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THE FUNCTION OF INTERPRETATION IN AN EMPIRICAL SCIENCE OF LITERATURE

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In view of the problem of interpretation as a partial set of an Empirical Science of Literature (ESL) there are differences between N. Groeben's and S.J. Schmidt's conception of literary studies: following Schmidt, there is no place for interpretation within his ESL; according to Groeben, however, interpretation can be admitted in an ESL, but in a functionally modified way. These differences are grounded on divergently emphasized meta-theoretical and methodological viewpoints, e.g. a strict vs. a non-technical application of the non-statement view of theories, new formation of a theory-net vs. methodical revisions towards empirization, etc. On the object-theoretical level the function of interpretation is determined by a decision between a strong and a weak version of the polyvalence postulate which is in fact an empirical issue. If, as Groeben expects, the individual reception of literary texts has a 'normalizing' character, not exhausting polyvalence potentials, then the constructive function of interpretation can be reconstructed in an ESL as an elaboration of polyvalence knowledge. However, it is not beyond doubt whether this reconstructed scientific type of action should be called 'interpretation'.

1. The problem

Since the beginning of the second half of this century all disciplines of science have developed strong tendencies to become more empirical. After World War II, for instance, sociology and, following it, educational research (pedagogy) have to a considerable extent constituted themselves as empirical social sciences – not, of course, without tempestuous meta-theoretical debate. In the early seventies, finally, this impetus also reached the study of literature. And it is not surprising at all, from the perspective of the sociology and psychology of research, that the most explicit and most zealously defended blueprints for an Empirical Science of Literature (ESL) have originated from within that kind of literary study which is most monolithically dominated by the epistemology and methodology of hermeneutics, i.e. the study of literature as practised by the German-speaking countries. I am referring here to the proposals by Schmidt (1975, 1980, 1982a) and by Groeben (1972, 1980). Both these proposals for an ESL are conceived of as approaches so fundamentally different from traditional literary scholarship that they claim to possess the quality of a paradigm

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change (in Kuhn’s 1967 sense). The material substance of this claim is most
plausibly apparent in the relation between the new ESL and the ‘old’ study of
literature viz. its admissible problems and general research procedures; and
that is to say, in the relation to the INTERPRETATION of individual literary
texts which must still be considered as the primary goal and, at the same time,
the central concern of the hermeneutics-oriented literary scholar (or is, in any
event, asserted to be by both Schmidt (1982b: 21) and Groeben (1982b: 48f.)).
It is precisely at this point, therefore, the potential function of INTERPRETA-
TION in a science of literature, that the meta-theoretical and methodological
differences between the two proposals for an ESL as mentioned before
crystallize: in Schmidt’s ESL there is no place for INTERPRETATION as a
specific scientific activity, and Schmidt therefore substitutes problems different
from traditional literary research, i.e. practises problem substitution: Groeben,
however, seeks to reconstruct INTERPRETATION as a possible component
of an ESL and thus believes in the ‘incorporability’ of the traditional problem
as well as the traditional procedure in the new approach. Now, first of all, we
have here, in principle, but two different strategies to design and implement a
paradigm change which is postulated unanimously on both sides: it is true,
though, that this divergence as to strategy indicates deeper intrinsic structural
differences of the two ESL-proposals. In the following I shall therefore first
talk about these meta-theoretical differences relating to disciplinary structure
in order to prepare both the ground and a frame (sections 3–5), and I shall
then outline in greater detail the substantial function of INTERPRETATION
in an ESL as I see it (sections 6–8).

To prevent misunderstanding I should like to stress right at the outset that,
for me, the question of interpretation is a comparatively marginal problem: I
do not consider it to be a central question of an empirical science of literature.
Furthermore, the differences between the two proposals for an ESL which I am
going to discuss with respect to the problem of interpretation are, in my view,
fairly marginal too, when compared with the shared convictions that a radical
change of the concept of scientific research in the direction of more empirical
investigation is urgently required for the scientific study of literature.

To avoid creating artificial differences by using too narrow a definition of
my topical concept, I shall start with a rather wide meaning postulate for
INTERPRETATION: I want it to mean the understanding of a literary text
performed as a (potential) scientific act or a part thereof.

2. The common point of departure: the construction of a paradigm

In principle, Schmidt and I start out from the same point of departure:
following the non-statement view of theories, on the basis of which Kuhn’s
concept of paradigm – which originally related to the history of science – was

explicated in the philosophy of science (particularly by Stegmüller 1973 whose
model is Sneed 1971), the construction of a new paradigm is attempted. As the
concept of paradigm, even its more precise formulation in the non-statement
view of theories, has been introduced by the philosophy of science only by way of
reconstruction, the constructive use suggested here entails considerable
problems – problems, however, that will not be discussed in this context
because both approaches in question – Schmidt’s and mine – are confronted
with them.

Consequently, Schmidt (1980) seeks to develop the theory of an ESL in the
sense of a Sneed-matrix in direct connection with Sneed (1971). Theories as
understood by Sneed are structures of the set-theoretical specification $T =
\langle K, I \rangle$, i.e. they are made up of a core ($K$) and intended applications ($I$), $K$
being defined by the following elements $\langle M_{pp}, M_{p}, M, G, C \rangle$ which are
explicated as follows (cf. Schmidt 1982b: 10), i.e. signify:

- $M_{pp}$ the class of partial potential models, i.e. the domains of entities about which the theory makes
- assertions (these entities must be describable by non-T-theoretical terms);
- $M_{p}$ the class of potential models, i.e. the domains of entities supplemented by the theoretical
- functions in $T$;
- $M$ the class of models, i.e. the class of entities satisfying the mathematical structures of the theory;
- $G$ the class of special laws and regularity assumptions (as understood by K. Eibl 1970); and
- $C$ the class of special constraints that must be met by the core of the theory.

