

Significance of Teaching Semiotic Pedagogy

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Abstract: Charles Sanders Peirce, the father of American semiotics and pragmatism, insisted that educational institutions be places for learning and not merely instruction. If Peirce's argument is accepted, then it is necessary to redefine the role of teachers, students, and subject matters in relation to learning semiotics, with its cultural emphasis on codes, signs, and social interaction. Semiotics is especially appropriate for rethinking the learning and teaching progress. In particular, semiotics is a central part of the emerging global discipline which studies human communication as one of the *Human Science* disciplines using logic based research methods of semiotics and phenomenology to investigate social and cultural interactions.

Thus, the present article is focused on the three areas of Semiotics as defined by Charles Morris when he participated in the *Unified Science Project* at the University of Chicago: 1. Semantics; 2. Syntax; 3. Pragmatics. In the same spirit, my article involves pedagogical activities for providing effective syllabus designs, teaching strategies, and classroom activities that show relevance for contemporary pedagogical studies in Communication and Cross-cultural studies.

Pedagogy based on the semiotic work of Peirce, and exemplified by his definition of the university as a "community of interpretation", forces a reconsideration of the roles which learners, teachers, and subject matter play within educational endeavors. This reconsideration may be called a "semiotic pedagogy" of communication and culture.

Key Words: semantics, pragmatics, syntax, symbol, icon, index, signifier, signified

Introduction

The study of semiotics is an interdisciplinary program encompassing such branches of science like Linguistics, Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, Theory of Literature, Aesthetics, History, Communication and etc. It is the study of signs derived from the speculations on signification and language of the American pragmatist philosopher C.S. Peirce and the Swiss linguistic theorist Ferdinand de Saussure. Also known as *semiology*, semiotics is concerned with the phenomena of *signs* in all their abundance and variety: letters, images, literary texts, acoustic signals, road signs, verbal signs, gestures, icons, symbols, allegories, corporate logos, indices, hieroglyphs, drawings, natural signs, celestial signs, musical notations, mathematical signs-in short, signifying objects and artifacts of virtually every size, shape, color, and substance. Semiotics includes the study of how meaning is constructed and understood. In a simplified meaning it can be interpreted how the word or any object can be accepted by a person, its effect on the reader, listener or foreigner.

Moreover, Semiotics broadens the experience range of sign systems and sign relations, which will increase mutual understanding between students from different countries and cultures. As concisely summarized by I.A. Richards "*Communication takes place when one mind so acts upon its environment that another mind is influenced, and in that other mind an experience occurs which is like the experience in the first mind, and is caused in part by that experience.*"

Given this context, the present paper is devoted to actualizing study of semiotic theory and pedagogy of American semioticians, which is extremely important to the development of educational system at any its level. This can be achieved by means of enormous resources of semioticians that offer us a truly unique opportunity to expand students' cross-cultural knowledge.

Charles Sanders Peirce, the father of American semiotics and pragmatism, insisted that educational institutions be places for learning and not merely instruction. If Peirce's argument is accepted, then it is necessary to redefine the role of teachers, students, and subject matters in relation to learning semiotics, with its cultural emphasis on codes, signs, and social interaction. Semiotics is especially appropriate for rethinking the learning and teaching progress in linguistics, translation theory, communication and media, etc. In particular, semiotics is a central part of the emerging global discipline which studies human communication as one of the *Human Science* disciplines using logic based research methods of semiotics and phenomenology to investigate social and cultural interactions.

Thus, the present paper is focused on the three areas of Semiotics as defined by Charles Morris when he participated in the *Unified Science Project* at the University of Chicago: 1. Semantics; 2. Syntax; 3. Pragmatics.

Starting from its origin as a science, semiotics has been one of the most hotly disputed issues due to its connection, application, and belonging to different other sciences.

In the same spirit, the scope of the present paper mostly covers basic theoretical information, knowledge, concepts, pedagogical activities, teaching strategies, and classroom activities relevant for contemporary pedagogical studies in teaching Semiotics as well as theoretical sources of outstanding semioticians on how the subject is interpreted from the points of view of different scholars.

The role of scholars, their contribution into the development of Semiotics along with other sciences is vital to our understanding of the world. In order to have a clear idea of semiotics, it is necessary to systematize all the known models of communication and create an effective syllabus that would enable the development of students' critical thinking abilities.

