

Parametric Interpretation: Issues and Answers

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Debating resolutions is the name of the game. Debating whole/entire resolutions may be problematical: a counter-example is usually sufficient to deny the validity of a whole/entire resolitional claim; resolitional wording often accommodates contradictory claims; resolitional breath makes topical/germane claims unmanageable; etc.

Subsequently, examples or illustrations are used to meet resolitional burdens. Inducing resolitional (probable) truth beckons fallacies of hasty generalization and counter-warrants. However, abducting resolitional validity via an example(s) acting as a substitute resolution has become fashionable since it evades induction's shortcomings. This approach is known as **parametric interpretation**. My working thesis: **parametric interpretation is educationally suspect and should be rejected for more traditional defining procedures**. Parametric interpretation refers to the practice whereby affirmative debaters select a subset of the resolitional set as the focus of debate. This resolitional subset becomes a substitute resolution for the resolitional set.

It is probably important to mention here that what happens in a debate when a debater hypothesizes an example from the resolitional set, setting it up as a substitute resolution, is much like abduction. Charles Peirce is primarily responsible for theories on abduction though it can be traced to Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*. I feel this process of inference is inappropriate to what we do in debating, has been mostly rejected by the community of logicians, and is internally inconsistent. Nevertheless, interscholastic and intercollegiate academic debaters still maintain that by proving an illustration or example of the resolution true, they have done enough to win the decision. Why parametric interpretation? Based on unscientific observations on my part, the following reasons for parametric interpretation seem most popular.

Parametric interpretation makes debating more interesting by increasing the possible range of affirmative claims.

This is true until the range of the affirmative interpretations borders on the trivial and insubstantial. Given the tendency of critics in academic debate to shy away from voting against the affirmative on topicality and significance, providing the affirmative a greater power of interpretation seems to compound the problem of specious affirmative claims. Also, interest is more than a function of variety. Many debaters and critics might find an intelligent examination of meaning (for example, a procedural discussion) as interesting as a substantive one. Witness the recent quarreling over kritiks and narratives.

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Berube: Parametric Interpretation

Parametric interpretation equalizes the playing field making it more difficult for the negative to run generic counterplans and generic disadvantages.

Parametric interpretation allows the affirmative to argue a simple exclusion permutation to any generic (utopian) counterplan and "no link" as their first response to generic disadvantages. While in policy debating, more often than not, affirmatives use plan specifications to delink generic claims, in non-policy debate, having foregone the plan (more or less), the affirmative can find themselves fighting arguments which are more resolitional than case proof specific. Hence, non-policy debaters use parametric interpretation to ward off these claims. In response, consider at least two perspectives. First, if generic arguments are illegitimate or unappealing, the response should be grounded in a critique of these arguments rather than fashioning a response which suffers from foundational weaknesses itself especially when in response to a generic argument, we hear generic responses with the criticism becoming self-referential. Second, to assume that generic arguments are categorically deficient and the fact that they link to the resolution is grounds enough to reject them, are deficient critiques since the focus of the argument is based on a highly questionable premise.

Parametric interpretation is more educationally beneficial than whole/entire or inductive interpretation.

Is it more beneficial to develop breadth over depth? Most student debaters are in academic environments that already structure their instruction within subject areas in order to assure more than a cursory review of a field. As the Infobahn is built, methodology will win over territory. With information available to anyone with a PC, a modem and a budget sufficient to pay the tolls, the person who knows how to design a research question will travel more efficiently than one who has learned to graze along the highway's shoulders.

Hence for the Spring 1995 CEDA debate resolution: **that the U.S. should significantly increase the development of the earth's ocean resources**, we have some of the following affirmative cases: break a dam in Maine to protect North Atlantic salmon, raise the Titanic to study its contents, leave the Titanic where it is to preserve it as a laboratory, build an artificial reef for better surfing, detonate nuclear weapons on Mars to release subterranean ice, shoot nuclear waste into the seabed, change shoreline lighting to stop confusing baby turtles, make porpoises play with disabled children, etc. Every one of these affirming claims may be warranted yet none necessarily provide any *truthvalue* to the resolution. This definitional free-for-all needs some study and justification beyond a dozen prepared superficial claims presented at the beginning of the 2AC.

Competitive debating -- to the extent that its aim is neither deep rumination nor cutting edge science -- is educationally suspect when it picks up helter skelter tools of other fields and uses them without understanding their intent. To borrow from abduction is logically suspect (Berube, 1991). To borrow stipulative definition from semantics, linguistics, and phenomenology is equally suspect given the reservations expressed by many experts from those

fields. So where do we turn for justification of parametric interpretation but from these very same sources? When we do we read a vociferous debate which I feel needs to be clarified here. I believe the question to be answered is: does parametric interpretation teach a method superior to resolutional interpretation? Though I feel the answer to this question is "no", there are other points of view and the purpose of the remainder of this essay is to assess contrary perspectives by soliciting commentary from the fields in which the practice is drawn.

This essay is organized in the following five sections: a discussion of "meaning", preconditions for parametric interpretation, a view of parametric interpretation as metaphorical, reasons why parametric interpretation is substantively acceptable, and, finally, reasons parametric interpretation is substantively unacceptable. The purpose of this essay is not the close the door on parametric interpretation but rather to raise the level of discussion beyond the logical criticism given by Berube (1991) and the uninformed preferences demonstrated by academic debaters in the years since that article.

