

# SEMIO-THINK: THEORY OF SEMIOTICS AND SIGNIFYING PRACTICES IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE CLASSROOMS

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## 1. Introduction

Dating back to ancient times (Baer, 1983), semiotics takes its modern foundations from two philosophers, Charles Sander Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure, expressing ideas on semiotics unawarely of each other in different continents (Yücel, 2015). As Danesi puts (2017), semiotics is a “metalanguage” (p. 61) that is enchantingly possible to be applied to a broad range of subject areas. This characteristic renders semiotics a multi and interdisciplinary branch, ranging from the domains of language and culture to philosophy and science. Whatever the subject area is, the primary tendency of semiotic ramifications like “Peircians”, “Lotmanians” and “Greimassians” is to put forward possible theories on “signs”, “culture” and “signification” by the evaluation of relations between signs whether verbal or non-verbal (Landowski, 2015, p. 84). Language and literature, both the cultural heritage of a community, are unsurprisingly under the research area of semiotics since they reflect the combination of signs within these cultures. Besides, they are nested entities because the unique material of literature is language. This fundamentally brings the use of literature in language classrooms (Carrio-Pastor, 2019; Hewings et al., 2016; Lazar, 2009), except for the sole systematic settings of literary education curricula (Blockside, 2000; Chambers & Gregory, 2006; Widdowson, 2013). Accordingly, it is possible to suggest that the primary purpose of this study is to propose one of the aforesaid semiotic approaches, so-called “Greimassian semiotics” (Yücel, 2001, p. 9), as a method of analysis to language and literature classes. Doing this is believed to provide informational and practical insight to both the teachers and the students, who are already concerned with teaching and learning a language and its literature. The reason for choosing the semiotic approach of Algirdas Julien Greimas, the founder of Paris School of Semiotics, among many others, is that it is one of “the first and most developed semiotic theory” (Yücel, 2012, p. 93), which seeks for signification process in literary-narrative artworks. With its goals, research areas and own analysis method, Greimas semiotics has been called “literary-narrative semiotics” (Yücel, 2012, p. 93) since it flourished. Besides, it is also believed in the study that the presentation of information on the application of this method will help students overcome the challenge of seeing problematic areas in literary works that have an idiosyncratic semantic universe created by the logical systematization of signs. Additionally, the conscious act of unfolding the universe of texts will help practitioners to systematize the reading process to increase critical thinking skills and to make the recondite points more explicit and comprehensible. As a signification theory, Literary semiotics requires apprehension of different semantic structures of the texts to cope with difficulties in explaining the complicated interaction between signs, which facilitates understanding the meaning formation in literary texts. However, it has specific rules, terminology, and analysis instruments that are sometimes hard to conceive. Therefore, in the analysis part of the study, the clarifications on the successive steps and tools of a systematized literary semiotic analysis will be made along with the instructional questions to be followed

by teachers and students. For the semiotic analysis, “The Last Leaf” (1995), which is one of the famous short stories of William Sydney Porter, a well-known American writer with the pseudonym “O. Henry”, has been selected. The analysis will be performed under three headings, each indicating a specific meaning layer of text. These are respectively discursive, narrative and deep levels.

## **2. Sign, System, and Meaning Production Process**

Semiotics, in general, seeks answers to questions such as how the meaningful whole is structured in various meaning layers, what the functions of these formative factors in these layers are, and how these factors make up a whole by articulating each other. There are two paths in semiotics as meaning formation process and analysis process. The former one, which is called “generative trajectory” (Greimas & Courtés, 1982, p. 135), contains the processes that Greimas’ semiotics design puts forward in terms of the producer of the text (writer). According to this design, the text’s formation starts in the deep layer where implicit or ideologic meaning (the actual message intended to be given) exists. It continues with the half-realized structures and ends with the meaning in the surface structure where its referents are located directly in the real world.

According to Greimas, the formation process of every text that has become a whole takes place with the interaction of three different meaning layers. These layers are descriptive, narrative and thematic planes. For Greimas, the formation of every text and the development of its meaning universe postulate a systematic process starting from the thematic plane developing over the narrative and descriptive planes. The text becomes meaningful with the help of this process which start from abstract concepts and develops on concrete concepts and structures (Kalelioğlu, 2020, p. 77).

For text analysis, in which semiotics is the core, the conductor of the lesson can attempt to analyse the text, starting with the structures that possess abstract meaning. However, this case complicates the process in terms of in-class implementations. One of the most important reasons for this is that the student might not be dominant in terms of the culture, history and daily use of the target language. Another reason is the meanings of the signs formed with the reconciliation in the related language society. In this sense, Roland Barthes assumes two main layers of language in terms of meaning. One of these is the denotation which expresses the dictionary meaning of the words, and the other is the connotation that takes shape in a particular society/culture. Louis Hjelmslev’s signification form which is the form of the narrative/essence of the narrative and is based on the notions such as “form of content/substance of content” (1969, pp. 47-60) and signifier/signified by Ferdinand de Saussure is the source of inspiration to the denotation/connotation subject on which Barthes worked.

According to Hjelmslev (1969), while the form of expression equal to Saussure’s signifier is the written or audial expression, the substance of expression is a pile of sounds in which language has not gained a structural feature. In this sense, while the form of expression is related to phonology, the substance of expression is related to phonetic knowledge. On the other hand, the form of content, which is the equivalent of Saussure’s signified, is the solid form of the substance specified by the society with reconciliation. In other words, it is the embodiment of the form of content. The substance of content can be described as the non-

linguistic realities that have not gained any structural feature. The substance of content represents the set of values that the majority of society has determined. For this reason, the analysis and description of the substance of content concern other science branches such as sociology, philosophy, psychology and poetics.

As for the form of content, it emerges as the embodiment of the substance of content, as literary, scientific, all kinds of expression. Considering the suggestion of Hjelmslev in the context of sign/reference, it can be said that the reference of the linguistic sign is the form of the content. However, it can also be stated that the realization of these signs depends largely on the substance of the content. Therefore, the correct realization of a linguistic reference is only possible with the state that both signifier and signified understand the reference concept. In this sense, while the form of the content depends on lexicology and morphology, the essence of the content depends on semantics. The efficiency of a healthy relationship between the signifier and signified is related to the substance of the content.

Based on the substance of content and the form created depending on this substance, the form of content is linked to cultural and encyclopaedical knowledge of the referent which shapes language. At this point, Barthes's referential meaning/connotation comes into prominence. According to Barthes, "every signification system has a narrative and content plane. Signification is in the connection between these two planes. Nevertheless, he asserts that the meaningful system that has been formed with the help of the connection between content and narrative planes forms another system and the first system becomes an element of the secondary system" (1979, p. 87). From this point of view, any semantic deviation does not occur because the meaning acquired from the first system is the referential meaning of the sign; however, it would not be justified to state that the same case is valid for the sign that has connotation/associative meaning. Therefore, the "primary system that contains referential meaning becomes the signifier or narrative plane of the secondary system in which connotation forms" (Barthes, 1979, p. 88). Nonetheless, it is also worth stating that no matter how often connotation systems occur and how much the secondary system contains the primary system, connotation systems cannot eliminate referential meaning systems. The reason behind this case is that if a referential meaning system does not exist, the secondary system, which varies greatly in different individuals, societies and cultures, cannot get a chance to emerge.

