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## “EVIL MASTERMIND” IN THE FRAMEWORK OF A VERBALLY MODELED REALITY

**Oleksandr Kolesnyk**

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University,

[o.kolesnyk@kubg.edu.ua](mailto:o.kolesnyk@kubg.edu.ua)

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1618-3804>

**Anna Hurina**

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University,

[annhurina@gmail.com](mailto:annhurina@gmail.com)

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6442-7228>



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*This article considers language means verbalizing the EVIL MASTERMIND in the framework of an alternative pop-cultural world. The paper regards an alternative reality as a logical construal, the result of categorizing and modeling activities. The said modeling unfolds according to the patterns of open systems' development and follows the logic of irrational rationalization that involves mythic space and its content as primary categorization filters. The latter is treated as the premises of myth-oriented semiosis. The article employs the multidisciplinary methodology of M-logic. The article addresses Loki as a prototype EVIL MASTERMIND which is identified as a temporarily tolerated system or a subsystem manifesting extraordinary capacities at different levels of organization and functioning, grudgingly tolerated by other systems due to its etiology essentially contrary to their own, responsible for both their benefits and eventual demise. The paper provides reconstructions of respective semantic features encoded in the verbal construals in Old Norse Eddic texts. Further interpretations of these semantic features result into their arrangement into a systemic cluster thus providing a look at the inner structure of the conceptualized notion of EVIL MASTERMIND in the archaic Germanic tradition. Loki's speech behavior is analyzed in terms of speech act semantics. Special attention is paid to the variant of EVIL MASTERMIND created in the alternative reality of a TV series "Loki". The article highlights peculiarities of the alternative EVIL MASTERMIND'S speech activities and focuses on their strategy-tactics arrangements. The paper provides comparative analysis of the two EVIL MASTERMINDS in regard to the patterns of "agonist" VS "antagonist" interactions, employed speech acts, strategies and tactics as well as synthetic interpretations of mythic concepts' transformations in a modeled alternative pop-cultural world.*

**Key words:** *alternative world, agonist, antagonist, EVILMASTERMIND, semantics, concept, system, Loki*

**Колесник О.С., Гурина А.С. “ЗЛИЙ ГЕНІЙ” у структурі вербально модельованого світу**

У статті розглядаються мовні засоби вербалізації концепту EVIL MASTERMIND (ЗЛИЙ ГЕНІЙ) в рамках альтернативного поп-культурного світу. Стаття розглядає альтернативну реальність як логічний конструкт, результат категоризаційної та моделювальної діяльності. Зазначене моделювання розгортається відповідно до алгоритмів розвитку відкритих систем відповідно до логіки «ірраціональної раціоналізації», яка залучає міфічний простір та його зміст як первинні фільтри категоризації. «Ірраціональна раціоналізація» трактується як основа міфологічно орієнтованого семіозису. У дослідженні використано мультидисциплінарну методологію М-логіки. У статті скандинавський Локі розглядається як прототип ЗЛОГО ГЕНІЯ, котрий визначається як тимчасово толерована система або підсистема, що виявляє надзвичайні здібності на різних рівнях організації та функціонування, що з обмеженнями / застереженнями сприймається іншими системами через те, що її етіологія істотно суперечить їхній власній. Така система є для них ситуативно корисною, але в кінцевому рахунку є причиною їхнього руйнування. У статті представлені реконструкції семантичних особливостей номінацій Локі, закодованих у словесних конструкціях у давньоскандинавських едичних текстах. Вхіді подальших інтерпретацій ці семантичні особливості упорядковані в системний кластер, зміст котрого проектується на внутрішню структуру концептуалізованого ЗЛОГО ГЕНІЯ в архаїчній північно-германській традиції. Мовленнєва поведінка Локі аналізується з точки зору семантики мовленнєвих актів. Особливу увагу приділено варіанту ЗЛОГО ГЕНІЯ, створеному в альтернативній реальності серіалу «Локі». У статті висвітлюються особливості мовленнєвої діяльності альтернативного ЗЛОГО ГЕНІЯ та акцентується увага на її стратегічно-тактичному аранжуванні. Стаття містить порівняльний аналіз вербальних іпостасей двох ЗЛИХ ГЕНІЇВ як учасників взаємодій «агоністів» та «антагоністів», з огляду на використані мовленнєві акти, стратегії й тактики, а також синтетичні інтерпретації трансформацій концептів-міфологем у модельованому альтернативному поп-культурному світі.

**Ключові слова:** *альтернативний світ, агоніст, антагоніст, ЗЛИЙ ГЕНІЙ, семантика, концепт, система, Локі*

## **Introduction**

Despite the fact that current civilization has entered the “informational”, utterly technological and arguably “rational” era, modern worldviews are still determined by myths and mythic traditions. Myths provide a framework for people’s positioning themselves within this world and in regard to a number of alternative realities. Present-day linguistics, though claiming “cross-paradigmatic” or even “multidisciplinary” approach towards myth-related language phenomena, still tackles them through the prism of poetics, semiotics, folklore and discourse

studies (Lindow, 2000), philosophy and religion studies or anthropology (Hillgarth, 1986).

While myth is essentially verbal, language means are engaged in generating new meanings and senses, as well as rediscovering historically "obscured" senses pertaining to humans' past experiences of interaction with the world. On the other hand, human mental activities involved in categorizing the world and rationalizing states of affairs in certain realities are fundamentally irrational. Whether the present-day civilization is multi-faceted due to resurgence of ethnic cultures and the celebrated "cultural diversity" or, on the contrary, globalized and uniform, as the trends in the modern pop-culture suggest, the pattern of generating alternative realities and respective worldviews is a universal mechanism of back-reference to the subconscious (arguably, genetically as well as linguistically embedded) experience.