These elements are then explicated by Schmidt for four partial theories within
the theory of literary communicative action which is itself a specification,
through several steps, of a general theory of action (cf. Schmidt 1982b: 17,
fig. 1).

To illustrate this kind of explication one may, for instance, quote the two
central regularity assumptions (class $G$) postulated by Schmidt: the AeL-
convention and the PL-convention. The AeL-convention states “the action rule
that utterances in ‘literary texts’ are to obey primarily poetic values and
norms” (Schmidt 1982b: 16). The PL-convention states “the rule that every
agent in the LITERATURE-system is entitled to correlate differing reception
results with the same text both at the same time and at other times” (ibid).

My own point of departure (cf. Groeben 1980: 14) has been a partially
‘analogical, non-technical’ adaptation of the non-statement view, similar to the
one Herrmann (1974, 1976) developed for the theories of psychology which,
likewise, are not completely axiomatic and formalized. In this adaptation the
(mathematical) ‘structural core’ (of theories in the non-statement view) is
represented by a so-called core of assumptions (see below for details). The
centre of this core of assumptions is the functional text concept as, for
instance, specified by reception aesthetics: a literary text attains its full reality
only through a reader’s active meaning attribution, i.e. the reader and his
reproductive activity are a ‘meaning-constitutive’ instance (Schmidt 1974: 43;
Groeben 1982b: 31). Textual objects therefore acquire meaning only when received by an individual mind. For me this implies the ineluctable necessity to investigate these reception processes and reception results in an empirical way and to make such investigation the central concern of the study of literature. In other words, my proposal for an ESL predominantly rests on reception research (Groeben 1980).

The position of reception aesthetics must therefore be criticized: though its definition of the functional text concept does indeed hold the potential for a paradigm change when contrasted with the traditional study of literature, all such potential is lost by the refusal (cf. for instance the notion of the implicit reader) to go beyond the framework of hermeneutic methods of analysis (cf. Groeben 1980: 45ff.). This manifest theoretical and methodological incoherence of the approach of reception aesthetics can only be overcome by a consistent methodology obeying the precepts of empirical science. Only the strict application of empirical methods in the narrow sense (reception analysis etc.) will lead to the kind of radical transformation of the traditional study of literature that would justify its designation as a paradigm change and which certainly does not apply to reception aesthetics. Accordingly I have tried to provide an arsenal of empirical methods that seems adaptable in the light of the current state of knowledge (Groeben 1980: 74ff.) and, on this basis, to show two things: (1) ways of solving classical problems of the (hermeneutic) study of literature (op. cit.: 133–145) and (2) the specific and central questions of an ESL that must be formulated, clarified, and answered (e.g. the factors governing the reception of literary texts and their effects) (op. cit.: 186–218).

3. Strict or ‘non-technical’ application of the non-statement view?

Although Stegmüller and Sneed have reconstructed the non-statement view of theories only for completely formalized theories (of theoretical physics), Schmidt nevertheless endeavors to implement this concept of theory in the construction of an empirical theory of LITERATURE (ETL) (cf. Schmidt 1980: Vff. and 5ff.). At the same time, members of Schmidt’s research team, however, keep propounding the view rather impetuously that the traditional (hermeneutic) study of literature is still in a pre-paradigmatic phase; Hauptmeier, for instance, in a rather negative critique of my empirical proposal, which at the same time proclaims Schmidt’s approach to an empirical science of literature as the only sensible one, states forcefully (1981: 566) “that at present the study of literature has not yet furnished any rational..., commonly accepted, productive research program, which for a meta-theoretician could serve as a base for evaluating the progressivity of a rival program”.

In my view the jump from the (alleged) pre-paradigmatic phase of the classical study of literature to an ETL in the precise understanding of the non-statement view is too big. The structural core ‘K’ (see above), be it noted, is explicated as a mathematical structure by Stegmüller and Sneed; and as the transfer to a discipline which is not completely formalized and mathematical – doubtless in the case of literary study – unavoidably requires a certain measure of analogical proceeding, I have from the beginning performed the adaptation of the non-statement view in an explicitly analogical, ‘non-technical’ fashion, similar to the one developed for psychology by Herrmann (1976), another discipline which is not completely formalized (cf. Groeben 1980: 14):

There theories are conceived of as research programs in the sense of processes of problem solving. In analogy with the structural core (‘conceptual framework’) of theories in the non-statement view, every problem is characterized (quasi by definition) by a core of assumptions: this core manifests itself in the form of assumptions about possible or factual states of a domain of objects, trajectories (between Is- and Ought-states) etc.; when problems are to be solved, these ‘core assumptions’ remain intangible! Normal science then seeks to solve problems by applying this core of assumptions, i.e. by deducing through additional and secondary assumptions empirically testable hypotheses, expectations, predictions etc. The ‘disappointing’ of such expectations (falsification) need not lead to the abandoning of the core assumptions but merely to a revision of the additional assumptions etc.; there is, of course, also the possibility of problem substitution: the application of the old core assumptions is discontinued and new core assumptions are developed. The methodological criteria of the paradigm in question in the main refer to the set of additional and secondary assumptions, hypotheses etc.; as, for instance, regards the degree of precision, the implied criteria of truth, of intersubjectivity etc.

An example of an additional or secondary assumption according to this nomenclature is the PL-convention quoted above which I postulate as well, though in a weaker version: one may remember that Schmidt explicitly (1980: 162ff.) takes up my arguments in support of the assumption of polyvalence (Groeben 1980: 35ff.; the differences in the explication of the PL-convention will prove to be of central importance in the specification of the material function of INTERPRETATION further below). In the sense of this non-technical application of the non-statement view, the core of assumptions is in my view primarily made up by the postulates relating to the functional text concept: these postulates are indeed not to be falsified by any number of empirical reception data according to the meta-theoretical explications of the non-statement view; on the contrary: any gathering of reception data invariably presupposes the functional text concept. In other words, the functional text concept defines the problem frame, is unfalsifiable (qua ‘conceptual structure’ sensu Stegmüller 1973) and establishes (as mentioned above and discussed extensively in Groeben 1980: 45ff.) the necessity of an ESL (qua reception research).