DEFINING MEANING

Meaning is required for debating to have any significance outside itself. If the game of debate was merely teaching skills, resolutions would never need to be changed unless subject matter became obsolete. We change resolutions because there is something to be learned from debating varied subjects. Without meaning, discussing subjects becomes frivolous. For our purposes, meaning exists on a continuum of sorts extending from no meaning (nothing) to all meanings (everything). Debate needs to occur on ideas



expressed by words, terms and phrases with meanings assigned between these two extremes. Jockeying between these end points is the grist of the parametric interpretation controversy.

In academic debate, the affirmative wants the resolution to mean their proof and the negative wants otherwise. The negative topicality argument tries to push the affirmative claim past some point on the continuum beyond which affirmative claims may be ungermane. The subtopicality arguments was a refinement which moved that point further toward the no meaning terminus. Parametric interpretation has slingshotted the affirmative back beyond reasonable germaneness standards from decades ago.

There are currently few, if any, standards to decide the legitimacy of a parametric interpretation beyond obscure logic tests (Berube, 1991). Most debaters and judges fail to embrace any having been convinced that anyone and everyone has equal access to research facilities and the Information Superhighway.

It is not possible to defer to the proponents of parametric interpretation, the affirmative, for a fair and equitable criteria to establish meaning for they are motivated by extra-academic concerns, winning. Criteria for meaning must be drawn into the debate rather than asserted from within. Those sources are heavily cited below.

Traditionally, the meaning of propositions (consequently a resolution as well) is determined in two different ways. First, it is the sum of all possible meanings, (a point of view which defenders of parametric interpretation find unacceptable) and second, it is the mean of all possible meanings (an approach advocated by inductionists) (Santambroglio & Violi, 1988). Santambroglio and Violi seem to want to test meaning against the set from which it was drawn in order to preclude including an unlikely circumstance as a legitimate interpretation. This burden seems uniformly embraced in semantics unless the interpreters mislead their audiences or are dabbling in fiction, fantasy, or figuration.

To preclude substitution for just any reason which, in turn, would manage the affirmative's vested interest in skewed criteria, certain equitable requisites would seem necessary. To discover these requisites, we begin with an axiom of meaning.

...[T]he meaning of a sentence in particular turns out to amount to a set of possible worlds, namely those in which the sentence is true (Santambroglio & Violi, 1988, p. 6).

Note that "possible worlds" semantics construct alternative grammatical and lexical systems along the lines of non-Euclidean geometry: systems that deny our customary linguistic and epistemological assumptions. If meaning is the product of all possible meanings, parametric interpretation would require special dispensation. If that is the case, when would it be necessary to substitute a parametric interpretation for a lexical one?

PRECONDITIONS FOR PARAMETRIC INTERPRETATION

The reason for preconditions is simple to explain. If, as Elgin (1993) suggested, meaning is organic, then stipulating a meaning will have an effect. Interjected into an evolution of meaning, the stipulated meaning affects subsequent interpretations.

Debaters, critics, and audience leave the debate instant with a reinforced or challenged meaning of the words and the ideas articulated by them. (This is the same sort of reasoning associated with language critiques.) They, in turn, incorporate these meanings, these meanings stimulate others to do the same, producing a cascading phenomenon, like the "telephone game" played by children.

When we give meaning to a word and name a thing, how we and those we affect approach that thing is never quite the same as it was before that meaning was given.

Meanings are paradigms of reality; by seeing them as objects, not as having a certain content, one becomes acquainted with reality and sees it as real (Zemach, 1992, p. 120).

Though this is not the place to evaluate the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis, it is enough to say Whorf hypothesized that language was "cardinal in rearing human youth, in organizing human communities, in handing down the culture from generation to generation" and "the structure of the language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one understands his environment" (Chase, 1956, p. vi). Consequently, an effect would obligate the antecedent to some degree. While the range of such obligations is not clear at this time, some level of obligation must exist nevertheless.

Of course, if the degree of obligation is unknown, then a blanket prohibition against parametric interpretation would be unjustified; indeed, it is. The existence of some obligation justifies the establishment of criteria which must be met to forego lexical interpretation for parametric interpretation.

Rundle (1990) forewarned that stipulating meaning has burdens or obligations. Absent some criteria, meaning might degenerate.

Degeneration of meaning thus occurs along two basic lines. It occurs when we simply accept the established framework without bringing it to bear on the issues of the moment. And it occurs when we simply concoct the issues of the moment without accepting any framework. Meaningless repetition on the one hand, and unembodied meaning on the other (Welch, 1973, p. 51).

Welch understood that both prohibiting parametric interpretation and allowing it without conditions might damage meaning. An unbridled explosion of meaning impedes understanding and even community. As each person babels her own language, her respondents are left hanging.

The next issue to address deals with the power of the criteria. Should the criteria be highly demanding or not?

...[N]o word can refer to any piece of external reality if we do not have criteria to apply so as to see what it refers to. Words are not magically associated with things, so to speak, without our intervention. The evidence we have, or we can have, which makes us see that a sentence is true or a word refers to something in the world, enters therefore as an essential ingredient in the fundamental notions of semantics, in the subjectivist perspective (Santambroglio & Violi, 1988, p. 18).

The subjectivity of the process will need to be reined to reduce misunderstanding. While parametric interpretation might at times be highly desirable, interpretation all the time would be cacophonous.

What then are acceptable criteria for parametric interpretation? The clearest is the failure of lexical interpretation. Clark provided a potential criterion when she considered when new vocabulary should be built. "When do adults coin new words? The answer: when they want to fill a lexical gap—that is, when they feel the need to express a meaning for which there is no conventional word already available" (1983, pp. 74-75). Clark purposefully tried to manage word making to preclude both the whimsical interpretation whereby meaning is assigned to entertain and interpretation by trial and error mostly associated with novitiates at learning meaning.

