

ALEKSANDRA GOMULCZAK  
PIOTR LEŚNIEWSKI

## Analogies and Language. A Study in Stefan Themerson's Semantic Poetry

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone,  
“it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.”  
Lewis Carroll *Through the Looking-Glass*

Der Sinn einer Frage ist die Methode ihrer Beantwortung.  
Sage mir, *wie* du suchst, und ich werde dir sagen, *was* du suchst.  
Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophische Bemerkungen*

ABSTRACT: In this paper the concept of analogy within the framework of Semantic Poetry by Stefan Themerson is sketched. The Themersonian project is compactly described. Two analogies are presented. We call them the analogy by naturalness and the traveller's analogy, respectively. Some similarity between Semantic Poetry and the Fregean concept of reference is discussed. The Themersonian view on logic and the Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz's approach are also briefly compared.

KEY WORDS: analogy, meaning, unambiguity, semantics, poetry, Stefan Themerson

### 1. Introductory remarks

The concept of *closed and connected languages* was introduced by Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz [in Ajdukiewicz 1978a]. The paper – under the German title *Sprache und Sinn* – was originally published in *Erkenntnis* in 1934. Generally speaking, if  $L$  is a closed and connected language, then for each expression  $E$  of  $L$  there is an unambiguous coordination between  $E$  and its meaning.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Ajdukiewicz wrote:

---

<sup>1</sup> See [Ajdukiewicz, 1978a, p. 64]. The Polish phrase *języki zamknięte i spójne* has been translated as *closed connected languages* by John Wilkinson and as *closed, connected lan-*

(a) single ambiguous word points to the existence of two languages whose sounds and words are the same and whose coordinations between word and meaning differ at one point only.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, already in September 1936 he officially rejected this concept. It happened during a discussion at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Polish Philosophical Congress in Cracow. We say ‘unfortunately’ since it seems quite reasonable to treat these languages as highly idealized models of linguistic competence. The presupposition that there is an unambiguous coordination between a given expression and its meaning can be interpreted as an idealizational assumption.<sup>3</sup> Even though Ajdukiewicz himself called the concept of closed and connected languages a ‘fictitious and superfluous’ one in 1953, it is still an excellent example of a method of construction of unambiguous languages.<sup>4</sup>

In our paper another – unique – project towards unambiguousness in language is briefly presented, i.e. the concept of *Semantic Poetry* (S.P.) by Stefan Themerson.<sup>5</sup> We begin with a biographical note on Themerson. Then his project is shortly sketched. Next the use of analogies within the framework of the Themersonian approach is briefly described. At the end, some philosophical foundations of the Semantic Poetry are discussed.

Stefan Themerson is a writer, poet, thinker and film-maker born in 1910 in Płock, Poland. He was what we call today an interdisciplinary creator. Themerson and his wife Franciszka (née Weinles) were part of the Polish avant-garde during the 1930s. Their films represent an outstanding example of early Polish film-making.<sup>6</sup> In 1938 they moved to Paris, but unfortunately in 1939 the war started.<sup>7</sup> In 1942 Themerson got across Por-

*guages* by Richard Harandon. See [Ajdukiewicz, 1978a, pp. 52-53] and [Ajdukiewicz, 1995, p. 23].

<sup>2</sup> See [Ajdukiewicz, 1978a, p. 64].

<sup>3</sup> See for example [Nowak, 1980, pp. 23-38].

<sup>4</sup> See [Ajdukiewicz 1995, p. 23]. For further developments of Ajdukiewicz’s concept of meaning, see for example [Woleński, 1989, pp. 251-260].

<sup>5</sup> The abbreviation “S.P.” is Themerson’s idea, see [Themerson, 1997, p. 54].

<sup>6</sup> About Themerson’s films, see for example [Reichardt, Wadley, 2007].

