

## A Practical Approach to Communication Aspects in Respect to Semiotics

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### Abstract

The first part of this research has been consisted mainly in shedding light on theories and arguments about the science of signs with regard to the communication mechanism. To cite all the semiotic communicative system is not possibly feasible, still the nature of this topic does not require doing all this. In fact, this paper draws a clear idea about the elements and criteria involved in the communication process in relation to semiotics. However, statements and theories remain still enigmatic and somewhat unclear when not supported with solid and realistic examples. These will be the backbone of our practical approach aiming at decoding the argument in this domain. This is, in fact, what the second part will focus on. Hence, this will be divided into two major sections. The first one, will include no more than some broad lines about the literature we tend to follow in our study. The second, which is the longest and the most important phase will be restricted to discussing some selected patterns, within which we will base our work upon. At this stage, we have examined two semiotic models: theatre and cinematography as forms of communication.

### Keywords:

Communicative system – Semiotic models - Semantics -  
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## Introduction

In human societies, language plays a commanding role, and is generally taken to be the predominant means of Communication. However, the different studies of human development, mainly history, have proved convincingly that language, as a Communicative system, is just a recent phenomenon for human being. For instance, Man, in his primitive stage, used to live in forests and deserts, unaware of concepts such as speech and language, but rather his behaviours were, in a way not much different from that of the animals; hence cries, body gestures, and many other codes, conventional to the forest society, were the dominating features of human communication at that time.

Subsequently, man's acquisition of language was not to make him ignore his previous systems. In fact, nowadays the non-verbal codes seem to have encountered an enormous change, going hand in hand with human development. Thus his behaviour no longer resembles that of the animals, but they are rather efficient criteria that we can not do without in the field of communication processes. As we shall see later in a following section, man sometimes finds it difficult to express himself fully, in certain circumstances, by the uses of linguistics dints, so he turns to the non-verbal ones to secure him and do the job. Hence, it is quite clear that language remains not the unique way. whereby man can communicate and exchange messages, but is rather only one among many Communicative aspects.

Ferdinand De Saussure, a Swiss linguist, has done an important work in this domain, and came up with many conclusions, concerning

language. He was the first to point out the notion of Semiology as the science of signs, which is interested in the manifestation of signs communicative aspects. He suggests that language is a set of signs; hence linguistics which is said to be in charge of the study of language, seems to be just a part which should be under the control of a general science he called Semiology.

In this respect I will try to concentrate on the way signs manifest to provide man with a better communication. Therefore, my analysis will be two folds. The first section enhances on theories that will be applied on some segments taken from real life and see to what extent these theories are applicable. Thus, this section will include two main parts in the first one I will try to present a general background of Semiotics and the concept of communication. The second one will be devoted to the description of signs typology. In the other section, I will try to select the data by gathering the main patterns of the sign-systems, then try to analyse the role they play in the Communication phenomenon.

## **1.Semiotics A General Background**

### **1.1 What is Semiotics?**

Semiology, as such, is generally defined as the study of the signs, of course it does not deal with any sign, but rather it restricts its interest to the communicative signs; how they function and how people emit and receive them, thus formulating messages; and the way these messages are coded and interpreted. It is concerned with the forms of

communication in the large sense of the word, and how this communication conveys a meaning.

### **1.2. A Glance at the Historical Development**

Saussure's theories, then were presented in the form of dichotomies: for instance, signifier versus signified; language versus parole; synchrony versus diachrony; form versus substance and system versus paradigm. The most important point that can be worth attention, is that this period was known as the linguistic inflation; hence the linguistic sign remained the predominant aspect in the semiotic researches. While Saussure was considered to be the founder of Semiology in Europe, an American philosopher by the name of Charles Sanders Pierce (1830-1914) was regarded as the one who has gone far with Semiotics, and made it achieve a tremendous advance to spread all round the world. In the same line of art, the publication of *Elements of Semiology* by Barthes. R(1964) reversed the Semiotic conventions and came up with new remarks. He brought forth the non-linguistic sign and made it appear the most important criterion to be concerned with while investigating communication in respect to Semiotics. Among his various works we have *Le Système de la mode*, *Mythologies* and *S/Z*.