Clark suggested new words need to contrast with accepted ones. "Just as well-established terms within the vocabulary contrast with each other, so new words -- coinages -- must also contrast with each other and with words already in the language" (p. 70).

I believe Clark would expect the proponents of parametric interpretation to justify their construction. She wrote: "These coinages get constructed to supply words where none are available with exactly those meanings" (p. 67). It would seem plausible to conclude new meanings would be justified when customary ones are no longer sufficient or viable.

This burden was further and directly articulated by Richard Robinson. He believed interpretation must be premised on the unmanageableness of lexical interpretation. This burden of proof rests with those who want to expand affirmative case options.

Let us not stipulate until we have good reason to believe that the phrase which already covers our designatum is too cumbersome for our purposes (Robinson, 1972, p. 80). (Emphasis in original.)

The cumbersome is determined not by simple reflection per se but rather by reasoned reference to lexical texts of all sorts, including field lexicons.

Stipulation has become so common and attractive nowadays that many writers tend to invent a name if they cannot dig one out of their own memories by a day's reflection. But it is not sufficient to consult one's memory. It is required to consult also the experts, including the experts in those fields of study which the accidents of contemporary departmentalization separate from one's own (Robinson, 1972, p. 81).

Convenience is an insufficient reason to decide whether to assign new meanings simply because the assignation of new meaning is sufficiently inconvenient in itself.

To assign uncustomary words or other symbols to meanings when customary ones fulfil this purpose is to introduce unnecessary inconvenience into the attention-directing process (MacKaye, 1965, p. 58).

The resulting problem is how to decide if the stipulated or parametric interpretation provides meaning to the same word, term or phrase for which the lexical meaning was deemed deficient. In other words, might the definer be defining something other than the designatum?

The first chink in the armor of parametric interpretation becomes evident here. The only way we can decide whether the assigned meaning is legitimate is to test the interpretation against the designatum. For us, the designatum would be the resolution or a portion thereof. We decide equivalency by examining models of the resolution.

...[T]o say that sentences of a given language are **logically equivalent** is to say that they have exactly the same models, i.e., the class of minimal "interpretations" under which the sentence is true (Salmon, 1992, p. 742).

Salmon brings us full circle when he demands we use a standard sense in determining equivalence (p. 740). He draws that standard sense from the language of induction.

Equivalence may be defined in terms of validity of argument: A pair of sentences are equivalent if and only if the arguments that take one as premise and the other as conclusion are also valid (p. 741).

Now we have two cases against parametric interpretation. The first was based on an re-examination of propositional logic and existential instantiation (Berube, 1991). The second is based on a semantic study of meaning and language as examined above. How then can a proponent of parametric interpretation justify her practice?

The answer is: substantively. Her response has been parametric definition is a better practice than deference to lexical definition. This substantive debate is examined in the following sections.

PARAMETRIC INTERPRETATION AND METAPHORS

Metaphorical meaning is the sine qua non of parametric interpretation. The abuse of the defining process to portray highly questionable representations of the words, terms and phrases of the resolutions as germane has become particularly tiresome in academic debate. For illustrations, consider the Fall 1992 CEDA debate resolution: **that the welfare system exacerbates the problems of the urban poor in the United States.**

The resolution asked the affirmative to examine **the welfare system** and test whether it worsens some problems of the urban poor. We know that "when people refer to the **welfare system**, they usually mean programs designed to help poor families with children. These generally include Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), food stamps, Medicaid, and, for some, the supplemental security income (SSI) program" (Roberts & Schulzinger, 1987, p. 3). We would expect anyone using an whole/entire resolutional focus to discuss the set of these programs which comprise the welfare system.

Of course, some affirmatives might select a subset of the resolution to prove the resolution true. For example, they might wish to define **the welfare system** as does S. M. Miller.

...(S)ocial programs of the welfare system are mainly about women. Most of the aged are women, particularly those who are the **older old** (those beyond 85). Most medical care involves women, both as recipients and as guardians of the health of children. Today's poverty largely visits women: witness the attention to **the feminization of poverty** (1985, p. 587).

An affirmative might wish to focus on women's issues relating to welfare and urban poverty, and use her proof to induce the resolution is true.

A final approach would simply be to define the **welfare system** analogically or metaphorically. Borsodi defined analogic definition as "definition of a word by likening its referent or some similar object or even one which is better known and may therefore be more familiar to the reader of the definition" (1967, p. 30). Synecdoche and metonymy are the tools of analogic definition.

In journalism and creative writing, a wordsmith selects a clever illustration to help clarify a complex and often abstract idea. When an author decides to employ a metaphor, she understands the illustration is only analogic to the idea being discussed. Unfortunately, affirmative debaters have begun to use metaphorical definition as a tool for defining terms found in debate resolutions. They disguise the metaphorical nature of these definitions by indicting traditional sources of meaning, dictionaries, and hailing field contextual sources from which their metaphors are usually drawn.

Two illustrations from the welfare system resolution should illustrate this practice. First, the prison might be a welfare system of sorts. Journalist Fox Butterfield and anthropologist Mark Fleisher wrote just that.

In addition, some specialists are concerned that the United States has unwittingly created a new social welfare system inside the prisons. "The prison system has become part of the welfare system," said Mark Fleisher, an anthropologist who has been studying criminals for 15 years and has written *Warehousing Violence*, an analysis of prison life (1992, p. 4).

