

## A UNIFYING EXAMPLE IN ICONICITY: *VENI, VIDI, VICI*

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**Abstract** The primary aim of this article is to examine the role of examples in the formation of linguistic theories. Our hypothesis has two parts. Firstly, we argue that the recurrence of examples contributes to the structuring of a disciplinary field. Secondly, we will demonstrate that this canonisation is accompanied by a process of trivialisation. To test this, we analyse the main (sub)classifications of linguistic iconicity, from Jakobson’s *Quest for the Essence of Language* to more recent developments, using the example “*veni, vidi, vici.*” This overview will highlight the conceptual shifts, terminological ambiguities and epistemological tensions that run through this field.

**Keywords** The role of examples, linguistic iconicity, Peircian and Jakobsonian iconicity, diagrammaticity, imagic and diagrammatic iconicity, structural and semantic iconicity, exophoric and endophoric iconicity, primary and secondary iconicity.

### 1. The Importance of Examples for Linguistic Theories

A very important aspect of the circulation of linguistic theories is the examples used to support the theoretical claims being made. The examples that researchers draw upon in their work are not only an excellent way to make the theory more transparent and accessible for potential readers, but also a means of giving substance to what might otherwise be perceived as dry theory. As is often said about the power of an image, especially in today’s advertising, examples are worth more than a thousand theoretical words.

While this may seem an obvious point, it is worth noting that examples are not chosen at random. In fact, as Jean-Luc Chevillard *et al.* argue, quite the opposite is true: “un exemple n’est pas *n’importe quel* fragment de la langue, il correspond plutôt à un *échantillon représentatif* de

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cette dernière.”<sup>1</sup> This is an especially significant aspect within a constantly evolving and developing theoretical field such as that of linguistic iconicity.

Far from being limited to their undeviable illustrative role, the choice of examples constitutes a genuine act of doctrine. Different researchers, who may have very different theoretical backgrounds, rally around certain examples, thereby consolidating a field of study. Within the vast array of examples proposed in linguistic theories, some stand out more than others to the scientific community to which they speak. They thus become indispensable reference points and true access codes to a specific scientific community, acquiring an indexical function that indicates membership of that community. Referring to the sentence “Alfred sings,” for example, immediately indicates a structuralist orientation in the tradition of Tesnière, whereas an example such as “Colourless green ideas sleep furiously” indicates a Chomskyan generative orientation to any linguist, without much prior reflection.

As for the field of linguistic iconicity, examples function in a manner that is very similar to that in other branches of linguistics. After reviewing numerous publications dedicated to iconic phenomena, one recurring example that has become canonical over time is Caesar’s phrase describing his victory at Zela in 47 BC: “*veni, vidi, vici.*” Since its first appearance in Jakobson’s articles (1960<sup>2</sup>; 1966<sup>3</sup>), this adage has been used extensively by the majority of researchers to illustrate various types, divisions, and subdivisions of iconic phenomena. It can therefore be considered a quintessential example in the field of linguistic iconicity.

Nonetheless, we believe that the relationship between the corpus of examples and the theoretical tradition from which they stem is bidirectional rather than unidirectional. On the one hand, the selected examples serve to articulate a disciplinary branch – in our case, iconic studies in linguistics. The field of linguistic iconicity is structured around the omnipresence of Caesar’s phrase in articles following Jakobson’s work. This omnipresence is notably the result of John Haiman’s work, through which Jakobsonian theory was disseminated and the various classifications that emerged from it were configured.

On the other hand, this tradition influences the interpretation of the examples by constantly (re)constructing facts based on this interpretation. As Fournier notes,

“the corpus of inherited examples exerts, over a long period, a constraint on the choice of data and on the way in which they are understood. It is clear that such examples no longer present data in

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<sup>1</sup> See also Jean-Luc Chevillard *et al.*, “L’exemple dans quelques traditions grammaticales (formes, fonctionnement, types),” *Langages* 2, 166 (June 1, 2007): 5-31.

<sup>2</sup> Roman Jakobson first used it in 1960 to illustrate the semantic and rhetorical valences of a sequence of three verbs. See Roman Jakobson, “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics,” in *Style in Language*, edited by Thomas Sebeok (The M.I.T. Press, 1960), 350-377.

<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, he used it to exemplify and support the postulates of a theory of iconicity in diagrammatic form. See Jakobson, “Quest for the Essence of Language.”

the sense defined above. Access to data is mediated here by tradition, and the data themselves are constructed by the texts of the tradition.”<sup>4</sup>

By distinguishing, in light of the work of Milner and Auroux, between *facts* and *data*,<sup>5</sup> Jean-Marie Fournier analyses examples as *metaphrases* (a concept he borrows from Marc Dominicy), which, according to him, refer to

“discursive sequences resulting from the application to an initial example – a data-example – of some procedure, which may be simple translation. The form resulting from this process extracts the sequence from the raw reality of empirical data and presents a fact.”<sup>6</sup>

However, one should be wary of the tendency towards trivialisation<sup>7</sup> that may arise from canonisation. Its omnipresence in all classifications of iconic phenomena and in all introductions to articles dealing directly or indirectly with the subject can lead to it being treated as a true “textbook example”<sup>8</sup> or as a “stock phrase,” as proposed by Nänny and Fischer:

“Let us, by way of introduction, illustrate some iconic uses of language in a nutshell by means of an example that perfectly exemplifies most types of iconicity, namely Julius Caesar’s famous phrase *veni, vidi, vici* (“I came, I saw, I conquered”). This Latin dictum has, since Roman Jakobson first used it, been a stock phrase for scholars wishing to illustrate iconic features.”<sup>9</sup>

In what follows, we will analyse the various subclassifications organised around Caesar’s maxim, “*veni, vidi, vici*,” as reinterpreted by Roman Jakobson,<sup>10</sup> in order to demonstrate the

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-Marie Fournier, “Constitution Des Faits/Validation Des Données Dans Les Grammaires De La Tradition Française,” *Langages* 2, 166 (June 1, 2007): 89.

<sup>5</sup> “Auroux and Milner propose distinguishing, in the field of language sciences, between facts on the one hand and data on the other. The latter alone truly belong to the empirical realm, whereas facts belong to the transcendental: a fact is an atom of description, a fragment of theory, a minimal configuration of data lending itself to theorization (Milner, 1984: 177). A fact is the referent of a true proposition, whereas a piece of data is in itself a thing: one presents data, but one asserts facts (Auroux, 1984: 201),” in Fournier, “Constitution Des Faits/Validation Des Données Dans Les Grammaires De La Tradition Française,” 86.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>7</sup> It would also be interesting to address the trivialisation of this structure in contexts that go beyond the theoretical framework of iconicity. For reasons that we will explore in future work, this example is gaining traction in various artistic expressions, such as songs, album titles, films and television series, in both its original form and more or less parodied versions.

<sup>8</sup> Ludovic De Cuyper and Klaas Willems, “Introduction. Naturalness and iconicity in language.” In *Naturalness and Iconicity in Language*, edited by Klaas Willems and Ludovic De Cuyper, coll. *Iconicity in Language and Literature* 7 (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Max Nänny and Olga Fischer, “Introduction. *Veni, vidi, vici*,” in *The motivated sign*, edited by Olga Fischer and Max Nänny, coll. *Iconicity in Language and Literature* 2 (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Jakobson, “Quest for the Essence of Language.”

significance of the theoretical metaphrase, which initially became canonical before falling into common usage.

## 2. Diagram versus Image. Jakobson's Theory

The first aspect we will examine is how our example can be interpreted in terms of a diagram or image according to Jakobson's adoption of the Peircean classification. Although the order of the elements in the subtitle appears reversed compared to Peirce's classification, this is fully justified in Jakobson's text because, according to Jakobson,<sup>11</sup> Caesar's saying is an excellent example of a diagram at the syntactic level. Furthermore, we should bear in mind the importance of diagrammaticity from Jakobson's perspective.<sup>12</sup>

Since none of the three verbs individually reflect an element pertaining to the content or the perception of it in a direct manner at the level of linguistic form, the entire adage does not constitute an icon-image. Conversely, as the entire sequence highlights the relationship between linguistic form and the chronological development of the three actions, the structure attains the status of an icon-diagram.

However, contrary to Jakobson's<sup>13</sup> argument in his article, the adage can illustrate both types of iconicity: Peircean iconicity and Jakobsonian iconicity. Although we do not find an analysis of the same formula in Peirce, we know that, for the American scholar, the icon refers to the relationship between the sign as a whole and the referent. In this case, the adage can be interpreted as a sign that encodes the temporal correspondence<sup>14</sup> of Caesar's successive actions.

For Jakobson, however, at least in his theoretical intentions – since his examples do not always align with his theory – Caesar's adage is an example of iconicity, representing the relationship between the *signans* and the *signatum*, the expression plane and the content plane, and thus the relationship between the signifier and the signified – the mental image that the speaker forms of the referent.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Andrei Onighi, "La genèse et l'évolution de l'iconicité: Changements épistémologiques de Peirce à Jakobson," *Acta Technica Napocensis* 23, 3-4 (2003), 121-130.

<sup>13</sup> Jakobson, "Quest for the Essence of Language."

<sup>14</sup> As Yavseyev rightly points out, this issue of temporal concordance has taken many forms in various scientific paradigms, both linguistic and literary: "The phenomenon of temporal iconicity has appeared in different scientific paradigms under quite different labels, e.g., 'order of mention principle' (Clark & Clark 1977:358) or 'natural clause ordering' (Opačić & Osgood 1984:295) in psycholinguistics, *ordo naturalis* in discourse analysis (e.g., Brown & Yule 1983:125), 'principle of temporal sequence' (Tai 1985:50) or 'chronological sequencing' (Haiman & Thompson 1988: *passim*) in the study of syntactic iconicity, 'iconic sequence' in narratology (Fleischman 1990:131), 'principle of chronological order' in tense-aspect theory (Klein 1994:45), as well as 'principle of unmarked temporal interpretation' (Declerck 2006:427), 'general iconic principle of linear successivity' (Johanson 1995:327), etc.," in Vyacheslav Yavseyev, "Non-iconic chronology in English narrative texts," in *Semblance and Signification*, edited by Pascal Michelucci, Olga Fischer and Christina Ljungberg, coll. *Iconicity in Language and Literature* 10 (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), 191.

