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Debrecen studies on text and discourse: plural approaches to a single object
On the path of János S. Petőfi[1]
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1. Introduction

The present volume provides the non-Hungarian speaking community of linguists interested in text and discourse studies with an overview of the research carried out around the periodical *Officina Textologica*, published by the Institute of Hungarian Linguistics, University of Debrecen, Hungary, since 1997. Authors try to offer some insights into publications available so far in Hungarian only, breaking this way the limits of diffusion imposed by the fact that *Officina Textologica* has only collected articles written in this somewhat rare language.

In the past sixteen years, annual workshops preceding the elaboration of the forthcoming issues have gathered scholars not only from the departments of languages and linguistics of this university but also from other Hungarian universities as well as from abroad. Their fields of interest, theoretical and methodical approaches are often quite different; however, a coherent and fruitful dialogue is established each time on the grounds of a unique theoretical framework called *semiotic textology*.

This volume is not about semiotic textology *in general*. Readers can find several publications on this topic in languages other than Hungarian as well, among which Giuffrè (2011) is a recent and exhaustive account of the theory. What will be dealt with on the following pages is *a polyglot research program conceived in a semiotic-textological framework*.

Semiotic textology and the name of János Sándor Petőfi are inseparable. Not only was he the founder of the theory that has been evolving since the early 1970s and the inventor of its successive designations but he stood behind almost every research project referring to it. It was the case in Hungary where he played an essential role in boosting research into text and discourse especially after the end of the communist era. The *Officina Textologica* project too grew from his inspiration and from his intensive cooperation with the Debrecen team. Not surprisingly, this volume was to be introduced by Petőfi himself with a brief overview of the state of the art. However, the article has never been written.

Editorial works were about to be finalized and we were waiting only for Petőfi's article when the master, as many of us considered this fragile man of an exceptional brightness and intellectual energy, passed away. For all who had the chance of collaborating with him, it has been an irreparable loss.

The original purpose of this volume was not a commemoration for János Sándor Petőfi. Nevertheless, we very much owe it to him to dedicate it to his memory. Let us therefore begin by recalling some essential facts about his life and oeuvre. This will also give us a better idea about the context of the *Officina Textologica* project.

2. From theory building to research organization

János Sándor Petőfi was born in Miskolc on 23th April 1931. His career can be divided into seven main periods, four of which (the first three and the last one) are related to Hungary while the intermediary ones to Sweden, Western Germany, and Italy, respectively. He graduated at Kossuth Lajos University (today's University of Debrecen) where he first studied mathematics, physics and descriptive geometry (until 1955) and, later, German language and literature (until 1961). He worked as a secondary school teacher in Debrecen and Budapest till 1964 when he was nominated research fellow at the Centre for Computer Science at the Institute of Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS). For five years, he had Ferenc Kiefer and György Szépe, his contemporaries for co-workers, who, just like himself, became decisive figures of modern Hungarian linguistics. It was the latter who encouraged Petőfi to take the road that led him to semiotic textology – and, in a concrete, geographical sense, far from his country for a long time.

He pursued his scientific activities at the University of Umeå (Sweden, 1969–1970) and at the University of Konstanz (Germany, 1971). After having obtained his PhD degree and habilitation title in Umeå (1971), he received professorship and was nominated chair of the Department of Semantics of the Faculty of Linguistics and Literary Theory at the University of Bielefeld (1972).

The next stage of his itinerary, after seventeen years spent in Germany, was the University of Macerata, in Italy, where he held the professorship of philosophy of language from 1989 till his retirement. Although retired in 2007, he was nominated director of the *Centro di Documentazione e ricerca sugli approcci semiotico-testologici alla multi ed intermedialità* being just created, in capacity of professor emeritus. Petőfi led this research centre in collaboration with his disciples. He was discharged of his duties in 2011 on his own request. In the meantime, his presence in Hungary became more and more intense after the regime change. He considered 2007 as the beginning of the seventh period of his career.