Any world (W) as a complex system is characterized by fluctuating sets of ontological (a), functional (b), temporal-locative (d), and axiological (c) parameters. Each characteristic as a fuzzy cluster is manifested to a certain degree. For instance, a fuzzy informational cluster A (objects with ontological features) comprises ordered pairs that mark respective segments of informational (conceptual) domains contextually explicated to a degree from 0 to 1:  $A = \{(h_1, 0.4), (h_2, 0.3), (h_3, 1), (h_4, 0.6)\}$ . This cluster expressed as  $\mu A$  function, shows to which degree  $[0, 1]$  an element (h) is immersed in the domain, see [16]:  $A = \{(h, \mu A(h)) | h \in H\}$  (Zadeh 1972). Respective notations are made for the system's other parameters. Considering possible shifts in categorizer's vantage point, we mark the dynamic fluctuations of each fuzzy set of parameters as of  $\Delta$ . Irrational experience related to the myth and reflecting the fundamental features of a world is regarded as an inchoative axiomatic basic operator—"quantor"  $Q|x00|$ , where x00 marks a set of propositionally encoded ideas / experience of the WORLD (or any contextually focal object or a system around which states of affairs emerge, unfold and transform). Therefore, an alternative (possible) world appears as:

$$W = \sum \Delta \{ (h, \mu A(h)) | h \in H \} / Q|x00|, \Delta \{ (h, \mu B(h)) | h \in H \} / Q|x00|, \Delta \{ (h, \mu C(h)) | h \in H \} / Q|x00|, \Delta \{ (h, \mu D(h)) | h \in H \} / Q|x00|$$

Depending upon the degree of  $\Delta$  and the range of parameters' variations a world may acquire any configuration  $W'$ . The number of  $W'$  is virtually unlimited and depends on variable streams of informational input, variable interpretational

coordinates, variable “pragmatic filters” (worldview related, axiological, professional) involved in categorization and verbal construing.

The algorithm of construing an alternative world encompasses two primary phases of systemic “involution” (“myth” => “reality” transition) and “evolution” (“reality” => “myth” transition). The said phases unfold through four logical stages that are identified as "form building" (1), "interaction" (2), "management" (3); "synthesis"(4). At each stage the initial mythic structures interact with conceptual and semiotic structures of later eras and national cultures and are involved in conscious (rational) and creative (irrational) selection and combination (1), sequencing and assembly (2), expanding, rearrangement and tuning (3), generalization and extending (4) (Kolesnyk, 2021). For instance, a number of key concepts from Scandinavian mythology are chosen and introduced into a number of diverse contexts following the logic and business “navigational markers” of present-day pop culture thus resulting into cinematic productions like “Thor” or “Loki” TV series.

Mythic space as the verbally accessible energy-informational continuum (correlative to a certain segment of the semiosphere and diverse language worldviews) functions as the container of irrational basic operators involved in categorization processes as well as shaping of alternative (possible) worlds. Mythic concepts and scenarios provide a subconscious field of reference to the laws of nature, humanity's true place in the universe, nonhuman worlds, thus orienting and centering diverse cultures and subcultures in the “primary” reality. Mythic logic and axiology, subconsciously acknowledged as true and thus appealing, are the reasons of present-day pop-culture’s active use of mythic scenarios in the construction of possible worlds in cinema, music and literature. This article tackles the verbal means employed in the creation of such worlds, and focuses on verbal representations of the EVIL MASTERMIND, primarily on the verbal behaviour of Loki in the respective TV series.

### **Notes on methodology**

Verbal signs denoting components of an alternative reality manifest a number of specific features. The analysis of the latter requires an interdisciplinary approach and drawing wide cross-epistemic analogies. This article employs the methodology of the interdisciplinary M-logic (Kolesnyk 2016, 2019, 2021) combined with semantic reconstructions and interpretations (Hrygoryshyn, 2009), the elements of

cognitive analysis (Talmy, 1988; Wang, 2003; Wolff, 2010, 2017), discourse analysis (Dijk, 1983, 2006; Kuranova, 2018; Melko, 2019).

Verbal construing of alternative realities is identified as fluid myth-oriented semiosis. In this case, designations of the world basic concepts as well as the world's subjects' discourse are modeled through the above mentioned 4 stages of transformations. The logic of irrational rationalization drives sequences of cognitive procedures and designation acts which we address as “procedural interfunctions”.

Interpretations are carried out within the framework of previously introduced models of systemic interactions that focus on hierarchical and synergetic relations between systems and consider hierarchic causative-determinative (“descending” program from level 7 down to level 1), non-linear causative-symmetric (pairs of relations pertaining to levels 7-1 → 6-2 → 5-3 → 4 → system's re-profiling) and hierarchic-complementary (“resource consumption” and expansion from level 1 up to level 7) between systems' components.

The model is introduced in (Kolesnyk, 2016) and employed in integrative analysis of lingual, conceptual and cultural phenomena (Kolesnyk, 2021).

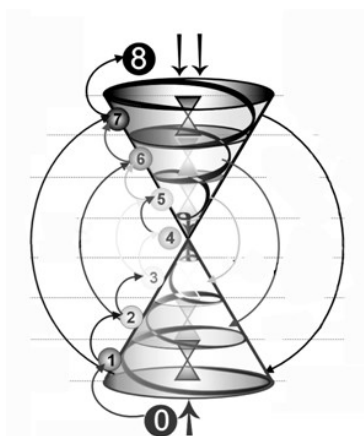


Figure 1. Causative logic of an open system's hierarchical plane organization

For instance, level 7 of the discussed model (Figure 2) stands for a system's ultimate purpose and capability of fitting the super-system's strategic program of development. In the field of linguistics, lingua-cultural studies and anthropology, this level addresses the connection of MAN and the WORLD, MAN and the NATION, MAN and the SACRED SPHERE, MAN and the UNIVERSE

(alternatively, MULTIVERSE) depending on the scale of analysis. Carrying out the most often vague, mystic, divine and empirically incomprehensible (due to its super-systemic origin) purpose-program determines the system's material, physical parameters (level 1 in the model).