A debater could argue what occurs within the confines of prison walls are either (1) a part of the traditional welfare system (in which case, she induces the resolution is true from the prison illustration) or (2) like what occurs in the more orthodox version of the welfare system (both we and the participants in this fictive debate understand that we are considering likeness and not real or nominal definition).

Second, the strategic defense initiative (S.D.I.) as a welfare system. For those debaters less particular about exact wording, consider a metaphor designed by Angelo Codevilla as reported by Miles Harvey.

[While m]ost arms control advocates would take issue with Codevilla's contention that the United States should consider ignoring [the U.S.-Soviet

Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty], ...few would argue with his description of Star Wars as "a welfare program for well-connected scientists" (1992, p. 24). In this case, the affirmative debating S.D.I. as the welfare system is banking the germaneness of her proof on the strength of the metaphor.

Borsodi explained metaphorical definition and its characteristics. Though Borsodi laundry lists over a dozen different types of definition, some are clearly subsets of others. There are, at least, three forms of metaphorical definition.

First, anatomic definition involves "definition of a word by enumerating a sufficient number of the parts or organs of the referent so as to make its whole nature clear" (Borsodi, p. 29). Second, qualitative definition involves "definition of a word by a statement of the qualities, aspects, characteristics, or properties of that to which it refers" (p. 29). And third, quantitative definition is "definition of a word by describing the size, weight, length, area, or any other dimensions of the referents or by the use of numerical mathematical symbols" (p. 29).

What happens in metaphorical definition is that the definer engages elements of anatomic, qualitative, and quantitative definition in some combination to establish the power of the metaphor. Unfortunately for the definer, certain basic standards are requisite to this process.

In fact the use of metaphor involves the same kind of contexts as abstract thought, the important point being that the members shall only possess the relevant feature in common, and that irrelevant or accidental features shall cancel one another (Ogden & Richards, 1956, p. 214).

Ogden and Richards suggested when we define for meaning, we emphasize what a thing is rather than for what purpose it is used. For phenomenologists, use is mostly accidental. To allow metaphors to serve as substitutes for definitions begs parametric interpretation.

There is fair consensus that metaphors are not definitional. As John Searle put it, "...metaphorical statements cannot be equivalent to literal statements of similarity because the truth conditions of the two statements are frequently different" (1979, p. 105).

Of course, the vagueness intrinsic to metaphorical definition is not rejected by all philosophers. Indeed, "some even claim that vagueness is a desideratum of definition. [Nevertheless, most] proponents of truth-conditional semantics take vagueness in a definition to be a virtue -- as long as its is coordinated between *definiendum* and *definiens*" (Sorensen, 1991, p. 72). This co-ordination is evaluated as tension.

Not only did Richards propose a set of useful terms for talking about metaphors (the "topic" or "tenor," the "vehicle," and the "ground"), he also proposed the "tensive" view - a view that emphasized the conceptual incompatibility between the terms in a metaphor (the topic and the vehicle), calling it the "tension" (Ortony, p. 3).

In journalism, there are moments when tension should be low and others when it should be high. You want low tension when the purpose of the metaphor is to increase understanding directly and quickly, an elucidating purpose. You want high tension when the purpose of the metaphor is to produce rumination, to encourage the reader to investigate for herself the complexity of the topic. High tension metaphors are rare and sophisticated literary devices. Low tension metaphors both occur more often and are more appropriate in defining. Indeed, low tension tends to increase the defining capacity of the metaphor.

Tension increases or decreases depending on the quality of similarity between the topic and the vehicle. Since similarity and likeness are never equivalent, an understanding of the power of a metaphor must lie in the study of its tension.

There are some additional drawbacks to the use of metaphors in defining. For example, similarity is not necessarily probative. Consider, the Supreme Court's examination of comparison evidence in the *Hamling* obscenity case.

The Supreme Court observed in *Hamling* that the mere availability of comparison evidence does not necessarily demonstrate its acceptability.

Rather, availability of comparison exhibits might show "nothing more than that other persons are engaged in similar activities" (Lentz, 1981, p. 67).

Furthermore, in a very strict sense, a metaphor is always insufficiently exact to preclude falsity. By taking an assertion literally is meant interpreting our symbols as primary symbols, i.e., as names used with a reference fixed by a given universe of discourse. When for any reason, such as poverty of language, no symbol is at hand we can choose a symbol whose referent is analogous to our referent and transfer this symbol. Then if the speaker fails to see that such symbols are metaphorical or approximately only, i.e., takes them literally, falsity arises, by which the interpreter could be misled (Ogden & Richards, pp. 102-103).

Consequently, it is dubious that metaphorical definition is intrinsically sufficient to qualify as definition in any real or nominal sense. Nonetheless, debaters continue to use metaphors as definitions to legitimate twisted and bent interpretations of a resolution. It is unlikely they choose a high tension metaphor to produce some productive self-reflection on a word, term, or phrase in the resolution. Rather they use metaphors as means to catch negatives off guard and skew the decision process toward surprise and premeditation.

An aside: metaphorical definitions have traditionally been discovered by chance, buried within the text of an article or book which had little, if anything, to do with the resolution. But with on-line full-text retrieval, these definitions are much more easily discoverable. These expensive sources are granting the surprise factor in debate to the better funded programs, a phenomenon which should concern all of us.