Society constantly develops secondary meaning systems based on the primary systems that human language offers itself. This forming act which develops in an open or closed rationalistic manner is closely related to a real historic anthropology. The connotation which is a system on its own contains signifiers, signified and a formation (signification) which connects these (Barthes, 1970, p. 89)

Based on this data, it can be stated that the difficulty of in-class processes in text analysis is closely associated with the systems in which connotations are created. Because of the reasons stated above, choosing an analysis method from abstract concepts to solid concepts for text analysis processes will leave the conductors and the course students in a difficult position, especially in classes where a foreign language is used.

So, what can be done at this point? Greimas's aforementioned generative process can be reversed. It is important to consider Denis Bertrand's suggestion while doing so. Bertrand

suggests “a structural arrangement opposite Greimas’s generative process as the analysis process” (2000, p. 29). This process offers an analysis method as a route map from solid to abstract. As elaborated in the next section, it is possible to correctly analyse the texts regardless of their type with the help of this route map, starting from solid structures whose texts are apparent and which can be seen at first glance and developing with abstract structures.

### **3. Analysis of O. Henry’s “The Last Leaf”**

According to Bertrand’s analysis model, the discursive, narrative-semiotic and thematic structures of a narrative should be analysed. It is of great importance to specify the forming concepts of a construct based on this theme. Bertrand stresses that thematic isotopy that consist of person, space and time in the discursive structure; narrative system, actantial syntax and modal structures in the narrative-semiotic structure; primary meaning in the thematic structure should be sought. Thus, in an in-class activity to be conducted with the help of semiotics, an analysis strategy will be adopted, which develops from known to unknown, visible to invisible, open (solid) structures to closed (abstract) structures. These questions to be specified will guide both the conductor and the students. In this sense, three different analysis planes, analysis tools, implementation and questions related to this implementation will be handled as descriptive, semiotic-narrative and thematic planes.

#### **3.1. Descriptive level analysis**

Firstly, it is necessary to specify the person, space and time that form the fiction of the narrative in the descriptive meaning plane. Some questions can be asked to define forming concepts in the solid plane. The goal of this is to determine the referents of signs that can be seen at first glance and direct students to develop the analysis process from easy to complicated.

As Yücel states:

Our world is a dynamic horizon as a person who perceives himself exists. [...] It can be said that three factors have a function on all kinds of knowledge about the world: the world itself (space), the subject that handles it (person) and a moment where both take place (time). With the alteration of one of these three factors, the world is not the same anymore (Yücel, 1979, p.11).

There are three main forming factors in the descriptive meaning plane. The arrangements and descriptive features of these factors can be exhibited:

*1st question: Who are the persons in the narrative, and what are their descriptive features?*

*2nd question: What is the space in the narrative, and what are the descriptive features it?*

*3rd question: What is the time in the narrative, and what are the descriptive features?*

*4th question: Describe the thematic roles of narrative persons.*

While the person, space and time (1st, 2nd and 3rd questions) attempt to uncover features that can be inferred in the first read, (4th) question attempts to find out thematic roles imposed on persons. The answers to the (4th) question will give us clues about what kind of a function and duty persons are fictionalized in the narrative. It is possible to form a table that gives answers to these four questions.

**Table 1:** Discursive level analysis (Adapted from Kalelioğlu, 2020, pp. 92-94)

		Descriptive features	Thematic roles
Person	Joanna (Johnsy)	A mite of a little woman with blood thinned (Henry, 1995, p. 179). Sick and weak (p. 182).	A young painter who falls ill with pneumonia. Sue's roommate. From California (p. 178).
	Sue (Sudie)		An artist who earns a living by drawing illustrations for magazines. Johnsy's roommate. From Maine (p. 178).
	Behrman	Over sixty years old, small and weak, has a long gray beard (p. 181). Weak and ill. Dead (p. 183).	An old painter who lives in the same building with Joanna and Sue (p. 181).
	The Doctor	Busy, has a shaggy, grey eyebrow (p. 179).	Doctor who takes care of Joanna (p. 179).
Space		Old Greenwich Village in New York City, building/s hunting for north windows and eighteenth-century gables and Dutch attics and low rents (pp. 178-180). A studio at the top of a squatty three-story brick (p. 178). A bare, dreary yard, the blank side of the brick house twenty feet away. An old, old ivy vine, gnarled and decayed at the roots, climbed half-way up the brick wall (p. 180). Dimly-lighted den below (p. 181).	
Time	Autumn	November (p. 179). Cold rain was falling, mingled with snow (p. 182).	

Considering Table 1, person, space and time can be defined in general. Joanna, Sue, Mr Behrman and Doctor are seen as the narrative persons, the house Joanna and Sue share, which is located in the district of Greenwich, New York, as the space and fall as the time of the narrative.

As for the thematic roles of the narrative persons;

**Joanna** is a young painter who lives with Sue and lives by the small-scale painting jobs:

At the top of a squatty, three-story brick Sue and Johnsy had their studio. 'Johnsy' was familiar for Joanna. One was from Maine, the other from California. They had met at the table d'hôte of an Eighth Street 'Delmonico's,' and found their tastes in art, chicory salad and bishop sleeves so congenial that the joint studio resulted (Henry, 1995, pp. 178-179).

Joanna, who has met Sue before and has almost the same tastes, is a pessimistic character who has almost given up on life and her ideal due to pneumonia. "Mr Pneumonia was not what you would call a chivalric old gentleman. [...] Johnsy he smote; and she lay, scarcely moving, on her painted iron bedstead, looking through the small Dutch window-panes at the blank side of the next brick house" (179). Joanna has dreams and passions as an artist. "She-she wanted to paint the Bay of Naples some day" (179). Nonetheless, the situation in which she landed strips her away from her dreams and passions. Joanna considers her life span the same as the life span of a few leaves struggling to survive on the branch of a weak, yellowed ivy she sees

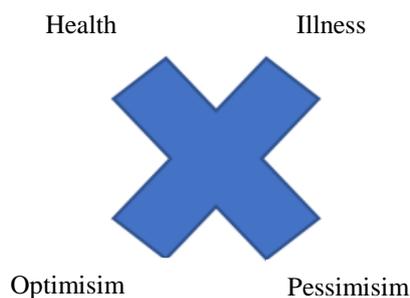
from her room window on a winter day. “Leaves. On the ivy vine. When the last one falls, I must go too. I’ve known that for three days. Didn’t the doctor tell you?” (180).

