

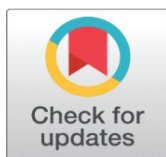
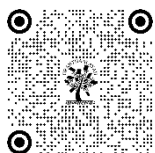


LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATIVE MOVEMENT: DANCE, DISCOURSE REPRESENTATION, AND ILLOCUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper endeavors to open up the domain of narrative dance to formal semantico-pragmatic inquiry, taking case studies from Indian dance drama and classical Ballet. It thus posits narrative dance as a richly promising domain of research and analysis in its analogues to, and interfaces with, discourse based on language. The communicative intent of narrative dance – alongside its aesthetic-cultural semiosis – is typically directed at the audience's (re)cognition of discourse referents and their actions in the dance space. It therefore lends itself to the scrutiny of Discourse Representation Theory or, more broadly, dynamic semantics, which are recognized frameworks for the formal linguistic analysis of narrative, and more rarely non-narrative, discourse. This intent in dance, however, differs from those of ordinary-language communications, in that it allows for creative play to convey shifting discourse-referent identities. Such creative play is brought into focus in the very different treatments of “stage” versus “individual”-level identities of the respective central characters within two case studies, viz., the (North-)Eastern Indian dance drama *Chitrāngadā*, on the one hand, and Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, on the other. While illocutions are conveyed through hand-gestures and (facial and corporeal) mime in these different traditions, they crucially play a complementary role in discourse representation as this latter pertains to narrative dance. The paper concludes by highlighting this mode of analysis as a means of achieving greater insight into viewers' / connoisseurs' responses to narrative and non-narrative dance subtypes as possible clues as to how meanings are construed out of these dance genres.¹

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Keywords: Meaning, Dance, Illocutions, Semantic Reference, Narrative, Discourse Representation Theory



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1. INTRODUCTION

A domain of human communication and aesthetic activity in which meaning extends out of human language, including gestural sign language, is dance (Valéry (1976), Bresnahan (2015/2020)). Depictions of and treatises on dance date back to the ancient world Nandikeśvara (1917), Bharata-Muni & Ghosh (1951), Choubineh (2020), and dance came to be recognised early on, both as a domain of disciplined training and accomplished performance and as an activity occurring liminally at the edge of the morally questionable owing to its associations with embodied sexuality and populist outreach in human societies. While certain kinds of animal behaviour have also been labelled “dance”, notably mating rituals displayed by certain bird species, in relation to human activities brought under the rubric of “dance” these can be seen to be partially analogous to birdsong as viewed and treated in relation to human language Berwick & Chomsky (2013). At the same time, in its detailed performative expression, partly (but only partly) in the vein of different natural languages dance encompasses a great deal of historically and culturally rooted variation: there are a wide range of traditions of dance across the world since antiquity.

This paper seeks to provide formal support to the claim that meaning in dance is a systematically structured dimension strongly analogous to linguistic meaning, albeit communicated through conventionalized dance-gesture and bodily mime (*inter alia*), that is worthy of focused attention. Section 2, below, focuses on the methodology adopted and introduces in 2.1 the primary theoretical framework adopted for the present investigation into narrative dance, i.e., Discourse Representation Theory, and in 2.2 the approaches of stage-level versus individual-level and kind-level semantics used as a supplementary analytic method and Austinian illocutionary force analysis to schematise the pragmatics of mime in narrative dance. Section 2.3 outlines the key methodology adopted for the present investigation. Section 3 presents the actual analysis, under which Section 3.1 briefly takes stock of the roles of gesture and mime as key components that make up the communicative resources of dance. Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 present the two case studies for the application of DRT to dance drama, augmented by the need to additionally distinguish stage- and individual-level characterizations in the modelling of these. Section 3.2 notes the non-applicability of DRT in its classic form in the case of non-narrative or metaphor-based dance. Section 3.3 briefly notes the significant role of dance illocutions in the establishment of discourse referents in dance. Section 4 concludes with noting the need for the recognition of knowledgeable audience cognition in the construal of meaning in dance.