As far as this kind of text concept is concerned, there is complete agreement between Schmidt and myself; I shall therefore outline it once more in Schmidt’s own words (1982b: 20) characterizing this text concept as one of the most important innovations of the new paradigm: “TEXTS as such have no
meaning, they acquire meaning through the cognitive efforts of subjects; ... meaning is therefore a product of active effort and not a feature of texts". It appears somewhat strange to me against this background that members of the NIKOL-group have been launching rather heavy attacks against my using the functional text concept in the express explication of reception aesthetics. Thus Hauptmeier tirelessly accuses me of clinging to the hermeneutic ideas of reception aesthetics (1981: 568f.), of adhering to the same ontological model (of text) as hermeneutics (ibid.: 574), of retaining completely the hard core of the hermeneutic conception of research (ibid.: 576). Let me stress once more that this is nonsense with regard to the text concept of reception aesthetics: the concept as used by reception aesthetics is certainly potentially revolutionary; it is only in its methods that reception aesthetics regresses beyond its point of departure and does not leave the confines of hermeneutics – a fact that has repeatedly been criticized by myself.

A large number of Hauptmeier’s criticisms, in my view, simply spring from his distorted representation of my position; however, I am not going to bore the reader with a list of corrigenda but shall restrain myself to just one example, quoting an assertion of Hauptmeier’s and confronting it with my own original statement in Groeben (1980), so that the reader may judge for himself whether Hauptmeier’s assertion is justified.

Hauptmeier (1981: 569): “But let us return to Groeben. Despite the fact that he has not yet noticed the tenacity of hermeneutics in reception aesthetics...” – Groeben (1980: 56): “... clinging to a hermeneutic procedure inevitably means regressing beyond the point of departure of reception aesthetics” and (ibid.: 66): “The hermeneutic method reduces the perspectives of communication theory and reception aesthetics to the tenets of an aesthetics of production and representation”.

I claim therefore nothing but the very same functional text concept as is submitted by Schmidt; and it is just this text concept which forms one of the central points of agreement between the two proposals for an ESL. The difference between the two is that I make use of the non-statement view of theories only in a non-technical way. The advantage of this approach is, for instance, that it – qua side effect, as it were – allows the reconstruction of the traditional study of literature as a paradigm in its own right. More importantly, however: the explication of the text concept is equivalent to the definition of the problem frame of the ESL, i.e. to all that which corresponds to the (non-statement) theory in the non-statement view applied non-technically. I therefore restrict ‘theory’ (the ‘conceptual structure’ qua definition of problem frame) to a very tight core of postulates – and quite on purpose: I hold a very explicit (strict?) differentiation of an ‘ETL’ right at the beginning of the development of a new conception of scientific research, of a new research program, to be dangerous – dangerous in the sense of introducing constraints prematurely and thus obstructing and hindering the development

of the program. I shall name only two such potentially obstructive constraints in Schmidt’s ETL: first, the derivation of the ETL from a general theory of action may lead to difficulties in the investigation of non-intentional reactions towards literature; and second, specific concepts may delimit by way of definition what ought to be kept open as an empirical question: as I see it, Schmidt’s concept of polyvalence is a case in point – and the decisive aspect of the explication of the function of INTERPRETATION in an ESL (see below sections 6–7).

4. Priority of theory explication or revision of methods?

This assessment of mine will now also clarify the second important difference between Schmidt’s proposal for an ESL and my own: my first priority in the elaboration of the new research concept is the development of a set of empirical methods, Schmidt’s is the development of theory. Now Hauptmeier, too, stresses repeatedly that a (new) paradigm, an ESL, could after all only be constituted through the elaboration of an ‘explicit theory’ (e.g. 1981: 572). Such an assertion implies the rejection of any proposal putting the revision of methods first and must therefore be analyzed in greater depth. First we must remind ourselves that I do not impute to Schmidt, despite his giving priority to theory development, that he objects to technical methods; he simply concentrates his efforts on a different aspect of the problem (and one may thus hope to achieve, one day, some kind of harmonizing integration: he does not have to battle with methods as I am already doing it). In contrast, Hauptmeier reproachfully seems to insinuate that I have no theory at all (1981: 572). I think that there are several misunderstandings indicated here.

Let us ask first what concept of theory we are dealing with: theory in the non-statement view or in the statement view? If it is ‘theory’ in the sense of the non-statement view, then any reproach is simply unfounded – at least with reference to the non-technical application made explicit above – because the ‘theory’ which, according to the non-technical application to non-formalized disciplines, consists in the definition of a problem or problem frame is given by the functional text concept. The members of the NIKOL-group have not realized here, despite my unambiguous references, that there are ways of exploiting the non-statement view of theories which are different from the one they prefer (of course the other possibility may be open to attack, but surely it must be discussed first; it is simply not enough to merely assert that I do not have a ‘theory’ as specified by the non-statement view). For the reader who is not quite familiar with the non-statement view I may point out again that calling a text concept ‘theory’ just does not contradict the requirements of this conception in the philosophy of science: a ‘theory’ in the non-statement view is a ‘linguistic structure of a conceptual nature’ which, consequently, is no more
falsifiable than the definition of a problem (frame) through the functional text concept. In contradistinction, the statement view of ‘theory’ definitely requires theories to have, for instance, explanatory power (in the sense of the dependence of the explanandum on – effective – real causes); ‘structures of a conceptual nature’ are unsuitable to explain anything (because ‘explanation’ defines the structure of systems of statements) and I shall therefore from now, in accord with the statement view, use the term ‘explanatory proposal’ instead of ‘theory’; with reference to such explanatory proposals, however, it is correct to say that I do not offer a theory – for the simple reason that I do not consider it sensible. The history of those empirical social sciences I am somewhat familiar with shows that their domains of phenomena are so complex that it has so far proved impossible to develop a unitary (monolithic) theory with satisfactory explanatory power (cf. the disciplines mentioned at the beginning: psychology, sociology, and pedagogy). And I cannot believe that the very first attempt at constructing a science of literature will be a success! For me, the primary step to take in an ESL is the development of a set of empirical methods which is adequate to cope with a multiplicity of competing explanatory proposals within the fundamental problem frame of the functional text concept.