However, not all researchers consider treating Caesar's adage as image iconicity to be a misstep. While the majority consider this phenomenon to fall under the category of syntactic diagrams, some studies characterise it as a syntactic image. In his classification of iconic phenomena, Nobile<sup>15</sup> emphasizes that this is a prototypical case of a pure syntactic image, devoid of any indexical or metaphorical infusion, given that the signifier and the signified share "the same cognitive-sensory substrate (temporality) and that it manifests itself solely through the apprehension of the relevant syntagmatic segment, without the need to resort to paradigmatic analysis."

### 3. Haiman's Reading of Jakobsonian Theory: Isomorphism and Motivation

One of John Haiman's early articles on the theme of iconicity, "The Iconicity of Grammar: Isomorphism and Motivation,"<sup>16</sup> reveals an appropriation of the Jakobsonian reading without much prior assimilation, both in terms of its strengths and its limitations.

Jakobson's influence on Haiman's treatment of iconicity is highlighted by the predominance of diagrammaticity among the forms of iconicity. It is through the lens of diagrams – defined as "a systematic arrangement of signs, none of which necessarily resembles its referent, but whose relationships to one and to each other mirror the relationships of their referents"<sup>17</sup> – that Haiman addresses the issue of iconicity.

According to Haiman, diagrammaticity serves as the structuring principle of language – an idea that was only latent in Jakobson's text. Although the primacy of diagrams in this field is a foundational argument with strong epistemological significance that renders the issue of iconicity more scientifically relevant, this argument gives rise to a number of problems. Contrary to the definition above, in practice these diagrams are once again interpreted from a Jakobsonian perspective as proportional similarity between the signifier and the signified, rather than as a relationship between signs and objects in the world, as Peirce would have it.

What follows is an examination of a subdivision of the notion of diagrammaticity proposed by John Haiman, which he divides into two types: diagrammatic iconicity of isomorphism and diagrammatic iconicity of motivation.

For Haiman,<sup>18</sup> the phenomenon of isomorphism presupposes the existence – "universally (though often only implicitly) recognized in practice" – of a one-to-one correspondence between *signans* and *signatum*. Although he uses Stoic terminology – *signans* and *signatum* – the relationship

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<sup>15</sup> Luca Nobile, "Introduction. Formes d'iconicité," *Le français moderne – Revue de linguistique française* 1, 1 (2014): 31.

<sup>16</sup> John Haiman, "The iconicity of grammar: isomorphism and motivation," *Language* 56, 3 (September 1980): 515-540.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 515.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 515-516.

to which he refers is that between the *signifier* and the *signified*, to use Saussurean terminology, or that between *the expression plane and the content plane*, to use Hjelmslevian terminology.<sup>19</sup>

According to Haiman, this diagrammatic iconicity of isomorphism is illustrated by the impossibility of perfect synonymy in natural languages, another subject dear to Saussure<sup>20</sup> and to the structuralists.

Although open to criticism in several respects, this notion of *isomorphism*<sup>21</sup> once again demonstrates Haiman's founding ambitions for the field of iconicity and, through a hidden continuity with structuralist concerns, a paradigm shift.

The second type of diagrammatic iconicity in Haiman's typology<sup>22</sup> is that of motivation. Unlike isomorphism, which is considered to be universal, the diagrammatic iconicity of motivation is non-universal and concerns the functioning of certain grammatical structures "like an onomatopoeic word, reflects its meaning directly."<sup>23</sup> A few years later, Haiman defined motivational iconicity as: "[the] ways in which the linguistic form is a diagram of conceptual structure, and homologous with it in interesting ways."<sup>24</sup>

To illustrate this, Haiman<sup>25</sup> uses "Caesar's Law"<sup>26</sup> – *veni, vidi, vici* – an example undoubtedly borrowed from Jakobson. However, while Jakobson sees this as an example of a syntactic diagram – given that the relationship between the signifieds is transposed into the three signifiers, namely a sequence of three verbs facilitating a progressive reading of the type *first > then > finally* – Haiman argues that this is a (diagrammatic) iconicity of motivation, since "the order

<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the reference to Louis Hjelmslev in Haiman's article is far from insignificant – "Following Hjelmslev, Kurylowicz, and Martinet, I will refer to this relationship as the iconicity of ISOMORPHISM," John Haiman, "The iconicity of grammar: isomorphism and motivation," 515-516. In *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, a work published in 1943, drawing on and extending Saussure's duality of the linguistic sign (see Antonino Bondi, "Hjelmslev et la «fonction sémiotique»: du modèle structural au modèle cognitif," *Histoire Épistémologie Langage*, 30, 2 (2008): 204), Hjelmslev proposes an articulation of the *semiotic function* based on two "fonctives:" *expression* and *content*. The two planes – that content plane and that of expression plane – consist, in Hjelmslevian theory, of a form and a substance – see Louis Hjelmslev, *Nouveaux essais* (Presses Universitaire de France, 1985), 152-153.

