit comparison* highlights the thesis through the negative with the purpose of canceling out what does not correspond to the object of study.

The relationships established in the aforementioned comparisons are summarized in the following chart:

		Difference	
	Similarity		
	Train/Street	Langue	Suit
Material Identity	-	-	+
Identity in Value	+	+	-

The non-linguistic term in the following semiological comparisons acts as a further opportunity to state dissimilarity, the precise ways in which langue behaves differently from the non-linguistic objects of the relationship, as presented in the quotation and the chart below.

> Other human institutions – customs, laws, etc. – are all based in varying degrees on natural connexions between things. They exhibit a necessary conformity between ends and means. Even the fashion which determines the way we dress is not entirely arbitrary. It cannot depart beyond a certain point from requirements dictated by the human body. A language, on the contrary, is in no way limited in its choice of means. For there is nothing at all to prevent the association of any ideas whatsoever with any sequence of sounds whatsoever. (Saussure: 76)

	Langue	Other human institutions
Arbitrariness	+	-

Again, the dissimilar example is presented as an instance of an exclusively non-linguistic behavior, which ultimately stresses out the specificity of the linguistic object analyzed.

The chess game in the CGL is the comparison which perfectly captures both mechanisms described: a comparison for similarity and for dissimilarity.

> But of all the comparisons one might think of, the most revealing is the likeness between what happens in a language and what happens in a game of chess. In both cases, we are dealing with a system of values and with modifications of the system.

A game of chess is like an artificial form of what languages present in a natural form. (Saussure: 87)

In contrast, a section of the game of chess metaphor allows for the exhibition of the dissimilarity mechanism as well, in relation to volition in language:

There is only one respect in which the comparison is defective. In chess, the player *intends* to make his moves and to have some effect upon the system. In a language, on the contrary, there is no premeditation. Its pieces are moved, or rather modified, spontaneously and fortuitously. (Saussure: 88)

The metaphor/comparison operations typical in the CGL – in both their similarity and dissimilarity articulations –serve the purpose of positively accounting for langue, of ultimately neutralizing the characteristics alien to the object of Linguistics. Through the application of the structuralist method, eminently oppositional, only the actual features of langue are kept as a result of the argumentation mechanism.

3. Argumentation on Language Theses in the *Alice Books*

The CGL argues for the properties of the object *langue* by using a method which consists of the presentation of an opposition, the characterization of both of its members and the elimination of one of the terms.[4] Through this method the theory accounts for what actually happens in language.
Alternatively, Carroll proposes a theory on what happens *and* does not happen in the object *language*, placing at the same level what is licit in language together with what is a violation. The unproblematic coexistence of opposites, the sustained apparent contradiction, multiplicity and ambiguity seem to be at the basis of the object *language* constructed in the *Alice Books*. No feature is discarded; rather, all terms coexist in Nonsense Literature.

3.1. Language and Reference

The linguistic games in the *tail/tale* (Carroll, AAIW: 49) and the *horse/hoarse* (Carroll, TTLG: 222-223) episodes appear as a metaphoric debate on Nomenclaturism/ Conventionalism, a literary discussion on the arbitrariness of the sign, the lack of a one-to-one relationship between signifier/signified that calls for the conventional character of language.
The arbitrariness principle determines that there is no natural relation between a signifier and a signified. This does not imply that the individual has the free choice to attribute a signifier to a signified; only that there is no natural attachment between them. Such link is conventional, socially agreed upon, and emanates from the system itself, in either an absolutely or a relatively-motivated fashion. (Harris: 17; Joseph: 62-70)
The nomenclaturist/conventionalist debate has recurred throughout the history of Philosophy and Linguistics. Plato's *Cratylus* presents both arguments –the conventionalist and the naturalist approaches to language – as a dialogue between two characters, Cratylus and Hermogenes, who hold opposing views that create a thematic tension. In this dialogue each viewpoint is explained and argued for under the assumption that one of them will not prosper.

