Sign, Language, Significance and Communication

Mirela Arsith[1], Daniela Aurelia Popa Tanase[2]

Abstract: The hypothesis from which we start in our approach is that the sign is also an element of the communication process and non-participant in the signaling process. The constructive character of thought is manifested in language, which is revealed as "the constitutive body of thoughts." Language, as a reality and a phenomenon characteristic of man, it relates to thinking as language. This is done through the inner form of language. Through speech acts, thinking becomes communicable; the context of communication can be the space of interpretation of the deep relations between thinking and language. What we are pursuing in this paper is to argue that the process of thinking, which assumes concepts, judgments, reasoning, has to do with the meanings. Meaning is an inner property of thought, a relationship: a) between signs; b) between the sign and the object; c) between the people's activity; d) between people who communicate using the signs. Therefore, the significance is multidimensional and belongs to both the sphere of consciousness and any social process.

Keywords: semiotics; sign; language; thinking; meaning; communication

1. Introduction

Contemporary society is characterized by the manifestation of multiple virtual realities, by the simultaneous experience of events, due to the mediated logic of the present. Therefore, it is necessary for the human spirit to rethink the relations with time and space, through the mediation of multicultural signs and patterns.

[1] Associate Professor, PhD, Danubius University of Galati, Faculty of Communication and International Relations, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Boulevard, 800654 Galati, Romania, Tel.: +40.372.361.102, fax: +40.372.361.290, Corresponding author: arsith.mirela@univ-danubius.ro.
[2] Senior Lecturer, PhD, Danubius University of Galati, Faculty of Communication and International Relations, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Boulevard, 800654 Galati, Romania, Tel.: +40.372.361.102, fax: +40.372.361.290, E-mail: daniela.popa@univ-danubius.ro.

2. The Sign

On the horizon of many languages, images and cultural codes, *semiotics* has developed, in its capacity as a discipline that investigates signs, the social functioning of sign systems and the description of the conditions of production and understanding of meaning. "Semiotics is obviously the study of signs, under the condition of overcoming these signs and seeing what is happening under the signs" (Floch, 1995, p. 5). Semiotics correlates with various social practices such as education, marketing, art, advertising, etc.

Therefore, we find semiotics inserted in communication, literature, journalism, theater, law, etc. and correlated with various social practices: education, advertising, art, entertainment, marketing, etc. Therefore, the semiotic approach:

- configures the social functioning of sign systems;
- analyzes the activity of messages in semiotic acts;
- researches the conditions of production and understanding of meaning.

The signs convey thoughts or contents of thought, so that the rules that are imposed in their use and functioning belong to a field that studies thinking and knowledge.

The dynamics, transfer and transformation of signs represent *semiosis*, the highest level of semiosis is anthroposemia. It "includes all processes of significance, in which human beings are directly involved" (Arsith, 2006, p. 13). Anthroposemiosis highlights all the processes of significance specific to humanity.

Semiotics has established itself as a discipline that studies the uses of signs in the processes of communicative meaning, but also the significant signs and systems in nature, thought and society (Stănciulescu, 2001, p. 50). The human being, as a being of signs and symbols, consists *only in significance*.

Ernst Cassirer stated that the man lives simultaneously, in a purely physical world, and in a symbolic universe: "Language, myth, art and religion are [...] the different threads that weave the symbolic network […] of human experience" (Cassirer, 1994, pp. 43). Man is his language, and the essence of his nature is his ability to signify.

3. Language and Significance

Language, the most important system of signs, has the ability to transmit to the listener the ideas of the speaker, becoming the indirect and mediated cause of knowledge. Language has, on the one hand, the role of informing us about the world

and, on the other hand, of explaining our behaviors. Language is the language in action, an activity of using the system of linguistic signs. The sign (hence the linguistic sign as well) is an entity that is always involved in a process of meaning.