<sup>20</sup> See also Valentina Bisconti, *Le sens en partage. Dictionnaires et théories du sens XIX<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, coll. *Langages* (ENS Éditions, 2017), 216.

<sup>21</sup> However, as Cigana notes, isomorphism should not be confused with the monosemic approach, as Haiman did, because isomorphism operates between the plane of expression and the plane of content, whereas monosemy operates only within the plane of content – Lorenzo Cigana, "Coseriu et Hjelmslev sur la théorie de la marque. Éléments pour continuer le dialogue," *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 1, 46 (2024): 205.

<sup>22</sup> John Haiman, "The iconicity of grammar: isomorphism and motivation," 516.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> John Haiman, "Introduction," in *Iconicity in Syntax*, edited by John Haiman, coll. *Typological studies in language* 6 (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1985), 2.

<sup>25</sup> John Haiman, "The iconicity of grammar: isomorphism and motivation," 528.

<sup>26</sup> John Haiman, *Ideophones and the Evolution of Language* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 284.

of elements in language parallels that in physical experience or the order of knowledge,"<sup>27</sup> and, consequently, it is capable of reflecting meaning directly, "like onomatopoeia."

We thus note that Haiman's argument is similar to Jakobson's, given that the same parameters are taken into consideration, but in order to illustrate two different (sub)types of diagrammaticity.

According to Fischer and Nänny<sup>28</sup>, motivational iconicity, considered a more abstract concept than isomorphic iconicity, facilitates a smoother and more productive integration into the literary field, which employs a "more concrete language." According to the same authors, motivational iconicity, as initially conceptualized by Haiman, transcends the limits of 'ordinary language' to enter the realm of literary discourse.

### 3.1. Two *Particular* Choices

We reiterate that the use of these two concepts, *motivation* and *isomorphism*, is undoubtedly a very strong theoretical choice on the part of Haiman. Yet, he creates, in a seemingly deliberate manner, a field of study built on shifting sands, where the terminology employed is rarely questioned. The indeterminate use of these terms (by structuralist, generative, or functionalist orientations) seems to us to be motivated by a desire to transcend the formal dogmatism through which they have become established as specialized terms – indeed, Jakobson attempted to do the same.

Haiman is aware of the importance of theoretical and methodological divergences in that they provoke a proliferation of debates and, consequently, enable the *full-scale* development of a field of study.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, to initiate his analysis, he borrows Jakobson's classification of iconic facts, which is already conceptually ambiguous. Indeed, by adding his own classifications, the degree of conceptual ambiguity snowballs and reverberates throughout the entire field of linguistic iconicity, establishing itself, in a Heraclitean manner, as a primary – if not the sole – constant.

Alongside the externally derived epistemological distinctions between the conceptual domain of iconicity and other conceptual domains, it must be noted that even from an epistemological perspective internal to the conceptual domain of iconicity, matters are far from clear. As Greenberg<sup>30</sup> rightly points out in 1995, "the term isomorphism is not a very fortunate

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<sup>27</sup> John Haiman, "The iconicity of grammar: isomorphism and motivation," 528.

<sup>28</sup> Olga Fischer and Max Nänny, "Introduction. Iconicity as a Creative Force in Language Use," in *Form miming meaning*, edited by Max Nänny and Olga Fischer, coll. *Iconicity in Language and Literature 1* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), XV-XXXVI. coll. *Iconicity in Language and Literature 2* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001), 2.

<sup>29</sup> "If areas of disagreement are those which most invite future research, then such research might focus on the contrast between iconic and economic motivation, and on ways of identifying conflicting motivations cross-linguistically. In addition, the psychological reality of some of the iconic tendencies discussed in these papers is something that may be testable, and if so, definitely should be tested," in John Haiman, "Introduction," 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Apud* Ludovic De Cuyper, *Limiting the iconic. From the metatheoretical foundations to the creative possibilities of iconicity in language*, coll. *Iconicity in Language and Literature 6* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008), 95.

coinage,” since it derives from the Greek words *isos* (equal) and *morphe* (form). Consequently, taking the etymological meaning into account, it must be noted that isomorphism “can easily be confused with Haiman’s notion of motivation.”<sup>31</sup>

As is well known, Jakobson in turn uses the term isomorphism to emphasize that syntactic structures, having a signifier and a signified, can be represented in the form of diagrams. Furthermore, it should be noted that the concept of motivation developed by Haiman is potentially more problematic than that of isomorphism, due to its terminological proximity to Saussure’s concept of motivation. Haiman openly admits to having drawn the concept of motivation from the *Course in General Linguistics*, and more specifically that of *relative motivation*. According to the author, Saussure’s approach to motivation stands in opposition to the principle of arbitrariness, although it is not explicitly defined in the *Course*.<sup>32</sup>

According to De Cuypere, Saussurean relative motivation is “purely a language-internal concept which strictly pertains to various word formations”<sup>33</sup> and which indicates, for example, that within the framework of a lexical paradigm such as *pommier*, *poirier*, *cerisier*, *prunier*, the suffix *-ier* is an indication of relative motivation, showing that a construction of the type *x + ier* could belong to the category of “fruit trees.” For his part, Haiman’s concept of motivation, conceived as a correspondence between the perception of the world and its formal representation, is a phenomenon of iconicity “based on the relation between language and reality.”<sup>34</sup>