Saussure returns to a version of this debate to criticize the 19th c. Comparativist and Neogrammarian Schools' methods. In the *Course* language is not considered an inventory of names that correspond to a list of things. The meaning of a word is not the pre-existing object for which the word stands[5]:

> For some people a language, reduced to its essentials, is a nomenclature: a list of terms corresponding to a list of things. […]
> This conception is open to a number of objections. It assumes that ideas already exist independently of words. It does not clarify whether the name is a vocal or a psychological entity, […]. Furthermore, it leads one to assume that the link between a name and a thing is quite unproblematic, which is far from being the case. None the less, this naive view contains one element of truth, which is that linguistic units are dual in nature, comprising two elements. (Saussure: 65-66)

The relation between signifier/signified occurs inside the system of langue in either a partial or an absolute way, which gives rise to the concept of "motivation": "A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern." (Saussure: 66) "In all these cases what we find, instead of *ideas* given in advance, are *values* emanating from a linguistic system." (Saussure: 115)

The Nomenclaturist view results in the isolation of items from their own linguistic system and of language-users from the linguistic community to which they belong. (Harris: 1988) This ultimately undermines the idea of langue as a system of pure values and is the reason for de Saussure to strongly discard it as one of the suppositions in Linguistic Theory.

The *horse/hoarse* game in the TTLG conversation between Alice and the train passengers speaks for the relationship of arbitrariness between the signifier and the signified, just as the well-known *tale/tail* game episode does in AAIW:

> 'It sounds like a horse,' Alice thought to herself. And an extremely small voice, close to her ear, said,
> 'You might make a joke on that –something about "horse" and 'hoarse", you know.'
> Then a very gentle voice in the distance said, 'She must be labeled "Lass, with care," you know –'(TTLG: 222-223)

There is no natural relationship between the signifier *hoarse* and the concept "sounding rough and harsh", and the concept "large four-legged animal used for riding". The link between the signifiers and the signifieds is purely conventional.
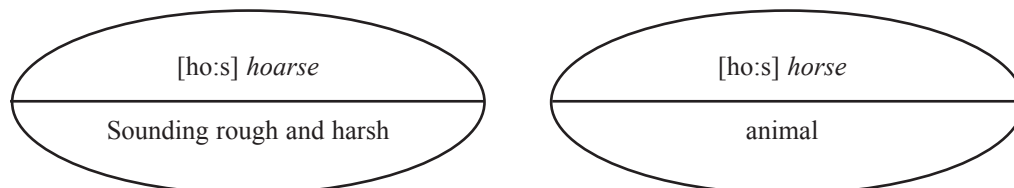
That relationship is not determined at will by the individual, but by the community as a whole, through the force of tradition. It is precisely this point that allows for the linguistic "joke" to hold. The Conventionalist view on language is represented at this point.

However, the correlations between low voice tone/small font size in this episode stands in violation to the social nature of the language agreement and the determination of the sign value within the system. The Nomenclaturist view on language is seen at play here.

Similarly, the *tale/tail* episode appears as a metaphoric discussion on the arbitrary relationship between signifier/signified.

'Mine is a long and a sad tail,' said the Mouse, turning to Alice, and sighing.

'It *is* a long tail, certainly,' said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse's tail; 'but why do you call it sad?' And she kept on puzzling about it while the Mouse was speaking, so that her idea of the tale was something like this:-

AND A LONG TALE.

" Fury said to a
mouse, That he
met in the
house,
'Let us
both go to
law: *I* will
prosecute
you. Come,
I'll take no
denial; We
must have a
trial: For
really this
morning I've
nothing
to do.'
Said the
mouse to the
cur, 'Such
a trial,
dear Sir,
With
no jury
or judge,
would be
wasting
our
breath.'
'I'll be
judge, I'll
be jury,'
Said
cunning
old Fury:
'I'll
try the
whole
cause,
and
condemn
you
to
death "

(AAW 48-49)

The text of the story ("tale") retold by the mouse is an iconic representation of the mouse's tail. Any correlation between iconicity and language stands in sheer violation of the arbitrariness principle.