## 2. Analysis and discussion

### 2.1. EVIL MASTERMIND though systemic analogies

Systems of diverse etiology engage in a vast variety of interactions. Paradigmatically these relations can be hierarchical, complementary, linear causative-consecutive as well as non-linear determinative etc. In the syntagmatic (synergetic) plane, the said relations are essentially those of cooperation (synergy, symbiosis), conflict, or domination. Each system as a complex multi-layered entity functions according to its ontological essence and potential, structural properties and pragmatic settings. Moreover, while each system is essentially auto-centered in regard to its pragmatics, the vector of its primary orientation is largely determined by its own prior experience of interacting with other systems and its own projected experience that targets future states of affairs within the relative reality. Systems of entirely contrary etiology are likely to employ contrary sets of navigational operators (values) and thus inevitably come into conflict in case of attempting to occupy the same physical space and use its resources. Therefore, any opponent is regarded by any system as hostile i.e. as an ENEMY / ANTAGONIST (cf. Talmy, 1988) and ascribed the whole array of negative attributes that are generalized as BAD / EVIL.

The “best representative” of the opposing system or a systemic cluster manifests a number of prominent properties at all structural levels. These features are either directly contrary to those of the AGONIST (categorizer, focal subject of a world, “positive by default” in its own categorization coordinates) or obtain supplementary negative connotations:  $h|\Delta(a^{-n(0,1)}b^{-n(0,1)}d^{-n(0,1)}c^{-n(0,1)})| \in H\} / Q|x00|$ . For instance, at level 1 (“physical”) the ANTAGONIST appears as “weak” or “strong, but destructive”; deformed or “well structured but dangerous / uncontrollable / alien”. At level 2 (“emotional”) the ANTAGONIST is regarded as the “experiencer of strange / wrong / alien emotions” or “experiencer of emotions triggered by inappropriate stimuli”. At level 3 (“mental”) the ANTAGONIST is seen as “stupid” or “clever but dangerous / destructive”. At level 4 (“social-adaptive”) the ANTAGONIST becomes the “outcast” or “grudgingly tolerated

alien increment”. At level 5 (“inter-group relations”) the ANTAGONIST functions as “destroyer / disruptor” or “situational ally”. At level 6 (“axiological”) the ANTAGONIST appears to be the “enemy / denier” or “ridiculer / copier”. Eventually, at level 7 (“informational”) the ANTAGONIST appears to be a scaled iconic embodiment of “the other world / dangerous alien world / death”.

In the context of different cultures, worldviews, alternative realities and mythological traditions the ANTAGONIST could emerge as ANTI-HERO, ENEMY KING, MYTHIC BEING (GOD, DEMON, LORD OF HELL). They may manifest either all of the above mentioned features or their specific combinations. The configuration dominated by the hypertrophied content of the system’s level 3 allows identifying the respective ANTAGONIST as EVIL MASTERMIND.

## 2.2. Mythic Loki: field of reference

In the Norse mythology Loki as a MYTHIC BEING, associated with both GODS and GIANTS, is a part of the SACRAL SPHERE (the over-system, container of senses and patterns of systems’ development) thus functioning as a “conceptual determiner”, the AGONIST and the ANTAGONIST that impacts the states of affairs in the respective world / worlds. As the AGONIST, Loki is accepted by the systemic cluster of different etiology (a Jotun among the Aesir).

The set of semantic features that determine the essence of the MYTHIC BEING potentially identified as EVIL MASTERMIND is encoded as an elliptic micro text in the inner form of its name. Its etymology has been debated and variants have proven to be rather diverse. However, a synthetic approach allows a dialectic “merge” of seemingly distant versions: 1) *Loki* < Old Norse. *lúka* “close, finish” < (?) I.E. *leu-g* “to break” (Pokorny, 1959, p. 686) which implies Loki’s role in stirring Ragnarok as “the end of all things”; 2) *Loki* ~ Lith. *Lokys* “bear” ~ Gr. *Λύκος* “wolf” that allude to Loki’s animalistic nature; 3) *Loki* < Old Norse. *logi* “flame, fire” (cf. G. *Loge*) < I.E. *\*leuk-* “light” (~ “shimmering”) (Pokorny, 1959, p. 687), which is claimed to be a weak assumption, yet it allows an associate Loki and an element which is absolutely dynamic, unstable and changing, i.e. “treacherous”, “shapeshifting” which Loki is, which further implications of “fast, dangerous, destructive”. 4) *Loki* < Proto-germ. *\*lukkaz-* “bent” < I.-E. *\*leug-* / *loug-* “bent” (Levitski, 2010, p. 366), where “bent” is a generalized metaphoric code-on of “twisted” → [“transforming” → “dynamic” / “fickle”] or “flexible” → [“adjusting” / “misbalancing”]. As E. Heide argues, Far. *Lokki*, Dan. *Lokkemand*,

Norw. *Loke*, *Lokke*, Sw. *Luki*, *Luku* < Germ. \**luk-*, “something related to loops, knots, hooks, closed-off rooms, and locks” (cf. Sw. *lockanät* and Far. *lokkanet* “cobweb”, literally “Lokke's web”, Far. *lokki~grindalokki~grindalokkur* “daddy-long-legs” referring both to crane flies and harvestmen, modern Sw. *lockespindlar* “Locke-spiders”) (Heide, 2011, pp. 65-76). The latter version refers to Loki's physical skill as well as to his ability to “spin” intrigues and instigate conflict. Loki's alternative names (*heitir*) – *Hveðrungr*, *Loptr* – also allow associations with “sound” and “air”, respectively, thus reinforcing Loki's connection to elements and energies of the mythic world. Therefore, the basic proposition X00 identifying Loki encompasses the features of “dynamic / shifting” > “instigator / treacherous”, “weaver” > “plotter”, “finisher” > “destroyer”.