1.1. THE INTERFACES BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND DANCE: MOTION AND MEANING

Ironically, until recent years, attempts to study meaning in dance as a discursively grounded phenomenon analogous to linguistic meaning have not been made systematically outside of musicological studies (see, e.g., Allanbrook (1983)), although there has come to be considerable scholarship on the philosophy of dance since the past several decades (Hanna (1979), Danto (1981), Sparshott (1995), Bresnahan (2015/2020), *op. cit.*; Seeley (2020)). There is, however, a recognition of dance as a significant sub-domain of the Sanskrit term *nāṭya*, ‘drama, staged performance’, in ancient Sanskrit treatises on dance that were recognized as being part of the study and analysis of rhetoric in ancient India (Goswami (2002), 7) –

thereby connecting language, and more specifically the study of linguistic meaning in its more figurative aspects, with the domain of dance.

In the following section, a concise overview is undertaken focusing on specific aspects of cognition and communication in and through dance, notably, on gesture as performed using the hands and on the classically recognized performative domain of mime.

1.2. GESTURE AND MIME AS COMMUNICATIVE ELEMENTS IN DANCE

Dance makes use of gesture and facial and/or bodily mime to signify and communicate, analogously to creative uses of language (Sheets-Johnstone and Cunningham (1966)). Dance is, like language, grounded and realized in both the neuro-cognitive and the communicative dimensions (Calvo-Merino et al. (2008)) while also being recognized as one of the preeminent visual arts (Valéry (1976), Danto (1981), *op. cit.*; Seeley (2020)). In different traditions of dance around the world, these have come to be codified into conventionally learned and transmitted hand-gestures and mimetic postures and movements, close analogues to which occur in sign languages for the deaf Bagchi (2014).

Traditionally codified hand-gestures (sometimes involving the arms as well), static ones used during meditative practice as well as dynamic ones employed in dance traditions, have been noted in classical Indian treatises on performance under the rubric of the Sanskrit term *mudrā*, and these are now simply called Mudra, plural Mudras, in South Asian English (Bagchi (2010), 259). These Mudras as specifically used in classical Indian dance, the thirty-one or so single-hand Mudras in particular, have been described by Patel-Grosz et al. (2018), largely following Puri (1986), as *hasta mudrās*, ‘hand Mudras’: more accurately, these are the *asamyukta-hasta* ‘unconjoined-hand’ Mudras described in classical Indian dance texts such as Nandikeśvara. (1917), Nandikeśvara. (1957). They have left it unspecified, however, whether the twenty-eight or so two-hand Mudras, the *samyukta-hasta* ‘conjoined-hand(s)’ *mudrās*, are also included under the rubric of these hand-gestures or *hasta mudrās*, as in fact these latter should be so included since not all of them are merely pairs or combinations of two single-hand Mudras. Mime, and especially facial mime, on the other hand, has been noted and categorized under the Sanskrit term *abhinaya* ‘[a] carrying forward [of drama], acting’ (Bagchi (2010), 261).² The range of facial expressions available to human beings by virtue of their anatomy and cognitive-motor capabilities have been noted in relatively recent times as well Green (2008), as forming the basis for such conventionalized mime schemata in different dance traditions.

These two categories of dance signs – Mudras and *abhinaya* – are combined in a variety of ways to signal illocutions in dance, in a semiotically more removed sense than the real-world sense of speech acts as conveying illocutions in the kind of real-world uses of language that we engage in under the rubric of “ordinary language”. As is discussed in subsequent sections, illocutions in dance play a crucial role in expressing and differentiating *discourse referents* in a certain sub-type of dance as recognised in classical dance traditions spanning across cultural and national boundaries. This mode of identification of discourse referents merits investigation

² The term *abhinaya* had more extended and nuanced meanings in the context of stagecraft in general, beyond just dance, in the Indian performative domain: see Chattopadhyay and Goswami (2016: 98-102). In the context of dance, specifically the *āṅgika* ‘bodily’ sub-category of *abhinaya*, in Western terms understood as mime in dance, came to be designated by the more general term *abhinaya*, with a further foregrounding of the *mukhaja* (‘arising in the face’) sub-type of *āṅgika abhinaya* (*op. cit.*: 98) in classical Indian dance traditions.

outside of controlled laboratory settings in which reference in limited narrative dance sequences have been carried out thus far, with more of an outreach into actual dance texts as these are choreographed and performed on stage or for videography.