Another point about Joanna in the descriptive plane is the alteration between the start and end of the narrative. There are different types of situations in narratives. This situation is also valid for the main narrative person Joanna in O. Henry’s narrative. “I’ve been a bad girl, Sudie,” said Johnsy. It is a sin to want to die” (183).

**Table 2:** Situation-transformation-situation for the main narrative person, Joanna

<b>ISituation I</b>	<b>Transformation</b>	<b>Situation II</b>
Pessimism / sickness	→	Optimism / wellness

As it is clear in Table 2, Joanna is as a sick and desperate woman (state I) in the descriptive plane of the narrative. However, she has undergone the situation changes (state II) thanks to the help of the transformations. “Your little lady has made up her mind that she’s not going to get well” (179). The most important change in terms of the main narrative person here is that pessimism becomes optimism, and sickness state becomes health or wellness. In terms of semiotics, it is possible to form an opposition and assume these signs given in Table 2 are triggers of one another.



**Figure 1:** Contrasting circumstances affecting Joanna’s life

It is possible to see Joanna’s transition from one state to another in the opposing signs encountered in the descriptive plane analysis in Table 2. From this, it is possible to deduce that optimism is necessary for a healthy life. As also stated in the same table, a transformation is in question here. Joanna transforms from a pessimistic character who gave up on life and considered her own life the same as the life of a leaf struggling to survive on the branch of weak, yellowed ivy into an optimistic character. This transformation is an essential factor in her unhealthy state becoming a healthy state. It is possible to see this contradictive circumstance and transformation in Figure 1 as well.

One of the thematic roles of Sue is that she is a painter like Joanna and a helpful person. Sue also makes her living by painting. “Young artists must pave their way to Art by drawing pictures for magazine stories that young authors write to pave their way to Literature” (Henry, 1995, p. 180). Sue appears as a person who gives strength and support to Joanna during her recovery process. “She arranged her board and began a pen-and-ink drawing to illustrate a magazine story. She heard a low sound, several times repeated. She went quickly to the bedside” (pp. 179–180). Sue is curious about Joanna and stands by her no matter how busy

she is. She ignores any bad thoughts she hears from Joanna about death and invites her to be optimistic every time. “Oh, I never heard of such nonsense, complained Sue, with magnificent scorn. [...] Try to take some broth now, and let Sudie go back to her drawing, so she can sell the editor man with it, and buy port wine for her sick child, and pork chops for her greedy self” (p. 180). Sue is not only the person who does the same job as Joanna or just shares a house with her but is also an essential narrative person who provides support for her recovery.

It would not be correct to state that Sue has the same transformation process as Joanna (see Table 2) because there is no difference of the states between the start and end of the narrative. Therefore, situational equality is in question in terms of Sue (state I = state II), reflected in Table 2.

Mr Behrman is the other significant person in the narrative. Mr Behrman is also a painter, just like Joanna and Sue and lives in the same building. “Old Behrman was a painter who lived on the ground floor beneath them. He was past sixty and had a Michael Angelo’s Moses beard curling down from the head of a satyr along the body of an imp” (p. 181). Mr Behrman appears in the narrative as someone who has devoted almost all of his life to painting but has not achieved any success. “Behrman was a failure in art” (p. 181). Nevertheless, he is a narrative person who always tries to help and protect Joanna and Sue as much as he can. “Try to sleep’, said Sue. ‘I must call Behrman up to be my model for the old hermit miner” (p. 181). Mr Behrman “regarded himself as especial mastiff-in-waiting to protect the two young artists in the studio above” (p. 181). Like Joanna, Mr Behrman also dreamed of making the work of art that would one day carry him to the top. “He still talked of his coming masterpieces” (p. 181).

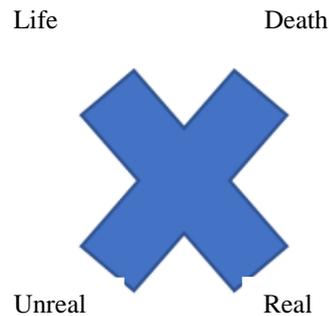
State-transformation-state relation of Joanna that appears in Table 2 is also valid for Mr. Behrman.

**Table 3:** Situation-transformation-situation for the narrative person, Mr. Behrman

Situation I	Transformation	Situation II
The dream of making his masterpiece/ being alive	→	Realizing his dream / not being alive

Appearing in the narrative as a helpful neighbour and a painter who dreams of making his masterpiece one day, Mr Behrman’s state changes from the beginning to the end of the narrative. At the beginning of the narrative, he is a benevolent painter. Despite being old and weak, he believes that he will produce unforgettable work one day. “He had always been about to paint a masterpiece but had never yet begun it” (Henry, 1995, p. 181). After a while, this dream of the old painter comes true. “Ah, darling, it’s Behrman’s masterpieces” (p. 183).

The most important change from the point of narrative person here is that the state of life at the beginning of the narrative transforms into death. Again, there is a contrary situation here in terms of semiotics.



**Figure 2:** Mr. Behrman’s situational transformation

Mr Behrman’s good deed to Joanna results in him making his masterpiece and make Joanna hold on to life. On the other hand, this deed caused the death of the old painter. Therefore, depending on the thematic roles taking place in the descriptive plane, the narrative person Mr Behrman saved the main narrative person’s –Joanna– life in exchange for his own life.

Lastly, a doctor who examines Joanna appears in the descriptive meaning plane. “One morning, the busy doctor invited Sue into the hallway with a shaggy, grey eyebrow” (p. 179). The Doctor appears as a narrative person who gives advice for Joanna to hold on to life after doing what he can and does not undergo any state changes. “I will do all that science, so far as it may filter through my efforts, can accomplish. But whenever my patient begins to count the carriages in her funeral procession, I subtract 50 per cent from the curative power of medicines” (p. 179).

In this section, it has been attempted to analyse the descriptive plane with the help of four questions, and a model has been presented to implementers. Therefore, the factors that form the descriptive meaning plane of O. Henry’s “The Last Leaf” have been analysed in terms of person, space, time and the descriptive roles of persons. In the next step, the narrative-semiotic structures, a higher grade that forms the meaning universe of the narrative, will be analysed.

### 3.2. Semiotic-narrative level analysis

In terms of semiotics, each narrative has a certain system within its own structural arrangement. With the help of this system, the narrative becomes a meaningful whole and creates its meaning universe. Just like in the descriptive plane, there are a few elements that construct the semantic universe in the narrative plane. One of the most important concepts here is that the actant –active subject=subject of doing. This person, who was previously encountered as a person/actor in the descriptive level, is now an actant in the narrative-semiotic plane.

There are factors, which are different from the linguistic structures, to constitute the narrative structures. One of these factors is the actants who mobilize the narrative by their functions. Each narrative person determined at the narrative level is an actant who has a function in the text (Kalelioğlu, 2018, pp. 135–136).