Subsequently, and by the coming of Julia Kristeva and Tzvetan Todorov, Semiotics no longer remained only a science dealing with the life of signs, in a restricted way, but rather has enlarged its domain to become an applied science, and a way of looking at things, particularly, works of art. Some of their famous works are Todorov's *La critique de la critique*, *Theory du symbole*, and Kristeva's

Le LangageCet Inconnu and the theory of "semi-analysis". The two authors have contributed to give an approach to the aspect of intertextuality or what Todorov called "vraisemblance". similarly, we should not forget the important researches of Vladimir Propp. "Morphology of the folktale", and "Claude Bernard notion of functions".

So far, we have tried to give, at least, a glance at the historical development of Semiotics. Thus, for a better understanding of this discipline we should narrow our attention to the very criteria characterizing Semiotics in the aim, hopefully, of achieving a clear cut idea about the aspect of communication in relation, of course, to Semiotics. To do so, we have first of all to know what a sign is, its classification and different types.

### **1.3. SignDefinition and Classification**

Le Signe est une réalité psychologique à deux faces ; l'une étant le concept, l'autre l'image. (Saussure ;19947, p.84)

The fact that the sign is produced intentionally or by a human sender is not relevant, any natural event can be a sign. (Kristeva, p. 64)

A sign or representation is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. (Pierce, 1914)

In the absence of a universally accepted theory of Semiosis, current hand books have made their best to provide us with some definitions. On this basis we shall try to analyse sign conception, and its classification according to some Semioticians.

### **Ferdinand De Saussure (1857-1913)**

Saussure has tried to analyse the sign from its inner construction, and argued that it is formed of two criteria: the signifier which is the concept of the thing, and the signified which is its image. For instance, the word "tree" is the signifier of the physical property tree found in reality, which is the signified. The signified, then, is not a thing, but a mental representation of the thing, thus a signified may have different signifiers; it may be represented graphically, phonetically, iconically etc. In the case of the Linguistic sign, Saussure has argued that the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary, that is, there is no logical relationship between them, but it is rather conventional.

Whereas C.S.Pierce(1914), When dealing with the sign, he tried to present a complete classification following *Logic*. In his attempt he sees a sign as triadic of structure:

***1. The triadic relations of comparison based on the kind of sign.***

***Qualisign:***It is a quality which acts as a sign once it is embodied.

***Sinsign:***An actual thing or event which acts simply, and singly as a sign.

***Legisign:***A law that acts as a sign

***2. Triadic relations of performance involving actual entities in the real world.***

***Icon:***A sign where the relation between signifier and signified is resemblance

***Index:***Something which functions as a sign by virtue of some sort of factual or causal connection with its object.

***Symbol:***Something functioning as a sign because of some rules of conventional or habitual association between itself and its object

### ***3. Triadic relation of thought based on the kind of object.***

***The rhem:*** It is a sign indicating the understood possibility of an object to the interpretant, should he have the occasion to activate or invoke it.

***Disisign or pheme:*** It is a sign conveying information about its object as opposed to a sign from which information may be derived

***Argument:*** A sign whose object is ultimately not a single thing but a law.

Above all, Pierce argued these nine kinds of signs may be combined among each other to produce an Infinitum of sign categories.

## **2.Types of communication**

we can notice that all the systems that provide communication among the world creatures are kind of signs. In fact, they are of many types, thus to facilitate their investigation, Semioticians have classified them into two major types, Linguistic and non-linguistic sign systems.

### **2.1. Linguistic Sign System**

To understand the linguistic communication system, we have to see the different manifestation and constructions from the smallest unit to the largest one. Linguists have suggested that we should preach language following some analysis levels: they are phonetics phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics

### **2.2. Phonetics & Phonology Level**

Phonology is a scientific diagnosis of the sounds of language. That is how they are articulated and produced in the form of physical properties, how they travel to the addressee; and finally how they are perceived by the addressee. Therefore, we have three branches of

phonetics, Articulatory Phonetics, Accoustic Phonetics and Auditory Phonetics.