<sup>7</sup> About the life of the Themersons during Second World War and the fate of their families, see [Themerson, Themerson, 2013].

tugal to England. With his wife (who had got there in 1940) they decided to stay on permanently. In 1948 they started to run a publishing company – the Gaberbocchus Press. Themerson's thought was under the great influence of analytical philosophy, especially Bertrand Russell (with whom he developed a long and fruitful friendship). He wrote seven novels and plenty of essays on ethics, aesthetics, logics and science. He died in 1988, a few months after the death of his wife. It is worth to emphasize here that in 2006 after many trials and tribulations, a bilingual edition of *The Good Citizen's Alphabet* by Bertrand Russell was published in Poland. The book includes drawings by Franciszka Themerson.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Brief characteristics of Semantic Poetry

Themerson developed the idea of Semantic Poetry in his early novel *Bayamus and the Theatre of Semantic Poetry*<sup>9</sup>, published in 1949. Then he continued it in other writings.<sup>10</sup> S.P. was founded on the author's reflection on the problem of communication and our knowledge about the meaning of words, or (to be more specific) the absence of such knowledge. The whole idea has its roots in Themerson's ethical ideas. But let us start from the beginning.

S.P. is a method of translating the words used in a poem into the dictionary definitions of these words.<sup>11</sup> Themerson calls it the *dictionary method*.<sup>12</sup> To be more specific, the word in a poem is replaced by the part

<sup>8</sup> For the history of this book, see [Sady, 2006].

<sup>9</sup> See [Themerson, 1997].

<sup>10</sup> Semantic Poetry appears in a book of comics made by his wife – *Semantic Diver-tissements* [Themerson, Themerson, 1962]. Themerson also adopted the Semantic Poetry into music and in 1972 wrote and composed a semantic opera *St. Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio or Brother Francis' Lamb Chops*. In 1975 he published a selection of essays *On Semantic Poetry*. A film about S.P. called *Stefan Themerson and Language* was made also in 1975 (by E. Van Zuylen). Themerson acts there himself and describes a method of S.P. For the screenplay, see [Van Zuylen, 2013]; the film is available online [<http://lux.org.uk/collection/works/stefan-themerson-and-language>].

<sup>11</sup> [Themerson, 1997, p. 52, p. 54].

<sup>12</sup> [Themerson, 2009, p. 15].

of the definition called *definiens*.<sup>13</sup> The aim of this treatment is to gain (or regain, it would be explained later) the exact, precise and most possible unambiguous meaning of the word. The main (but nameless) character of *Bayamus* says:

Each of the S.P. words should have one and only one meaning. (...) They should be well defined. They should be washed clean of all those diverse aureolas which depend on the condition of the market.<sup>14</sup>

Themerson reckoned that the language of modern poetry had lost what he calls its *fundamental tone* and replaced it with *overtones*.<sup>15</sup> The *fundamental tone* of the word is its exact meaning. Themerson identifies the exact meaning with the reference/denotation of the word.<sup>16</sup> *Overtones* are identified with the associations which appear in our minds when we see the words or think about them. These associations have an individual, particular, national, emotional and political nature.<sup>17</sup> When we link the meaning with this kind of association, it is easier to use the words to make them have an impact on human minds by, e.g. politicians or demagogues.<sup>18</sup> Themerson claims that politicians know more about language than all the philosophers and logicians put together.<sup>19</sup> That is why he wanted to replace words' associations with knowledge. If people knew the meanings of the words they use, it would not be so easy to manipulate them.<sup>20</sup> Themerson emphasizes that:

<sup>13</sup> For the structure of a definition, see for example [Ajdukiewicz, 1974, pp. 57-77].

<sup>14</sup> [Themerson, 1997, p. 52].

<sup>15</sup> [Themerson, 2009, pp. 13-14].

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> [Themerson, 1997, p. 82, Themerson, 2009, p. 9].

<sup>18</sup> Therefore it is worth to investigate situations of enslavement and exasperation in the foundations of the humanities. For a systematical approach to such situations and relevant assumptions of counterrationality and irrationality, see for example [Gan-Krzywoszyńska, Leśniewski, 2015, pp. 169-176].

<sup>19</sup> [Themerson, 2013b, p. 46].

<sup>20</sup> The problem of the ambiguity of language was also a field of a struggle for Socrates. After all, his maieutic method was aimed at finding the precise meaning of words.