I discussed the learning process via metaphors when I considered a hypothetical situation whereby a father is trying to teach his daughter what a leaf is by showing different leaves. Yet even this form of metaphorical learning demands that the set from which the

illustrations are drawn must be restricted to commonalities. In this fictive illustration, I argued that "if this process of discerning commonalities is to minimize errors, any leaf will not do...." (Berube, 1991, p. 19).

Beyond conclusions a single illustration cannot serve as a substitute resolution for the debate, confusing a substitute instance for the resolution proper whether it is metaphorical or not risks treating the resolution as a proper thing rather than as a common thing which, of course, is grammatically unjustified. A logically sufficient example of the resolution is not necessarily a unique example.

From this observation, do not conclude that metaphors are not useful in the defining process. Indeed, metaphors might be useful in discovering meaning, but they are not meanings in and of themselves. Borsodi has catalogued this type of definition as metonymic definition. He defines it as "a simple definition by the enumeration of words which refer to any thing or any document which is between, or which is mediatory of, the extremes represented by synonyms and antonyms of the word being defined" (Borsodi, p. 27). Borsodi suggests we bounce between extremes until we come to some median as which point we arrive at meaning. Metaphors are useful in terms of illustrations on the continuum of meaning for a word, term, or phrase.

Meanings have to serve not only as instruments with which we attempt to explore, invite, accept, defend ourselves from and adjust ourselves to actuality, but even more as instruments by which we attempt to order meanings themselves (Richards, 1991, p. 153).

THE SUBSTANTIVE CASE FOR PARAMETRIC INTERPRETATION

There is a set of semantic theories which quite simply advance: meaning is only established associatively. These theories help establish a case for parametric interpretation. It is my hope that debaters may choose this avenue of defense.

Are letters, words, phrases, clauses and sentences just symbols with no intrinsic meaning? These theorists believe early pictograms were names and their meaning was extended as they grew to serve as ideograms. As symbols they name things but their deeper meaning is associated with ideas or concepts identified with them. Because memory is a limited function, they suggest meaning established any other way is problematical. These semanticists claim "[a]rbitrary symbols can be made meaningful in one and only one way: by being associated with things in the world...." (Lakoff, 1988, p. 18).

...[M]eanings and their components must be finitely representable, since they must be stored in a brain of finite (albeit large) capacity. This rules out extensional theories of meaning in which, for instance, the meaning of *dog* is

taken to be the set of all dogs (or the set of all dogs in all possible worlds) (Jackendoff, 1988, p. 82).

These semanticists are also much less concerned about word associated meaning than they are with the power of the associative claim. If the associative meaning is not exclusive of all meanings, the power is lower.

It is a widespread belief that meaning is identical to concept. The reason for this grievous mistake is that until recent times all linguistic schools, with the exception of the Bloomfieldian, automatically equated meaning with the meaning of the word, because it regarded the word as the fundamental unit of language. We know today that this fundamental element is not the word but the sign. The word can also be this element but only if and when it coincides with the sign. And frequently it does not (Antal, 1964, p. 38.)

This has led to the conclusion by some that parametric interpretation may simply be intrinsic to assigning meaning of any sorts. "Every word-word definition necessarily implies a word-thing definition to those hearers who know the meaning of one of the words" (Robinson 1972, p. 17). Since lexical definitions, by nature, stimulate thing identification, thing identification would seem nearly inevitable to the assignation of meaning.

Furthermore, it might be unrealistic to expect any lexical definition to fully include all possible states of meaning. Perceptionists tend to agree: "The source of meaning is found in the internal psychological states of individual speakers. There is thus no reason yet to believe that adequate theories of meaning and linguistic understanding will ever have to appeal to any kinds of external causal, historical, or social relations...." (McKinsey, 1991, p. 164). If lexical interpretation is imperfect, then parametric interpretation might be a sufficient alternative in many instances.

There is also the simple observation that most lexical interpretations were originally derived parametrically. Historical linguists agree: "It is probable that most words were originally stipulated and later became customary. That this is the history of technical terms like, energy, electron, valence, ion, copper sulphide, protoplasm, chromosome, etc., is well known" (MacKaye, 1965, p. 59). Some exceptions to this claim are found in more abstract concepts, but the theory still has much merit.

Other semanticists claim that lexical interpretation is fundamentally suspect. For example, if lexical meaning is meant to include a broad range of things, it is often indictable for its indeterminacy.

For it is not definition in general that can be used as a cure for ambiguity, but only stipulative definition. Lexical definition and real definition do not cure ambiguities. The purpose of lexical definitions is rather merely to describe ambiguities. The purpose of real definitions is nothing to do with ambiguity, but fails unless the words used in it have already been cleared of ambiguities

by previous stipulations. Some forms of real definition create ambiguities rather than cure them (Robinson, 1972, p. 67).

Also it may be the drive to produce inclusive yet brief definitions which makes lexical definitions imperfect.

A lexical definition cannot be at the same time brief and perfect, because words in common usage have many meanings. But a stipulative definition is not under this limitation, because it is not an attempt to report the infinite varieties of actual usage but rather an attempt to replace them by a single unambiguous usage. We rarely have a good reason for stipulating that a word is to have more than one meaning (Robinson, 1972, p. 62).

Given these drawbacks, many argue parametric interpretations serve to reduce indeterminacy and solve for much of the ambiguity that plagues lexical interpretation. "Where contextual cues are inadequate to decide among rival interpretations, explicit stipulation is required to fix the reference of ambiguous expressions. Otherwise their interpretation is indeterminate" (Elgin, 1983, p. 26).

Another benefit to parametric interpretation may be its ability to improve understanding.