The research of the meaning of meaning and of the conditions of its production led to the configuration of semantics, a dimension of semiotics, "a science of transcending given language, through the act of referring to reality and interpreting expressions" (Ioan, 1999, p. 57). At the same time, linguistics, logic, philosophy of language, etc. deal with semantics.

The essence of the meaning of a linguistic symbol is that it represents something. The meaning of any term usually has two fundamental elements, one or the other of which can play a dominant role in the use of language:

(a) *denotation* or *literal meaning*; this is a relationship between a linguistic expression and persons, objects, characteristics and activities external to the language system, being more or less common to individuals belonging to a certain language community;

(b) *connotation* or *figurative meaning*; the words of everyday language hide many nuances and subtleties, revealing emotional feelings, valuing attitudes, allusions and implications, all having a decisive role in perfecting meaning by passing it beyond what is said, pursuing effects of effective influence of the recipient (Arsith, 2006, p. 26).

Therefore, the words of a language can have a general meaning, accepted by all members of a community, or these words can have a variable meaning, favoring the implicit or the presuppositional. Adam Schaff proposed the following explanations of meaning (Arsith, 2005, p. 66): the thing whose name is the sign; a property of things; an inner property of thought; a relationship:

-   between signs;
-   between sign and object;
-   between the sign and the idea about the object;
-   between the sign and the activity of the people;
-   between people who communicate through the use of signs.

This classification contributes to a better understanding of the spheres of manifestation and of the transformations of meaning. In the vision of Charles Santiago Sanders Peirce, meaning represents the thought or chain of thoughts determined by the use of a statement; it has three references as a sign:

- is a sign of relationship with a certain thought, which interprets it;
- it is a sign for some object, with which it is equivalent in the respective thought;
- is a sign in a certain quality that relates it to its object (*apud* to Arsith, p. 66).

Achieving meaning means perceiving as many of the relationships established through the discursive functioning of signs. From semiotics, meaning, in relation to the sign, fulfills the function of referent, and meaning realizes the function of reference.

4. Communication - Process of Meaning

According to W. Von Humbold, "language is the constituent organ of thoughts" (apud Boboc, 2005, p. 9). but language is also the activity through which thinking becomes communicable through the acts of speech, through the "sound form" of language. Michael Devitt and Kim Sterelny stated that language is "a system for expressing or communicating thought" (Devitt & Sterelny, 2000, p. 26).

The main function of language is communication, an action of a *sender* to transmit a *message* about *something* to a receiver, who must interpret the message. Solomon Marcus, in the volume *Signs about signs*, argues that communication processes are the object of study for semiotics *only* in their capacity as processes of meaning (Marcus, 1979, p. 14). Communication appears to us as "*production and interpretation of signs (statements) that want to say something true or false about a real state.*" (John, 1999, p. 57).

Through communication, people refer to states of affairs or events. At the same time, the attitudes of the broadcasters towards the semantic representations or towards the real world or towards possible worlds are also expressed. Like actions, communication can cause new events or new states of affairs in the world. In this context, an approach of modal logic is required, capable of creating models for capturing human attitudes, "seeking to study how true or false a statement is, whether it is necessarily or possibly true or false' (Arsith, 2005, p. 78).

Depending on the degree of belonging of a property to an object, Aristotle still identified the contingent, *possible, necessary and impossible ways*. The Romanian logician Petru Ioan proposed (1999, pp. 284-285):

- doxastic modalities, of trust, of opinion, of faith;
- temporal, chronological modalities;

- spatial, topological-modal modalities;
- dialectal modalities of change;
- ethical modalities of sanctioning;
- aesthetic modalities, of evaluation, of appreciation;
- directional modalities, of spatial reporting, etc.

We set out to exemplify the modal dimension and the attitudinal configuration that political communication can reveal to them. Therefore, we propose for analysis the following fragment:

"... it is a new world, but America must not be afraid of it. It is a new world and we must help shape it. It is a new world that necessitates a new American foreign policy - a policy based on the constant decency of values and on the optimism of our view of history.