In my view, Schmidt does not offer a unitary explanatory proposals either (in the sense of the statement view): his recent reconstructions of traditional sets of literary problems such as the sociology, psychology, criticism, and didactics of literature are, on the whole, collections of questions and answers within an ESL, not solutions qua explanatory hypotheses – a result which I do not criticize because I consider it inevitable. And where he does indeed offer a small number of hypothetical law statements the difficulty of sticking to a coherent explanatory proposal becomes more than evident: he explains changes in the LITERATURE-system in history through external changes in the social system (e.g. ‘changes in the socio-economic conditions of production’: GH 2, 3 and 4 in Schmidt 1982a: 46f.). The specific kind of change, however, is quite directly explained by recourse to internal constructs (such as innovation, or – following Martindale 1975 – the psychoanalytic construct of regression): the coherence of the two explanatory perspectives remains obscure.

The distinction between the explication of ‘theories’ with reference to statement view and non-statement view implies that the two views do not mutually exclude each other. The completely unfamiliar and revolutionary attribution of the feature ‘non-falsifiability’ to theories by the non-statement view has, however, led quite a few people with an interest in the philosophy of science to erroneously believe that the two views would indeed mutually exclude each other. This seems to be the case with Hauptmeier who criticizes my explication of methodological criteria (1981: 573):

... we can conclude that Groeben applies the methodological criteria of intersubjectivity and strict subject-object-distinction to all levels of literary analysis in order to prevent vitrious influences/dependencies between theory-construction and reality-testing... – an argument I have never understood considering Groeben’s reference to Kuhn’s and Sneed’s and Stegmüller’s non-statement view, unless it is an expression of a badly camouflaged positivism.

Clarification is easy here: I assume – like Stegmüller who may surely be quoted here as the optimal witness – “that the structuralist view is in no way opposed to the statement concept” (Stegmüller 1969: 485). That is to say that there are two levels of methodological relevance within the statement view: the level of the theoretical explication of hypotheses (explanatory proposals), and the level of the testing of hypotheses by observable data (explanatory power). The non-statement view has placed a third level in front of these two: the level – non-technically spoken – of the core assumptions, of the definition of a problem (frame) – the regulative idea of falsifiability (in whatever degree of liberalization) reaching only as far as the level of hypotheses in statement form (explanatory proposals), not as far as the level of the core assumptions (paradigm). Consequently, the non-statement view has not supplanted the statement-view within the philosophy of science but merely augmented it. In an ESL too, ‘normal science’ in Kuhn’s sense (1967) will primarily consist in the development and testing of explanatory proposals (hypotheses in statement-form) on the basis of undisputed core assumptions. To do this in an ESL one needs a set of empirical methods which must be worked out as fast as possible.

Now this is not only the (repeated) rationale for the priority of the development of methods but also for the claim that observation procedures for the testing of hypotheses must form the centre of this development (Groeben 1980: 68f.). Hauptmeier (here undoubtedly the representative of the NIKOL-group) takes all reference to observable data as a corroboration of the double-language-model (i.e. the distinction between a theoretical language and an observational language sensu Carnap), as a ‘methodological as well as ontological distinction between theory and reality’, and thus suspects a relapse into naive falsificationism or even positivism (Hauptmeier 1981: 580).

There is not enough space to present the developments within the philosophy of science from the double-language-model to the empiricist base-language (Hempel), from naive to sophisticated falsificationism (Lakatos), from the definition of theoretical constructs by means of concepts of an observation language to the theory-ladenness of all observation (Feyerabend, Kuhn etc.); I have done this elsewhere (Groeben and Westmeyer 1975: 190ff.). Let me very briefly make clear: speaking of ‘observable data’ does not imply that nature – whatever that may be in an ESL – shouts ‘No!’ when observed; falsification always involves all the various exhaustion possibilities of social science research (recourse to theories of observation, mistakes in experimental designs, experiment effects, etc.). Calling methods ‘procedures of observation’ does not imply a double-language-model in the traditional understanding, but much
rather historical-pragmatic relativity as it has already been introduced with the empiricist base-language; it does certainly also involve for me Sneed's concept of 'T-theoreticity' which means that specific terms are used as theoretical terms in one theory and not in another. At the same time, however, it implies the conception of "observational statements though without an observational language" (Stegmüller 1979: 262) as it is characterized summarily by Stegmüller following Quine:

An observational statement is characterized in the sense "that all assertions about it depend, apart from the given sensory stimulation, only on that kind of stored information which is required for its understanding" and "that all speakers of a language make assertions about it in the same way provided they are exposed to the same kind of concomitant stimulation" (Stegmüller 1979: 263).

Such (or similar) conceptions of 'observable data' are indispensable if the idea of an ESL is not to lose all methodological meaning (and also, by the way, if the empirical investigations undertaken by the NIKOL-group – e.g. Schmidt and Zobel 1982; Hitzentzberg et al. 1980 – are to be 'exemplars' of the disciplinary matrix of an ESL as claimed by Schmidt 1982b: 6). In addition, one may care to remember that the principal task of the philosophy of science is the reconstruction of the practical work of scientists and not the passing of verdicts on concepts, should the reconstruction of certain aspects of a science (as for instance the observation problem) not have been completely successful.