(...) poetry sometimes occurs to be morally wicked and intellectually dishonest, and then it is nothing else but demagoguery. And when it happens, the poetry becomes a crime.<sup>21</sup>

Poetry must be lucid and sober:

Semantic Poetry does not arrange verses into bunches of flowers. It bares a poem and shows the extra-linguistic data hidden behind it.<sup>22</sup>

The method of S.P. is inseparably linked with its specific form. Themerson claims that the form of a written text can also be a medium of meaning/sense.<sup>23</sup> In this particular case, the form performs a concrete and important function, since replacing a word by a definition causes big changes in the text pattern. In a place of a single word we put five, ten, or more words. The consequence is the following: we risk losing a clear picture of the text, because after the translation one sentence consists of a few different sentences (and not all words are translated, Themerson does not translate, e.g. connectives and screamers). And to put one sentence after another in such a structure produces chaos. To prevent this consequence, Themerson invents a tool which he calls *Internal Vertical Justification*.<sup>24</sup> It helps to arrange the structure of a poem after the semantic translation. The words of the definition are put one under another (i.e. vertically), whereas the main sentence remains horizontal (see Fig. II below). Vertical alignment helps to replace one word by a set of words without losing the line of a main sentence. And in this way we know where exactly is the beginning

<sup>21</sup> [Themerson, 1987, p. 352].

<sup>22</sup> [Themerson, 1997, p. 86]. It is interesting that there are several differences between the Polish and English versions of *Bayamus*. In the quoted sentence, in the Polish version instead of the word *data* there is *reality*, which, as we see it, changes a little the sense of this sentence. In our view, the English version better corresponds with the assumptions of S.P. And it cannot be a matter of translation because both of them were written by Themerson. And it does not happen merely in *Bayamus*, but also in other writings like *Prof. Mmaa's Lecture*. About the issue of self-translation in Themerson's writing and corrections made by him in his own works, see [Kraskowska, 1989].

<sup>23</sup> Themerson was fascinated with the possibilities of typographical experiments. In his writing typographical games are pervasive, especially in his books for children [Kraskowska, 1989, pp. 112- 113]; see also for example [Themerson, 1960].

<sup>24</sup> [Themerson, 1997, p. 55].

and the end of a definition, and when the main sentence is continued. The semantic poem is built from sets of words, and we can say that the semantic poem itself is a set of protocol-sentences.

Themerson openly refers his idea to the French Encyclopedists who, like the later Themerson, claimed that Nature is a source of a knowledge about the world.<sup>25</sup> In the Themersonian philosophy naïve realism plays a fundamental role – for him it was certain that the world exists, thus we ought to study nature empirically. Themerson states that even ethics was founded on relations which exist in nature.<sup>26</sup>

There is also some similarity between the concept of S.P. and the theory of meaning developed by Gottlob Frege in his famous paper from 1892 *Über Sinn und Bedeutung* (*On Sense and Reference*).<sup>27</sup> The *fundamental tone* (resp. exact meaning) can be identified with the Fregean *Bedeutung* which is the denotation (or reference) of the word. The *overtones* (resp. associations) can be identified with the Fregean *Vorstellungen* (English *conceptions*). They are characterized in the following passage in [Frege, 1948]:

The referent and the sense of a sign are to be distinguished from the associated conception. If the referent of a sign is an object perceivable by the senses, my conception of it is an internal image (...), arising from memories of sense impressions which I have had and activities, both internal and external, which I have performed.<sup>28</sup>

Giving a close look into S.P. we see that Themerson also distinguishes Frege's sense (German *Sinn*) in his project. The following paragraphs are aimed at an approximation of how he uses the notions of *meaning* (*reference*) and *sense* when explaining the S.P. method.

<sup>25</sup> [*Ibidem*, p. 54]. The original Fregean phrase *verknüpfte Vorstellung* was translated by Max Black as *the associated conception*, and as *the associated image* by Herbert Feigl.

<sup>26</sup> For Themerson's view on the significance of naïve realism, see [Themerson, 1980, Themerson, 2013a, Themerson, 2013c]. For the Themersonian ethics, see for example [Themerson, 2011].

<sup>27</sup> See for example [Frege, 1948]. Themerson does not refer to this theory directly, but a similarity appears to be obvious. Nonetheless, we cannot be certain that Themerson knew Frege's theory.

<sup>28</sup> [*Ibidem*, p. 212].

### 3. Semantic translation – semantic development – semantic restatement

When Themerson describes the method of S.P. he mostly uses the notion *semantic translation*. It appears everywhere in *Bayamus*. But in his letters to L.G. Hellström, he also uses the notions: *semantic development* and *semantic restatement*.<sup>29</sup> It is important to say a few words about this before moving to the problem of analogy. Understanding why he uses these notions provides us with what is essential for the idea of Semantic Poetry.