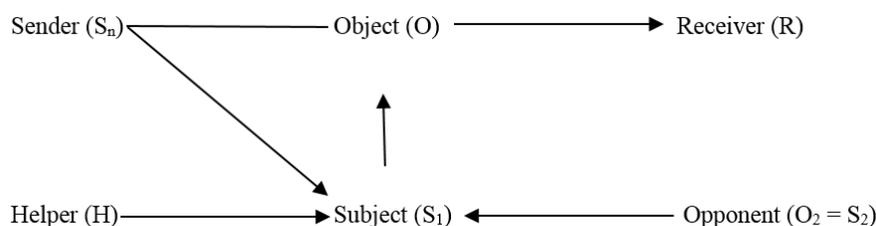
Narrative persons determined in the descriptive level and have function in the narrative such as Joanna, Sue, Mr. Behrman and the Doctor are also the actants. The actantial states of these persons may change throughout the narrative.

According to Greimas and Courtés, there are six actants acting in the narrative plane. These are “subject/object, sender/receiver, and helper/opponent” (1982, pp. 5-6). A narrative person can undertake several actantial duties at the same time:

Individual, social and environmental factors and situations determine people’s actions in real life. This situation is also the same for the actants in the narrative. In other words, as a result of the interaction of the individual, social, and environmental factors, an actant can turn into another actant in the narrative (Kalelioğlu, 2018, p. 136).

Narrative persons’ function and their acts are more important than who they are in the narrative plane. In other words, the actions that guide the narrative are in the foreground.

The actions of the actants and consequences play an important role in the continuity of the narrative because the direction of the narrative depends on these facts. For instance, each action that results in a positive consequence creates another narrative programme (NP). A narrative programme refers to the sequential relationship of events in a narrative that follow each other in a certain order. “A narrative programme expresses the abstract representation of syntactic relations in the narrative and the transformations of the word at the superficial semantic plane (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. 91). The narrative programme is divided into two as *main* narrative programme and *sub*-narrative programme. Each sub-narrative programme supports the continuation of the main narrative programme. Therefore, the actants and their actions play a critical role in this continuity or discontinuity of the narrative.



**Figure 3:** Actantial scheme

It is possible to adapt the actantial schema in Figure 3 into O. Henry’s narrative. While doing that, it is also possible to determine different types of sub-programmes. Accordingly, the actantial schema can be reproduced many times regarding the possible circumstances in the narrative. However, in order not to create much confusion and to activate the specific data gathered in the previous semantic layer, our starting point can be the narrative programmes resulting from the states in Figures 2 and 3. Consequently, situational presentation formed in these two figures is related to the two important narrative persons. Joanna and Mr. Behrman play a great role in the transformations that take place in the main narrative theme.

Each narrative usually has three stages as *initial*, *development*, and *final*. Here, it can be asserted that the initial and final stages are shorter than the development stage. The most important reason for this is that these stages include situational information occurring at the beginning and end of the narrative. In other words, it is possible to relate these two phases at the beginning and the end of the narrative with the (state I and state II) (see Tables 2 and 3). It is necessary to underline that everything such as chain of events, actants, actions, encounters, and the like, that led the narrative move from one condition (state I) to another (state II) as a result of the actions of the actants taking place in the development stage. It is also possible to

relate the development stage to the part where the transformations occur. In this sense, the initial and final stages are the shortest stages in terms of the narrative whereas the development stage makes up the longest or densest part.

The narrative can be divided into stages in terms of its initial, development and final status. It is vital to consider the two narrative persons, who direct the narrative with their acts.

1<sup>st</sup> Question: *Create a table that exhibits the stages of the narrative in the context of main narrative person/s.*

2<sup>nd</sup> Question: *Determine the changes as state/transformation/new state encountered in the narrative programme.*

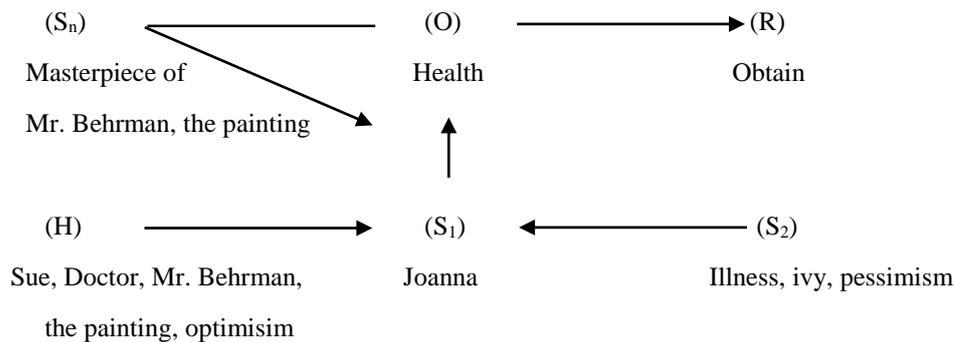
**Table 4:** Narrative stages and situational oppositions in the context of the narrative theme

Situation/Transformation /New situation →	Narrative stages →	Initial	Development	Final
	Actants ↓			
Situation/Transformation /New situation →	Joanna	Joanna has fallen ill.	At first, she does not make any effort to recover and waits for the day she will die pessimistically.	But then she puts her pessimism aside and does her best to heal.
		Unhealthy	→	Healthy
Situation/Transformation /New situation →	Mr. Behrman	The old but healthy helpful man, full of desire to one day make his own masterpiece, always helps Joanna and Sue.	The old man learns from Sue that Joanna thinks her own lifespan is the same as a leaf fighting for life on decaying ivy.	The old painter rushes to help Joanna to hold on to life and heal at the cost of his own life.
		Healthy	→	Unhealthy

In Table 4, it is possible to see the answers to both questions asked at the level of narrative structure plane above. For the 1<sup>st</sup> question, the narrative stages and decisive situations and transformations have been determined according to two important narrative characters – Joanna and Mr. Behrman– encountered in the narrative. To provide an answer for the 2<sup>nd</sup> question, the opposing state/transformation/new state features of both actors encountered in the narrative programme have been expressed. According to this, the sickness process which is unhealthy for Joanna is healthy for Mr. Behrman / the transformation process which is healthy for Joanna is unhealthy for Mr. Behrman. Therefore, it can be asserted that there is an opposition in the transformation of the subjects. These opposite states will be discussed in this section with the help of an actantial schema.

Based on the Table 4, which shows the basic programme of the narrative, the relationship between two important narrative persons and the situational transformations, the actions of both actants and their relations with other actants can be examined in Greimas’s actantial schema.

3<sup>rd</sup> Question: *Explain the relationship between the main narrative person Joanna and other actant/s.*



**Figure 4:** Relational values of the actant Joanna

As an answer for the 3<sup>rd</sup> question; in Figure 4, the sender (S<sub>n</sub>) makes an agreement with the subject (S<sub>1</sub>). This agreement is about the value object (O) getting healthier (R). In this case, Joanna either abides by the agreement she makes with the sender, regains her health and be rewarded by the sender or not –getting well or be punished. As can be understood from Figure 4, Joanna (S<sub>1</sub>) is not alone, because there are both helpers (H) that enable Joanna to reach her goals and opponents (S<sub>2</sub>) that keep Joanna away from her aim.