Language units denoting Loki in Old Norse texts explicate the following sets of ontological (a), functional (b), locative-temporal (d), and axiological (c) semantic features:

**“giants’ kin” / “ase” (=a01):** *Laufeyjar sonr* [the mother is of the Aesir] (Thrymkviða, 18), *þeim er bróðir // Býleists í för*. The brother of Byleist accompanies them (Voluspa, 51), *Sá er nefndr Loki eða Loftr, sonr Fárbauda jötuns. Móðir hans er Laufey eða Nál, bræðr hans eru þeir Býleistr ok Helblindi*. “He is called Loki or Loftr, son of the giant Fárbaudi. His mother is Laufey or Nál, his brothers are Býleist and Helblindi” (Gylfaginning, 33). Though he is a “mongrel”, his etiology is essentially contrary to the gods and men: as the “kin of giants” he is bound to be “the father of monsters” and fulfill a number of respective functions as an ANTAGONIST to these two races;

**“witty / clever / sly” (=a02):** *Hann hafði þá speki um fram aðra menn, er slægð heitir, ok vélar til allra hluta*. “He has surpassed all other men in what is called cunning and is good in all kinds of tricks” (Gylfaginning, 33);

**“shapeshifter” (=a03):** *En Loki hafði þá ferð haft til Svaðilfara* “And that was Loki who ran along with Swathifari” (Gylfaginning, 42), *En er þetta sá Loki Laufeyjarson, þá líkaði honum illa, er Baldr sakaði ekki. Hann gekk til Fensalar til Friggjar ok brá sér í konu líki* “So Loki son of Laufey did not like that no harm was done to Balder. So he went to Fensalar to Frigg in the likeness of a woman” (Gylfaginning, 49), *en oft um daga, brá hann sér í laxlíki ok falst þá þar, sem heitir Fránangrsfoss* “often in the day time he turned into a salmon and hid in the Fránang waterfall” (Gylfaginning, 50);

**“instigator” / “trickster” / “mischief maker” / “liar” (=b01):** *en Loki tók mistiltein ok sleit upp ok gekk til þings...* “Loki took the mistletoe and went to the



thing-place [Loki finding a murder weapon]" ... *Þá mælti Loki við hann: "Hví skýtr þú ekki at Baldri?"* "So Loki said: Why don't you throw something at Balder?" (a quesitive construction which is an insinuation or a prompt to action)... *Þá mælti Loki: "Gerðu þó í líking annarra manna ok veit Baldri sæmð sem aðrir menn. Ek mun vísa þér til, hvar hann stendr. Skjót at honum vendi þessum"* " So Loki said: Do like the others, entertain Balder as the others are doing. I will show you where he is standing" [a direct admonitionand urge towards an action], *er lauss Loki // líðr ór böndum // ok ragna rök // rjúfendr koma* "until Loki shakes his bonds loose and Ragnarok comes" (Baldrs draumar, 14), *Sá er enn talðr með ásum, er sumir kalla rógbera ásanna ok frumkveða flærðanna ok vömm allra goða ok manna.* "There is one more among the ases, whom some call the instigator of quarrels between the ases and a liar and a disgrace among the gods and men" (Gylfaginning, 33), *jöll ok áfu // færi ek ása sonum, // ok blend ek þeim svá meini mjöð.* "hate and venom I'll bring to sons of Ases and blend this poison with their mead" (Lokasena, 3) (a menasive-promisive speech act);

**"traveler"** (=b02): *Fló þá Loki, // fjatrhamr dundi, -// unz fyr útan kom // jötna heima // ok fyr innan kom // ása garða.* "Loki flew then – the feathers were rustling – away from Jotunheim to Asgard" (Thrymkviða, 9);

**"companion"** (=b03): *ok þeim atburðum, at Óðinn ok Hænir ok Loki höfðu komit til Andvarafors* "and told him that once Odin, Hænir and Loki came to Anvari's waterfall". (Reginismál, 1), *at Öku-Þórr fór með hafra sína ok reið ok með honum sá áss, er Loki er heitir* "Öku-Thor rode his goats and there was an as with him who was called Loki" (Gylfaginning, 44);

**"negotiator"** (=b04): *Loki kvað: "Illt er með ásum, //illt er með álfum; // hefr þú Hlórriða // hamar of folginn?"* "Loki said: Things are not well among the asses, nor among the elves. Did you get Hlorrídi's [Thor's] hammer hidden?" (Thrymkviða, 7). Loki's verbal behavior is determined by the status and capacities of his adversary. He employs both declarative and quesitive speech patterns within a cooperative communicative strategy. He actively indulges in lying whenever it suits his purposes of is required by the quest: *Sat in alsnotra// ambótt fyrir //er orð of fann //við jötuns máli:// "Svaf vætr Freyja //átta nóttum, vá var hon óðfús //i Jötunheima."* "A wise servant-woman [Loki in disguise] sat near and she replied to the jotun: "Freyja stayed awake for eight nights, so willing to come to Jotunmeim" (Thrymkviða, 28);

**"advisor"** / **"plotter"** (=b05): *at hann hefði lið af hesti sínum, er Svaðilfari hét, en því réð Loki, er þat var til lagt við hann.* "then he asked for his horse

Swathilfari, and, as Loki had advised, he was allowed to have it” (Gylfaginning, 42), *Þá kvað þat Loki // Laufeyjar sonr: //“Þegi þú, Þórr, þeirra orða.// Þegar munu jötnar // Ásgarð búa //nema þú þinn hamar //þér of heimtir.”* “So said Loki, son of Laufeyja: Thor, you shouldn’t be saying this. The jotuns will capture Asgard if you do not (re)take your hammer” (Thrymkviða, 18). In this capacity Loki also deals with systems of the same rank and engages in the tactics of verbal argumentation within a cooperative communicative strategy;

“**birth-giver**” (=b06): *Lætr hann megi Hveðrungs // mundum standa // hjör til hjarta, // þá er hefnt föður.* (Voluspá, 55) “[Viðarr] pierces with the blade the heart of Hveðrung’s son [Fenrir], avenging his father [Oðin]” (Voluspá, 55), *Ól ulf Loki //við Angrboðu, // en Sleipni gat // við Svaðilfara; // eitt þótti skass //allra feiknast, //þat var bróður frá //Býleists komit.* “A wolf Loki fathered with Angrboda, and Sleipnir with Svathilfari; one more monster, the most dire, was sired by the brother of Byleist” (Völuspá in skamma, 11); *Loki át hjarta // lindi brenndu, // fann hann halfsviðinn // hugstein konu; //varð Loftr kviðugr // af konu illri; // þaðan er á foldu // flagð hvert komit* “Loki ate a woman’s heart, found in the fire half-burnt; thus was impregnated Loptr by an evil woman; that is where all witches come from” (Völuspá in skamma, 12);