The smallest unit in the phonetic medium of language is the phoneme. Phoneme is, then, a sound which when contrasted to another sound, produces a semantic difference. The relations with the phonemes and their combinations in a set of sequences are controlled and studied by the science entitled Phonology

### **2.3. Morphological Level**

Morphology is the science dealing with forms of words, that is the combination of those phonemes into forms of words. The unit of analysis in morphology is the morpheme, which is twofolds: free morpheme and bound morpheme. Morphology provides us with rules whereby we can produce an infinitum of word formation: for example, affixation and compounding.

### **2.4. Syntactic Level**

Syntax is a set of rules governing the construction of segments (words) into phrases and sentences. It is by using syntax that we can know whether a sentence is grammatical or ungrammatical, disambiguate sentences that ambiguous: put the stream of morphemes in the right order and so on.

As Chomsky has already stated, we can have a grammatically well formed sentence, yet without conveying a meaning, this is the task of other science called semantics

### **2.5. The Semantic Level**

Semantics is the science put in charge of study of meaning. By the use of syntax we can form a structure, but still this structure is ill formed until it goes with semantic rules: perhaps the best example to illustrate this is the famous sentence of Chomsky "Colourless ideas sleep furiously in green house". Nevertheless, sometimes semantics proves to be not up to solve all the linguistic problems, so linguists turn to pragmatics which is considered as the waste paper basket of semantics.

So far we have seen how the linguistic signs are systematized and organized in a set of rules to present a communicative process for human beings in particular. These are the basic criteria that make discourse understandable among the language speakers. The linguistic signs like the other signs, can take different shapes and have different connotations from one discourse to another; the only thing that set them apart is the fact that the linguistic signs are controlled by universal rule and not community conventions.

### **3.Non-Linguistic systems**

Before dealing with the different classes of the non-linguistic systems is worth beginning with a brief definition of what non-linguistic systems are. Indeed, the word non-linguistic refers to all the sign systems that are not linguistic; in other words, that are not based on language (Langue & Parole).

Actually, non-linguistic signs are of a huge number and can not be mentioned all without a miss: therefore in this attempt we concentrate on the major sub-divisions in the aim of coming out, at least, with a general idea about their form and nature.

### 3.1. Metalinguistic Code

Metalinguage, for instance, is a term that has an origin in the logician school of Vienne which has seen the necessity in "distinguishing neatly the language about which we speak and the language we speak." (Tarski: 1933)

Metalinguage is generally defined as a language about language. It is very important, however, to differentiate between metalinguage which Hjelmslev considers as a semiotic hierarchy, that is not of words and sentences but of sets of grammars and laws acting as signs dealing with language as an object of study; and metalinguage the representation system of language the object.

for instance parentheses, diagrams, trees and many other representations found in sciences as mathematics, physics, phonetics, ... etc. The main reason of using this kind of metalinguage is to play the function of language and facilitate the transmission of the message in certain contexts and circumstances, that language may appear unable to do so.

### 3.2. Paralinguistic Code

Paralinguage is known as the medium whereby language or a linguistic utterance is expressed. In fact, the linguistic utterance is not only a product of the morphological, syntactic and semantic rules of language, but many other factors are involved. The linguistic unit of communication may have different dimension, and connotations in relation to certain factors; for instance, we have pitch loudness, timber, tempo, and others.

George L. Trager divides the paralinguistic features into three main aspects:

***Voice set:*** Which depends on the physiological nature of the speaker, that is age and gender.

***Voice Qualities:*** Which are characterized by the control of the speech organs; that is pitch, rhyme, resonance, tempo, etc...

***Vocalization:*** The actual sound can be emitted normally or including some vocal characterizers such as laughing moaning, giggling, shouting, whispering, etc...

### 3.3. Kinesic and Proxemic Systems

#### a. Proxemics

Proxemics is a science interested in the spatial codes, and their influence upon the communication process. Proxemics as stated by Keir Elam was founded upon the well-tested hypothesis that man's use of space in his architectural domestic urban work, place activities in neither casual choice subject to powerful rules which generate a range of (connotative) cultural units.