Semantic development is linked directly with the work of the method. It can be understood in two ways. Firstly, it is simply about a development of a form. The text is expanded, and prolonged due to using definitions. Secondly, it is about development understood more deeply. It provides us a sense/meaning which, after the semantic translation, becomes more evolved and objective since the meaning refers to denotation, and denotation is objective.

Semantic restatement is related to semantic development, obviously. Semantic development leads to a restatement of the meaning of the word, updates it by using current dictionary definition, and makes it as unambiguous as possible.

But Themerson put the notion of *semantic restatement* in a broader context of his philosophy. He claims that:

(\* art [including poetry] is a perpetual restatement of fundamental notions [and] problems.<sup>30</sup>

By this sentence he *states* that one of the main functions of art is observing the world around and re-stating problems and notions. The function of art is to keep asking questions about what we see and what is important.<sup>31</sup> In our view, the function of art defined in this way is similar to the

<sup>29</sup> See [Themerson 2009, p. 10].

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> On some relations between philosophical questions see for example [Leśniewski 2013].

function of philosophy, though we are not sure if Themerson would fully agree with us.<sup>32</sup> Returning to S.P., the problem of meaning is one of the fundamental notions and problems which should be perpetually restated, since knowledge is evolving and the world is changing, but the problems, like communication and our understanding each other, are always present.

We can distinguish two levels of semantic restatement due to Frege's theory of sense and meaning. Firstly, we choose a definition to precise the meaning of a word. Then, when the meaning is restated, we establish that this concrete meaning should also be understood as a sense, because it is our knowledge which is replacing the associations. Themerson's requirement for sense and meaning is very restrictive. The meaning is a reference, whereas the sense is knowledge. And according to Themerson, the knowledge should always be linked with reference.<sup>33</sup> For Themerson the sense must refer to meaning.

There is one more thing worth to be mentioned. When Themerson criticizes the way we perceive meaning in poetry (as associations), he does not critique the associationist theory of meaning itself.<sup>34</sup> His remark is, rather, about the consequences of putting associations before knowledge. He agrees that we have associations, but we must not rely on them, we ought to rely on what we know instead (unless we do not *know* what we are talking about). It appears here a strong normative aspect of the Themersonian view on meaning and sense.

Above we aimed for an approximation of the assumptions and features of Semantic Poetry. This brief characteristic is merely a sketch of the idea of Themerson's project. There are plenty of interesting things which await deeper recognition e. g. the structure and role of definitions used in S.P., the question of translation, the question of the status of S.P. in the context of traditional poetry etc.

In the next page an example of Semantic Poetry is presented. Then we will move to the problem of using analogies due to explaining the method

---

<sup>32</sup> About the Themersonian critique of philosophy see [Themerson, 1980, Themerson, 2013a].

<sup>33</sup> [Themerson, 2009, p. 11, p. 14].

<sup>34</sup> For the associationist theory of meaning, see [Ajdukiewicz 1978b, pp. 7-18].



and significance of selected features of Semantic Poetry. Below there is a flagship example of the S.P.<sup>35</sup> Firstly, there is an original poem, followed by the translation:

I. The fragment of the Chinese poem *Drinking under the moon* by Li Po:

\*  
The wine among the flowers,  
O lonely me!  
Ah, moon, aloof and shining,  
I drink to thee.

II. The semantic translation of the above poem:

\*  
The fermented  
grape-  
juice  
among the reproductive  
parts  
of  
seed-plants  
  
O! I'm conscious  
of  
my state  
of  
being isolated  
from  
others!

---

<sup>35</sup> For further examples of semantic translations, see [Themerson, 1997, pp. 39- 42 and pp. 57- 71].

Ah! Body attendant revolving keeping & shining  
 on about 238,840 miles by  
 the (mean) reflecting the light  
 Earth aloof radiated  
 by  
 the  
 sun

into  
 my  
 mouth  
 I take  
 & while expressing the hope for thy success.  
 swallow  
 the  
 liquid

#### 4. Analogy as an explanation tool

On the following pages we will give an example of the direct use of analogy by Themerson. He uses analogy to explain how S.P. works with the meaning. We will also see here again, how Themerson uses the theory of meaning and sense. He does not explain how he understands the notion of analogy, but uses it to show an example. We can try to reconstitute his concept of analogy by analyzing how he uses it and by explaining what was the point of using it. There are two main examples to discuss. Both are based on a mind experiment, possible to verify empirically (though the second one would be difficult to achieve, or at least would take a lot of time to perform).