“**bully**” / “**threat giver**” (=b07): *Loki kvað: "Gull er þér nú reitt // en þú gjöld of hefr // mikil míns höfuðs, // syni þínum // verðr-a sæla sköpuð; // þat verðr ykkarr beggja bani."* “Gold has been given, a big ransom for me you have received; your son will be ill-fated, it [the gold] will bring death to the both of you” (Reginsmál, 6). Dealing with a being of lower or equal rank Loki combines declarative speech acts with threats, bullying and menacing prophesying;

“**mocker**” / “**offender**” (=b08): *ása ok álfa, er hér inni eru, þú ert við víg varastr ok skjarrastr við skot.*”of all the Ases and elves, who are here, you [Bragi] are the most wary in war, and the shyest in shooting” (Lokasena, 13), *“Þegi þú, Óðinn, // þú kunnir aldregi // deila víg með verum; // oft þú gaft // þeim er þú gefa skyldira, // inum slævurum, sigr.”* “Silence Odin! You never could deal victory to men. Often you granted victory not to whom you should have, but to lesser men.” (Lokasena, 21), *“En þik síða kóðu // Sámseyu í, ok draptu á vétt sem vödur, // vitka líki // fórtu verþjóð yfir, // ok hugða ek þat args aðal.”* “But they say you on Samsey you beat the drum [worked seith magic], and plied magic like a volva, and in the form of a vitki fared among men. I think that was womanish” (Lokasena, 24), *“Þegi þú, Freyja, // þik kann ek fullgörva; // era þér vamma vant; // ása ok álfa, // er hér inni eru, // hvern hefir þinn hór verit.”* “Be silent Freya! I know well

that you are full of faults. To the Ases and elves who sit here you have been a whore” (Lokasena, 30), “*Þegi þú, Týr, // þú kunnir aldregi // bera tilt með tveim; // handar innar hægri // mun ek hinnar geta, //er þér sleit Fenrir frá.*” “Silence Tyr! You never could bring justice between two men. Your right hand, I also know, was chewed off by Fenrir.” (Lokasena, 38). These and other offensive accusations are identified as invective speech acts directed against virtually all key components of the system that tolerates a potentially dangerous “implant”. Employing multi-vectored and symmetric logic of systemic interactions, we suggest the following reconstruction of the dynamics of states of affairs in the mythic worlds’ cluster. As a representative of ontologically contrary system (a fractally scaled iconic subsystem) with its specific program of development (level 7), Loki cannot but be a destructive trickster even within a friendly environment (level 1); this controversy manifested in numerous conflicts and flamed by the instigation of Balder’s murder intensifies contradictions of axiological nature (level 6) that result in the lack of system’s appreciation and low esteem of the subsystem which result in the latter’s overload at level 2. This overload is critical so it cancels the controlling factor of the upper level 3 (mental): Loki is too frustrated, overwhelmed and driven by emotions that he speaks without thinking and delivers the said invective messages. As a result, the usual interaction at level 5 is no longer in order, automatically rendering all capacities of the subsystem ineffective at level 3 (his wit does not help him escape either the conflict or the payback). Consequently, the sequence of scenarios focus at level 4, where the subsystem is excluded from the system.

“**killer**” / “**invader**” (=b09): *Loki mátti eigi heyra þat, ok drap hann Fimafeng* “Loki detested that and he killed Fimafeng” (Lokasena, 1), *Loki laust hann með steini til bana.* “Loki through a stone at him and killed him” (Reginismál), *Loki á orrostu við Heimdall, ok verðr hvárr annars bani* “Loki is fighting Heimdall and they kill each other” (Gylfaginning, 51), *Naglfar losnar. // Kjöll ferr austan, // koma munu Múspells // um lög lýðir, en Loki stýrir. // Fara fíflmegir // með freka allir, // þeim er bróðir // Býleists í för.* “Naglfar is loose, [it] journeys from the east, Muspell's people are coming, over the waves, and Loki steers. The kin-of-monsters with all the greedy ones are coming. The brother of Byleist accompanies them (Voluspá, 50-51), *Þar kemr ok þá Fenrisúlfr ok Miðgarðsormr. Þar er ok þá Loki kominn ok Hrymr ok með honum allir hrímpursar, en Loka fylgja allir Heljarsinnar.* “There come Fenrir and Midgard’s Srpent. There also comes Loki and Hrym and all rime-giants” (Gylfaginning, 51);

**“problem solver” / “maker” (=b10):** *Þá sendu þeir Loka at afla gullsins. Hann kom til Ránar ok fekk net hennar ok fór til Andvaraforis ok kastaði netinu fyrir gedduna, en hon hljóp í netit.* “So they sent Loki to procure gold. He went to Ran, got her net and went to Aandvari’s waterfall and cast the net to catch the pike” (Reginismál, 1), *Fjölsviðr kvað: “Lævateinn heitir hann, // en hann gerði Loftr rúnum //fyr nágrindr neðan; //í segjárnskeri // liggr hann hjá Sinmöru, //ok halda njarðlásar níu.”* “Fjolsvith said: “Lævatein [the weapon] it is called, that Lopt with runes has guarded, down by the doors of death; in an iron chest by Sinmora lies it, and nine locks hold it.”” (Fjölsvinnsímál, 26), *þá svarði hann eiða, at hann skyldi svá til haga, at smiðurinn væri af kaupinu, hvat sem hann kostaði til.* “so he swore that he would arrange that the smith [mason] would not fulfill the conditions” (Gylfaginning, 42);

**“of Asgard” (=d01):** *ás, er Loki heitir* „to the ase called Loki“ (Gylfaginning, 20), this designation metaphorically refers to Loki as an Asgardian, the accepted dweller of a space rather than to his race;

**“evil” (=c01):** *Loki er friðr ok fagr sýnum, illr í skaplyndi, mjök fjölbreyttinn at háttum* “Loki is fair and handsome but ill-natured and fickle” (Gylfaginning, 33);

**“of low reputation” (=c02):** *En þat kom ásamt með öllum, at þessu myndi ráðit hafa sá, er flestu illu ræðr, Loki Laufeyjarson,* “And everyone agreed that the bad advixe had been given by the reason of all trouble, Loki son of Laufey” (Gylfaginning, 42), *ok vömm allra goða ok manna* “a disgrace among the gods and men” (Gylfaginning, 33).