| [teil] tale	[teil] tail
story	a part of an animal's body
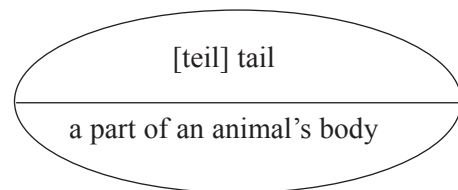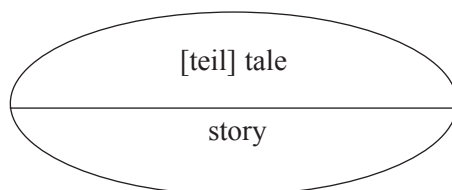
However, the linguistic joke holds only as a result of the lack of a one-to-one correspondence between phonological form and concept.

Another instance of this procedure is the Tweedledum/Tweedledee episode. In TTLG (232), the finger-posts pointing the direction to the house of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the mirror-imaged twins, are written themselves as mirror images, thus sustaining a natural relationship at the core of the linguistic sign.

To Prep	TWEEDLEDUM'S	HOUSE		THE HOUSE	OF TWEEDLEDEE
	POSSESSOR'S NAME NP	NP		NP	POSSESSOR'S NAME PP

Yet, the fact that the two terms to the preposition are presented as coexisting options provided by langue, having the preposition as a common axis, lays out the principle of arbitrariness in the signifier/signified relation.

Signifier: Somebody's	Signifier: Of Somebody
Signified: Possession	Signified: Possession
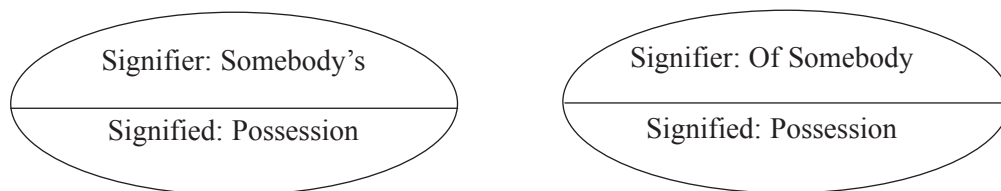
As shown, Lewis Carroll enters the Nomenclaturist/Conventionalist debate from an angle radically different from de Saussure's: by simultaneously presenting and sustaining both arguments, as well as by having the characters enact them. This contributes to the creation of the ambiguity that pervades the *Alice Books*. The tension between both arguments does not get resolved and, in some cases, not even presented as such.

Contrary to the Saussurean argumentation method, which explores, opposes and discards one term of the correlation to keep the one that best describes the object *langue*, Lewis Carroll explores those terms by juxtaposing them, without triggering any opposition, and by keeping both of them in his fictional world. Both terms are put at work in literature to produce the nonsense effect.

3.2. Volition in Language

The Humpty Dumpty episode in TTLG may operate as a space of emergence of the dialogue established between Carroll's and de Saussure's works over the principle of linguistic arbitrariness.

In Saussurean Theory, volitional choices on language always apply within the limits set up by the system, on which neither the individual nor the community seem to be able to exercise any power. This framework clearly states the independence of langue from human intentions, belonging to the realm of parole, as "an individual act of the will and the intelligence" (Saussure: 14). The principle of arbitrariness does not concern individual or communal, ad-hoc modification of the system. Indeed, the individual is regarded as merely passively registering langue. (Saussure: 14) "Values have no other rationale than usage and general agreement. An individual, acting alone, is incapable of establishing a value."

(Saussure: 111-112)

Freedom of choice is further constrained by tradition, by the principle of continuity in langue, which acts as an inertia force against possible changes while, at the same time, does imply so. (Saussure: 78)

In contrast, Humpty Dumpty's conception on language challenges this linguistic principle of arbitrariness and puts forward an argument for the individual's freedom to introduce changes to the language system.

'If I'd meant that, I'd have said it,' said Humpty Dumpty. (TTLG: 271)

Volition in language is treated in Humpty Dumpty's *glory* and *impenetrability* episodes:

[On *glory*]

'There's glory for you!'