1.3. DISCOURSE REPRESENTATION THEORY (DRT), DYNAMIC SEMANTICS, AND DANCE

A distinction is made between narrative and non-narrative dance episodes in salient classical Indian dance forms or traditions, notable amongst which are Bharatanāṭyam (from the state of Tamilnadu in southern India), Kuchipuḍi and Vilāsini-Nṛtya (from the states of Telengana and Andhra Pradesh in southeastern India), Kathakali, Kuḍiyattam, and Mohiniyattam (from the state of Kerala in southern India), Odishi (from the state of Odisha, formerly Orissa, in eastern/southeastern India), Kathak (from the states of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab and the national capital region of Delhi in northern India), Manipuri (from the state of Manipur in northeastern India), and Sattriya (from the state of Assam in northeastern India). Narrative dance is termed *nṛtya*, while purely formal non-narrative dance, showcasing the dancers' skill, is termed *nṛtta* in the texts as well as in the dance pedagogies for these traditions [Vatsyayan \(1974\)](#). This category of narrative dance has also come to be refashioned in more recent experiments with synthesizing different dance traditions in the creation of choreographed dance-drama ballet, such as the body of work in the latter genre produced by the Nobel laureate poet-songwriter, dramaturge, and educationist Rabindranath Tagore and labelled "Rabindra-Nāṭya" (*nāṭya* encompasses both 'drama' and '(performed) dance' in the Sanskrit texts mentioned earlier), and also (with the incorporation of various folk elements as well) in the so-called "item numbers" of dance in Bollywood movies and music videos.

Since narrative dance, *nṛtya* in classical Indian dance traditions, has story-telling at the heart of its communicative function, it makes sense (literally) to explore the discourse representation of meaning as "context change potential" as the broad research program of Dynamic Semantics (as mentioned above, in Section 2), interacting with versions of Discourse Representation Theory as developed by Hans Kamp ([Kamp \(1981\)](#), [Kamp and Reyle \(1993\)](#)) and Irene Heim [Heim \(1982\)](#), in the closely allied form of File Change Semantics), has defined a key aspect of meaning in language and discourse. This also makes sense in the context of Classical and (with just a few exceptions) Romantic Western Ballet, in which dance is employed, *inter alia*, to tell conventionalized and carefully choreographed stories [Foster \(1996\)](#).

Given the nature of narrative progression in dance as being aimed at audience comprehension of the narrative, one finds that it is Discourse Representation Theory, rather than the more generalized formal approach of dynamic semantics *per se*, that provides a relatively transparent mapping of the "context change" in the narrative dance as available to the audience. While Discourse Representation Theory has thus far been successfully applied to the analysis and formal modelling of linguistic discourse with its reliance on sentences as its composite "building blocks" [Bagchi \(2008\)](#), so to speak, given the nature of dynamic reference and predication in narrative dance with clarity for audiences as one of the latter's primary objectives it merits application to narrative dance as well, in (narrative) classical Western Ballet [Harrold \(1980\)](#) and classical Indian dance in particular. The application of Discourse Representation Theory preferentially to story-telling in narrative is a promisingly relevant research agenda to pursue, given especially the generative turn in explorations in the cognition and performance of dance, including

possible typologies of different dance forms worldwide, in recent years ([Charnavel \(2016\)](#), [Napoli and Kraus \(2015/2017\)](#)).

1.4. THE CURRENT STUDY

The present study is the first known application of the established semantic framework of Discourse Representation Theory to two dramatic episodes each taken from an Indian dance drama and a classical Western Ballet, respectively, to work out the narrative structure of these episodes in terms of their characters as discourse referents and their attributes, states, and actions as predicates that drive the narrative forward in the dance. The actual application of this framework to these two episodes as case studies is presented in Section 3, ahead.