These conceptualized semantic features constitute the “elliptical text” encoded in the inner form of the verbal construals designating Loki and reflect the content of the respective mythic concept. The features are arranged as a field-type frame structure while immediate connections between its components (propositions) are represented as predication ( $\Leftrightarrow$ ), adjunction ( $\wedge$ ), disjunction ( $\vee$ ), implication ( $\rightarrow$ ), and negation ( $\neg$ ); whereas  $|**|$  mark clusters of features,  $()$  mark the nuclear segment of the concept,  $[]$  are used for the medial zone and  $\{\}$  – for the periphery or the boundaries of the whole concept. Thus the linear notation of the logical structure of the LOKI concept (P1) appears like this:

$$P1 \Leftrightarrow \{[(X00 \wedge |a02 \rightarrow b01, b04, b05| \wedge |a01 \rightarrow b10 \rightarrow |c01 \wedge c02|) \vee |b07, b08 \vee b09|] \wedge a03 \wedge b02 \wedge b03 \wedge b06 \wedge d01 \wedge b03\}$$

Thus, Loki manifests a number of functional capacities that allow him to be tolerated by a system of contrary etiology (the grudging acceptance results in negative designations and eventual expulsion). He engages in a number of scenarios pertaining to the sacral sphere, interacts with mythic creatures rather than humans and is responsible for the system's significant transformations. As a dialectic "factor of chaos" he cooperates with other components of the said conceptual sphere and triggers a number of scenarios favourable for it, yet at the same time he is responsible for the surge of entropy within the said systemic cluster that leads to its utmost breakdown. His abilities of mental and communicational nature are outstanding, thus qualifying him for a prototype EVIL MASTERMIND.

### **2.3. The discourse of EVIL MASTERMIND in "Loki" TV series**

In the context of an alternative reality created in a pop-cultural multi-semiotic artifact, which a TV series is, the concept EVIL MASTERMIND inherits basic characteristics from the mythic space yet undergoes a number of transformations. Basic sets of his features as well as his scenario engagement are explicated visually. Both have been altered in regard to reference field and types of interactions: there are different spaces (worlds) rather than those known from the Norse mythology, Loki interacts with humans, "super-heroes" and "outworldish beings" not common for traditional worldviews. The features of "magic" and "communicator" prevail over the focal ones from the Scandinavian mythic space. While being "magic" appears to approximate him to a "wizard-type" being, rather universal and common / imperative for a typical commercially successful pop-cultural fantasy world, his characteristics of a "communicator" ride on the features of "liar" and "trickster" expanding and exploiting them, providing a specific twist for the story in the series.

Norse mythic concepts are scarce in the general settings of the alternative pop-cultural world *W'* which appears to be only nominally tied to the Scandinavian mythic space. The conceptual matrix of this world that defines the space for the EVIL MASTERMIND's activities includes the following components inherited from the original mythic space and verbalized in Loki's discourse construals (Figure 3).

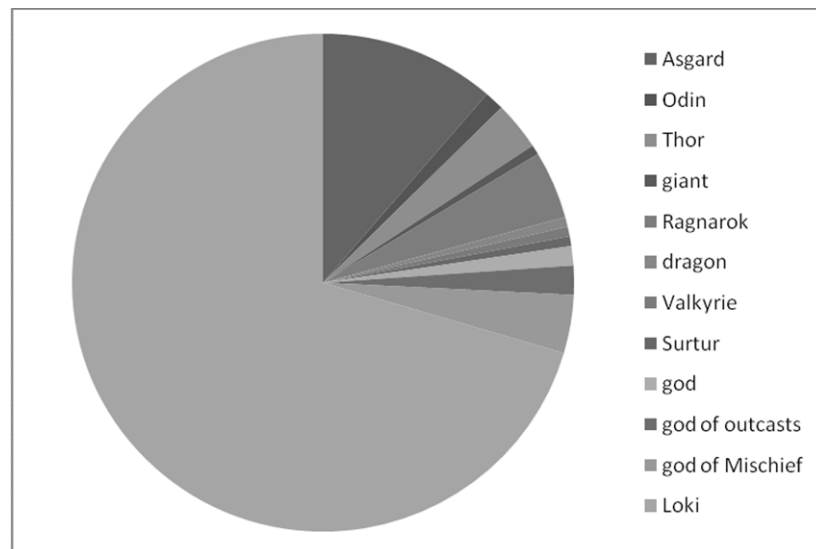


Figure 3. Distribution of Norse mythic concepts' designations in the "Loki" series

In the customer corpus comprising scripts for the Loki TV series' characters' discourse (6 episodes, total volume of 22730 words) 112 units are the respective proper name, among the co-referent units 2 denote him as "god", 6 are functional descriptors "God of Mischief" (semantically closest to the subject of the Scandinavian mythic space), and 3 complementary descriptors are ironic designations "god of outcasts". Apart from the designations of Asgard, the other concepts' representations are minimal. Thus we speak of a distant, superficial and conventional relation of the pop-cultural alternative world *W'* and the "prototype" one and regard the former as a "near-fake" semiotic projection.