'I don't know what you mean by "glory,"' Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. 'Of course you don't – till I tell you. I meant "there's a nice knock-down argument for you!"'

'But "glory" doesn't mean "a nice knock-down argument,"' Alice objected.

When *I* use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.'

'The question is,' said Alice, whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.'

'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master – that's all.' (TTLG: 274)

[On *impenetrability*]

'They've a temper, some of them – particularly verbs, they're the proudest – adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs – however, *I* can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That's what *I* say!'

'Would you tell me, please,' said Alice, 'what that means?'

'Now you talk like a reasonable child,' said Humpty Dumpty, looking very much pleased. 'I meant by "impenetrability" that we've had enough of that subject, and it would be just as well if you'd mention what you mean to do next, as I suppose you don't mean to stop here all the rest of your life.'

`When I make a word do a lot of work like that,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'I always pay it extra.'

'Oh!' said Alice. She was too much puzzled to make any other remark.

(TTLG: 275)

Forcefully Humpty Dumpty claims for his right to be the "master" in language. Here the individual's capacity for choice extends beyond the alternatives already present in langue. TTLG shows an individual able to introduce changes to the system through speech and to "change the rules" at will, a possibility precluded in langue.

In fact, the two options - the possibility and the impossibility of exerting volition on langue – coexist in TTLG through the characters of Humpty Dumpty and Alice, respectively. Humpty Dumpty operates along the individual volitional execution aspect. Alice, instead, does so along tradition, inertia and social determination in langue. "But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument', Alice objected." (TTLG: 274)

By not constraining the argumentation to what actually happens in language, by showing what is not possible in language as possible, TTLG acts as a mirror that reverses linguistic principles, allows for contradiction to become an essential part of the object and gives rise to the apparent chaos of nonsense.

3.3. Language as a System

The chess game, one of Saussure's most famous comparative accounts for the notion of language as a system of values (Saussure: 87-89) is also the backbone of *Through the Looking Glass*. Indeed, Saussure considers the chess game as the comparison that better captures the essence of langue, as already discussed in section 2 of this article.

Carroll organized his work itself as a chess game, and the episodes in the book, where Alice encounters the different mirror characters, are the result of successive moves of the chess pieces. During this game some of the laws that normally rule it – and rule language as well!– get altered. The specific cases of the types of relations established in the system will be discussed.

The Saussurean principle of arbitrariness, which affects the signifier/signified relationship, organizes the totality of the language system. Signs are pure values, determined relatively, oppositionally and negatively by their position in the system, by what the other units in the system are not, through a relation of similarity and dissimilarity among them. The sign value is thus defined by the void extension left in the system by the other neighboring signs.

The CGL shows that, in spite of the momentary changes in the state of the board, the game is still the same. The movement of the pieces determines the general change of the whole state of the game because the value of each element in the system depends on the position of all the other units in the system. A change in *one* unit determines a change in all the relations on the board.

In TTLG, however, the state of the game remains the same, despite change. All pieces moving simultaneously and in the same direction, relations are kept equal; no change is then recorded in the general patterning on the board:

> The most curious part of the thing was that the trees and the other things round them never changed their places at all: however fast they went, they never seemed to pass anything. 'I wonder if all the things move along with us?' thought poor puzzled Alice. And the Queen seemed to guess her thoughts, for she cried, 'Faster! Don't try to talk!'. (TTLG: 215)

3.4. Relations in the Language System

The language system is ruled by syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, established between co-present and alternative terms, respectively. Syntagmatic relations are based on the linearity principle and concatenate signs along a time-ruled chain. The coexis-

tence of all the elements in the syntagm creates value.

Paradigmatic relations, instead, rely on mnemonic associations of sound and meaning and alternation of terms. The Course states the impossibility for two units of the paradigm to coexist syntagmatically.