The first document of his oeuvre in linguistics is his university degree thesis on a German language history topic (Umschreibungen in dem Werk "Der Arme Heinrich" von Hartmann von Aue. Grammatische und stilistische Untersuchungen). Soon after that, he revealed the real breadth of his endeavour, which spanned literary science, linguistics, philosophy of language, semiotics and communication theory. He was familiar with the works written in Russian as well as in English but it never led him to simply adopt the ideas of the Soviet or American linguists: even his very first papers attest an original conception of how texts should be analyzed. His PhD thesis, published as a monograph under the title *Transformationsgrammatiken und eine ko-textuelle Texttheorie*, was widely acclaimed and brought him international fame. Thenceforth, his works played a decisive role in the development of textology (known as text linguistics and text grammar as well).

One can find no discontinuity in his oeuvre even if his conception of text has evolved. In fact, there are two main periods in the development of his theory. The first one embraces the 1970s when he focused on the modelling of the internal – or, using his own term, cotextual – factors of textuality while the theory itself was elaborated during the second period. Its starting point is the *text structure – world structure* (TeSWeST) theory that he later renamed as *semiotic textology* and to which he made continuous improvements. In this framework, text is considered as a complex sign with regard to its function in communication, having, despite of its usual verbal prevalence, multimediality for an essential property. Thus, it is from a semiotic point of view that one might account for every (i.e. syntactic, semantic and pragmatic) aspect of its interpretation. Conceived in this way, text is far from being an exclusive object of linguistics, as its description necessitates an interdisciplinary approach. Thus, presenting the disciplinary context of text research was always an essential part of his work. Interdisciplinarity meant for Petőfi the respect of the plurality of scientific knowledge, an effective method of problem solving as well as a way of living and thinking rather than a simple slogan. It is for that very reason that the theoretical framework of semiotic textology could become a common platform of exchanges for many scholars with various orientations, as it is precisely the case of our polyglot research program in textology at the University of Debrecen. A synthesis of the theory written in Hungarian was published in 2004 by Akadémiai Kiadó publishing house under the title of *A szöveg mint komplex jel* (*Text as a Complex Sign*).

Petőfi was an extremely productive author. His bibliography contains hundreds of publications written in seven languages, published in renowned international journals and book series. Among the titles, one can find about two dozen monographs (signed either as a single author or as a co-author), and three dozen collective volumes appeared under his editorship. He promoted teaching

of text linguistics in Hungary as well by contributing to textbooks. He was founding editor of two book series that belong to the most noted forums in the field of text research (*Research in Text Theory*, de Gruyter [1977], *Papiere zur Textlinguistik*, Buske [1974]). He also founded a review with Teun A. van Dijk (*Text*), and even two Hungarian periodicals have been created with his collaboration: *Szemiotikai Szövegtan* (*Semiotic Textology*, 1990, with Imre Békési and László Vass) in Szeged and *Officina Textologica* (1997, with Irma Szikszainé Nagy and Edit Dobi) in Debrecen.

János S. Petőfi is one of the best-known Hungarian linguists in the world. This charismatic scholar was not only a pioneer of his field (or, better said, fields) but a decisive personality in organizing scientific life whom a multitude of talented linguists in many places all over the world acknowledges as their master. He spent more than half of his working years abroad, however, he never lost contact with his country and with Hungarian scholars; on the contrary, he provided them with all the help he could offer. After the regime change, he played an increasingly salient role in the activities of Hungarian textological research groups inside and outside the borders of the country, at the universities of Pécs, Debrecen, Szeged, Budapest, and Cluj. If their research could be institutionalized and linked to international circuits, it is also due to the merit of Petőfi who endeavoured to align scientific activities carried out in the context of different cultures.