Examples for opponents (S<sub>2</sub>):

“In November a cold, unseen stranger, whom the doctors called **Pneumonia**, stalked about the colony, touching one here and there with **his icy finger**. Over on the East Side this ravager strode boldly, smiting **his victims** by scores. [...] Johnsy **he smote**; and she lay, scarcely moving, on her painted iron bedstead” (Henry, 1995, p. 179).

“An old, **old ivy vine**, gnarled and decayed at the roots, climbed half-way up the brick wall. The cold breath of autumn had stricken **its leaves** from the vine until its skeleton branches clung, almost bare, to the crumbling bricks” (p. 180).

Leaves. On the ivy vine. **When the last one falls I must go too**. I’ve known that for three days. Didn’t the doctor tell you?” (p. 180). “There goes another. No, **I don’t** want any broth. That leaves just four. I want to see the last one fall before it gets dark. **Then I’ll go too**” (p. 180). “It will fall to-day, and I shall die at the same time (p. 182).

As seen in the examples above, the obstacles (S<sub>2</sub>) holding Joanna (S<sub>1</sub>) to regain (R) her health (O) are respectively pneumonia, ivy with rotten and falling leaves and Joanna’s pessimistic opinions about herself. As stated before, it is possible to come across a narrative person as an actant that undertakes various duties. Here, Joanna is seen as a subject (S<sub>1</sub>) that attempts to reach the object of value and as an opponent (S<sub>2</sub>). Joanna, at first, does not make effort because she considers her fate as the same with the fate of the falling leaves of decaying ivy, until her helpers lay their hands on the situation.

Examples for helpers (H):

Oh, **I never heard of such nonsense**,’ complained **Sue**, with magnificent scorn. ‘What have old ivy leaves to do with your getting well? And you used to love that vine’ (p. 180). “Johnsy, dear,’ said **Sue**, bending over her, ‘will you promise me to keep your eyes closed, and not look out of the window until I am done working?’ (p. 181). “**Sue found Behrman** smelling strongly of juniper berries in his dimly-lighted den below. [...] **She told him** of Johnsy’s fancy, and how she feared

she would, indeed, light and fragile as a leaf herself, float away when her slight hold upon the world grew weaker” (p. 181). “Dear, dear!” said **Sue**, leaning her worn face down to the pillow; ‘**think of me, if you won’t think of yourself. What would I do?**’ (Henry, 1995, p. 182).

“Well, it is the weakness, then,” said **the doctor**. ‘I will do all that science, so far as it may filter through my efforts, can accomplish’ (p. 179).

**Old Behrman**, with his red eyes plainly streaming, shouted his contempt and derision for such idiotic imaginings. ‘Vass!’ **he cried**. ‘Is dere people in de world mit der foolishness to die because leafs dey drop off from a confounded vine? I haf not heard of such a thing (p. 181).

**It is the last one,**’ said Johnsy. ‘I thought **it would surely fall during the night.**’ [...] **The ivy leaf was still there.** Johnsy lay for a long time looking at it. And then **she called to Sue.** ‘**I’ve been a bad girl,** Sudie,’ said Johnsy. ‘Something has made that last leaf stay there to show me how wicked I was. **It is a sin to want to die** (p. 183).

While it is seen that Sue, Doctor, Mr. Behrman are Joanna’s supporters (H) who help her regain her health, which is the value object, her sickness, ivy with the falling leaves and her pessimistic state are the opponents (S<sub>2</sub>).

In Figure 4, there is not much the Doctor can do for Joanna, who has already gotten at the beginning of the narrative. Because the Doctor did his best medically and left the rest to Joanna. There are opponents and helpers of the subject trying to realize its action. The action of the subject attempting to have the value object will end up either with success or failure. Accordingly, the subject (S<sub>1</sub>) will either abide by the agreement she made with the sender (G<sub>n</sub>) and reach the object of value in order to finalize the narrative programme positively (S<sub>1</sub> ∧ O ∨ S<sub>2</sub>)<sup>1</sup>, or not reach the object of value and cause the programme to end negatively (S<sub>1</sub> ∨ O ∧ S<sub>2</sub>)<sup>2</sup>.

It is a sin to want to die. You may bring me a little broth now, and some milk with a little port in it, and- no; bring me a hand-mirror first; and then pack some pillows about me, and I will sit up and watch you cook (p. 183).

Even chances,’ said the doctor, talking Sue’s thin, shaking hand in his. ‘With good nursing you’ll win (p. 183).

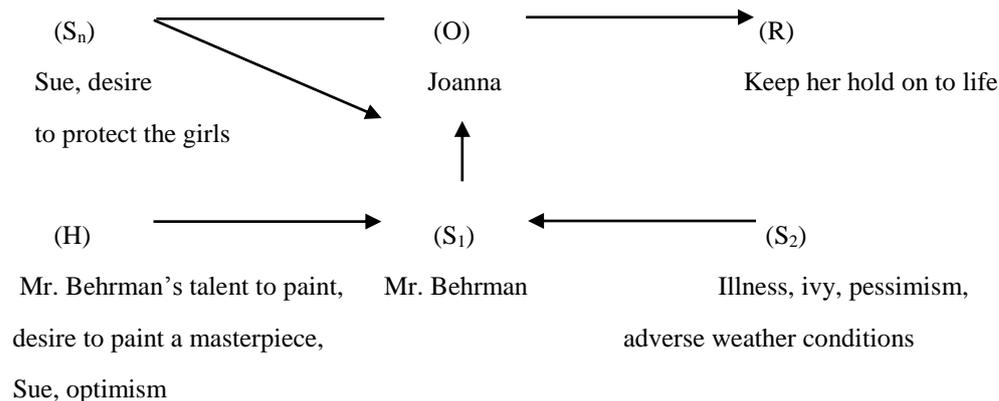
The next day the doctor said to Sue: ‘She’s out of danger. You’ve won. Nutrition and care now – that’s all (p. 183).

Based on Figure 4, it can be seen that Joanna (S<sub>1</sub>) reaches the object of value and completed the narrative programme positively (S<sub>1</sub> ∧ O ∨ S<sub>2</sub>).

4<sup>th</sup> Question: *Create an actantial scheme for Mr. Berhman, an important supporter of the main narrative person, based on the context of the narrative programme in Figure 4 and reveal the relationship of Mr Behrman with other actants.*

<sup>1</sup> Subject of state is shown by; S<sub>1</sub> (subject) ∧ (junction) O (object) ∨ (disjunction) S<sub>2</sub> (opponent). This formula shows that Joanna attains her aim, and she succeeds the narrative programme positively.