2. METHODOLOGY ADOPTED

2.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The formal semantic framework of Discourse Representation Theory (as initiated by [Kamp \(1981\)](#) and expounded further by [Kamp and Reyle \(1993\)](#), with the variant known as File Change Semantics as developed by Heim 1988), which is a special-case exemplar of the broad theoretical category of Dynamic Semantics (initiated primarily by [Groenendijk and Stokhof \(1991\)](#)), is the primary theoretical framework of analysis adopted for the present study. Briefly, Discourse Representation Theory can be exploited to map the individual characters, termed discourse referents under the approach, and the attributes and actions that they are characterised by, termed properties and predicates, in the context of a piece of discourse such as a narrative (e.g., a short story, a dialogic text, an epic poem, or a novel in language and/or literature), and for the purpose of this paper a performed narrative, that they appear in; this sets up a “discourse representation structure”, abbreviated as a DRS, that schematically captures the structure of each episodic sequence in the narrative. The structure and progression of the performed narrative can therefore be abstracted out by means of a comprehensive DRS for the performed episodic narrative and, with the successive DRSs logically linked in sequence, the entire performed narrative.

2.2. ADDITIONAL THEORETICAL ISSUES

It turns out, however, that discourse referents do not always remain invariant in either their attributes or their characteristic actions throughout a narrative, or even within a narrative episode that might constitute a part of the fuller narrative. Instead, they often take on temporary, or “stage-level” attributes and/or actions that are deviations from their individual-level or even “kind-level” predications (“kind-level” referring to characteristics of kinds such as specific animals versus humans, for instance: [Carlson \(1977\)](#), [Bagchi \(1999\)](#)). In the context of narrative performance, specific discourse referents often take on attributes that are both stage-level and kind-level, such as a particular gender specification that lasts only for part of the narrative, as will be seen in the case of the eponymous lead character of *Chitrāngadā*.

In addition, a modified Austinian speech act theory has been tentatively suggested here as a promising framework for the analysis and systematization of illocutionary stances as expressed through bodily and facial mime and as supporting semantic construal in narrative dance performances. This has been deemed conceptually necessary, even at a merely suggestive level, since such illocutionary

stances cannot be modelled directly within Discourse Representation Theory or through kind/stage/individual-level predicate analysis in any non-trivial way but are clearly played out in a complementary pragmatic dimension to the formal-semantic modes of analysis just mentioned.

2.3. PROCEDURE AND DATA

Data for the present study has been collected for qualitative value; this is a first-of-its-kind pilot study of meaning *in vivo* in the context of performed dance rather than of meaning *in vitro* in laboratorily-staged dance performance, hence the qualitative approach has been found to be more appropriately suitable for the study rather than a quantitative sampling approach. For the narrative Indian dance exemplars, six dance drama pieces by Rabindranath Tagore that are commonly performed in an Eastern Indian dance mode and setting have been examined (*Chaṇḍālikā* 'untouchable girl', *Chitrāngadā* 'wearer of multi-hued robes (name of the warrior princess of ancient Manipur)', *Māyār Khelā* 'the play of illusion', *Shyāmā* 'dark(-secret) woman', *Bālmīki-Pratibhā* 'Valmiki's awakening', *Kāl-Mṛgayā* 'fatal hunt', all accessible at School of Cultural Texts and Records 2011-2013, an online Tagore archival project documented by Chaudhuri (2016)), out of which one, viz., *Chitrāngadā*, has been selected for detailed study since it is the only one among the six that directly addresses gender as pluri-staged performance. For the Western Ballet exemplars of narrative dance, out of seven selected commonly-performed classical Ballet pieces that were closely examined (*Lac des Cygnes/Swan Lake*, *La Sylphide*, *Giselle*, *Cinderella*, *The Nutcracker*, *La Bayadère*, *Romeo and Juliet*) based primarily on Harrold (1980), *Swan Lake* by Tchaikovsky has been chosen since its plot is expressly centred around a confusion of identities and illocutionary stances for its leading female character/s. Moreover, both of these dance drama pieces are redactions of epic folk legends, viz., the tale of Chitrāngadā from the approximately 2500-year-old classical Indian epic *Mahābhārata* and the Swan Lake legend from centuries-old folklore of the Lake Van region (spread across eastern Turkey and Armenia) as transmitted through Central Asia into Russia and right through to France, respectively.