The author suggests that proxemics appears in three syntactic systems:

- **The fixed feature: architectural configuration**
- **semi-fixed: movable but not dynamic objects.**
- **informal: that is the space between individuals.**

#### b. Kinesics

Body motion as a communicative medium is the focused subject for a (principally American) science more or less contemporary with

proxemics namely kinesics. In other words, kinesics deals mainly with body motions and behaviours that serve as language or means of communication. These motions are organically produced by the body: for instance eyebrow motions, facial expressions, posture, certain gestures of hands and so on.

In the same way as Linguists have done, kinesists have tried to cut out body motions into small unit. They consider the kineme to be the smallest unit as compared to « phoneme » in linguistics. Kinemes may undergo some combinations to give a unit called kinemorph.

The necessity and importance of body motion lie in the fact that they are complementary aspect of language in the process of communication. In fact, language would remain an incomplete means of communication if it is used in isolation. To check this we have simply to imagine someone speaking without making use of some gestures, or paralinguistic features, we will certainly encounter many ambiguous sentences, thus we can not know which of which the speaker is driving at.

### **3.4. Garment Systems**

As we have already mentioned, language is not the unique means of communication, but still there are many tools whereby one can express himself in a way similar to language. Garment, for instance, is used to decorate the human body, however, it can go beyond this function and act as a communicative system. In the field of communication, garment have three possible representations. To begin

with we have the written clothes, that is the linguistic representation, found in magazines and newspapers.

Another representation, is that of image and photography for example we may come across in fashion magazines, clothes worn by someone; this certainly, involves a kind of communication, yet this seems to be a fixed form and less dynamic in relation to garments as really worn, which is the third representation. These are the crucial media of fashion language. The three different representations provide three different focalization, however, the most important one is that of clothes as really worn because, unlike photography, we can, observe clothes as worn by different individuals, and each one involves a specific message, thus it is not fixed to the extent that we can sometimes read through it the personality of the wearer, that is, for example, his social level: job, and so on.

### **3.5. Food System**

Each community in the world has some conventional ways of cooking, eating, and presenting food. This has a number of functions and performances in the process of communication. By just seeing some one eating we can deduce his region (nation), possibly his psychological state, and many things. Yet, sometimes we come across particular cases, for example we may find an arab eating in the western way; this of course has a special connotation; for instance here in Algeria the Western world is considered to be the center of civilization, thus in imitating the western way of eating some tend to be considered as civilized people.

These are not all the kinds of communicative systems in non-linguistic categories. There is actually an infinitum, yet the nature of our discussion does not require mentioning all the categories, but just enough information to clarify the aspects of communication and find the basis to our investigation.

In this part our aim is to give a theoretical information about our topic. Then we have tried to introduce the discipline of semiotics, and we have seen how the semiotics units function in respect to the communication process. We also examined some of the main systems of communication. Hence, what we have to do now is to try and see to what extent these theories are applicable and true in the practical field.

#### **4. A Practical Approach to Semiotic Models**

##### **4.1. Theatre as a Form of Communication**

To communicate one's ideas, and convey meaningful strings, many forms are taken into account. In this respect, the theoretical performance, as an artistic work, is reckoned as one of the richest and most complex forms of communication; for instance, many significant modes, and communicative codes are potentially at work.

Theatre as such has three different realizations, it can be a text presented graphically in a book, seen as a performed story on T.V, or attended as really performed on a theatrical stage. Actually, the form, as well as the presentation of the text, as a means of communication, have great influence upon the addressee's perception and decoding of the message.

In a book the addressee is no more than a reader, all the information he receives is nothing among words and sentences. In this case, the image he gets about the play story remains abstract and bare; since it has already been convincingly argued that language solely cannot provide, in all the cases, a full communication. The theatrical model brings about a multiplication of communicative factors, and complex of potential components which have significant influences on the performance; for instance factors such as the actor's voice, body, that is personal stature, vocal qualities and physical idiosyncrasies, are of great necessity in the rendering of the message.