By the stipulative substitution of a word for a phrase, language is abbreviated. What can now be said could also have been said previously, without using the new rule or the new name; but it can now be said in fewer words, because the thing can now be indicated by a single name, whereas formerly a descriptive phrase was required. The value of such timesaving does not lie merely or mainly in leaving more time for other activities. Abbreviation not merely shortens discourse; it also increases understanding. We grasp better what we can hold in one span of attention, and how much we can thus hold depends on the length of the symbols we have to use in order to state it. Abbreviations often immensely increase our ability to understand and deal with a subject (Robinson, 1972, p. 68).

Parametric interpretation functions as linguistic shorthand.

Furthermore, some phenomenologists maintain: parametric interpretation also builds knowledge. On one level this leads to lexical growth necessary for lexical interpretation. "For adults, lexical growth comes from novel coinages, innovative lexical items constructed just for the occasion to carry a particular meaning" (Clark, 1983, p. 67.).

One a second level, parametric interpretation may be foundational to science. As Salmon explained, "...a = b does, but a = a does not, contain a valuable extension of knowledge..." (1992, p. 739). When we assign illustrations to words, we not only test their traditional meaning assignation, but we enable new associations that are necessary to express new ideas.

The greatest good to be obtained by stipulative definitions, however, is different from and much more important than any yet mentioned. It is the improvement of concepts or the creation of new concepts, which is the key to one of the two or three locks on the door of successful science. The notions summoned and held in mind by ordinary words, though rich in suggestions and poetry and emotions, and valuable for their suppleness and ease, have, owing to their vagueness and ambiguity, two defects that make them incapable of establishing science. Neither their causal consequences are clear enough (Robinson, 1972, p. 68).

Robinson goes as far as to suggest science is wholly dependent on stipulative definition. "We must be released from the lexical definitions which merely describe common usage in all its unscientific nature, and allowed to stipulate simpler, more precise, and more univocal words and ideas, if we are to have science" (1972, p. 73). He expounded on this conclusion by claiming reduced ambiguity from stipulative interpretation is what enables productive inferences, the groundwork of all science.

Science requires universal agreement not merely on the applications of its terms to events experienced, but also on the inferences that can be drawn from those terms when they are combined into propositions. Safe and agreed inferences are possible only with precise and unambiguous terms. Thus stipulative definition gives us the immense benefit of certain inference (1972, p. 70).

If parametric interpretation works through metaphors and if we work from the premise we live in a metaphorical world, then we may find real value in parametric interpretation. Hardly provocative, Lee observed "[a]s our world changes, so new metaphors come into play. This has been particularly evident in the field of computing, where metaphorical processes operate at a variety of levels. Individual words have moved into the domain through the process of semantic extension" (1992, p. 89).

In this metaphorical world, we need a tool that can maintain meaning in a fluctuating and evolving environment. "Thus, metaphor has a crucial role to play in allowing language (which in some ways is a finite phenomenon) to adapt to an ever-changing world" (Lee, 1992, p. 89).

The adaptability of parametric interpretation helps us avoid what some semanticists termed the **symbolic fallacy**.

...[A] decisive objection against most theories in the cognitive tradition--semantic networks, semantic decomposition, meaning postulates--is "they say nothing about how words relate to the world." All they do is tell how words are related to words, or how sentences can be paraphrased by other sentences; but it is a fallacy--the **symbolic fallacy**--to assume that meaning is merely a

matter of relating one set of symbols to another. The meaning of a sentence, what we grasp when it is uttered in particular circumstances can, for example, guide our movements and help us in orienting ourselves in the physical world; but there is nothing in the theories committed to the symbolic fallacy to explain how this could possibly happen, given that they are silent on how words relate to the world (Santambrogio & Violi, 1988, p. 15).

This now brings us to a discussion of meaning in parametric interpretation. If there are no checks on illustrations, many suggest meaning cannot be associated with parametric interpretation.

There are at least two checks or tests on parametric interpretation. First, a parametric interpretation would need to be mentally representable. If we cannot envision it, it is meaningless. Our cognitive senses do check illustrations. "Meanings of indicative sentences are situations, and meanings of terms are objects, that we mentally represent. Terms and sentences are checks drawn on meanings deposited in the mind" (Zemach, 1992, p. 116).

Second, a parametric interpretation is checked by context. "Some philosophers have believed apparent reference to and quantification over nonexistent possibles could be eliminated by contextual definition, i.e., paraphrased away from whole sentences in which they occur," (Lewis, 1991, p. 512).

An additional drawback to parametric interpretation has been its likelihood to be abused. In academic debating, competitors seek contorted illustrations to avoid rebuttal. However, the same claim can be made of lexical interpretation. The question is one of sufficiency and not one of perfection.

An understanding of red can be manifested and conveyed by pointing to something and saying **This is red**; this may be remote from the preferred philosophical form of definition, but you cannot ask for anything more than is given in our ordinary explanations, of which this is one, explanations which give our understanding—the only understanding there is—and for which in this instance there does not appear to be any real alternative. Once more, such an explanation is not shown to be defective by the fact that it can be misinterpreted, a possibility that cannot be ruled out with any form of explanation (Rundle, 1990, p. 30).

Rundle went further: unlike lexical definition, meanings established parametrically are more in tune with how words are used.

A persistent philosophical contention is that words are satisfactorily explained only if given a definition in terms of genus and difference, of necessity and sufficient conditions for their application. However, whereas this is to impose a rigid, formalistic pattern upon our loosely structured usage, ostensive definition is more in harmony with actual practice (p. 30).