The reason why this paper is established within the frameworks of linguistics is that semiotics generalizes the definition of a sign to encompass signs in any medium or sensory modality and thus broadens the range of sign systems and sign relations. In order to extend the definition of semiotics applicable to language in amounts to its widest analogical or metaphorical sense and closer to some of the humanities as well, it is necessary to conduct classes including most important and significant materials in semiotics such as the works of Charles W. Morris, Thomas Sebeok, Jurgen Ruesch, Chris Morris, Nim Chimpsky, Bob Hodge, Richard L. Lanigan, Umberto Eco and others.

The study of semiotics through practical classes is of great value both for teachers and students as it offers number of advantages that would broaden students' thinking abilities from the point that the bases of semiotics are applicable not only in studying linguistics, literature and translatology, but every other respective science as well.

Since signs exist everywhere and in every field regardless whether it concerns some definite science or everyday life, they should be revealed the proper way by means of applying semiotic analysis. By means of this very activity students acquire necessary skills to understand, decode the signs they face in their life, which is of a great importance for everyone. The process of analyzing should be reached by reviewing all three abovementioned stages: semantic analysis, syntactic analysis and pragmatic analysis. In order to realize the process of semiosis, first of all, it is necessary to overview general basic definitions that are frequently used in semiotics. Indeed, semiotics is a vast field, however in this paper we just try to give necessary information about the most frequently used concepts and terminology concerning semiotics.

According to Peirce "We make meanings through our creation and interpretation of 'signs', 'we think only in signs' (Peirce 1931-58, 2.302). Signs take the form of words, images, sounds, acts or objects, but such things have no meaning and become signs only when we accord them with meaning. **'Nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign'**, declares Peirce (Peirce 1931-58, 2.172). Anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as 'signifying' something - referring to or *standing for* something other than itself. We interpret things as signs largely unconsciously by relating them to familiar systems of conventions. It is this meaningful use of signs which is at the heart of the concerns of semiotics.

There are two dominant models of what constitutes a sign that were suggested by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce:

Saussure offered a two-part model of the sign. He defined a sign as being composed of:

- a 'signifier'** (*signifiant*) - the *form* which the sign takes; and
- the 'signified'** (*signifiū*) - the *concept* it represents.

The *sign* is the whole that results from the association of the signifier with the signified (Saussure 1983, 67; Saussure 1974, 67). The relationship between the signifier and the signified is referred to as 'signification'.

A sign must have both a signifier and a signified. You cannot have a totally meaningless signifier or a completely formless signified (Saussure 1983, 101; Saussure 1974, 102-103). A sign is a recognizable combination of a signifier with a particular signified. The same signifier could stand for a different signified and thus be a different sign.

A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern. The sound pattern is not actually a sound; for a sound is something physical. A sound pattern is the hearer's psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by the evidence of his senses. This sound pattern may be called a 'material' element only in that it is the representation of our sensory impressions. The sound pattern may thus be distinguished from the other element associated with it in a linguistic sign. This other element is generally of a more abstract kind: the concept. (Saussure 1983, 66; Saussure 1974, 66)

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As for the *signified*, most commentators who adopt Saussure's model still treat this as a mental construct, although they often note that it may nevertheless refer indirectly to things in the world. Saussure's *signified* is not to be identified directly with a referent but is a *concept* in the mind - not a thing but the notion of a thing. Some people may wonder why Saussure's model of the sign refers only to a concept and not to a thing. An observation from the philosopher Susanne Langer (who was not referring to Saussure's theories) may be useful here. Like most contemporary commentators, Langer uses the term 'symbol' to refer to the linguistic sign (a term which Saussure himself avoided): 'Symbols are not proxy for their objects but are *vehicles for the conception of objects*... In talking *about* things we have conceptions of them, not the things themselves; and *it is the conceptions, not the things, that symbols directly mean*. Behaviour towards conceptions is what words normally evoke; this is the typical process of thinking'. She adds that 'If I say "Napoleon", you do not bow to the conqueror of Europe as though I had introduced him, but merely think of him' (Langer 1951, 61).

Louis Hjelmslev used the terms 'expression' and 'content' to refer to the *signifier* and *signified* respectively (Hjelmslev 1961, 47ff). The distinction between signifier and signified has sometimes been equated to the familiar dualism of 'form and content'. Within such a framework the signifier is seen as the *form* of the sign and the signified as the *content*. However, the metaphor of form as a 'container' is problematic, tending to support the equation of content with *meaning*, implying that meaning can be 'extracted' without an active process of interpretation and that form is not in itself meaningful (Chandler 1995 104-6).