(In connection with such deliberations the researcher who is engaged in practical work often feels the strong desire that philosophers of science would one day subject themselves to guidelines of self-control: only he, for instance, whose list of publications contains at least a third empirical papers will be allowed meta-theoretical reconstructions – to make sure he knows what he is talking about!)

5. The strategy of paradigm change: problem 'incorporation' or problem substitution?

The differences discussed so far from the background to the most conspicuous discrepancy between the two proposals for an ESL: the strategy of the paradigm change, i.e. the assessment of the questions and answers of the traditional (hermeneutic) study of literature. Schmidt's attempt at constructing as explicit an 'ETL' as possible quite naturally implies that he gives priority to the explication of the theory and, consequently, primarily develops all the problems central to an ESL more or less from approaches independent of the traditional study of literature. As regards the relation of the 'old' and the 'new' (empirical) study of literature, he is therefore bound to take a position favoring the perspective of problem substitution. On my part, the non-technical applica-

tion of the non-statement view and the express priority given to the revision of methods cannot but lead to efforts to establish first whether the classical problems of literary study may not also be attacked, and thus possibly solved, with the help of the new methods. But such differences are, in my opinion, not differences in structure – at least not a great extent; they much rather signify differences in practical procedure, i.e. the sequence of steps in the explicit demonstration of the efficiency of the ESL. It is surely right to say that, in principle, both approaches share the belief that an ESL will be capable of achieving both: solve traditional problems – at least in part – and, naturally, pose and solve new ones.

One ought therefore to be careful not to overestimate the substitution of problems that certainly in some measure characterizes the relation of the old paradigm and the new one, something I think Hauptmeier is guilty of in his presentation of Schmidt's approach; he more or less asserts by way of exclusion that the construction of a new theory must always be a radical and total change of perspective (cf. the thesis of incommensurability) – as, for instance, the overcoming of Newtonian physics by Einstein's, or the superseding of phlogiston chemistry by modern chemistry (Hauptmeier 1981: 578). He thinks it particularly strange that I have taken no notice of the gestalt-switch-thesis (ibid.: 578). I have indeed taken notice of that thesis but I cannot find it very helpful because all it says is that a psychological construct has been used in a metaphorical way to provide a wrapping for the rational core: from the part of psychology, namely, it may be made clear that such all-or-none changes without any interim-phases or intermediate steps occur only in the domain of perception but not in complex cognitive processes (and, apart from that, this psychological criticism of the metaphor of the gestalt-switch in the philosophy of science was offered as early as 1975; its author whom Hauptmeier seems to have overlooked this time is – ironically enough in this context – Groeben). The rational core of the metaphor is that the domain of problems appears radically changed after a paradigm change: this does not mean, however, that the old problems do not exist any longer but that there are new problems which are considered to be more important. It is of course possible that 'old' problems become special and marginal cases of 'new' ones (many philosophers of science see the relation of Newtonian and Einsteinian physics in this way).

With regard to precisely this point now there is no disagreement at all between Schmidt and myself: I have pointed out time and again that an ESL will, in the long run, concentrate on other problems than the traditional hermeneutic study of literature, in particular on questions concerning the explanation of processes of reception, processing, and the effects of literary texts (cf. Groeben 1980: 186f, 1982b: 70f.). Any assertion to the effect that I would admit only the old hermeneutic problems for treatment with empirical methods (Hauptmeier 1981: 577) is simply false. This misleading impression may have arisen because I have in fact (and much more intensively than the
NIKOL-group) tried to reconstruct classical problems within the ESL, but certainly not in such a way only as to simply carry over the old problems without any alteration. The truth is that reconstruction within an ESL produces fairly radical changes with respect to functions: let me quote as just one example the downgrading of the problem of ‘adequate reception’ which I have discussed in great depth, or the upgrading of the ‘reception amplitude’ (Groeben 1980: 138ff.; the last-named aspect will also be of relevance to the problem of INTERPRETATION). The very same perspective of the reconstruction of classical problems in an ESL involving a potential re-assignment of weight or function is taken by Schmidt in his practical development of an ESL, e.g. in his recent second volume on the ETL (1982a), in which he examines the reconstructability of literary history, of the psychology, didactics, etc. of literature. Of course one cannot exclude the possibility that the result of such attempts may prove a reconstruction of the old problems within the new paradigm to be either impossible or uninteresting. For me, the reconstructibility of special problems in literary history is, for instance, definitely limited (especially the problem of the actual interpretation and reception of texts at remote points in time; cf. Wolff and Groeben 1981); Schmidt views the question of INTERPRETATION as irreconstructible within an ESL (1980: 291ff.). Here Schmidt and I take a different stance with regard to the question of reconstruction, which is, at least in part, also an expression of a difference in strategy: I am trying to accommodate the traditional problems and questions of literary study in an ESL as far as possible (to ‘incorporate’ them; cf. Groeben 1980: 21) whereas Schmidt favors their substitution. One may consider this way of advancing to be more diplomatic (as regards the attitude towards the traditional study of literature) – like Hauptmeier 1981: 566 – but it is certainly an exaggeration to insinuate that, by endeavoring to reconstruct INTERPRETATION, I would intend to reduce the ESL to the problems as defined by the traditional study of literature (Hauptmeier 1981: 567, 573, 578ff.). It ought to be noted that I assign a different function to INTERPRETATION in the ESL (cf. Groeben 1980: 150ff., and below). The fact that I consider a reconstruction feasible rests, however, precisely on the differences I have exposed: on the non-technical application of the non-statement view and the priority of the development of methods. One may thus state a first (meta-theoretical) result: there are differences between Schmidt’s approach to empiricalization and mine. First, there is the non-technical application of the non-statement view of theories in my proposal; against its background the functional text concept is to be seen as the core of assumptions (in the sense of a non-statement theory); then there is the priority of method revision which is connected primarily with the – now subordinated – statement-aspect of theories (explanatory proposals): the criticism that this kind of empiricalization is a reversion to positivist ideas (Hauptmeier 1981: 580) is therefore unfounded. It is just as absurd to classify the strategy for the implementation of a paradigm change, which consists in the effort to reconstruct old problems within the ESL, as an adherence to the traditional objects and goals of analysis (Hauptmeier ibid.). The attempt to reconstruct INTERPRETATION within an ESL cannot a priori be nothing but a reduction to the objects of traditional hermeneutics; a re-construction always involves a re-weighting as well as a change of the functions of the scientific activities in question. This kind of reconstruction involving a change in function will now be outlined.