“Whatever Saussure’s intended sense of “motivation” may have been, it will be clear from our discussion that motivation in our sense will mean a correspondence between our perception of the world and our representation of this perception.”<sup>35</sup>

All these attempts to scientifically ground the field of linguistic iconicity, because they involve complex terminological back-and-forth between the inside and the outside of the linguistic field, remain a gateway to misunderstandings. Moreover, by superimposing several terminologies without delimiting them from a theoretical standpoint, the epistemological foundation of the field of study of iconicity *in the English tradition* presents itself, once again, in a protean form – which affects its entire methodological development. This ever-changing nature is compounded by the fact that Haiman asserts that “it is clear from the exemplification that Saussure provided, that his notation of motivation is identical with Peirce’s notion of diagrammatic iconicity.”<sup>36</sup>

But although the concepts employed may seem clumsy and at times enantiosemic, they are certainly imbued with strong doctrinal significance.

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<sup>31</sup> Ludovic De Cuypere, *Limiting...*, 95.

<sup>32</sup> John Haiman, *Natural Syntax: Iconicity and Erosion*, coll. *Cambridge Studies in Linguistics* 44 (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 14

<sup>33</sup> Ludovic De Cuypere, *Limiting...*, 94.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> John Haiman, *Natural Syntax...*, 14-15.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

#### 4. Fischer and Nanny's Typology: Structural Iconicity *versus* Semantic Iconicity

Taking as their starting point Haiman's classification of iconic phenomena into imagic and diagrammatic, as well as the conceptualization influenced by the Jakobson-Haiman tradition, Fischer and Nanny<sup>37</sup> take a step further in the subclassification and configuration of diagrammaticity.

To this end, they argue that iconicity could, in fact, be approached as a peripheral phenomenon<sup>38</sup> of language, but only in its imagic variant, which implies a vertical and direct relationship, a "one-to-one relationship between the sign or signifier (usually a morphologically unstructured one) and the signified."<sup>39</sup>

Diagrammaticity is a concept that does not imply a vertical and direct relationship, but rather a mediated vertical relationship between two horizontal relationships: one between the elements that form the signified (event 2 occurs after event 1 and before event 3)<sup>40</sup> and the other between the elements that form the signifier. It is in this very instance that they mention the sequence of the three verbs: *veni, vidi, vici*. Being, consequently, more abstract and epistemologically "more respectable,"<sup>41</sup> diagrammaticity is, according to Fischer and Nanny, omnipresent in language, where it plays the role of a structuring principle, especially at higher levels, and particularly in discursive manifestations.

In the structural category, the authors primarily include the two forms of diagrammaticity proposed by Haiman: isomorphism and motivation. Regarding isomorphism, unlike Haiman, for whom this concept had primarily a syntactic scope<sup>42</sup> – although he used as an example the impossibility of perfect synonymy in natural languages – Fischer and Nanny place greater emphasis on its lexical scope. At the syntactic level, by virtue of the principle of isomorphism, the authors directly oppose the generative postulate – that deep structure can manifest itself in different surface structures, given that only the latter is available for analysis.

As for the other variant of structural diagrammaticity, that of motivation, we note that most of the iconic principles of Haiman and Givón's functional-typological grammar are integrated into it: centrality/peripherality, distance, sequential order, marking, and repetition. According to

<sup>37</sup> Olga Fischer and Max Nanny, "Introduction. Iconicity as a Creative Force in Language Use."

<sup>38</sup> Moreover, we note that onomatopoeia, often classified by iconicists under the category of imagic iconicity, was treated in the same vein by Saussure in the *Course*. Yet, phenomena of imagic iconicity continue to be of primary importance at the discursive level, especially in literature, according to Olga Fischer and Max Nanny, "Introduction. Iconicity as a Creative Force in Language Use," XXII.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> As is customary for iconicists, the boundaries between the *referent* and the *signified* are far from clear. Although defining iconicity as similarity between the signifier and the signified, Fischer and Nanny use Caesar's adage to demonstrate the diagrammatic relationship between the sequence of the three verbs at the formal level and the three events "in the real world," *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> See also Luca Nobile, "Introduction. Formes d'iconicité."

<sup>42</sup> Olga Fischer and Max Nanny, "Introduction. Iconicity as a Creative Force in Language Use," XXIV.

Fischer and Nänny,<sup>43</sup> it was the diagrams of motivation that made the transition possible from the iconicity of ordinary discourse, as initially conceived by Haiman, to the domain of literature.<sup>44</sup>

In the other variant of diagrammaticity – the semantic one – the authors classify metaphors, both cognitive and grammatical. This semantic iconicity based on metaphor is defined by the authors as a source of linguistic creativity, which is, without a doubt, one of the “tools constantly resorted to by poets.”<sup>45</sup>

However, its scope is not limited to literary discourse, since, according to these researchers, it also applies to cases of analogy and certain instances of unidirectional grammaticalization. It is very important to note that for these two types of diagrammatic iconicity – both structural and semantic – “it is the *perceived* relation in meaning between two concepts that leads to the use of the same form or word or the same shape or structure. Sometimes it also works the other way around (i.e., from form to meaning), but this is less common.”<sup>46</sup>

Consequently, according to the distinction proposed by Fischer and Nänny between structural diagrammatic iconicity and semantic diagrammatic iconicity, the adage by Caesar that we are analysing lends itself to being classified in the first category, given that it serves as an example of structural diagrammaticity with a *sequential order* motivation.