At around the same time as Saussure was formulating his model of the sign, of 'semiology' and of a structuralist methodology, across the Atlantic independent work was also in progress as the pragmatist philosopher and logician Charles Sanders Peirce formulated his own model of the sign, of 'semiotic' and of the taxonomies of signs. In contrast to Saussure's model of the sign in the form of a 'self-contained dyad', Peirce offered a triadic model:

The **Representamen**: the form which the sign takes (not necessarily material);
An **Interpretant**: *not* an interpreter but rather the sense made of the sign;
An **Object**: to which the sign refers.

'A sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representamen' (Peirce 1931-58, 2.228). The interaction between the *representamen*, the *object* and the *interpretant* is referred to by Peirce as 'semiosis' (ibid., 5.484). Within Peirce's model of the sign, the traffic light sign for 'stop' would consist of: a red light facing traffic at an intersection (the representamen); vehicles halting (the object) and the idea that a red light indicates that vehicles must stop (the interpretant). Variants of Peirce's triad are often presented as '*the semiotic triangle*' (as if there were only one version). Here is a version which is quite often encountered and which changes only the unfamiliar Peircean terms (Nutth 1990, 89):

Sign vehicle: the form of the sign;
Sense: the sense made of the sign;
Referent: what the sign 'stands for'.

Daniel Chandler has continued to employ the Saussurean terms *signifier* and *signified*, even though Peirce referred to the relation between the 'sign' (*sic*) and the *object*, since the Peircean distinctions are most commonly employed within a broadly Saussurean framework. Such incorporation tends to emphasize the referential potential of the signified within the Saussurean model. Here then are the three modes together with some brief definitions and some illustrative examples:

Symbol/symbolic: a mode in which the signifier does *not* resemble the signified but which is fundamentally arbitrary or purely conventional, so that the relationship must be learnt. E.g. language in general (plus specific languages, alphabets, musical notation, punctuation marks, words, phrases and sentences), numbers, Morse code, traffic lights, national flags;

Icon/iconic: a mode in which the signifier is perceived as *resembling* or imitating the signified (recognizably looking, sounding, feeling, tasting or smelling like it) - being similar in possessing some of its qualities: e.g. a portrait, a cartoon, a scale-model, onomatopoeia, metaphors, 'realistic' sounds in 'programme music', sound effects in radio drama, a dubbed film soundtrack, imitative gestures;

Index/indexical: a mode in which the signifier is *not arbitrary* but is *directly connected* in some way (physically or causally) to the signified - this link can be observed or inferred: e.g. 'natural signs' (smoke, thunder, footprints, echoes, non-synthetic odours and flavours), medical symptoms (pain, a rash, pulse-rate), measuring instruments (weathercock, thermometer, clock, spirit-level), 'signals' (a knock on a door, a phone ringing), pointers (a pointing 'index' finger, a directional signpost), recordings (a photograph, a film, video or television shot, an audio-recorded voice), personal 'trademarks' (handwriting, catchphrase) and indexical words ('that', 'this', 'here', 'there').

Peirce and Saussure used the term '*symbol*' differently from each other. Whilst nowadays most theorists would refer to language as a symbolic sign system, Saussure avoided referring to linguistic signs as 'symbols', since the ordinary everyday use of this term refers to examples such as a pair of scales (signifying *justice*), and he insisted that such signs are 'never wholly arbitrary'.

Turning to *icons*, Peirce declared that an iconic sign represents its object 'mainly by its similarity' (Peirce 1931-58, 2.276). A sign is an icon 'insofar as it is like that thing and used as a sign of it' (*ibid.*, 2.247). Just because a signifier resembles that which it depicts does not necessarily make it purely iconic. The philosopher Susanne Langer argues that 'the picture is essentially a symbol, not a duplicate, of what it represents' (Langer 1951, 67). Pictures resemble what they represent only in some respects. What we tend to recognize in an image are analogous relations of parts to a whole (*ibid.*, 67-70).