The aforementioned all lead to the conclusion that communication may actually be enhanced by parametric interpretation. "People have things to talk about only by virtue of having mentally represented them" (Jackendoff, 1988, p. 83). Bertrand Russell offered a more literative justification when he made the simple argument that assuming a closed set of definitions for a word is not only intellectually arrogant but simply wrong thinking.

No proposition containing **the** (in the singular) can be strictly proved by empirical evidence. We do not know that Scott was **the** author of *Waverly*; what we know is that he was an author of *Waverly*. For aught (sic) we know, somebody in Mars may have also written *Waverly*. To prove that Scott was **the** author, we should have to survey the universe and find that everything in it either did not write *Waverly* or was Scott. This is beyond our powers (1940 p. 55).

Maybe it is for all the preceding reasons that Zemach wrote: "The meaning of a word is the word itself seen as internally related to certain things; thus, the best expression of an image is the use of the sign whose aspect it is" (1992, p. 32).

THE SUBSTANTIVE CASE AGAINST PARAMETRIC INTERPRETATION

I begin by observing the relevance of meaning in selecting a parametric claim. Semanticist Eddy Zemach may find the best expression of an image is a sign but he does not conclude that the sign provides meaning per se. The extrapolation of the sign to another instance is fraught with difficulties. While a thing may be expressed, there may be no meaning beyond the example instant. "Meanings are not mere symbols; hence, there is no way to assign them nonstandard referents..." (1992, p. 76).

He finds parametric interpretation expressive but unable to clarify ambiguous concepts by extension via illustrations. Even by listing illustrations, it is difficult to establish meaning. He writes meaning is not enumeration.

The problem of the opacity of reference cannot be solved by having the speaker conjure up in her mind the entire extension of the term and define it in extension. Such a fiat is impossible, but it is also futile: the meaning of a term is not a list of all the items to which it is applicable (1992, p. 35).

Experts in language agree when they make two claims. First, they argue illustrations often do not function within the working grammar of a language. "A language **appears** to refer to things **out there** by defining and describing these things. But the definitions of language depend entirely upon how the words are used in a sentence, not on the thing per se" (de Gramont, 1990, p. 57).

Second, they argue the "function of language is not to construct meaning, but to communicate meanings which already exist" (de Gramont, 1990, p.3). This preoccupation with

construction may lead to private languages of sorts which would moot communication. "If words refer to things, then those things could not change in their meaning, else we would be unable to understand each other" (de Gramont, 1990, p. 5).

When parametric interpretation is substituted for lexical interpretation, it reduces our ability to perceive outside of ourselves. "...[L]anguage is responsible for our ability to perceive reality as independent of our experience" (de Gramont, 1990, p. 19). The overly subjective nature of parametric interpretation not only makes communication difficult if not impossible, but also it makes interpersonalizing experience problematical. "...[M]eaning is not primarily the knowledge in the speaker's mind but an objective part of the objectively existing language" (Antal, 1964, p. 10).

Observations like these helped Wittgenstein conclude what is done in parametric interpretation was naming not describing, hence the assignation of meaning was missing in the process.

For naming and describing do not stand on the same level: naming is a preparation for description. Naming is so far not a move in the language-game--any more than putting a piece in its place on the board is a move in chess. We may say: **nothing** has so far been done, when a thing has been named. It has not even got a name except in the language game (1953, p. 49).

As the naming process applies to propositional objectives, it leads us to a game which is fruitless in deciding meaning of any sorts. "Hence, if naming is not a propositional move and only (descriptive) propositions are moves in language games, then we cannot play these games" (Nesher, 1992, p. 69).

A serious substantive criticism of parametric interpretation deals with the power of stipulation. When illustrations are drawn from the media or government (if any distinction can be made), the assignation of new meaning may work to further empower the image-makers, the power wielders themselves.

Indeed, cognitive models may be so powerful that their users tend to lose sight of the fact that the processes involved are in fact metaphorical. On the other hand, there is no doubt that governments do occupy a particularly powerful position in this whole area. The close contact between government institutions and the media, and the status of the former as **experts**, ensures that ways of thinking and speaking that originate in the institutions of government will spread quickly into wider public discourses (Lee, 1992, p. 88).

Though someone might argue sources of lexical meaning are also ideologically tainted, it must be observed lexical interpretation establishes only parameters within which meaning can be found. On the other hand, parametric interpretation actually reduces the breadth of potential meaning by substituting illustrations for lexical parameters. Phenomenologists claim this closes down imaginative variation rather than increasing it.

Rather, texts are the product of a complex interaction between social, psychological and linguistic factors impinging on the producers of a text at a particular time in a particular situation. That is, the processes operating in the production of text are profoundly ideological (Lee, 1992, p. 83).

Consequently, parametric interpretation may moot meaning rather than increasing or embellishing it.

...[B]ut, in case the word did previously exist as the name of something else, then, as Pascal points out, that previous meaning is entirely annulled by the new stipulation. A stipulative definition stipulates that, whatever the word may mean in other communications or even in earlier parts of this communication, it is for the rest of this communication to be taken as having **no meaning whatsoever** except the one now stipulated (1972, p. 60).

Other substantive criticism exists. For example, a case has been made that parametric interpretation ignores environmental considerations and is overly internalized. "Thus if a person's linguistic understanding is always determined by the person's narrow states, then that understanding must be considered logically independent of the causal, historical, or social relations that the person bears to other persons or objects in the external environment" (McKinsey, 1991, p. 156).