<sup>2</sup> Joanna does not attain her value object.



**Figure 5:** Relational values of the acting actant Mr. Behrman

As an answer for the 4<sup>th</sup> question, the subject of doing or actant of the actantial schema is Mr. Behrman. The first actant that activates the subject of doing is Sue, who is the sender and the helper of this schema. Nonetheless, the action of Sue to activate the subject of doing results from her being as a sender (S<sub>n</sub>) not as a helper (H). Therefore, Sue as a sender (S<sub>n</sub>), informs Mr. Behrman (S<sub>1</sub>) about Joanna's state and expresses her sadness.

Sue found Behrman smelling strongly of juniper berries in his dimly-lighted den below. [...] She told him of Johnsy's fancy, and how she feared she would, indeed, light and fragile as a leaf herself, float away when her slight hold upon the world grew weaker (Henry, 1995, p. 181).

Upon this news, Mr. Behrman (S<sub>1</sub>) gets upset and feels the necessity to do something because the old man cares about the object of value Joanna (O) and her sender Sue (S<sub>n</sub>) living in the same building. "For the rest he was a fierce little old man, who scoffed terribly at softness in anyone, and who regarded himself as especial mastiff-in-waiting to protect the two young artists in the studio above" (p. 181).

Sue informs Mr. Behrman about Joanna's situation and he takes up protecting the girls as an actant (subject). Mr. Behrman (S<sub>1</sub>) wants to save the value object –Joanna (O)– from the desperate state that she is in, and he wants her to hold on to the life again (R). The agreement between the sender and the subject of doing depends entirely upon this.

As soon as Mr. Behrman (S<sub>1</sub>) receives the news, he goes to their houses with Sue (H). After this stage, it is possible to consider Sue as Mr Behrman's supporting actant. Mr. Behrman (S<sub>1</sub>) models for free in his free time and watches over the girls. "You are just like a woman!" yelled Behrman. "Who said I will not bese? Go on. I come mit you. For half an hour I haf been trying to say dot I am ready to bese" (p. 182).

Mr. Behrman (S<sub>1</sub>) is not only a helpful person but also a talented (H) painter, who wants to make his own masterpiece one day. "He had been always about to paint a masterpiece, but had never yet begun it" (p. 181). "Some day I will paint a masterpiece, and we shall all go away" (p. 182).

The subject of doing, in Figure 5, attempts to save the value object (O) from the pessimistic (S<sub>2</sub>) state of mind and live her life without them (R) after the agreement he made with the sender as expressed in Table 4. While doing this, he has a helper that supports the subject. These are the subject's ability to paint, his desire to one day make his own masterpiece, Sue

and her optimistic perspective on life (H). On the other hand, there are opponents that do not want the subject to reach the value object. These opponents include the sickness that lays up Joanna and makes her unhappy; Joanna's feeling of despair resulting from this sickness; the ivy triggering this feeling; and bad weather conditions (S<sub>2</sub>).

Johnsy was sleeping when they went upstairs. Sue pulled the shade down to the window-sill and motioned Behrman into the other room. In there they peered out the window fearfully at the ivy vine. Then they looked at each other for a moment without speaking (Henry, 1995, p. 182).

The old painter (S<sub>1</sub>) who enters the house with Sue (H) comes up with a brilliant idea. Despite the cold and rainy weather, Mr. Behrman (S<sub>1</sub>) puts this idea into practice without awaking Joanna (O). "A persistent, cold rain was falling, mingled with snow. Behrman, in his old blue shirt, took his seat as the hermit-miner on an upturned kettle for a rock" (p. 182).

The subject of doing works his magic under the cold and rainy weather all night and achieves his purpose. Accepting the end of her own life as the end of the life of the last leaf struggling to live on the rotten ivy, and never giving up on this idea, Joanna sees that the leaf clings tenaciously to the ivy against all the odds in the morning of that stormy, cold and rainy night.

But, lo! after the beating rain and fierce gusts of wind that had endured through the livelong night, there yet stood out against the brick wall one ivy leaf'. [...] It was the last on the vine. 'It is the last one,' said Johnsy. 'I thought it would surely fall during the night. I heard the wind. It will fall today, and I shall die at the same time (Henry, 1995, p. 182).

Firstly, continuing to be pessimistic, she thinks that the leaf will not be able to withstand the storm and the severity of the rain one day, and she waits curiously for it to fall, just as she waits for her own death.

When it was light enough Johnsy, the merciless, commanded that the shade be raised. The ivy leaf was still there. Johnsy lay for a long time looking at it. And then she called to Sue, who was stirring her chicken broth over the gas stove. 'I've been a bad girl, Sudie,' said Johnsy. 'Something has made that last leaf stay there to show me how wicked I was. It is a sin to want to die (Henry, 1995, p. 183).

Witnessing a small leaf's struggle for survival in winter, the value object Joanna takes a lesson from this situation. The subject of doing Mr. Behrman (S<sub>1</sub>) has achieved to save the object Joanna (O) from despair in spite of the bad weather conditions (S<sub>2</sub>) and has made her accept that her fate is not the same with the fate of a leaf on the branch of a rotten ivy.

An hour later she said – 'Sudie, some day I hope to paint the Bay of Naples.' The doctor came in the afternoon, and Sue had an excuse to go into the hallway as he left. 'Even chances,' said the doctor, talking Sue's thin, shaking hand in his. 'With good nursing you'll win (Henry, 1995, p. 183).

In spite of the opponents such as bad weather conditions, pessimism, sickness and the ivy, Mr. Behrman (S<sub>1</sub>) completed the actantial schema in Figure 5 positively and this results in Joanna's favour.

I have something to tell you, white mouse,' she said. 'Mr. Behrman died of pneumonia today in hospital. He was ill only two days. The janitor found him on the morning of the first day in his room downstairs helpless with pain. His shoes and clothing were wet through and icy cold. They couldn't imagine where he had been on such a dreadful night. And then they found a lantern, still lighted, and a ladder that had been dragged from its place, and some scattered brushes, and a palette with green and yellow colours mixed on it, and - look out the window, dear, at the last ivy

leaf on the wall. Didn't you wonder why it never fluttered or moved when the wind blew? Ah, darling, it's Behrman's masterpiece- he painted it there the night that the last leaf fell (Henry, 1995, p. 183).

As can be understood from the excerpt, the subject, Mr Behrman (S1), teaches a young girl that she can overcome any difficulty she comes across with optimism, faith and struggle and that she should not sink into despair. Succeeding in keeping the value object alive by adhering to the agreement he makes with the sender, the subject of doing, Mr Behrman (S1), succeeds in making the masterpiece he always dreamed of at the cost of his own life. In this sense, the subject (S1) achieved the object and caused the narrative to favour the main narrative person ( $S1 \wedge O \vee S2$ ).