All the communities, from the smallest to the largest ones, that he distinguished by the support of his (not only) spiritual presence have been keen not to seem ungrateful. As a matter of fact, János S. Petőfi was a widely acclaimed scholar. He attended three Nobel symposia as an invited participant, and even a Nobel Prize ceremony as an honorary guest. (Nobel Symposia, held since 1965, gather world-class researchers from areas of science where breakthroughs are occurring or deal with topics of primary cultural or social significance.) He was distinguished by the János Lotz medal of the International Association for Hungarian Studies in 1996. He was honorary member of the Hungarian Association for Semiotic Studies as well as of the Hungarian Association of Applied Linguists and Language Teachers (HAALLT). He was conferred the Doctor Honoris Causa award by three different universities (two in Hungary: Pécs [1991], Debrecen [1996] and the University of Turin [2004]) and the *magister emeritus* award by Gyula Juhász Teachers' Training College (Szeged). The Hungarian Academy of Sciences elected him an external member in 2007. As for himself, he undoubtedly saw the greatest honour in the accomplishment of his work by his disciples and in their results. Their gratitude and their attachment clearly manifested themselves by the fact that the participants, representing Hungarian, Italian and German colleagues, at the conference held at HAS on 27th April 2011 offered him not less than four

festschriften on his 80th birthday

3. A systematic exploration of an uneven domain

When Petőfi returned to his alma mater with the idea of the *Officina Textologica* project, there was no research group in text linguistics he could directly address. But there were several linguists, attached to different departments of languages (Hungarian, English, French and German), working on different topics in various fields, with different theoretical backgrounds, who shared a common interest in problems of text and discourse. The interdisciplinary nature of semiotic textology that Petőfi proposed to adopt as an overall framework managed to yield an excellent platform of dialogue. Taking also into account the centre of gravity these departments formed with regard to external cooperation possibilities, the future participants considered it obvious to set up an organized form of scientific exchange following an organically conceived long-term program. It was on these grounds that the keynote paper of Petőfi was published in 1977 as the first volume of the *Officina Textologica* series. The topics dealt with are the following:

1. The disciplinary environment of text study. Text linguistics and textology in text study.
2. The relation of these terms and research orientations in the relevant literature.
3. Aspects of the text linguistic/textological analysis and description of text creating factors.
4. Linguistics from a textological perspective.
5. Semiotic textology as a theoretical framework for text linguistics.

In the last chapter, Petőfi sketches the structure and the main thematic groups of the planned publications on the basis of his introductory considerations.

The *Officina Textologica* project was originally conceived as a series of annual meetings on specific topics, followed each time by the publication of a collective volume, with the objective of creating "a special forum (or fictive roundtable) for scholars working on and interested in the problems of text study" (Petőfi 1997: 84). This might include either the construction of a general theory of texts, studies on a given language from a textual point of view, or the creation of textological/text linguistic tools that are applicable in a specific field. The authors, indeed, remained in their particular fields, maintaining their specific point of views while observing the same object in a textological approach. However, the framework defined by Petőfi ensured the coherence of the dialogue and, thus, that of the thematic volumes. The discussion was intended to be polyglot and integrative as much as possible, i.e. multilingual/contrastive studies were planned and a kind of paradigm was to be set up in order to allow

combining and/or explicitly comparing perspectives of researchers from different background and interests.

This project, having been supported by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA) during two funding periods, has yielded so far two cycles of thematic volumes. The first one, including fourteen numbers published between 1997 and 2008, follows Petőfi's original program. After his above mentioned, introductory study comes a volume on coreference containing analyses of Hungarian texts (Petőfi 1998). It is followed by another collection of papers of the same kind on problems of possible linear arrangements of sentence constituents (Szikszainé Nagy 1999). The fourth volume is a discussion of coreference relations presented in the second one (Dobi and Petőfi 2000). The following issue contains studies on a wider range of topics, pertaining to the relationship of grammar, text linguistics and textology (Petőfi and Szikszainé Nagy 2001). The next year's volume revisits the problems of linear arrangement in a form of discussion (Szikszainé Nagy 2002). Volume 7 introduces contrastive text linguistics with papers on linearization and theme/rheme structure (Petőfi and Szikszainé Nagy 2002). It is followed by Edit Dobi's monograph on a two-step representation of text sentences in a semiotic-textological framework (Dobi 2002). In 2003, the authors follow the exploration of contrastive text linguistics, addressing this time another aspect of linearization, i.e. thematic progression (Petőfi and Szikszainé Nagy 2003). Volume 10 is about the textual role of conceptual schemata (Petőfi and Szikszainé Nagy 2004) while in volume 11 three authors discuss textological works written in Hungarian (Petőfi 2005). Volume 12 deals with the question of co-referentiality using a contrastive approach (Petőfi and Szikszainé Nagy 2005). Another monograph follows as volume 13, written by myself on connectives (Csűry 2005). Finally, the last number of this first period takes up the problems of conceptual organization by examining the role of scenarios in building texts (Dobi 2008).