## 5. Nöth’s Classification: Exophoric Iconicity versus Endophoric Iconicity

Another useful classification, relevant both to the analysis of the example *veni, vidi, vici* and to other iconic phenomena, is that of Winfried Nöth,<sup>47</sup> who distinguishes between *exophoric iconicity* and *endophoric iconicity*. While the exophoric variant deals, as the first volume of the *Iconicity in Language and Literature* series announced, with cases of *form miming meaning* in iconicity, and is based on the relationship between the sign and the referent in the world or the perception we

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> “Thus, the linear sequence of verbal signs may be used as an iconic diagram to signify succession in time or space, continuity, change (growth and decay), duration, rank, and motion. But syntactic juxtaposition or typographic arrangement may equally function as iconic diagrams to express, for instance, symmetry, balance, relative position, fragmentation, etc. (Nänny 1985). Almost all poetic devices, from typography (Cureton 1986; Nänny 1992), sounds (Epstein 1975, 1978), meter, lineation, and stanza breaks to rhetorical figures (e.g., chiasmus), as well as a large number of narrative techniques, can be fruitfully interpreted in terms of their iconic function – with the all-important proviso, however, that the act of interpretation must always proceed from meaning to form (Epstein 1978: 28) and not the other way around,” in Olga Fischer and Max Nänny, “Introduction. Iconicity as a Creative Force in Language Use,” XXV.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., XXIII.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Winfried Nöth, “Semiotic foundations of iconicity in language and literature,” in *The motivated sign*, edited by Olga Fischer and Max Nänny, coll. *Iconicity in Language and Literature 2* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001), 17-28.

have of it,<sup>48</sup> the endophoric variant of iconicity focuses on the opposite cases, of the *form miming form* type.

Thus, what distinguishes the two types of iconicity in Nöth<sup>49</sup> is their relationship to the linguistic system: the first concerns an extralinguistic relationship, whereas the second concerns a purely intralinguistic relationship. Conversely, as Nänny and Fischer point out,

“we would like to add at this point that, although endophoric iconicity is concerned with resemblances between signs, and not between the sign and the signified, it too involves ‘meaning’.”<sup>50</sup>

Initially, due to the ambiguity of Jakobson’s article, Caesar’s adage, “*veni, vidi, vici*,” was interpreted as a phenomenon of exophoric iconicity, in Nöth’s terminology. This interpretation is based on the fact that the sequence of the three verbs reflects *the ordo naturalis* of the referential events, marking the chronological progression of the three actions.

However, as Nänny and Fischer<sup>51</sup> point out, the theoretical boundaries between these two forms of iconicity proposed by Nöth are not clearly defined. Since endophoric iconicity presupposes a relationship between forms, this relationship in turn becomes another sign, which is linked to another referent:

“the difference between endophoric and exophoric iconicity may be less clear in practice than it is in theory [...], because even endophoric iconicity consists of a structure (form mimicking form), which, combined into a new sign, then mimics a third element (a signified) in the world as we perceive it.”<sup>52</sup>

To a certain extent, we observe that Nöth’s exophoric iconicity partially overlaps with John Haiman’s motivational diagrammatic iconicity and Fischer and Nänny’s structural diagrammatic iconicity.

Nonetheless, according to Nänny and Fischer,<sup>53</sup> who draw on Johansen’s<sup>54</sup> analyses, this same example could also be interpreted through the lens of Nöth’s endophoric iconicity, particularly given the internal phonetic organization of this structure. We will subsequently rely on the argumentation of Nänny and Fischer.<sup>55</sup>

First, endophoric iconicity could be generated by *the crescendo* of assonance in the three verbs, because “[i:] occurs once in *veni* but twice in *vidi* and *vici*) may be considered to reflect the growing momentum of Caesar’s military operations.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Max Nänny and Olga Fischer, “Introduction. *Veni, vidi, vici*,” 2.

<sup>49</sup> Winfried Nöth, “Semiotic foundations of iconicity in language and literature.”

<sup>50</sup> Max Nänny and Olga Fischer, “Introduction. *Veni, vidi, vici*,” 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Jørgen Dines Johansen, “Iconicity in Literature,” *Semiotica* 1-2, 110, vol. 1-2 (1996): 37-55.