Indexicality is perhaps the most unfamiliar concept. Peirce offers various criteria for what constitutes an index. An index 'indicates' something: for example, 'a sundial or clock *indicates* the time of day' (Peirce 1931-58, 2.285). He refers to a 'genuine relation' between the 'sign' and the *object* which does not depend purely on 'the interpreting mind' (*ibid.*, 2.92, 298). The *object* is 'necessarily existent' (*ibid.*, 2.310). The index is connected to its object 'as a matter of fact' (*ibid.*, 4.447). There is 'a real connection' (*ibid.*, 5.75).

Film and television use all three forms: icon (sound and image), symbol (speech and writing), and index (as the effect of what is filmed); at first sight iconic signs seem the dominant form, but some filmic signs are fairly arbitrary, such as 'dissolves' which signify that a scene from someone's memory is to follow.

Hawkes notes, following Jakobson, that the three modes 'co-exist in the form of a hierarchy in which one of them will inevitably have dominance over the other two', with dominance determined by context (Hawkes 1977, 129). Whether a sign is symbolic, iconic or indexical depends primarily on the way in which the sign is used, so textbook examples chosen to illustrate the various modes can be misleading. The same signifier may be used iconically in one context and symbolically in another: a photograph of a woman may stand for some broad category such as 'women' or may more specifically represent only the particular woman who is depicted. Signs cannot be classified in terms of the three modes without reference to the purposes of their users within particular contexts. A sign may consequently be treated as symbolic by one person, as iconic by another and as indexical by a third. As Kent Grayson puts it, 'When we speak of an icon, an index or a symbol, we are not referring to objective qualities of the sign itself, but to a viewer's experience of the sign' (Grayson 1998, 35). Signs may also shift in mode over time. As Jonathan Culler notes, 'In one sense a Rolls-Royce is an index of wealth in that one must be wealthy in order to purchase one, but it has been made a conventional sign of wealth by social usage' (Culler 1975, 17).

From a semiotic point-of-view, such questions could only be answered by considering in each case whether the different forms signified something of any consequence to the relevant sign-users in the context of the specific signifying practice being studied.

Thus, the discipline described is aimed at developing students' thinking abilities as semiotics is an interdisciplinary subject and is anticipated to provide developing interpretation skills of students, includes general concepts on semiotics.

Thus, teaching semiotics would provide and acquaint students with general theoretical knowledge in semiotics along with its abovementioned three aspects (semantics, syntax and pragmatics), along with wide sources from different fields of science.

As a new discipline in Kyrgyzstan, semiotics is now being included into the programs of just few universities in Bishkek whilst universities located in other regions of the Kyrgyz Republic still have no idea about Semiotics as a science. And even those ones that have this subject are mostly focused on just one of its branches called "Semantics".

1. Despite the fact that Kyrgyz–Turkish Manas University is considered to be one of the youngest universities with its 15 years' existence, the administrators and faculty included the course in semiotics into its program. The urgency is caused with the fact that KTU "Manas" is an international university with more than 20 nationalities, where students must aware of mastering semiotics not only to survive in a foreign country, but also be aware of the cultural aspects in order to communicate with each other and understand codes that are hidden in foreign words and study foreign languages, to conduct comparative analyses of different linguistic phenomena whether it is a word, a text, a picture, a symbol for further experiencing them.

As a conclusion for the present paper, I would like to cite the words of one of American semioticians, Richard L. Lanigan, who in his book "On the Goals of Semiotics [Survey]", compiled by Thomas A. Sebeok, *Semiotica*, 61, nos. 3-4, p. 381, 1986 said: "Semiotics is rapidly becoming the *lingua franca* of the scholarly world. The primary goals of the semiotic discipline should be (1) to extend the current analysis and discussion of sign theory into new subject matters, especially in the human sciences, and (2) to continue educating our colleagues about semiotic research as the conjunction of animal, human, and machine realities. In every discipline, we need to acknowledge and illustrate the *in situ* discovery of sign production. This is not another facile call for more interdisciplinary work. Rather, it is a phenomenological challenge to the scholars of each discipline to reexamine their philosophical and theoretical grounding *as communicated*. It is a mutual demand: to the arts to be systemic as well as intuitive in presentation, and, to the sciences to be creative as well as empirical in abstraction... Semiotics as the human art and science of *communicology* can, and should, be a vigorous alternative to the conceptual comforts of traditional art and science. An achievable goal for semiotics is to effectively communicate what it describes, how it defines, and why it interprets."

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