3. RESULTS: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. MOTION AND MEANING IN NARRATIVE DANCE: TWO CASE STUDIES

To illustrate the play on the identification of clear-cut discourse referents as typically demanded by the mode of representation in Discourse Representation Theory, two case studies are presented here. Both of these pose an interesting problem for the theory with their play on stage-level and individual-level depictions of key discourse referents central to the narrative, corresponding to the use of stage-level and individual-level predicates (Milsark (1974), Carlson (1977), Kratzer (1995)). These two case studies illustrate two different distributions of stage-level and individual-level depictions: (1) wherein a single individual is portrayed by two distinct stage-level performers (divided by differential gendering), and (2) wherein two distinct individuals, with a crucial impersonatory stage of one by the other, are portrayed by the same performer, but with visibly different sets of bodily and illocutionary attitudes. These are given immediately below, in Subsections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2, respectively.

3.1.1. DANCE DRAMA WITH CLASSICAL INDIAN DANCE: *CHITRĀNGADĀ*

The first is from the Indian dance-play *Chitrāngadā* composed by the Nobel laureate poet-dramaturge Rabindranath Tagore in multiple versions between 1892 and 1936, based on the ancillary legend of the ancient Manipuri princess Chitrāngadā from the Indian epic *Mahābhārata* ('great Indian [text]') traced back to around the 5th-4th century B.C.E. This dance-play is also noteworthy for its being performed using classical dance-forms, such as the classical Manipuri dance that originated in the state of Manipur in northeastern India, as well as folk dances such as the Chhau dance of the states of West Bengal and Odisha in eastern India, in a variety of fused performances. The narrative of the dance-play, however, is largely sought to be maintained, with some creative variation given the play on gender in the realization of its most central discourse referent at different points in the narrative. In this play, the eponymous princess of ancient Manipur (in eastern or northeastern India) as redacted by Rabindranath Tagore (1892, 1936), the princess Chitrāngadā is shown as having been trained in "masculine" arts (such as archery, hunting, and protecting the land through armed vigilance and intervention) and manners by her father, the king of Manipur. Largely owing to this mode of upbringing, she has developed an identity that is, in terms of her outward gendered *persona* (in the original sense in Latin as 'mask'), less stereotypically that of a "feminine" individual than of an ambiguously gendered individual in a woman's body. In the opening scenes of the dance-play, the princess is shown hunting for wild animals in a forest of the kingdom with her companions, typically female hunters and assistants, and accidentally stumbles upon and disturbs a sleeping man ostensibly in an ascetic's habit, who turns out to be her warrior idol Arjuna and who contemptuously rebuffs her and her friends, calling them (mistakenly, as it happens) a "group of young boys". As the story moves rapidly on, Chitrāngadā prays to Madana, the love god (the counterpart to Cupid or Eros in the pantheon of Hinduism), to be given at least a temporary "feminine" persona, in order to be able to get close to the Mahabharata warrior-hero Arjuna, whom she idolizes. This transformed persona might be viewed as a "stage-level", rather than ultimately the final "individual-level", longer-term identity as a proud, strong woman with which she affirms herself.

Figure 1



Figure 1 Chitrāngadā as Depicted on the HMV Vinyl Record Cover, Circa Late 1960s (ECLP 2272) for the Musical Dance Drama by Tagore.

Source still from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsjBijVrWic>

A hyper-simplified example DRS is presented below, for the opening action scene of the dance-play *Chitrāngadā*:³

DRS 1.

| | |
|--|---|
| [p, q, r, ... x, y, z, w, ...] | |
| [Chitrāngadā(x), warrior(x), female(x), young(x)] | |
| [young-women(z, w, ...), fellow-hunters(z, w, ...)] | while [Hunt ((x, z, w, ...)(p, q, r, ...))] |
| [Arjuna(y), man(y), uber-warrior(y)] | ⇒ [Disturb(x, y)] |
| [Wild-animals(p, q, r, ...)] | |

This is followed by Arjuna’s ire and subsequent indulgent dismissal of Chitrāngadā and her hunting companions as a “group of young boys”; an upset and yet smitten Chitrāngadā attempts to offer Arjuna her love, but the latter politely rejects her offer on the pretext of being under a (temporarily, as it turns out) ascetic vow. Thereafter Chitrāngadā offers worship to the Hindu god of love Madana (who can be thought of as an approximate conceptual counterpart to the Greek god Eros, for those unfamiliar with the Hindu pantheon of South Asia) and pleads for his help with winning Arjuna over; Madana, by way of his boon to her, grants her a more “feminized” body and demeanor for the duration of a year. However, for Chitrāngadā’s self-discovery immediately thereafter (as portrayed in video), working out a canonical DRS proves to be a challenge, since the predicates required to capture the “new” Chitrāngadā are, after all, mostly just stage-level attributes, and not individual ones.