The text as presented in T.V and/or social media may appear somehow more effective in comparison with the written form. For instance, by the use of image we may get a bit nearer to what the addressee intends to convey, yet, this in turn has lots of inconvenient and negative points. On the T.V all the events and activities of the play are perceived from a single point of view, that is through the eyes of the cameraman. Therefore, the angle of localization is fixed and limited, thus so many factors are to lose their function and efficiency.

When the addressee is present within the preformance place, she/he can easily capture the content of the message, and from its different angles of vision, while in T.V or in a book he is restricted to only some sign categories, audiovisual one for example.

In attending a play, as it is really performed, the addressee is too close to the message of the addresser. Moreover, his perception is limitless, and can not only stand passively following the events of the

story, but get as well absorbed, hence he can feel and experience what is going on in an active manner. In this case the addressee occupies a place where he will be qualified to interpret and preach the meaning of this complex of messages, such as speech, gestures, decorations etc... Accordingly the theatrical, dramatic and cultural codes will be at his disposal, thus he will in turn assume the role of a transmitter of signals to the performers, and this is expressed through laughter, applause, whistling etc...

To get more acquainted with theatrical communicative forms, we have chosen one text to base our analysis upon. Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* as a model from classical Drama.

#### **4.2. Midsummer Night's Dream**

Through his *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare is speaking to us, he is transmitting a message. In this context the act of communication takes a specific form, and a complex structure. Shakespeare here is considered as an addressee; yet he is not the unique one. In respect to the other addressers, he is the first degree emitter, that is the principal sender of the message. In fact, he is the producer of the message carried out by the play; however, he is not facing the audience directly, but only through his work, the actors' performances, decorations, lights, and all the materials constituting the play are considered as addressees, but of secondary degree.

At this stage of the art, attitudes about the theme of love, has been the main concern of Shakespeare in this play. Through the use of comic, and humorous aspects he has tried to reach the audience's

attention and so achieve his goals. Thus, he tried four types of characters: the nobles (Thesius and Hypolita); the young lovers (Lysander and Demeterius, Hermia and Helena); the mechanicals; and the Fairies. Each one of these character categories represents a specific point of view of love emotions, in either an implicit or explicit way.

In his act of communication, language was the most highly dominating means. This was, of course, due to the fact that theatre was not that developed, as it is the case now in modern drama. Besides, the non-linguistic signs, as tools of communication, were not given much importance. Thus in a special use of language Shakespeare has managed to deliver his message in a neat and comprehensive way. This appeared in the play in two different shapes: natural and artificial language; and in both the cases they are to identify the personality of the speaker; for example the language spoken by the mechanicals is quite dissimilar to that of the other character categories.

The relevance and efficiency of the author's work, was achieved through his poetic use of language to express his ideas and carry out his imaginations. By means of some stylistic devices, as imagery, metaphore, simile, analogy, personification and others, he has succeeded in reaching the mind of the addressee and made her/him perceive the message in the form of iconic forms, build up not with colours, and physical shapes, but only with words, and sentences. For instance, we should pay great attention to the kind of language the young lovers speak and that of the mechanicals:

*Lysander:* How now my love? why is your cheeks so pale. How chance the roses there do fade so fast?

*Hermia:* Belike for want of rain which I could well bestow from the tempest of my eyes

*Hermia:* My Lysander

I swear to thee, by Cupid's strongest bow

By his best arrow with golden head

By the simplicity of Venus doves

By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves

And by that fire which burned the Carthage queen When the false Trojan under sail was seen

By all the vows that ever men have broken

In number more than ever women spoke

In that same place thou hast appointed me

Tomorrow will meet with thee

This piece of language is well organized, rhythmized, not the way we speak in everyday situations. By means of this particular use of language the addressee tried to discuss and highlights some phenomena, for instance he is shedding light upon the attitudes of the young lovers towards love, how they swear, and talk to each other, thus through language we can read the personality of the speakers, and as it is already noted, it is one of the aims of the author. since language stands is a social phenomenon.