6. Separability of reception and interpretation? Strong vs. weak postulates of polyvalence

Schmidt excludes the possibility of reconstructing INTERPRETATION in the sense of a unitary and systematic procedure or method in an ESL. His principal reason is the diversity and complexity of what has so far been practised as INTERPRETATION in the study of literature: it encompasses assertions “about the ‘meaning’ of a Literary Communicatum, about its … ‘aesthetic value’ and ‘literary rank’ … about the ‘relationship’ between different Literary Communicata and Contexts … about ‘social function’ …” (Schmidt 1980: 298). He does, however, admit (and show explicitly) that there is a demand for such L-interpreters [1] and L-INTERPRETATIONS in our society (op.cit.: 294ff.). The decision about whether INTERPRETATION is to be reconstructed in an ESL, for Schmidt, depends on whether the operations denoted by this term are part of literary communication or whether they are part of the analysis of the system of literary communication: with regard to the latter he is prepared to assign the status of scientific act to some of the operations involved (“e.g. Describing, Commenting, Explaining, Condensing etc.”; Schmidt 1982a: 167), the larger part, however, comprises only forms of participation in literary communication and is thus the subject of a theory of literary processing, not a part thereof (Schmidt 1980: 315, 1982a: 174ff.).

My starting point, in contrast, is the separability of reception (qua participation in literary communication) and INTERPRETATION (qua scientific operation of interpreting) (Groeben 1980: 133ff.): INTERPRETATION thus represents the genesis and the testing of singular hypotheses about the meaning of texts. In accordance with the functional text concept, however, the testing of hypotheses about meaning cannot simply be restricted to the interpreter’s recurring to ‘the text itself’ because in this way he would merely fall back on his own reception, the reception of one individual subject: INTERPRETATION consists in the (theoretical) construction of a text sense from the basis of individually received textual meanings. It is textual meanings and thus receptions that (qua participation in literary communication) form the basic set of

[1] Editor’s note: ‘L’ means ‘in the social system called LITERATURE’.
objects to which the scientific activity of INTERPRETATION refers. The functions of all that which, in traditional literary study, is offered as INTERPRETATION, however, in this process are specified more precisely and, consequently, transformed: one may, for instance, no longer search for the all-embracing generally valid total interpretation (‘super-reader–super-text’: Groeben 1980: 150ff.). What direction of analysis INTERPRETATION, as reconstructed in an ESL, is to follow predominantly, will be made more explicit below (see section 7).

First I must clarify, however, why Schmidt thinks it impossible to perform the discriminative attribution of reception (text processing) to the participation in the system of literature, and of INTERPRETATION to the theory of such participation. The reason I see is that there are two distinct variants of unequal strength of the postulate of polyvalence. One may distinguish between an intra-individual and an inter-individual postulate, the second being clearly the weakest, the first the strongest variant. The inter-individual postulate means explicitly that different readers, at varying moments in time, assign different meanings to one and the same text (‘basic communicatum’ in Schmidt 1980), which, in themselves, may be both coherent and relevant (cf. Groeben 1982b: 33); the intra-individual postulate of polyvalence, on the contrary, implies that one and the same reader, at the same time or at other times, assigns different meanings to one and the same text, which, in themselves, are both coherent and relevant; the latter version is, more or less, postulated by Schmidt in his PL-convention (e.g. 1980: 325: ‘... and then he is in a position (or thinks he is) to assign to the basic communicatum ..., in the process of one or several consecutive communicative acts, on one level or on different levels, reception results that strike him as satisfactory’).

The decisive difference is that Schmidt asserts the validity of the strong version of polyvalence already for the level of reception (i.e. non-scientific text processing); he infers that a recipient is capable of specifying "wherein the polyvalence of his receptive acts lies" (Schmidt 1980: 312). In my view, he thus puts reception on such a high level (of complexity) as can, realistically, only be granted to the scientific activity of INTERPRETATION – and giving reception such a high degree of polyvalence/complexity consequently leaves no level for a coherent explication of INTERPRETATION itself. It is precisely in these implicit assertions of empirical validity, however, that I see the problem which is in need of further clarification by empirical research. The PL-convention postulates for the recipients the “knowledge attributed mutually to each other that they are ready and capable to receive polyvalently” (Schmidt 1980: 174, 325f.). ‘Being capable’, however, is a most problematical concept in dire need of explanation, as the trait-approach in differential psychology has demonstrated: is it a skill or an ability? Is it a kind of structural competence which may not take effect in actual performance or does, as a rule, not take effect at all? Is it perhaps even only the competence of an ideal recipient (like Chomsky’s ideal speaker)? And furthermore: does it perhaps consist only in a kind of normative knowledge which is of no consequence in real action? (We have here a phenomenon which has developed into a perpetual problem in psychology in connection with the concept of attitude which was tentatively employed to establish a correspondence between cognition and action by definition!)