The two works analyzed here may also be interpreted as sustaining a dialogue on these notions. Numerous games on associative relations recur throughout the *Alice Books* and introduce ambiguity to this linguistic principle. Such is the case of the "important/unimportant" dialogue between the King and Alice (Carroll, AAIW: 152), the Hatter's "Twinkle, twinkle little bat" poem (AAIW: 97-98), the "much of a muchness" exchange between the March Hare and Alice (AAIW: 101-102), the "worth a thousand pounds a…" dialogue on the train (Carroll, TTLG: 220-221). In all these instances the alternation –or lack thereof-between the elements in the paradigm is explored.

[The "important/unimportant" episode]

'What do you know about this business?' the King said to Alice.

'Nothing,' said Alice.

'Nothing *whatever*?' persisted the King.

'Nothing whatever,' said Alice.

'That's very important,' the King said, turning to the jury. They were just beginning to write this down on their slates, when the White Rabbit interrupted: '*Un*important, your Majesty means, of course,' he said in a very respectful tone, but frowning and making faces at him as he spoke.

'*Un*important, of course, I meant,' the King hastily said, and went on to himself in an undertone, 'important – unimportant – important –' as if he were trying which word sounded best.

Some of the jury wrote it down 'important,' and some 'unimportant.' Alice could see this, as she was near enough to look over their slates; 'but it doesn't matter a bit,' she thought to herself.

(AIW: 152)

This fragment advocates for the unproblematic coexistence in use of the units in the paradigm, in opposition to the alternation presented in the *Course* as typical of the units in the paradigm.

[The Hatter's "Twinkle, twinkle little bat" poem]

[…] I had to sing
"Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!
How I wonder what you're at!"

You know the song, perhaps?'

'I've heard something like it,' said Alice.

'It goes on, you know,' the Hatter continued, 'in this way: -
"Up above the world you fly,
Like a tea-tray in the sky.
                    Twinkle, twinkle –"'

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Here the Dormouse shook itself, and began singing in its sleep *'Twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, twinkle –'* and went on so long that they had to pinch it to make it stop. (AIW: 97-98)

This episode is, in fact, a language game on the first stanza of *The Star*, a well-known poem by Jane Taylor: *Twinkle, twinkle little star;/how I wonder what you are!/ Up above the world so high,/ Like a diamond in the sky*[6]. It explores the alternation between *bat/star* and *you are/you're at*, *you fly/so high,* and *tea-tray/ diamond.*

[The *much of a muchness* episode]

[…] 'and they drew all manner of things – everything that begins with an M –'
'Why with an M?' said Alice.
'Why not?' said the March Hare.
Alice was silent.
The Dormouse had closed its eyes by this time, and was going off into a doze; but, on being pinched by the Hatter, it woke up again with a little shriek, and went on: '- that begins with an M, such as mouse-traps, and the moon, and memory, and muchness" – you know you say things are "much of a muchness" - did you ever see such a thing as a drawing of a muchness?'
(AIW: 101-102)

This episode discusses a mnemonic relation of alternation which allows for the inclusion of the signifiers mouse/moon/memory/much/muchness in the same paradigm.

And a great many voices all said together ('like the chorus of a song,' thought Alice), 'Don't keep him waiting, child! Why, his time is worth a thousand pounds a minute!'
[…]
And again the chorus of voices went on. 'There wasn't room for one where she came from. The land there is worth a thousand pounds an inch!'
[…]
And once more the chorus of voices went on with 'The man that drives the engine. Why, the smoke alone is worth a thousand pounds a puff!'
[…]
The voices didn't join in this time, as she hadn't spoken, but, to her great surprise, they all *thought* in chorus (I hope you understand what *thinking in chorus* means – for I must confess that *I* don't), 'Better say nothing at all. Language is worth a thousand pounds a word!'
(TTLG: 220-221)

The paradigm here sustains the paradigmatic relation established among *minute/inch/puff/word* based on contextual alternation.

As stated by Saussure, syntagmatic relations are defined by their linear sequential character. It is this character that the following Carroll's passage invites to think over, in addition to the idea that language is not just based on linear relations but also on a hierarchical principle. The problematization of the patterning relations of the units in the syntagm are captured by Nonsense through language games as the following:

'Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?' said the March Hare.