<sup>55</sup> Max Nänny and Olga Fischer, “Introduction. *Veni, vidi, vici*,” 3.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Second, this vowel assonance is mirrored at the consonantal level, where “there is a gradual loss of sonority (from [n] to [d] to [k]) in the sequence, ‘suggestive of hastened progression with a final punch in victory’ (Johansen 1996: 48).”<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, the syllabic structure of Caesar’s saying – characterized by a three-word structure alliterating on the [v] sound, with each word consisting of four letters and two syllables containing a consonant and a long vowel – could thus suggest, from a semantic and rhythmic perspective, the simultaneity of the three actions. In his hermeneutic approach, Jakobson also notes that the purported simultaneity of the actions in the tautogram “adds splendor to Caesar’s laconic victory message: *Veni, vidi, vici.*”<sup>58</sup> Nänny and Fischer expand on Jakobson’s initial semantic analysis, emphasizing that

“the phrase consists of three spondees, which lend the short words weight and impact. These similarities and repetitions may semantically imply that the three actions were the same – not only equally swift and equally easy, but equally momentous as well – whereas the alliteration highlights the initial sound of the phrasal climax, *vici* (a kind of Churchillian *V-sign avant la lettre*, so to speak).”<sup>59</sup>

These interpretive attempts, on the one hand by Jakobson himself, and on the other by Nänny and Fischer, highlight areas of transition between forms of grammatical iconicity and certain forms of rhetorical iconicity, a distinction we will address below.

## 6. Müller’s Classification: Grammatical Iconicity *versus* Rhetorical Iconicity

We note that all the typologies examined previously actually manifest in various ways within a single broad domain, namely that of grammatical iconicity. Contrary to this approach, Müller<sup>60</sup> emphasizes that examining this example exclusively from a grammatical perspective – even though the analysis may be influenced by cognition in its relationship between the grammatical level and the referential reality – could be considered a “misuse of a quotation.”<sup>61</sup> First, Müller expresses his astonishment at linguists’ insistence on treating this phenomenon as a mere fact of ordinary language, when it is

“as rhetorical and as far removed from ordinary language as may be. Nobody would, in an ordinary, real-life context, use such language, except when citing it as a quotation. And the use of Caesar’s words with the purpose of illustrating such an evident iconic principle as the correspondence of the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Roman Jakobson, “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics,” 358.

<sup>59</sup> Max Nänny and Olga Fischer, “Introduction. *Veni, vidi, vici.*” 3.

<sup>60</sup> Wolfgang G. Müller, “Iconicity and rhetoric: A note on the iconic force of rhetorical figures in Shakespeare,” in *The motivated sign*, edited by Olga Fischer and Max Nänny, coll. *Iconicity in Language and Literature 2* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001), 305-322.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 305.

temporal sequence of events in real life with the sequence of its representation in language can almost be called a misuse of a quotation.”<sup>62</sup>

In the context of his analysis, it is essential to understand that, for Müller, the rhetorical value inherent in Caesar’s sentence is of paramount importance, because it is part of a series of phonetic and stylistic devices, such as alliteration, assonance, asyndeton, or the distinction between short and long vowels. The rhetorical value is also rooted in the morphophonetic dimension.<sup>63</sup> It should thus be emphasized that, for Müller, grammatical/cognitive value is not sufficient in and of itself, as it is inseparable from the rhetorical aspect. It is from this perspective that he approaches the example *veni, vidi, vici* as a phenomenon of rhetorical iconicity.

## 7. Primary Iconicity versus Secondary Iconicity and Variants

Another distinction frequently used in the taxonomy of iconicity is that which separates primary or first-degree iconicity from secondary or second-degree iconicity. Unlike earlier taxonomies, these categories are characterized by their more *author-specific*, dynamic nature and lack stability or consensus.

Influenced by cognitive linguistics, Johansen’s classification,<sup>64</sup> which distinguishes between first-degree iconicity and second-degree iconicity, is the most widely used by researchers studying this topic. According to Johansen, first-degree iconicity refers to an intralinguistic representational relationship of an extralinguistic phenomenon, whereas second-degree iconicity refers solely to intrasystemic iconicity. In this regard, Johansen’s classification largely overlaps with Nöth’s distinction between exophoric iconicity – which Johansen classifies as first-degree – and endophoric iconicity – which Johansen classifies as second-degree. It should be noted that the analyses of these two authors also exhibit significant similarities. From a chronological perspective, it appears that Johansen’s analysis predates Nöth’s (proposed at the 1999 conference but published only in 2001).

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> “The subject position is emphasized by the fact that the individual elements of the triad consist of first-person-singular verb forms which, through their endings, contribute significantly to the sound structure of the quotation already mentioned. Grammar and sound effect are intertwined in these words. The utterance would lose its subjective verve if it were written in the third person: *Venit, vidit, vicit*. The quotation, which compresses a great deal of meaning into few words, may seem to contradict one of the principles of iconic coding posited by Givón (1995: 49): ‘A larger chunk of information will be given a larger chunk of code.’ But it can also be said that Caesar’s dictum follows Givón’s principle because Caesar suggests – or even pretends – that his victory was a very swift and brief action,” in Wolfgang G. Müller, “Iconicity and rhetoric: A note on the iconic force of rhetorical figures in Shakespeare,” 306.

<sup>64</sup> Jørgen Dines Johansen, “Iconicity in Literature,” 49-51.

However, these descriptive tools proposed by Johansen have not become established as standard and do not have a stable terminological legacy. We note that Tabakowska<sup>65</sup> in turn applies the term ‘primary iconicity’ to image iconicity, considered more direct and perceptual, whereas ‘secondary iconicity’ would be the equivalent of its diagrammatic variant, which is more indirect and perceptually more abstract.