Positively speaking: it is my thesis that the reader, as a rule, receives even polyvalent texts in a ‘normalizing’ way (Steinmetz 1974), i.e. that he, by way of assimilating (Piaget) the text into his life experience and the horizon of his world view, attributes only one meaning to the textual pattern – even though he may admit on the basis of his normative knowledge that the textual pattern could tolerate several coherent meaning ascriptions. There is a number of arguments to support this empirical hypothesis in the present state of knowledge (cf. for more details Groeben 1981):

- there is empirical proof that human perception as such is influenced by pre-dispositions, prevalent needs etc. (cf., for instance, that hungry Ss associate food and eating with ambiguous pictures more often than non-hungry Ss (Levine et al. 1942; further discussion in Stadler et al. 1975: 209ff.));
- there is evidence for the fact that the processing of linguistic items, in particular, consists in the integration of given ‘world knowledge’ (cf. the research by Bransford and co-workers who have proved the influence of knowledge through features of the external environment – water, wood, animals etc. (extensive discussion in Hörmann 1976; Groeben 1982a: 22ff.));
- there are indications that the reception of literary texts, too, is strongly influenced by cognitive dispositions, world knowledge etc., in the sense of mono-semization, i.e. ‘normalization’ (cf. the investigation by Eggert et al. 1975: young readers simply declared linguistic items conflicting with their receptive disposition to be irreconcilable; Groeben 1980: 79ff.).

If this hypothesis of ‘normalizing’ reception is empirically correct – and this would mean that one can only infer the weakest version of polyvalence as stated above – then the central task required of literary interpretation is precisely the ‘localization of those items or textual features’ which are responsible for inter-individually polyvalent reception processes and results: a task placed by Schmidt on the level of reception itself (1980: 308), but without any empirical justification.

7. The constructive function of INTERPRETATION: the elaboration of polyvalence knowledge

INTERPRETATION is then, in the first place, the determination and elaboration of the poly-functionality and polyvalence of literary texts, based on
inter-subjectively observable inter-individual receptions of various kinds – and, complementarily, also the identification of those items and features of texts which are responsible for inter-individual monovality. This can only be done by the gathering and analysis of a great number of actually received textual meanings if only the weak thesis of polyvalence proves empirically viable (Groeben 1981: 112ff.) – everything else being, at least in part, an unrealistic demand contradicting the meta-norm ‘Ought implies Being Able’. It will therefore be necessary to make explicit at least the following tasks of the scientific activity INTERPRETATION:

1. Identification of the (inter-individual) ‘reception amplitude’ (Lämmert 1973) of a literary text (synchronously as well as diachronically).
2. Elaboration of coherent (and further irreducible) meaning variants with particular groups of readers in dependence on their pre-dispositions (as the provisional version of an explanatory perspective directed at the pre-dispositions governing reception; cf. Groeben 1980: 176ff.).
3. Identification of items and features of the textual pattern with which (inter-individually) polyvalent reception processes and results may be connected.
4. Complementarily: identification of items and features of the textual pattern to which inter-individually monovalent reception processes and results may be referred.

This list does not claim to be exhaustive; I shall nevertheless propose the following open explication of my reconstruction as inferred from the present state of the discussion: all operations leading to the attainment of the four goals listed are to be regarded as components of the scientific activity INTERPRETATION in an ESL.

This means that INTERPRETATION is, of course, positively aimed at the strong version of the postulate of polyvalence. It must be at least (and first of all) in the person of the interpreter according to the standards of science that, according to the explication given, intra-individual polyvalence is realized. One implicit goal of this kind of interpreting must naturally be to stimulate and enable the recipient through the development of his polyvalence knowledge to receive in a more polyvalent way (as long as he does not do violence to the textual pattern). Thus the proposed reconstruction of INTERPRETATION within the ESL is in full accord with the functional text concept and its aesthetic implications (e.g. the two-factor model of aesthetics in which one relevant factor is entropy or poly-functionality/polyvalence; cf. Groeben 1980: 36ff.): INTERPRETATION, in this fashion, seeks to support the meaningfulness and functioning of literary texts in the reception process – one central function of such aesthetic objects being the breaking-up of the reader’s rigid pre-formed horizons of meaning, habits of perception, association, and processing. And this also means that INTERPRETATION, when reconstructed in this way, will always work towards making itself superfluous (this is the didactic impetus behind it): namely, to bring about the situation in which reception itself involves maximal intra-individual polyvalence. This apparently paradoxical goal, however, does not at all contradict the proposed reconstruction because, in the last resort, all didactic goals are of this kind: every teacher works towards making himself dispensable.

With the help of this functional sketch a first (and also meta-theoretical) evaluation of the proposed reconstruction of INTERPRETATION within an ESL may now be attempted. First of all, one may see clearly that this kind of reconstruction does not allow for all the operations subsumed under INTERPRETATION in traditional literary study to be carried over into the ESL. Reconstruction must naturally also mean greater precision, and greater precision will inevitably lead to modifications (cf. Opp 1970: 162). In this perspective Schmidt’s position – be it said once again – seems too rigorous: quite evidently he does, after all, accept some of the operations traditionally associated with INTERPRETATION as scientific activities in his ESL; to exclude INTERPRETATION completely from all scientific enterprise and to banish it to the level of the participation in literary communication only because some of the operations cannot be reconstructed, is in my view unnecessary. The second aspect, however, is more important: against the background of the non-technical application of the non-statement view, of the orientation of the paradigm change towards method development, and thus of the restriction of the (non-statement) theory to the functional text concept, the reconstructibility of interpretation within an ESL finally proves to be dependent on what features are to be ascribed to the reception process and its results. Naturally my reconstruction stands and falls with the acceptance of the assumption that reception is, as a rule (and independently of, or even despite, the ‘knowledge’ designated by Schmidt’s PL-convention), ‘normalizing’. And that is to say: this kind of reconstructibility is, in any event, no cause for concern whatever in an ESL – it is just an empirical question. An empirical question must not, however, simply be shaken off prematurely, i.e. without recourse to data, merely with the help of conceptual definition – as is the case with Schmidt due to his very strong concept of polyvalence. This is the well-known danger inherent in all monolithic theory development: empirical problems are all too often disposed of too hastily by way of overrigrorous definitions – and the concept of polyvalence is a case in point and was therefore mentioned above in connection with my criticism of the priority of theory development for the paradigm change.
8. Evaluation: the relation of the ESL-proposals

At the beginning I have pointed out that the differences between Schmidt's ESL-proposal and my own could be made most conspicuous by the case of INTERPRETATION. The identification of these differences (from my point of view) therefore provides an opportunity for describing the fundamental relationship of the two proposals – an opportunity I should like to make use of (from my point of view) in conclusion.