The only significant connection to the mythic space explicated verbally in the series are the designations of Asgard. They correspond to Loki's "of Asgard" (=d01) semantic feature verbalized in the Eddic texts. However, in the alternative pop-cultural fantasy world this reference is deliberately reinforced. "Asgard" is used as a descriptor within a self-glorifying verbal construction: *I am Loki of Asgard. And I am burdened with glorious purpose* (Loki 01); a generic descriptor: *Odin of Asgard* (Loki 02), *She was, um... A Queen of Asgard* (Loki 03); a designator of a specific place: *Asgard, mystical realm, beyond the stars* (Loki 02), *Asgard, the Nine Realms. - Space? - Space? Space is big* (Loki 01); an object of cataclysm: *And I could go down to Asgard before Ragnarok causes its complete destruction* (Loki 02), *Yes. The destruction of Asgard and most of its people. I'm sorry* (Loki 02), *apocalypse is coming. Ragnarok, Surtur will destroy Asgard* (Loki

02); a container: *would have been taken to a cell on Asgard* (Loki 01), including ironic / sarcastic utterances: *Candy. Do you have candy on Asgard* (Loki 02), *It's not Asgard, that's my lunch. - It's a metaphor* (Loki 02). This locative semantic feature is essential as it provides an implication of [generic space → supernatural abilities]; being devoid of his magic and cast away from the familiar space (i.e. excluded from a network of synergetic relations that sustained a dynamic system) Loki keeps trying to reacquire his power and reintegrate in familiar relations with beneficiary or adversary systems where he (as a system) functions to his full capacity, can exercise his role of “the factor of chaos” and feel comfortable.

In the context of the alternative fantasy TV-world Loki's feature “**giants kin**” / “**ase**” (=a01) is addressed only once: ..... while his magic, shape shifting and other supernatural properties are canceled. The feature “**witty / clever / sly**” (=a02) becomes a focal one yet it and his functional capacities as “**instigator**” / “**trickster**”/ “**mischief maker**” / “**liar**” (=b01), “**traveler**” (=b02), “**companion**” (=b03), “**negotiator**” (=b04), “**advisor**” / “**plotter**” (=b05) are driven by different pragmatics. His functional features “**bully**” / “**threat giver**” (=b07), “**killer**” / “**invader**” (=b09) are disabled. Hence his purpose is to survive (i.e. to prevent the scenario  $SYS_{\lim \rightarrow 0} |a^{-n}|$ ) and find a way home ( $SYS \text{ trans } d^{-n} \rightarrow d^{x00}$ ). Successful unfolding of this scenario depends on Loki's reversing or negating his inherent features “**evil**” (=c01) and “**of low reputation**” (=c02) ( $SYS \text{ trans } c01 \rightarrow -c01$ ;  $c02 \rightarrow -c02$ ) that might prevent a stronger AGONIST from destroying him.

Therefore, the structure of an “alternative pop-cultural Loki” (P2) appears the following way:

$$P2 \Leftrightarrow \{[(X00 \wedge |a02 \rightarrow b04, b05| \wedge |a01 \rightarrow b01 \neg|c01 \wedge c02| \wedge b02) \wedge d01 \vee b03] \wedge a03\}$$

The zone of two sets of data overlapping (i.e. two semantic / conceptual spaces overlapping) that is considered as  $P1 \cap P2 = \{x00 | x00 \in P1 \text{ and } x00 \in P2\} = x00 \in (P1 \cap P2)$  reflects semantic features common for Scandinavian Loki P1 and pop-cultural TV-Loki P2, namely  $M(0) = \{x00, a02, a01, b01, b02, b03, b04, b05, c01, c02, d01\}$

The propositions present in the P1 set and absent in the P2 is reconstructed as  $M(1) = P1 \setminus P2 = \{n01 | n01 \in P1 \text{ and } n01 \notin P2\}$ . In this case  $M(1) = \{a03, b06, b07, b08, b09, b10\}$ . Respectively, the propositions present in the P2 set and absent in the P1 is reconstructed as  $M(2) = P2 \setminus P1 = \{n01 | n01 \in P2 \text{ and } n01 \notin P1\}$ .

As  $M(2) = \{0\}$ , we speak of reduction in the original concept's structure and narrowing of the range within which derivative senses are generated.

Apart from this reduction, we register re-arrangement of propositions and sets of propositions between the zones of the concept's content / zones of language units' semantics. In the nuclear zone of P2 the feature b01 is connected to a01, reflecting a difference in pragmatics; the feature b02 is moved to the nuclear zone, yet it is determined by different pragmatic, as the subjects locative transformations are not voluntary. The shift of d01 and b03 to medial zone are caused by the same reason.

Loki's quest of surviving between strange spaces and hostile AGONISTS depends on reintegrating into relations at level 4 of systems of variable and different etiology. Without his super powers it is carried out both by action and verbally. Loki implements the following communicative strategies encompassing a number of specific tactics in his discourse activities.

Loki adheres to the strategy of **discrediting the opponent** (an Agonist) and uses the tactic of **negative evaluation**: [*The Time Variance Authority is*] "*Drunk with power, blinded to the truth*", and this is the reason for their walking "*into one wolf's mouth after another*" (Loki: 02, 10:30), the latter being a metaphoric allusion towards the mythic scenario of Tyr putting his hand into Fenrir's maw as a sign of trustworthiness yet breaking the oath (and losing the hand) thus pointing at the opponent's lying and inevitable self-demise. This idea is reinforced by direct statement, that [the Time Variance Authority does not put the truth in the first place, and] "*isn't aware of its surrounding*" (Loki 02, 10:03) which implies incompetence of the adversary and reinforces it with the element of **attempted dominating strategy**, namely, the tactic of **auto-profiling** that contributes to a special contrast between the AGONIST and ANTAGONIST: "*My teeth were sharp, but my ears even sharper*" (Loki 02, 10:15). Auto-profiling may be reconsidered as auto-augmentation within a different strategy.

Whenever he is forced to comply with the AGONIST, he presumes to retain at least a shade of dignity after being called "*a scared little boy, shivering in the cold*" (a reminiscence of the low esteem inherited from the Norse myth): when the dominating communicative strategy and direct opposition are impossible, he employs a mix of "**grudgingly cooperative**" and "**non-cooperative**" strategies indulging in the tactics of sarcastic commentaries: "*it is adorable that you think you could possibly manipulate me*"; or restrained insults, as he agrees to look through the papers to "*see if there is something that was missed*" stating that the



AGONIST were “*idiots*” who “*probably missed a lot*” (Loki 02, 17:48). In this context, he used the non-cooperative strategy, namely the tactic of insult and humiliation.