From a perspective primarily influenced by visual semiotics and subsequently applied to the linguistic domain,<sup>66</sup> Göran Sonesson proposes a distinction between primary iconicity and secondary iconicity.

The former implies that the function of the relationship between signs is a consequence of the analysis of *the iconic ground*, where, in Sonesson’s terms, “the perception of an iconic ground existing between two things is one of the reasons for positing the existence of a sign function joining two things together as expression and content.”<sup>67</sup>

As for secondary iconicity,<sup>68</sup> the function of the sign should already be known prior to any analysis of the *iconic ground*: “the knowledge about the existence of a sign function between two things functioning as expression and content is one of the reasons for the perception of an iconic ground between the same things.”<sup>69</sup>

According to De Cuyper<sup>70</sup> and Willems,<sup>71</sup> at the level of language, it is primarily secondary iconicity that is involved, given that it does not cross the boundary of the arbitrariness of the sign

<sup>65</sup> Elżbieta Tabakowska, “Linguistic Expression of Perceptual Relationships: Iconicity as a Principle of Text Organization (A Case Study),” in *Form miming meaning*, edited by Max Nänny and Olga Fischer, coll. *Iconicity in Language and Literature* 1 (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), 409-422.

<sup>66</sup> According to De Cuyper and Willems, the same obstacles that Sonesson observes in visual semiotics apply to the field of linguistic iconicity, which is why they consider that the solution proposed by Sonesson could be useful in overcoming this “apparent stalemate,” Ludovic De Cuyper and Klaas Willems, “Introduction. Naturalness and iconicity in language,” 7.

<sup>67</sup> Göran Sonesson, “The ecological foundations of iconicity,” in *Semiotics Around the World: Synthesis in Diversity. Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress of the IASS, Berkeley, June 12–18, 1994*, edited by Irmengard Rauch and Gerald F Carr (Mouton de Gruyter, 1997), 741.

<sup>68</sup> With the same criteria in mind, albeit on a different corpus, Lecerclé proposes a form of second-degree iconicity that overlaps with Sonesson’s configuration of secondary iconicity. This form of iconicity proposed by Lecerclé is likened by the author to a reflexive iconicity: “At the reflexive end of such a gradient, language is iconic of itself: the word order *exemplifies*, but it also *denotes*, to speak like Nelson Goodman (Goodman 1976), the constitution of the linguistic sequence, its linearity. Reflexive iconicity lies in this paradoxical combination of exemplification (each utterance, taken reflexively, is a token of the linearity of language) and its inverse, denotation: for each utterance not only conforms to the constraints of linearity, it represents them, in so far as it fulfills the reflexive equivalent to the poetic function of language, when the form of the message is the contents of the utterance”, Jean Jacques Lecerclé, “Of Markov chains and upholstery buttons: ‘Moi, madame, votre chien...’” In *The motivated sign*, edited by Olga Fischer and Max Nänny, coll. *Iconicity in Language and Literature* 2 (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001), 299.

<sup>69</sup> Göran Sonesson, “The ecological foundations of iconicity.” 741.

<sup>70</sup> De Cuyper, *Limiting the iconic...*, 74 sqq.

<sup>71</sup> Ludovic De Cuyper and Klaas Willems, “Introduction. Naturalness and iconicity in language.”

and that it presents itself as an additional layer added at the level of discursive productions for an “extra meaning on a textual level,” which we can call, following Bouissac,<sup>72</sup> an iconicity *in the eye of the beholder*.

### Concluding Remarks

An analysis of the various categorisations of the adage “*veni, vidi, vici*” within the framework of studies on linguistic iconicity highlights the central role played by examples in developing a linguistic theory of iconicity, and in developing linguistic theories in general. Far from being mere illustrations, these examples emerge as genuine theoretical vehicles, capable of guiding classifications, stabilizing concepts, and uniting scientific communities around shared references.

The case of César’s formula is particularly revealing in this regard. Its frequent appearance in works stemming from the Jakobsonian tradition has established it as a canonical example, providing a foundation for various conceptualisations of iconicity. However, this canonisation carries the risk of trivialisation, whereby the example becomes a *stock phrase*, invoked almost automatically and sometimes to the detriment of critical reflection on its relevance.

Examining the various typologies – whether concerning the distinctions between image and diagram, the subdivisions proposed by Haiman, or subsequent classifications – thus reveals a dual dynamic. On the one hand, examples contribute to the cohesion and expansion of the field. On the other hand, they perpetuate certain conceptual ambiguities by consolidating sometimes divergent interpretations under the guise of apparent obviousness.

From this perspective, it is clear that the epistemological status of examples in linguistics must be re-examined. Such an approach calls not only for greater vigilance in their use, but also for a broader reflection on the conditions of production and transmission of knowledge in the language sciences. Rather than being mere auxiliaries of theoretical discourse, examples constitute one of its primary sites of elaboration.

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<sup>72</sup> Paul Bouissac, “Iconicity or iconization? Probing the dynamic interface between language and perception,” in *Outside-in – Inside-out*, edited by Costantino Maeder, Olga Fischer and William J. Herlofsky, coll. *Iconicity in Language and Literature 4* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2005), 21.