##### 4.1. Analogy by *naturalness*

There are two main situations described. Both are based on a concept of *what is natural to us*. Themerson asks a question: What would we do, if we would like to perform an act as similar as possible to what J. Sterne did

when he took a horse-drawn carriage and went to France?<sup>36</sup> It seems that we should take a horse-drawn carriage. But from some standpoint it's not what we ought to do to achieve a similarity of performance. For Sterne, a horse-drawn carriage was a natural/common vehicle. For Themerson (in 1950s) to use a horse-drawn carriage would be something extraordinary. In the 1950s the natural/common vehicle was a car or a train. Thus, from this point of view – which for Themerson is very essential – if we want to do something *as similar as possible*, we should travel by ways which are common for us in the times we live.

Themerson extrapolates this example on the problem of the meaning of the words used in poetry. He wants to show, by using analogy, how the way we understand them is changing. In Frege's terminology – how the sense of the word is changing.

In Fig. II we saw an example of the semantic translation of a poem by Li Po. Li Po lived during the T'ang Dynasty (i. e. partly in the VIII century). Let us suppose we want to undergo an experience as similar as possible to what Li Po's listeners went through. Should we try to understand the poem in the same way as they did? Themerson's answer to this question is negative. He argues that when Li Po used the words *moon* and *far away* he was referring to the experience and knowledge of people who lived in eighth century China.<sup>37</sup> Our experience and knowledge (XXI century) differs from theirs, and consequently from Li Po's. This knowledge is our natural way of experiencing and perceiving the words *moon* and *far away*. For Themerson, it is irrational to expect us to imagine experiencing the same feelings or knowledge of the moon as Li Po and his listeners did. Semantic translation restates the meaning of a word, and updates it to our contemporary knowledge. Therefore, Themerson claims, from a very essential point of view that:

(...) semantic translation is more the same thing as his [Li Po's] original than his original itself [in XXI century].<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> [Themerson, 2009, p. 10].

<sup>37</sup> [*Ibidem*, p. 11].

<sup>38</sup> See [Themerson, 2009, p. 11].

There is one further important aspect linked with this analogy. While the sense of the words (i.e. our knowledge) is different for us than for Li Po's, the meaning (understood in Fregean terminology) stays the same, since, quoting Themerson:

Li Po's moon, you can take it out of his poem and put it into Rableais (though the sentences containing it will express different statements) the word itself will refer to same thing. And you can take Rableais' moon and put it where Saint Francis says 'moon'. It will refer to the same thing.<sup>39</sup>

Thus the meaning is always the same. The knowledge about the meaning can change, as we develop it due to the progress of science. Therefore, the definitions can also be changing. We can imagine that in the next 50 years our knowledge of things could be much bigger or much different (which is possible), and then the definitions would be different, and with it the semantic translations. But what is interesting about the S.P. method, is its universality, since it can work as well today as in the next 50 years. And its function will not change.

As we can see above, there are two ways of using analogy here: one within these two situations, and the second one between them. The analogy within a situation is built on a concept of *naturalness*. It is based on a single essential feature which makes the situations in both stories similar. Thus, Themerson, by explaining the *analogy by naturalness* in a mind experiment with vehicles, can extrapolate it on a problem of restating a sense, which is one of the most valuable consequences of the S.P. method, since it can (and ought to) be restated perpetually. The analogy between these two situations is based on the similar structure of both cases. Of course, the structure is built by Themerson intentionally to explain how we can move from an empirically possible situation to a more abstract case and demonstrate the validity of the assumptions of the S.P.

---

<sup>39</sup> [*Ibidem*, p. 14].