'Exactly so,' said Alice.

`Then you should say what you mean,' the March Hare went on.

'I do,' Alice hastily replied; 'at least –at least I mean what I say – that's the same thing, you know.'

'Not the same thing a bit!' said the Hatter. 'You might just as well say that "I see what I eat" is the same thing as "I eat what I see"!'

'You might just as well say,' added the March Hare, 'that "I like what I get" is the same thing as "I get what I like"!'

'You might just as well say,' added the Dormouse, who seemed to be talking in his sleep, 'that "I breathe when I sleep" is the same thing as "I sleep when I breathe"!'

'It *is* the same thing with you,' said the Hatter, and here the conversation dropped, and the party sat silent for a minute, while Alice thought over all she could remember about ravens and writing-desks, which wasn't much.

(AIW: 93-94)

Beyond the actual address to these notions in the *Course* and in the *Alice* texts, it is interesting to apply them to the analysis of the argumentation method used in both works. While de Saussure's argumentation presents the terms of the theoretical paradigm and selects one of those terms to constitute the syntagmatic organization of his theory, Carroll keeps all the associative alternatives simultaneously operating in the syntagm of his *Alice Books*. This way, the nonsense "theory" on language defies the nature itself of the association principle of language.

4. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed some crucial problems in Linguistics treated in Saussure's CGL, such as the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign, the Nomenclaturist/Conventionalist debate on language, the concept of 'system' (its units and relations), the individual and social forces in language. The analysis has extended to the representation, treatment and re-specification of these concepts and principles in Carroll's *Alice Books*.

While Structuralism in Linguistics constructs an oppositional systematic object, in which only one term of the opposition is kept, Nonsense in the *Alice Books* is, precisely, violation of the order. Volition and social agreement, nomenclaturism and conventionalism, alternation and coexistence are opposing principles that, nevertheless, do not cancel out one another in literature. Such coexistence produces an effect of ambiguity and lawlessness that disintegrates the object –language –, but that, at the same time, furthers the exploration of its nature.

Such dialogue between Literature and Linguistics on the nature and definition of the object *language* triggers further questions and nuances on the language problem.

"Method in madness"[1] runs along with madness in method in the dialogue between Linguistics and Literature.

Or, as in the dialogue between Alice and the March Hare,

'Why with an M?' said Alice.

'Why not?' said the March Hare.

(AIW: 101)

NOTES

[1]   The *Course in General Linguistics* gathers the lectures delivered by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). Its main purpose is the foundation of Linguistics as a science by delimiting its specific field through the construction of an exclusive object. Some of the central concepts explored in these lectures are those of 'linguistic sign' and its properties, 'system', 'paradigm/syntagm', 'synchrony/diachrony', among others. His work, considered fundamental for the development of 20th c. Linguistics, has also had a major impact on fields such as Psychoanalysis and Anthropology.

[2]   "Lewis Carroll" was the literary pseudonym adopted by Rev. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832-1898), a 19th c. Oxford scholar, author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. A mathematician, logician, photographer, and literary writer, he was one of the main representatives of Nonsense Literature in Victorian Britain, together with Edward Lear. While considered a classic of the Children's Literature genre, his work encodes the treatment of fundamental issues on time, space and language.

[3]   *Intertextuality* here is understood as an effect of the reading process, as typically defined within the Aesthetics of Reception paradigm.

[4]   See A.M. Nethol. "Introduction" In *Ferdinand de Saussure*. Argentina, Siglo XXI Argentina Editores, 1971.

[5]   Hesitation in the extent of the antinomenclaturist approach to language in de Saussure has been attributed to his participation in the same tradition he criticizes in the *Course* (Harris 16).

[6]   See Gardner, Martin (Ed.). *The Annotated Alice. The Definitive Edition*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company Ltd, 2000, pp. 74-75.

[7]   Echoing Polonius' words in *Hamlet*, Act 2, scene 2, 193-206: "Though this be madness, yet there is method isn't."

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