The data obtained here is also the explanation for the opposition states seen in Tables 1 and 2. The answer as to how and why the state-transformation-new state in Tables 2 and 3 occur is in this section, in which actantial schemata formed in Figures 4 and 5 are evaluated.

In this sense, it is possible to deduce:

It is necessary to ascribe meaning for the state-transformation-new state in Table 2. However, the meaning in the descriptive plane cannot go beyond the signifier (word). Therefore, the signification to be conducted in detail depends on the actants examined in the narrative plane, their relationships with each other, actions, and these aspects' cause-effect relationships. Thus, transformation to a new state in Table 2 is possible with the help of Mr Behrman appearing as a sender and helper in Figure 4 and as the subject of doing in Figure 5.

When we consider the state-transformation-new state presentation in Table 3, it can be seen that Mr Behrman is faced with the desire of producing his own masterpiece. This situation takes place as an action in Figure 5. It is possible to see Mr Behrman's transition from one state to another with the cause-effect relationship in the actantial schemata. Accordingly, the facts that result in the aforementioned transformation are Mr Behrman's work as the sender (Sn), Mr Behrman himself, and his positive world-view as the helper (H). Figure 5 also plays a vital role in the transformation of states. According to the figure, the causes that made his state transform into another are his wish to protect the girls who are the senders (Sn), his positive perspective, his ability to paint and his actions as the subject of doing (S1).

Meaning is formed by the articulation of elements in the same system. Every articulation is the result of a transformation. This transformation refers to the transition of any formative element from one state to another, just as in the narrative persons. Regardless of the formative elements (person-space-time), it is essential to know that transformations occur due to the actions of the actants. Facts that bring dynamism to the narrative, such as transformation/change, do not take place by themselves instability. Therefore, it is almost impossible to explain the transformations with their reasons in the descriptive plane because the actions and cause-effect relationships related to these actions do not occur at this plane. For this reason, the semantic plane in which the narrative gains its dynamism and actions of actants cause transformations is the semiotic-narrative plane.

### 3.3. Thematic level analysis

In this plane, which forms the deep structure of the narrative, the value judgement on which the narrative depends, ideological frame, the moral of the study are analysed in the opposition between abstract and implicit formative structures with reference to the data collected in the descriptive and semiotic-narrative planes. In order to reach consistent and reliable results, the semiotic square is used in such an examination. “By **semiotic square** is meant the visual representation\* of the logical articulation of any semantic category” (Greimas & Courtés, 1982, p. 308). Meaning consists of oppositions. Therefore, it is possible to reveal the meaning in the deep structure by creating interrelated, but opposite poles.

No opposition can emerge or be created by itself. Having absolute grounds for the formation of oppositions is essential in terms of the reliability of the analysis. However, it should also be noted that the detection of the relationship between signs is just as important in such an analysis.

Possible questions for the presentation of O. Henry’s “The Last Leaf” narrative on semiotic square:

1<sup>st</sup> Question: *Specify opposite poles in the semiotic square and explain this by relating to the data obtained from previous meaning planes.*

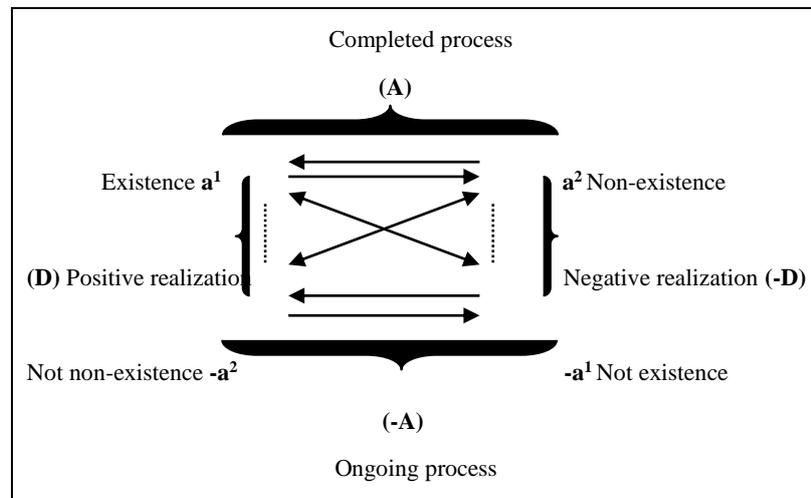
2<sup>nd</sup> Question: *What is the implicit/abstract meaning that is formed in the deep structure and contain the hidden/unseen goals of people in the narrative.*

As an answer to the 1st question, it can be said that every semantic plane forms its universe in the narrative by articulating each other. Therefore, it is important to relate to oppositions presented in Figures 1 and 2 in the descriptive plane of the narrative while forming the semiotic square. The health/illness opposition that is presented in Figure 1 is the life/death opposition in Figure 2. The health/illness state of the main narrative person, Joanna, is associated with her personality traits of being pessimistic/optimistic in opposition. In this sense, Joanna either will be optimistic and change her worldview and continue to live, or she will die with her pessimism. That is, she will either exist or not.

This case is also valid for the oppositions generated in Figure 2 regarding Mr Behrman. The biggest dream of the old painter, who has not achieved any success in his life, is to make his own masterpiece one day. This situation left him between life/death opposition with his optimistic, protective and competent artist personality. According to the narrative programme, this state of being caught in the middle is unknown to him and to everybody except the narrator. However, the idea of realizing the ideal of this helpful old artist also shows the relationship between the real/unreal opposition. In this context, due to the role assigned to Mr Behrman, he has to make a choice between life and death without noticing to make his dream come true. This choice will either immortalize him or destroy him forever. So, Mr Behrman will either exist or not.

Consequently, based on the semantic relationships in Figures 1 and 2, it is possible to deal with the two narrative persons of the semiotic square to be formed below, in the opposition of existence/non-existence, which has the ability to represent the situation they are in and the transformations and changes they have undergone. This situation has no material value;

people set goals for the facts they believe in and either reach them and exist or perish. It is possible to conduct the same results from this. Therefore, the subjects go through is a process of existence.



**Figure 6:** Presentation of the deep structure of the narrative in the context of existence/non-existence

As an answer for the 1<sup>st</sup> question, based on the presentation in Figure 6, there are more than one meaning that exist in the narrative. First of these is that Joanna takes a lesson from the leaf on an ivy which persistently clings to life in spite of hard and bad conditions.

But, lo! after the beating rain and fierce gusts of wind that had endured through the livelong night, there yet **stood out against the brick wall one ivy leaf**. It was the last on the vine. [...] The day wore away, and even through the twilight they could see **the lone ivy leaf clinging to its stem against the wall**. And then, with the coming of the night the north wind was again loosed, while the rain still beat against the windows and pattered down from the low Dutch eaves. When it was light enough Johnsy, the merciless, commanded that the shade be raised. **The ivy leaf was still there** (Henry, 1995, pp. 182-183).