#### 4.2. *The traveller's analogy*

The mind experiment is as follows: suppose one wants to go far away from the place one is living in. The easiest way to do so is to go straight from the place one is living in and keep going. And when one keeps going farther and farther, one rounds the Earth and comes back to the very place one had left. The desire to still keep going far away brings one back to the place of departure. But Themerson remarks that it does not mean that the travelling was in vain, since:

(...) to have been in a place and to come back to the place, are not the same thing. He [the traveler] is not the same, but experience-richer – and so the place isn't anymore the same, because now it contains at least one new person – him, himself.<sup>40</sup>

The situation above is extrapolated by Themerson on the following problem: let us suppose someone wants to go in search of the meaning of things. And the best way to do so is to define as unambiguously as possible the words he is using. When the defining process begins, one starts to define words, and then tries to define the words which were used in his definition and so on. Finally, one finds out that there are words which are not definable by other words, but appear constantly during the defining process. So he finds himself surrounded by vicious circles and the only thing he finds out is that:

(...) about [the] whole process called – language – you cannot talk in the same language, you have to invent especially for the purpose a language of higher degree (...) and we find ourselves standing in the middle of a ladder, vicious circles and epicycloids below our feet, and an 'infinity' of meta-languages (Wittgenstein) above our poor tormented mind-containers.<sup>41</sup>

The desire to get deeper into meaning makes one turn in vicious circles. Nonetheless, claims Themerson, it does not follow that his travelling into meaning was in vain. Words taken from any private or particular vo-

<sup>40</sup> See [Themerson, 2009, p. 12].

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*.

cabulary, such words and the same words but having undergone a trial of the vicious circle variety, are not the same things any longer.<sup>42</sup>

This analogy seems to be a little more complicated than (4. 1), since the second case here is more complex and the similarity is less apparent and/or demonstrable. This analogy also brings us to the problem of semantic restatement. Even if, after all our struggle to do so, we cannot define every possible word, we still gain a lot of experience and knowledge about this very word and its meaning.

This analogy is also based on the similar structure of both cases. What is important is that Themerson uses a possible to achieve and imagine an empirical example, and shows that the more abstract and complex situation can be explained and understood due to the similar structure. According to the standard approach, analogy is a tool which guides us from the known to the unknown.<sup>43</sup> And it helps to validate something which before seemed to be very confusing and unclear.

## **5. Diversification and consistency in Themerson's thought – philosophy and language**

When we look at Themerson's philosophical position just from a (simply understood) point of view of S.P., the connection with analytical and scientific-oriented philosophy seems to be obvious. But the truth is, in some essential part, completely different. Themersonian thought has two sides (or maybe more) which are seemingly contradictory. Let us give a brief, but closer look into the Themersonian standpoint.<sup>44</sup>

On the one hand we have the problems of ambiguous language (S.P.), and Themerson is striving for precisising it. On the other we have philosophy. When using language Themerson expects unambiguity. But with philosophy things are quite different. He considers unambiguity a defect if it is

<sup>42</sup> See [Themerson, 2009, p. 13].

<sup>43</sup> See for example [Biegański, 1909, p. 1].

<sup>44</sup> This paper shows only particularly selected issues of Themersonian thought. His philosophical position is dispersed in various writings, which still await detailed analysis.

strongly present in philosophy. His critique is aimed mainly at formal logic and the certainty present in some philosophical claims.

Semantic Poetry is built from definitions, but (as we saw above) Themerson is aware that it is not possible to give an exact definition of everything. In his essay *An Introduction to Semantic Poetry* he shows that even the word *poetry* is not definable, because all the definitions of poetry are either too narrow or too wide.<sup>45</sup> Themerson assumes that the *poetry* is not contained in a poem itself, but there is something in our minds which decides what is poetic (even if he does not explain what it is exactly). Thus, it is not possible to define everything; however, that does not privilege us to use unambiguous language.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, Themerson claims that aiming at unambiguity is very often a defect of philosophy:

the world is more complicated than the language we speak about it; therefore, it is also more complicated than truths which we state about it using words and sentences.<sup>47</sup>

In this statement he argues that our language is not capable of expressing everything we experience in the world.<sup>48</sup> And for Themerson the most limited language is the language of formal logicians who

(...) dream their dreams about the world of unambiguous nouns and predicates, ruled by the rule of [the] excluded middle; about the world where everything is what it is and isn't what it isn't. And they dream their dream until the deductive conclusions, which are valid for all possible worlds except for our own.<sup>49</sup>

The curious thing about Themerson's philosophy is its diversification. He uses the tools of analytic philosophy to build his Semantic Poetry,

<sup>45</sup> See [Themerson, 1987a, p. 333].

<sup>46</sup> The question of a *description* of everything remains open.