As both proposals for an ESL are coherently designed, the differences between them throw into relief a divergence in accentuation: Schmidt attempts to inaugurate an ESL through the decided explication of the fundamental structure of a network of theories, i.e. he analyzes in detail what theoretical problems, conceptual distinctions etc. are inevitable and indispensable once the functional text concept has been accepted. To accomplish his aim he must assume the strict applicability of the non-statement view to literary study and, having made that assumption, may then set himself the goal of building the whole theoretical structure of a science of literature anew right from the foundations. In adherence to this conviction and this goal he is then forced to put the main emphasis on the demarcation of his ESL from classical hermeneutic conceptions, questions, and procedures – foregoing any conciliatory gestures. In contrast, my own approach stresses the necessary revision of methods. One important conviction supporting it is that literary study admits only of a non-technical application of the non-statement view, which in itself is motivated by my scepticism towards the possibility of developing a coherent theory of literary communication without falling victim to conventionalization. Putting method revision first, however, leaves room for attempts to integrate useful classical perspectives and questions, some part of traditional research processes etc., into the new paradigm (‘incorporation’), which, all in all, prefers conciliation to strict demarcation.

As the two proposals articulate convictions which are, on the one hand, rather far-reaching, and on the other rather careful, and refer to different, though in part complementary, domains, they lay themselves open in various ways to hazards of error and rejection: Schmidt’s proposal in the context of theory explication, mine in the context of method development and methodology. In accord with the hallowed guideline of rational criticism each proposal therefore has great potential for stimulating further discussion: Schmidt’s quite clearly with respect to questions of substance and theory and, somewhat in reverse, mine with respect to formal matters and methods. We may therefore draw one consequence at this stage that should be acceptable to both sides: an ESL will certainly develop best if it makes use both of the potential stimulating the discussion of questions of substance and theory, and of the potential furthering the discussion of forms and methods. Against this background also a common future solution to the problem of INTERPRETATION becomes visible: Schmidt introduces the strong version of the postulate of polyvalence in order to distinguish theoretically between linguistic and literary communication, amongst other things; as stated above, an ESL will have to test empirically the legitimacy and usefulness of such a theoretical distinction (in the sense of a validation of a descriptive construct). I assume that Schmidt must be, and in fact is, interested in this kind of test in order to increase the empirical substance of his theoretical framework. On the other hand one must note expressly that, even granted the empirical usefulness of the weak polyvalence postulate for the characterisation of individual (literary) reception – as I propose – the corresponding concept of INTERPRETATION, i.e. the identification of inter-individual polyvalence, will be fairly different from what is predominantly offered as INTERPRETATION in classical literary study. In this respect I share the view that, against the background of the functional text concept, hermeneutic INTERPRETATIONS of texts do, in fact, mainly consist in the search for the one correct (‘adequate’) sense of a given text, though their underlying methodological conception may be different (cf. Groeben 1980: 150ff.). The question is therefore legitimate whether, in view of this state-of-affairs, it is sensible to go on calling procedures of establishing polyvalence and of elaborating polyvalence knowledge ‘INTERPRETATION’. I do think it possible that, following the empirical tests I have proposed, a subset of scientific operations aimed at the identification of polyvalence knowledge about given literary texts (qua ‘basic communica’) may be delimited more precisely, and may then also be given another and more precise name than ‘INTERPRETATION’.

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The opinion is held that every theory of interpretation as well as every interpretive praxis necessarily depends on presuppositions about the conceptions of 'literature', 'literature criticism', 'text', 'meaning', and 'understanding'. Every scholarly discourse on literary interpretation should therefore produce an explanation of these concepts. This explanation is elaborated in the framework of an empirical science of literature via the epistemological and semantic bases of biological constructivism. Interpretation is conceived as the construction of relations between received text meanings and cognitive experiences or frames of reference. Interpretations cannot be and, above all, should not be subjected to criteria of scientificity; instead they should serve social needs of moral, cognitive, and emotional orientation and identity. Interpretations should make use of rational argumentation as much as possible, yet no argument can prove the truth or objectivity of whatever global interpretive hypothesis.

I. Remarks on the status quo

In spite of all assertion to the contrary, empirical investigations show that the activity called 'interpretation' is still in the centre of the 'literary market'. As is proved by the sales numbers of interpretive texts, there is a high consumption of 'interpretations' at schools and universities; and again supported by empirical evidence, there is no doubt that the reading of interpretations has begun to displace the reception of literature itself (see the research work of Lutz 1981).

Even within the guild of literary scholarship, as Fish or Steinmetz frankly admit, the predominance of interpretation is still unbroken. This is clearly illustrated for example by the response of literary scholars to proposals for an empirical science of literature which are always answered by the query: "And how do you interpret in the empirical science of literature? Are your interpretations any better than ours?"

Finally, if we have a look at text-books on the study of literature, we will be confronted with reports on interpretive approaches moving Indian file from 'immanent-text analysis' to 'reception aesthetics' – but nowhere do we find a rejection of interpretation as the essential task for literary studies or literary

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