We can no longer have a policy only for the industrial nations as a foundation of global stability, but we must respond to the new reality of a world that is, from a political point of view, in full wake.

We can no longer expect the other one hundred and fifty countries to follow the dictates of the powerful ones, but we must continue, with confidence, our efforts to inspire, to convince and to show the way." Jimmy Carter, *Human Rights and Foreign Policy* (1977) cited in (Urofsky, 2000, p. 331)

The frequency of use of "*must*" in this passage express a practical necessity. It is about a reckless attitude in relation to the world. We can first identify a reckless attitude toward the world: "America must not be afraid of it." The meaning of the "must" expresses the practical necessity by which America must qualify as a daring agent.

The next attitude is the *implicit availability* in the new world: "*we must help form it.*" In this communicative sequence, the meaning of "must" reveal the practical need to achieve a goal. We consider that the sentence "*we must respond to the new reality*" reveals an approach of welcome and communicative relationship, which combines both meanings of practical necessity.

Another attitude that is configured is the *effective, actional involvement*: "we must continue, with confidence, the efforts", the meaning of qualified agent being assumed as belonging to the agent: "the efforts to inspire, to convince and to show the way", and the sense of necessity of achieving the goal is revealed as an objective: "to continue".

The statement "It is a new world that necessitates a new American foreign policy" establishes (justifies) the attitudes expressed; *the new world* is constituted in a *necessary and sufficient condition for a new American foreign policy.*

The expression "*We can no longer have a policy only for the industrial nations*" is equivalent to the wording "*It is necessary not to have a policy ...*", or with the statement "*It is impossible to have another policy ...*"; there is a state in the "world" that needs to change in order to correspond to the new world which is "*politically awake*". Speaking, the enunciator expresses his faith, doubt, certainty, thus acting on the receiver.

From the perspective of the modal network, political communication evolves, with priority, in a specific space of the *possible*, *the verosimil* and *the credible*, *the promise*, *for some* (even if it is desirable *for all*), promoting a complex attitudinal configuration: it is uttered in the name of a political group, a social category, a nation.

Political communication is able to propose goals, solutions, means of achievement, which the enunciator assumes; political communication affirms the qualification of the speaker (and, implicitly, of the group he represents) as a competent, capable, well-intentioned, efficient agent.

5. Conclusions

Language is a means of communication. The foundation of social practice, language participates both in the establishment of scientific, philosophical, artistic theories and practices, etc., and in the coherent functioning of society. Communication in various social contexts builds and reconstructs social reality, which it describes, interprets and enriches through various processes of meaning.

6. Bibliography

Arsith, M. (2005). *Semiotica discursului politic/ The semiotics of political discourse.* Iași: Editura Ștefan Lupașcu.

Arsith, M. (2006). *Semiotica/Semiotics.* Bacău: EduSoft.

Boboc, A. (2005). *Limbaj şi cunoaştere/Laguage and knowledge*. Bucharest: Cartea Universitară.

Cassirer, E. (1994). *Eseu despre om/ Essay on man.* Bucharest: Humanitas.

Devitt, M. & Sterelny, K. (2000). *Limbaj şi realitate/ Language and reality.* Iasi: Polirom.

Floch, J.M. (1995). *Identités visuelles/Visual identities.* Paris: PUF.

Ioan, P. (1999). *Logica „integrală" în distincţii, operaţionalizări, definiţii şi exemplificări/ "Integral" logics in distinctions, operationalizations, definitions and examples,* Vol. I. Iaşi: Stefan Lupaşcu.

Marcus, S. (1979). *Semne despre semen/ Signs about signs.* Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică.

Stănciulescu, T. (2001). *Comunicare publică şi asistenţă socială/ Public communication and social assistance*. Iaşi: Editura Erota.

Urofsky, M., I (coord.) (2000). *Texte fundamentale ale democraţiei americane/ Fundamental texts of American democracy.* Bucharest: Teora.