*Bottom:* No a whit, I have a device to make all well, write me a prologue, and let the prologue seem

**to say, we will do no harm with our swords, and that  
Pyramus is not killed indeed and for the more better  
assurance, tell them that, Pyramus, am not Pyramus.  
But Bottom the weaver. This will put them out of fear.**

This kind of language is simple and natural, it is carefully chosen, and intentionally done in order to reflect the characteristics, and personality of this specific social category, and above all to give us an idea about the reasoning and behaviour of the lower class. Bottom is a comic and the most humorous character in the play; his presences in the stage has a special connotation, and constitutes thus one of the principal means of communication used by Shakespeare.

***Bottom:* Methink you should have little  
reason for that and yet to say the truth. Reason  
and love keep little company together  
nowadays. The more the pity that some honest  
neighbours will not make them friends.**

What Shakespeare is driving at from this passage, is that the irrationality of love is too obvious in the milieu to the extent that even a simple and stupid man like Bottom is up to recognize it.

That was some of the forms, and systems of communication Shakespeare has made use of. We have clearly noticed that the linguistic signs were the dominating elements, but still, the non-linguistic signs were not completely absent simply they were not as important and essential as the case may be with modern drama.

#### **4.3. Cinematographic systems of communication**

Unlike theatre, the principal addressers are namely the producer; the author of the script, or a novel in case of a film adapted from a novel, and the actors performing the actions. So, every communicative act is perceived through the iconic representation provided by photograph. The intentional attempt of the communicative aspect in cinema, lies in the fact of presenting the real world in a realistic image, in a way different from that of the novel, cinema depicts the real world in a fictional reality. This is quite obvious in the techniques used in the cinematographic systems of communication.

Cinema is considered to be a language with its entities and syntax proper. However, this is quite different from the linguistic conception of language. The minimal unit of cinema is the image which may be combined into a sequence. In the communication process, the cinematographic elements are shown as different from those of theatre. For instance, we have the use of characters, setting, and narrativity. The only thing that make cinema a dissimilar system, is that everything in the cinematographic language is represented iconically, through photograph. The film is the means of communication, and at the same time a complex of various acts of communication. In a highly developed techniques and clever tricks, cinematographic addressers tries to narrate his story with the intention of achieving logical relation between this fictional reality and the real world. The communicative function of the characters in cinema is much different and less effective as compared to that of the protagonists in theatre. The difference lies mostly in the signs systems and nature. Most of the semiotic systems in theatre are

symbolic and obliquely presented. Meanwhile, cinema tries to appear as much natural as possible in the form of a mirror for the real world.

Thus the relation between the signifier (cinema) and signified (real world) is a relation of resemblance, as it is well illustrated in the third triadic of Pierce's sign classification. One thing upon which cinema should be praised lies in its efficiency of making its addressees, spectators omnipresent, able to visit many places thanks to the image. This is something not experienced in theatre where everything is abstract and symbolic.

We have come by now to the last points of this practical approach to the communication aspects in respect to semiotics. As our reader may notice, our discussion concerning cinema was very brief, this, of course, was due to the fact that it has many common points with the theatrical language; moreover, we simply did not want to fall into repetitions.

When we first made our mind to begin this practical approach, our intention is to shed light on the majority of the sign systems of communication; hence our choice of theatre and cinema. We may have missed some systems which are as much important as the previous ones, such as language of fashion, advertisement, institutional systems as military codes, and many other social tools of communication; however, these are all factors having the possibility of being included in the microscopic representation of the real world performed by cinema and theatre.

## CONCLUSION

During this long discussion, we have tried to state some of the main aspects of communication as a related phenomenon to the science of signs, founded by Ferdinand De Saussure. As it has been mentioned from the very beginning this attempt is to analyse this phenomenon, as clearly as possible, in a scientific and systematic method. Our work, therefore, has been divided into two different forms. A theoretical section aiming to shed light on the history of semiotics, and also to get a clear-cut idea about the communication mechanism, and the structure as well as the manifestations of its different elements.

On the other hand, the practical part has come to clarify and support the previously stated argument, in the aim of coming out with new ideas about this phenomenon, especially in relation to semiotics. However, the most important thing that we are longing to arrive at is that we should not restrict one's knowledge solely to the human communication.

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