The second cycle begins in 2009, with another programmatic volume of Petőfi (Petőfi 2009). He gives first a critical and detailed overview of the work carried out so far in the framework of the *Officina Textologica* project and establishes a positive balance with regard to the aims set at the beginning of the project. After several chapters on coherence and its approaches, he proposes that the team focus their attention on the study of coherence in texts and presents the planned topics of the next five volumes. According to this plan, the following issue (published as one of the four Festschriften offered to Petőfi on his 80th birthday in 2011) provides an evaluative overview of the terminology used in the (multilingual i.e. Hungarian, English, French and German) literature on particular areas of text linguistics (Dobi 2011). Volume 17 deals with phenomena relating to textual meaning on the basis of contrastive analyses of

semantic organization on English, German and French corpora (Dobi 2012).

4.   Five aspects of text as a complex sign

In the present volume, seven authors, having regularly participated in the *Officina Textologica* project, review the essential results of these publications in five main fields that have been most intensively explored so far. They also intend to point out some specific problems and questions that have been left open, thus illustrating not only their particular preoccupations but also the possible (and probable) research orientations of *Officina Textologica*.

After summarizing the studies related to the problem of meaning at the level of discourse published in the volumes of *Officina Textologica*, Péter Pelyvás's paper on *Meaning at the level of discourse: from lexical networks to conceptual frames and scenarios* presents the cognitive framework in which concepts spanning from lexical networks to conceptual frames and scenarios can be useful for textual research.

In their study, Andrea Nagy and Franciska Skutta deal with *Co-reference*. They first present the essential concepts and the coreference model of János S. Petőfi. The second part of their work turns briefly to the twelve articles of volume 2 of the series in order to treat some special questions raised by the types of texts analyzed in this volume. Finally, they outline further research on the subject, as it appears in two, more recent volumes.

Edit Dobi's contribution is a paper on problems of linearization and information structure (*On the Results of the Discussion about the Phenomenon of Linearization of Text Sentences*). Linearization is an issue for both sentence grammar and text linguistics; therefore, one is confronted whith the question where the border lies between these two fields. The author aims to provide a review of the studies published in the *Officina Textologica* that are relevant to this topic, and presents not only the findings of the authors but further issues to discuss and problems to solve as well.

István Csűry's study (*Connectives and discourse markers*) deals with describing structural and pragmatic markers in the framework of textology. After reviewing *Officina Textologica* publications devoted to connectives and discourse markers, he discusses the main problems of identifying and classifying such elements and proposes a simple yet complete and useful way to tell apart text/discourse structuring element types. Terminological issues are also addressed in this chapter, and analyses of several text excerpts are presented as well in order to illustrate the interface role of connectives between syntactic, informational and discourse structures.

Finally, Károly István Boda and Judit Porkoláb present *Semiotic-textological approaches to literary discourse*. Their main concern is to overview the basic

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methods and formalism of co-reference analysis, developed from the first volume of *Officina Textologica*. It has become a powerful tool to explore the textological structure and thematic composition of literary texts. The paper contains a table as well indicating the literary texts of which one can find (partial or comprehensive) analyses in the *Officina Textologica* volumes.

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