This is where a dynamic-semantic approach to Discourse Representation Theory, especially in line with Irene Heim’s File Change Semantics [Heim \(1982/1988\)](#), is called for in order to capture the dynamic “stages” of the individual character of Chitrāngadā. According to the File Change Semantics approach, the representation of the discourse, in this instance the narrative of the dance drama, gets updated in the manner of a stack of index cards or a “card file” as changes and additions are made to the cast of characters and also their (temporary or permanent) attributes and/or actions – hence the meaning that transpires at each stage of the narrative is conceived of as “context change potential”, with each change in the “card file” effecting a change in the context as well as laying the semantic ground for possible further changes. In the case of the *Chitrāngadā* narrative, owing

³ For copyright reasons as well as problems of preservation of good visual quality in digital photos here, it has not been possible to present still photos from an actual performance of the dance-play. Instead, two video links are given below, for the two relevant intervals of the opening scene depicting Chitrāngadā as warrior and her awakening as a “feminine” individual, respectively:

- <https://youtu.be/DAwYmpBAxv8?t=54>
- <https://youtu.be/DAwYmpBAxv8?t=1244>

to the actions of Chitrāngadā’s worship of Madana and the latter’s granting of a year-long boon of a “feminized” body and manners to the former, her attribute of being a “warrior princess” gets partially eroded, albeit just for a year, and she acquires the attribute of a “feminized beauty”. Hence, the DRS for this set of happenings in the narrative is worked out as follows, with the addition of a Davidsonian “event referent” e whose specifications are further spelled out as a three-place, two-participant event [Kearns \(2011\)](#):

DRS 2.

{ x, y, m, e }

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------|
| Chitrāngadā(x) | | | |
| [Madana(m), god-of-love(m)] | | | |
| Arjuna(y) | | | [Grant-boon (m, x) |
| [Worship(x, m) | | ⇒ | Non-warrior-for-1-year(x) |
| Ask-why-the-worship(m, x) | | | Feminized-for-1-year(x)] |
| Narrate-to(x, m, e) | | | |
| Event(e) | | | |
| Spurn-plea-of(e, y, x) | | | |
| Request-seductive-abilities(x, m) | | | |

3.1.2. BALLET: SWAN LAKE

The second is the occurrence of two distinct characters, Odette the princess-turned-swan and Odile the sorcerer’s daughter, with identity conflation at a key point in the now copiously performed ballet *Swan Lake*, composed by P. Tchaikovsky on the basis of a similarly ancient folk legend from southern Russia and the Central Asian region. The story is summarized as follows. Prince Siegfried, chasing a flock of swans on a hunt in a forest of his kingdom, chances upon the transformation of a leading swan into a princess, Odette, at nightfall at the edge of the Swan Lake where she and her companion swans are doomed to be exiled. Odette tells him about the curse on her by the magician Baron von Rothbart, whereby she is doomed to be a swan during daytime until and unless a true love rescues her. Meanwhile, von Rothbart gets to know of this and pushes his own daughter Odile to impersonate Odette and seduce Prince Siegfried, especially at a ball in the palace where the prince is to choose his bride. At a key point in the story, the real Odette, hiding outside the palace during the night-time ball, finds this out and manages to alert Prince Siegfried about the deception. However, it is too late for the prince to get out of his betrothal to Odile, and the ballet ends with the Prince and the real Odette jumping into Swan Lake and their spirits ascending together heavenward.