Another case can be made that the virtuality of parametric interpretation leads to a weak paradigm for making observations beyond oneself. "Moreover, it could be argued, first person beliefs should be considered virtual paradigms of narrow psychological states. After all, it is just beliefs as Descartes' beliefs that he himself is a thinking thing and that he himself exists, which form the bulwark of the traditional Cartesian **methodological solipsism**" (McKinsey, 1991, p. 148).

Robinson made one of the better cases for opponents of parametric interpretation. He explained his argument is premised upon the shared symbology of lexical interpretation.

Words are the means to a knowledge of things. Without them an animal's knowledge is confined to his own unanalysed (sic) memories and perceptions of his own experience. Without them there is little analysis, little generalization, and no transmission of experience from one animal to another. When the cat comes home, he cannot tell you what he has seen. And this is not because he has no leisure, for the busy bees can tell each other that they have found honey; it is because he has no symbols. Without symbols history contracts into a plurality of incommunicable autobiographies and science into each organism's private rules of thumb (1972, pp. 27-28.)

While respondents might claim the illustrations of parametric interpretation are also symbols, they fail to extend their case to the consensual nature of symbols in the creation of knowledge.

It is obviously of no advantage to assign meaning to customary words which have no relation whatever to the meanings which custom has established for them, even if, under some circumstances, they prove unsatisfactory as attention-directors. To define a truth as a sardine container, or goodness as the quality common to cedar fence posts, would not violate the rule of freedom of stipulate definition, but it would violate the rule here laid down, the rule of approximation to custom; and convenience requires that such violation be avoided (MacKaye, 1965, p. 65).

Maybe it is this consideration that allowed Robinson to write that meaning might be derived from parametric interpretation but truthvalue cannot.

Lexical definitions have a truthvalue but stipulative definitions have not. A lexical definition is an assertion that certain people use a certain word in a certain way, and is therefore either true or false. A stipulative definition, however, is not an assertion at all. Therefore, since assertions are the only sentences that have a truth-value, it has no truthvalue. It is more like a **request** to the reader that he will understand the word in a certain way, or a **command**; and these, though significant utterances, have no truthvalue (1972, pp. 62-63).

The most condemning arguments against parametric interpretation are drawn from the observations that it is inherently inductive. "Learning the meaning of a new word is an inductive process" (Carey, 1983, p. 126). We simply cannot assign any illustration to a word. If Captain Shawan decides that his life is like a soap opera, we can test his illustration by comparing characteristics of his life with those of a soap opera. If he instead said his life was like fried calamari, we would still attempt to test his claim. "A major goal for the theorist trying to understand the process of meaning acquisition, like that for the theorist trying to understand any case of induction, is to specify the constraints on the hypotheses..." (Carey, 1983, p. 236). What we would need to do with Captain Shawan is to learn the process he used to make the figurative leap from his life to fried squid. The problem here is there are no necessary and sufficient conditions to establish (or prove) the salience of metaphoric attribution.

We learn a meaning by testing the meaning against other meanings associated with the same word or thing whether we are talking about the welfare system or Captain Shawan's life. Merely denoting the meaning of a thing through illustration is never enough. If an illustration is substituted for a lexically derived meaning, we test illustration against other illustrations. "A better way to define by denotation is to cite an assemblage of representative specimens of things of which the given word is the name and also a representative list of things of which it is not the name" (MacKaye, 1965, p. 72). Many of those illustrations -- indeed, it can safely be said most of those illustrations -- would be framed within the lexical interpretation.

When we are dealing with the proposition, whether the assigned meaning is acceptable or not, we inevitably return to lexical interpretation in our tests. "In order to discover whether a proposition is true, we usually have first to find out what it means and secondly to compare its meaning with the facts" (Robinson, 1972, p. 29). It seems unwise to stipulate willy-nilly.

Absent a return to consensually assigned meaning, lexical interpretation, we are confronted with parametric meaning which cannot be evaluated, a powerful and untested metaphor. "The crucial property of metaphor is that the process is entirely open. There are relatively few constraints on the construction of likeness and the complexity of our social and conceptual world, the fact that it is constantly changing and developing, means that there is no upper bound on the innovative capacity of the process" (Lee, 1992, p. 193). While this innovative capacity sustains literary constructions, it does not fulfill the demands of discursive criticism and forensic speaking.

If we inevitably end with lexical definition to decide the viability of parametric definition, why not start there? Furthermore, we should turn to parametric definition if and only if a case can be made that lexical interpretation cannot adequately assign meaning to the subject being discussed.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Parametric interpretation is logically suspect (Berube, 1991) and cannot be used absent criteria. Though there are substantive reasons parametric interpretation may be desirable, the evidence rebutting this view seems much stronger.

This essay is not meant to end debate over parametric versus lexical interpretation. Instead, it is written to stimulate deeper discussion. The conclusions in this essay are subject to interpretation as well, and none of my claims are absolute in any sense. However, until we rein the breadth of debate propositions, we find ourselves at the mercy of the game of debate. Parametric interpretation is becoming a procedure in debate accepted only because it occurs regularly. It is not grounded in logic or semantics or linguistics. It is grounded instead on making the game more to the fancy of its participants. If debate remains housed in communication departments and associated with college curricula, it is incumbent upon its teachers to retain meaning for the game of debate. We cannot decide procedures based on what is better for the game because the game is not an end in itself. The end remains education, and the means must primarily meet those ends. So that no one mistakes me, I therefore conclude that parametric interpretation is educationally suspect and should be rejected for more traditional defining procedures.

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