<sup>47</sup> See [Themerson, 1993, p. 91].

<sup>48</sup> About Themerson's attempts to explain why our language is limited and his possible solution to this problem, see for example [Themerson, 2013a].

<sup>49</sup> See [Themerson, 1987, pp. 352-353].

whereas he turns against one of its fundamental tools, i.e. logic. Themerson even accuses logic of demagogy.<sup>50</sup> He did not accept especially the inevitability of inference.<sup>51</sup> For him, to follow inference despite all circumstances is immoral.<sup>52</sup> We can argue with this standpoint. For example, Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz's view on logic was completely opposite. For him, the knowledge of logic gives a protection from dogmatism; it causes a need for the validation of the statements that are given. And more, the logic teaches that not all the methods of validation have the same demonstrative value – a lot of them provide only a probability.

## 6. Conclusions

The Themersonian project of Semantic Poetry remains a very good example of elaborated approaches to the problem of unambiguity. It requires further systematical research and more practical applications. Themerson's original philosophical position awaits meticulous analysis. Undoubtedly, the detailed structures of the Themersonian concepts of analogy should be investigated carefully, especially by means of formal logic and standard set-theoretical concepts as well as concepts of category theory.

Obviously, it is arguable that the trend toward unambiguous languages even in science is unnecessary with regard to the goals of science.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, this has been declared openly by W. V. Quine:

The word 'meaning' is indeed bandied as freely in lexicography as in the street, and so be it. But let us be wary when it threatens to figure as a supporting member of a theory. In lexicography it does not.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, there is a fundamental connection between unambiguity and rationality. On the margin of a remark on rational actions Ajdukiewicz wrote in *Pragmatic Logic*:

<sup>50</sup> [*Ibidem*, p. 353].

<sup>51</sup> About Themerson's view on logic, see for example [Themerson 1987, Themerson, 2013a, Themerson 2013b].

<sup>52</sup> See [Themerson, 1987, pp. 364- 365].

<sup>53</sup> See for example [Łuszczewska-Romahnowa, 1979].

<sup>54</sup> See [Quine 1999, p. 83].



Hence it is evident that developing in the pupils the ability and the urge to make statements which are matter-of-fact, **unambiguous** and precise is one of the principal tasks of school education. [emphasis added]<sup>55</sup>

### Bibliography

- Ajdukiewicz K., (1974), *Pragmatic Logic*, Translated from Polish by O. Wojtasiewicz, Dordrecht-Boston, D. Reidel/ Warsaw, Polish Scientific Publishers.
- Ajdukiewicz K., (1978a), "Language and Meaning", Translated by J. Wilkinson, [in:] K. Ajdukiewicz, *The Scientific World-Perspective and other Essays. 1931–1963*, J. Giedymin [ed.], Dordrecht, D. Reidel, pp. 37-66.
- Ajdukiewicz K., (1978b), "On the Meaning of Expressions", Translated by J. Giedymin, [in:] K. Ajdukiewicz, *The Scientific World-Perspective and other Essays. 1931–1963*, J. Giedymin [ed.], Dordrecht, D. Reidel, pp. 1-34.
- Ajdukiewicz K., (1995), "My Philosophical Ideas", Translated by R. Harandon, [in:] *The Heritage of Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz*, V. Sinisi, J. Woleński [eds.], *Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities*, Vol. 40, Amsterdam-Atlanta, Rodopi, pp. 13-33.
- Biegański W., (1909), *O wnioskowaniu z analogii*, Lwów, Polskie Towarzystwo Filozoficzne. [Polish]
- Frege G., (1948), "Sense and Reference", Translated by M. Black, *The Philosophical Review*, Volume 57, Issue 3, pp. 209-230.
- Kraskowska E., (1989), *Twórczość Stefana Themersona – dwujęzyczność a literatura*, Wrocław, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich- PAN. [Polish]
- Gan-Krzywoszyńska K., Leśniewski P., (2015), "On Non-Rationalities in the Foundations of the Humanities: A Hexagonal Analysis of the Counterrationality Principle", *Studia Metodologiczne*, No 35, pp. 168-182.
- Leśniewski P., (2013), "Ethics and Metaphysics. On Some Practical Aspects of Erotetic Rationality", E. Nowak, D. Schrader, B. Zizek [eds.], *Educating Competencies for Democracy*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, pp. 83-95.
- Łuszczewska-Romańska S., (1979), "Ambiguity and the Language of Science", [in:] J. Pelc [ed.], *Semiotics in Poland 1894-1969*, Translated by O. Wojtasiewicz, Dordrecht-Boston, D. Reidel/ Warsaw, Polish Scientific Publishers, pp. 148-159.
- Nowak L., (1980), *The Structure Of Idealization. Towards A Systematic Interpretation of the Marxian Idea Of Science*, Dordrecht, D. Reidel.
- Quine W. V., (1999), *From Stimulus to Science*, Cambridge MA-London, Harvard University Press.
- Russell B. (2006), *The Good Citizen's Alphabet. Elementarz dobrego obywatela*. Translated into the Polish by M. Sady, Warszawa, BONOBO. [A bilingual edition.]
- Sady M. (2006), "Afterword", [in:] B. Russell, (2006). *The Good Citizen's Alphabet. Elementarz dobrego obywatela*, Warszawa, BONOBO, pp. 55-57.