Remarkably, in most full-fledged performances of this ballet, the characters of Odette and Odile are played by a single ballerina: this is often seen as a professional challenge by performers who are called upon to dance in this dual role. Here, aside from the brief period of “impersonation” of Odette by Odile, the two individuals are portrayed as distinct discourse referents, but by the same performer, whose bodily

and illocutionary attitudes are required to be noticeably distinct for the two different roles. Odette's *persona* is characterized by a simultaneous grace and heaviness of the arms (as though they are a swan's wings), a graceful yet tragic facial and corporeal demeanor, and nervous foot movements across the stage along with (and despite) those. Odile's, on the other hand, is portrayed as that of a confidently flippant woman, clearly human in her movements, especially of the legs and feet, and (overall) assertive, often smilingly confident, illocutionary stance; she is often dressed in a black tutu (or, more rarely, Romantic-style dress), whereas Odette, during her role, is in white with swan's feathers. However, as an impersonator of Odette within the situation of the ballet, Odile's character is required to strike a balance, in especially her bodily illocutions, between being true to her own character and being sufficiently representative of Odette's character as well.⁴ There is, then, a conundrum for Discourse Representation Theory to try to address: when Odile is impersonating Odette, even if temporarily, during the night-time ball scene, is she best modelled by one discourse referent or two in a DRS for a typical performance of the ballet, in which a single dancer performs in the two (ostensibly overlapping) roles? This is a problem that partially echoes the problem of coreference versus disjoint reference reported for character roles in highly delimited episodes of Bharatanatyam dance performance within a controlled laboratory setting as researched and reported by Patel-Grosz (2018). The problem of working out discourse referents in the case of dance drama – within or beyond particular dance traditions – is rather larger, however, than can be readily controlled within a laboratory setting: stage-level and individual-level characterizations often crosscut the distinctness of discourse referents, which any DRT characterization of such dance drama is called upon to recognize in formalizable terms.⁵

Nonetheless, a beginning DRS characterization of this “switch” between the characters of Odette and Odile could be attempted in the following manner:

DRS 3.

| | |
|--|--|
| [<i>r, s, x, y</i>] [<i>a, b, c, ...</i>] | |
| [Siegfried(s) | |
| Odette(x), Princess(x) <i>at nighttime</i> | |
| Swans({ <i>a, b, c, ...</i> }) | ⇒ [Find(<i>s, x</i>) <i>at Swan Lake</i> |
| Odile(y), Human(y), Impersonate (<i>y, x</i>) <i>at ball</i> | Tell (<i>x, s</i>) <i>about (r, Curse)</i> |
| Rothbart(<i>r</i>), Evil-Sorcerer(<i>r</i>), Father-of (<i>r, y</i>) | |

⁴ A relatively concise yet fairly representative depiction of Odette and Odile is to be found in the following video shared by the State Ballet of Georgia, with its artistic director Nina Ananiashvili as Odette/Odile: <https://youtu.be/Ev5C6orXQok>

⁵ Sarada Bandana Biswas, in personal communication (2/20/2021) following the University of Chicago webinar lecture, has pointed out to the author that classical Indian dance traditions such as the Sattriya dance form of Assam in Northeastern India make use of differential space demarcation on the stage for the dancer to signal different discourse referents, including self-reference versus disjoint reference. This is in keeping with the differentiation of loci for different referents in controlled Bharatanatyam sequences in a laboratory setting as reported by Patel-Grosz et al. (2018).

3.2. FURTHER PROBLEMS: NON-NARRATIVE AND/OR METAPHOR-BASED DANCE

Discourse referents become significantly harder to pin down with non-trivial analytic import in the context of non-narrative dance, such as *nr̥tta* in classical Indian dance, and even harder in that of metaphorical, or metaphor-based, dance theatre, in which the distinction between narrative and non-narrative performance becomes blurred. An exemplar of the former is to be found in the Khasi harvest dance of the state of Meghalaya in Northeastern India, in which the dance is performed by a group to a descriptive harvest song that does not necessarily have determinate discourse referents.⁶ A striking example of the latter is the composite dance theatre piece *Revelations* produced and staged by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Company at the Lincoln Center in New York City, first in 1960 and then many times into recent years. In this, the real-world racially-motivated oppression of African-American history is depicted through a graduated series of dances performed with vocal and instrumental music. While there are indeed performers in both of these exemplars, they are not centrally individual characters in these performances, and so enumerating them by means of individual discourse referents becomes a trivial formalization of the performance, at best, in each instance.