Loki shift from sarcastic remarks to the tactics of **ridiculing**. He addresses the Variant, saying that he “went undercover” and that he “has an offer for him”, which is to “overthrow” the Time-keepers. At the same time, Loki asks the Variant if he is “*too scared to meet me face-to-face?*” (Loki 02, 41:17) as an attempt to lure the AGONIST to reveal his identity as well as a response to the AGONIST’S taunting him with statements about Loki’s doppelganger’s superiority.

A tactic of **immediate commentaries** combined with **hints** and **allusions** is used for the purpose of potential shifting the adversaries’ negative estimation of himself. When he hears an utterance: “*if you see a Loki, prune it*”, he quickly adds, “*The bad Loki, preferably*” (Loki 02, 35:25), implying that between two variants of Loki who is “evil by default” he is the “good” one.

The **tactic of ironic statements and joking** refers to his innate functional feature of “emotive trigger / emotion experiencer”: when asked if a boy shopping in the mall could be him, he says that he “*probably would have worn a suit*” (Loki 02, 38:36). This remark could be phatic yet it implies his search for personal validation, i.e. the acceptance by the system which is not the case in the Norse mythology.

Like the classic Loki, the character of the series functions as a negotiator, yet he tries to survive rather than solve the problems of the Aesir. He uses the **manipulative positioning strategy** and the respective **tactic of emphasizing positive information**.

While on the TVA team trying to catch a Variant, Loki delivers a number of messages: “*I have a new purpose* [declarative pretense]. *I’m a servant of the Sacred Timeline* [declarative manipulative pretense]. *And knowing what I now know about his tactics, I can deliver you the Variant* [a promise], *but I need assurances* [request]. *Assurances that I won’t be completely disintegrated the moment the job has been done* [statement, specification of conditions]. *We’ll need to speak to the Time-Keepers at once* [implying proximity]. *They’re in graver danger than we realized* [descriptive statement, potential exaggeration]” (Loki 02, 11:02-11:30). This manipulation is distantly related to the “**negotiator**” (=b04) and “**advisor**” / “**plotter**” (=b05) semantic features. It aims at stimulating TVA workers’ positive attitude and trust as well as minting certain assurances for himself.

A modification of the **manipulative positioning strategy** also employs a version of **auto-augmentation tactic**. Loki “*would never stab anyone in the back*” because “*that's such a boring form of betrayal*” (Loki 02, 24:30). In this case an oxymoron-type paradox of “honest betrayal” [imminent and foreseen and therefore not so bad] implying personal courage, grandeur and worthiness [facing the adversary like a prototype hero] combined with ironic justification [avoiding boredom] are supposed to create an effect of “expecting an inverted fair play” and shift the axiological features ( $c_n$ ) from the entirely negative range towards the positive part of the scale.

A combination of different strategies and tactics is employed in cases like this: *Which is absurd, because my people are, by nature, gullible fools* [negative assessment in dominating strategy]. *A trait that I, the God of Mischief* [auto-augmentation, profiling in non-cooperative strategy], *exploited time and time again simply by listening* [statement, auto-profiling]. *My teeth were sharp, but my ears even sharper* [a qualifying statement, auto-profiling ] (Loki 02, 11:07-10:45)..

Thus, the EVIL MASTERMIND of the alternative TV world is deprived of a number of ontological features. The dominant and boosted features are “clever”, “resilient”, “resourceful” (hence MASTERMIND), while the rest are alluded to yet not manifested. A few features like “vulnerable”, “emotional”, “non-confident”, “scared” are regarded as semantic “add-ons” relevant in the structure of the pop-cultural alternative world. The functional array demonstrates the system’s shifted orientation vector: a trickster and negotiator no longer plots the demise of the gods but rather uses his skills for personal survival. The locative-temporal characteristics acquire a quality of “chaotic relativity” as the system randomly travels between time-space planes while its original time-space is also represented as a variation. Finally, the set of axiological features demonstrates a slide from “evil” to at least “ambiguous” if not “positive” (hence not entirely EVIL).

## Conclusions

A pop-cultural alternative fantasy world created in a TV series is a poly-code construal. It employs the mechanism of myth-oriented semiosis for generating a secondary mythology which is anchored in a recognizable mythic tradition (the “Loki” TV series uses several concepts from the Scandinavian mythic space). Both the prototype mythic world  $W$  and an alternative fantasy-world  $W'$  share several common points of reference. However, the variant  $W'$  as a container of fluid senses

that correspond to sets of quest-like scenarios is rather fuzzy, devoid of essential elements from the original mythic space and is determined by the pragmatics and guidelines of the globalized commercially oriented pop-cultural genre of art. In the case of the “Loki” TV series the logic of scenarios’ sequence is determined by the currently popular idea of worlds’ plurality, as well as recognition of objects’ dialectic nature. Consequently, the limited number of features of the EVIL MASTERMIND borrowed from the Scandinavian mythic space constitutes a “reshuffled conceptual assembly”. Its focal mental and functional-communicational features are expected to compensate for the deliberately disabled supernatural ones; spatial transfers are forced rather than driven by curiosity; the sets of inherently negative axiological features are reconsidered and represented as ambiguous or close to positive. The subject’s communicative strategies and tactics that are no longer dominating or aggressive but “grudgingly cooperative”, reflect the shift towards “humanizing” a god, diminishing or even humiliating the “great evil” for the sake of the present-day “positive” pop-culture / ideology of “the global village”, satisfying the customers’ need for comic effects etc. Semantic and cognitive transformations, responsible for the rise of an alternative reality and modeling a subject similar to the one under discussion follow the logic of causative, hierarchical and complementary systemic relations which unfold in cycles of larger-scale systemic inversions. On the other hand, alternative realities modeled in the context of the present-day civilization, demonstrate obvious conceptual and semantic (in the long perspective, cognitive, mental and cultural) reduction. The latter could be the focus of a specific research.

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