<sup>55</sup> See [Ajdukiewicz, 1974, p. 3].

- The Films of Franciszka and Stefan Themerson*, (2007), J. Reichardt, N. Wadley [eds.], London-Warsaw, LUX-CSW.
- Themerson F., Themerson S., (1962), *Semantic Divertissements*, Londyn, Gaberbocchus.
- Themerson F., Themerson S., (2013), *Unposted Letters 1940-1942*, Amsterdam-London, Gaberbocchus & The Harmonie.
- Themerson S., (2009), *A few Letters from the 1950's: Selected correspondence with Lars Gustav Hellstöm and Bertrand Russell*, Black River Falls, Obscure Publications.
- Themerson S., (1997), *Bayamus and The Theatre of Semantic Poetry & The Life of Cardinal Pölättio with Notes on His Writings, His Times and His Contemporaries*, Boston, Exact Change.
- Themerson S., (2011), *Faktor T. Część II i III*, Transl. by M. Sady, Gabberocchus w Polsce. [Polish]
- Themerson S., (1980), „Z encyklopedii wieczorów rodzinnych”, [in:] S. Themerson, *General Piesc i inne opowiadania*, Warszawa, Czytelnik, pp. 157-185. [Polish]
- Themerson S., (1987), „Katedra przyzwoitości”, Transl. by A. Bikont, P. Bikont, *Literatura na Świecie*, No. 7, pp. 342-366. [Polish]
- Themerson S., (2013a), „Logika, etykietki, ciało”, Transl. by M. Rychter, M. Wiśniewski, *Literatura na Świecie*, No. 9-10, pp. 86-214. [Polish]
- Themerson S., (2013b), „Niemodne alternatywy”, Transl. by J. Fruzińska, *Literatura na Świecie*, No. 9-10, pp. 40-54. [Polish]
- Themerson S., (1993), „Nim ukaże się książka”, [in:] S. Themerson, *Jestem czasownikiem, czyli zobaczyć świat inaczej*, K. Kopcińska, M. Grala [eds.], Płock, POKiS. [Polish]
- Themerson S., (1960), *Pan Tom buduje dom*, Warszawa, Nasza Księgarnia. [Polish]
- Themerson S., (1987a), „Wstęp do poezji semantycznej”, Transl. by A. Taborska, M. Giżycki, *Literatura na Świecie*, No. 7, pp. 330-341. [Polish]
- Themerson S., (2013c), „Wydział Specjalny”, Translated by K. Kopcińska, *Literatura na świecie*, No. 9-10, pp. 274-361. [Polish]
- Themerson S., (2013d), *Wykład prof. Mmaa*, Warszawa, WAB. [Polish]
- Van Zuylen E., (2013), “Stefan Themerson and Language”, [in:] *Themersonowie i awangarda*, P. Polit [ed.], Łódź, Muzeum Sztuki, pp. 226-238.
- Woleński J., (1989), *Logic and Philosophy in the Lvov-Warsaw School*, Dordrecht-Boston-London, Kluwer.

Aleksandra Gomułczak  
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland  
gomulczak.a@gmail.com

Piotr Leśniewski  
Department of Logic and Methodology of Science, Adam Mickiewicz University,  
Poznań, Poland  
grus@amu.edu.pl