3.3. ILLOCUTIONS IN RELATION TO DISCOURSE REFERENTS IN DANCE

Illocutionary force (Austin (1962), Sadock (1974)) is a key element that needs to be communicated through the means available to the dancer/actor. Illocutions in dance – examples of which are praying, asserting (oneself as a character), entreating, exulting, posing a question, apologizing/self-deprecating – serve to establish characters and actions that are portrayed on stage (or in film/video form). Different illocutions are often adopted or performed in sequence by a single dancer-performer to enact the roles of two or more discourse referents belonging to the narrative, as in solo performances in most classical Indian, and more broadly South Asian, dance traditions, with the illocutionary attitudes broadly classified in the domain of *abhinaya*, mime (as described earlier), in terms of nine *rasas*, aesthetic-emotive experiences⁷. This is the primary reason why illocutions are deemed to be relevant to the DRT analysis of narrative dance in the present investigation. In classical Western Ballet and in modern choreographed group dance performances of India, however, illocutions are typically performed through conventionalized mime postures and movements by different performers in accordance with their appropriate discourse-referent roles, with notable exceptions such as the dual character of Odette/Odile as traditionally performed by a single ballerina, as mentioned above (hence the illocution-sets for the two discourse referents have special signficatory value in the audience's live construal of the ballet's narrative). There is a further need to formalize the interleaving of such illocutions (through

⁶ The author is grateful to the Department of Linguistics, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong (Meghalaya), India, and to her former doctoral student Dr. Saralin A. Lyngdoh, in particular, for arranging for and translating a beautiful Khasi harvest song and accompanying dance at their Conference on Syntactic-Semantic Typology and Convergence on November 23, 2015. Unfortunately, for copyright reasons the video of the performance cannot be shared here.

⁷ The polysemous Sanskrit word *rasa* is defined by Chattopadhyay and Goswami (2016: 169-188) as “[a]n inexplicable inward experience of a connoisseur on witnessing a dramatic performance [...] or reading a poetical composition” (*op. cit.*: 169); beyond the nine *rasa* categories of facial (and accompanying bodily) expression in dance, viz., *śṅgāra* ‘romance, eroticism’, *hāsyā* ‘mirth’, *vīra* ‘valour’, *raudra* ‘(righteous) anger’, *bhayānaka* ‘fear(-inducing)’, *bībhatsa* ‘horror/disgust’, *adbhūta* ‘wonder(-inducing), strangeness’, *karuṇa* ‘sad(ness), pity(-inducing)’, and *śānta* ‘calm’, it is a complex notion that is further elaborated for other aesthetic performative and literary domains by the compilers in much detail that is beyond the central purview of this study.

performed self-expression: see also [Green \(2008\)](#)) with the unfolding of the narrative in the course of the dance, an ambitious project that necessarily lies beyond the rather delimited scope of the present paper.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to indicate at a modestly introductory level that, as a mode of outreach into “super linguistics” in the domain of the visual arts, Discourse Representation Theory (DRT), along with the study of illocutions in dance, offers rich possibilities in the understanding of how dance, like language, is successfully exploited to convey meanings in systematic ways, as this paper has aimed to demonstrate at a very introductory level. For DRT to achieve even a moderately meaningful measure of success in this domain, however, there is a strong need for the incorporation of mechanisms to characterize stage-level versus individual-level identities – and not merely predicates – into its formal DRSs in the domain of narrative dance across cultural traditions.

This mode of analysis is also an attempt to elucidate further the analytics of knowledgeable viewers’ / connoisseurs’ (*rasika-s’*, in the classical Indian tradition) cognitive responses to both narrative and non-narrative dance subtypes, toward a clearer understanding of how meanings are construed out of narrative dance in particular. However, both in principle and from observation any cognitively able human perceiver is, or with adequate sensory input of the dance can come to be, a *rasika*, connoisseur of the dance-form.⁸ Such a study is thus of significance in our greater understanding of human viewers as well as performers as culturally responsive cognitive agents, especially since, as in the case of uses of language, responsive judgements and intuitions of perceivers of the dance performances form a rich, if challenging, empirical domain for the deeper understanding of how we as human beings relate to dance as well as other domains of solo and/or group performance.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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⁸ A *rasika* is a connoisseur of the *rasa* content of an art-form or performance: this word itself is derived in Sanskrit from the noun *rasa* (see Footnote 7).

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