Regardless of its not being real (Joanna does not know it at that moment), the struggle for existence of the leaf in all conditions created an awareness in her. She left her pessimism aside and started to be optimistic, to strive for recovery, and wished to realize her ideal one day again.

**Something has made that last leaf stay there to show me how wicked I was**. [...] ‘You may **bring me** a little broth now, and some milk with a little port in it.’ An hour later she said – ‘**Sudie, some day I hope to paint the Bay of Naples** (Henry, 1995, p. 183).

Just like Joanna, regardless of their conditions, people should try to look on the bright side of life and should not let the problems deter them from their goals, ideals and dreams.

It is necessary to have a look at the relations between the axes in Figure 6 before dealing with the Joanna’s process in the context of the semiotic square.

**Table 5:** Interaxes relation in the semiotic square (Adapted from Kalelioğlu, 2018, p. 252)

<b>Relational values</b>	Opposite axes	Positive realization / Negative realization	(D) / (-D)
	Opposite axes	Completed process / Ongoing process	(A) / (-A)
	Contrariety relation	Existence / Non-existence	(a <sup>1</sup> ) / (a <sup>2</sup> )
	Sub-contrariety relation	Not non-existence / Not existence	(-a <sup>2</sup> ) / (-a <sup>1</sup> )
	Contradictory relation	Existence / Not existence	(a <sup>1</sup> ) / (-a <sup>1</sup> )
	Contradictory relation	Non-existence / Not non-existence	(a <sup>2</sup> ) / (-a <sup>2</sup> )
	Implicative relation	Existence / Not non-existence	(a <sup>1</sup> ) / (-a <sup>2</sup> )
	Suppositional relation	Not non-existence / Existence	(-a <sup>2</sup> ) / (a <sup>1</sup> )
	Implicative relation	Non-existence / Not existence	(a <sup>2</sup> ) / (-a <sup>1</sup> )
	Suppositional relation	Not existence / Non-existence	(-a <sup>1</sup> ) / (a <sup>2</sup> )

In Table 5, relational values have been correlated with the data in the semiotic square in Figure 6. Accordingly, Joanna emerges on the non-existence plane (a<sup>2</sup>) of the negative realization (-D) part as a person who has given up on her dreams, passions and life. However, this situation transforms with help of the efforts of Joanna, who witnessed the struggle of the only leaf left on the ivy and takes a lesson from it (a<sup>2</sup> → -a<sup>2</sup>). Gaining the ability to struggle thanks to this first transformation, Joanna (-A) finds herself on the axis (-A) of active struggle and successfully continues the struggle here, causing a new transformation and carrying herself from the not non-existence state (-a<sup>2</sup>) to the existence state (a<sup>1</sup>). Joanna takes a lesson and transforms her state in the negative realization plane (-D) to positive realization (D), regains the elements that she needs for her existence (a<sup>1</sup>) and completes the process positively. In this case, the process that Joanna has successfully undergone in her struggle for existence can be described as (a<sup>2</sup> → -a<sup>2</sup> → a<sup>1</sup>).

Regarding to Mr. Behrman, the old painter appears as a person, who is full of desire to make his own masterpiece one day, has a joy of life and thinks positively. The fact that contrary to the positive features he has as a human being, despite his nearly forty-year artistic life, he has not yet produced a remarkable work causes him to appear in the negative realization (-D) and non-existence plane (a<sup>2</sup>).

Behrman was a failure in art. Forty years he had wielded the brush without getting near enough to touch the hem of his Mistress's robe. [...] He had been always about to paint a masterpiece, but had never yet begun it. [...] He drank gin to excess, and still talked of his coming masterpiece (Henry, 1995, p. 181).

However, the old painter never gave up on this desire with his world-view and his optimistic, helpful and protective lifestyle. This situation, later, has moved the artist from non-existence plane (a<sup>2</sup>) to not no-existence plane (-a<sup>2</sup>) and he continued to struggle for life in (-A) axis, which is the dynamic process, to realize this dream one day. This ambition to struggle has moved Mr. Behrman from negative realization (-D) to positive one (D). When the

transformation in Figure 6 is examined in terms of Mr. Behrman, it can be seen that Joanna and him are the sharers of the same process ( $a^2 \rightarrow -a^2 \rightarrow a^1$ ).

Consequently, Mr. Behrman, unconsciously succeeded in creating the masterpiece he had dreamed of throughout his life while attempting to heal Joanna, who is an artist like himself. This case results in the emergence of interpretations such as there is always hope for people; determination always pays off; doing a favour will end up in good results.

#### 4. Conclusion

Among the aims of this study are respectively to offer the literary semiotic approach to the language learning environment and to present the possible ways to make an implementation of it. As stated earlier, doing this is believed to help students overcome the challenge of seeing problems in plot construction or actorial positions and time-space relations of a literary work. Additionally, the conscious analysis act to unfold the semantic universe of the text under investigation will help practitioners systematize the reading process, increase critical thinking skills and make the recondite points more explicit and comprehensible. Keeping in mind these purposes and their possible benefits, an application of the semiotic approach to a short story of O. Henry has been performed, taking into consideration three semantic layers. These semantic layers are the discursive, narrative and thematic (deep) ones.

With its specific rules, terminology and analysis instruments, a semiotic approach to a text may sometimes be hard to conceive on practitioners' side. Therefore, the clarifications on the successive steps and analysis tools of the systematized literary semiotic analysis have been made by using instructional questions to be followed by teachers and students. The questions posed in each analysis of the semantic layers are believed to have highlighted the significant parameters of the text in question. These parameters revealed with the help of questions have comprised the positions and characteristics of the actors, the use of time and space for discursive level. Subsequently, at the narrative level, they have been in the direction of finding out the essential acts of actors, considering the roles of inanimate or abstract entities in the formation of events that generally subsume actorial transformations. At the thematic level, the main interest has been on revealing the main oppositions that generate semantic relations in a text. Besides, these relations can be utilized to observe main changes from the initiation to the end of the narrative.

Some researchers define the literary semiotic approach as a game (Rifat, 2011) whose winners have performed the closest and most recurrent reading of the text. As far as the huge number of text features is concerned, it can be partially implemented to a text, which makes semiotics flexible. As Martin and Ringham state (2000), for instance, one can only wish to analyze actorial and time relations of discursive level or highlight abstract semantic forms of thematic level. Literary semiotics can be a promising alternative key to textual analysis in language education environments with both its flexibility and deepness.

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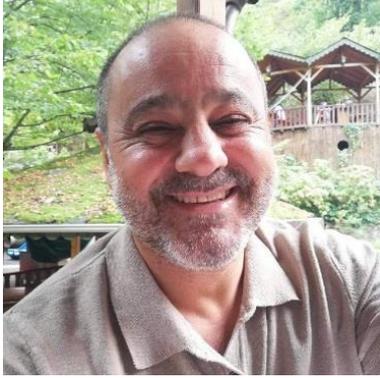
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