

## SEMIOTICS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

### СЕМИОТИКА КУЛЬТУРНОГО РАЗНООБРАЗИЯ

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**Аннотациясы:** Бул макалада семиотика жана белгилер түшүнүктөрүнүн маданияттагы көп түрдүүлүгү каралган

**Негизги сөздөр:** семиотика, маданияттын көп түрдүүлүгү, белгилер

**Аннотация:** В статье рассматривается понятие семиотики, знаков в культурном разнообразии.

**Ключевые слова:** семиотика, культурное разнообразие, знаки

**Abstract:** This article considers notion of semiotics and signs in cultural diversity.

**Keywords:** semiotics, cultural diversity, signs

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In every culture, there will be certain actions, which will be symbolic. If the action is simply translated literally, it may result in a wrong meaning. Social relationships are also a cultural element. In some cultures people used to live with their extended families which eventually resulted in a need to address each relative. For this reason, those people have different words to refer to each relation. Customs and traditions are parts of a culture as well. Be it a marriage, funeral or festival, the story and the significance or hidden symbolism behind it becomes a stumbling block for the translator. Beliefs and feelings change from culture to culture. While dragon is kind and protective in Chinese, it is evil in English. For mourning the English wear black, but the Chinese wear white. The colour white may represent purity and black evil in some cultures, but it may not be the same in another culture. What is considered a good omen, whether an event, an animal or a bird, may not symbolize the same thing in another culture. For example, one would do well in India to avoid zero and numbers ending in zero. In English the number 88 recently has taken an offensive connotation in England because it is thought to be related to a terrorist gang. In communication situations body language plays an important role, but the signs and gestures are not universal. In Vietnamese there are thirty ways to smile. In Korea a bow is an acknowledgement or greeting. In China a laugh may express sympathy even at some devastating news. Using the left hand is not acceptable in many Islamic countries....the list is endless.

Speakers of different languages do not divide the spectrum of colours up in a natural consistent way. We would never hesitate to affirm the importance of the difference between red and orange. Another language employs a set of basic colour terms very similar in application to our own, and does not have separate forms to indicate these two colours. As a result that language does not have separate meanings for red and orange. Religious elements, myths and the like are major components of any culture as well. In America, jokes from the pulpit are usually acceptable in fact, some of the best preachers regularly elicit laughs from their congregations, but in Europe similar language in the pulpit would generally be regarded as at least inappropriate if not decidedly uncouth."

Geographical and environmental elements are also part of one's culture. While Eskimos and Finnish have different units for different states of snow, in Saudi Arabia there are different words for different kinds of camel. Europeans as well as Iranians have only one word for each.

Simple formalities can be confusing. In a language, for example, "thank you" can be translated in several different ways depending on the situation as thanking someone for a gift, for a service, etc. Articles of dress, ornaments and values can also present problems for the translator. To give another example: the very flavour behind a food or its significance is untranslatable to an audience who has never heard of it. Even the gestures and certain actions will be symbolic in different cultures; for example, the vari-

ous movements of the head are symbolic in most languages.

In most English speaking countries, a person points to himself with his finger towards his chest when saying “I”, but this is not true for a Chinese who puts his finger on the side of his nose when saying “I”.

In sum, the things people say and do, their social arrangements and events are products or by-products of their culture as they apply it to the task of perceiving and dealing with their circumstances, all meaning is culturally conditioned, and the response to a given text is also culturally conditioned. Each society will interpret a message in terms of its own culture.

Each country (and city) has its own colour and mood, both shaping and reflecting the local culture and behaviours. Colour is packed full of meanings (both obvious and hidden), and is arguably the richest of all the sensory signs in terms of cultural as well as personal symbolism.

As an example, purple is an interesting colour which appears relatively infrequently in nature (a few fruits and vegetables, flowers, fish) . However, the colour is not popular in China, is considered soothing in India, was once prohibited at Japanese weddings, symbolises homosexuality in Mexico (and more recently many other countries) and stands for bravery in the US (Purple Hearts) .

Thus, colour (and all the other sensory experiences in the world) is rich in personal and cultural meanings which are primed implicitly through association with the sensation of that experience. Signs are all around us. It is no accident that red is perhaps the most popular colour for country flags, whereas purple only appears in two. Red is the easiest colour to make as a dye and usually the first colour (apart from white and black) to have a specific name (sign) in any language. Red is of course rich in meaning and of particular significance in nature and all our lives.

One of the first people to write persuasively and intelligently about cultural differences was the anthropologist Edward T. Hall, identifying three important dimensions of difference in terms of context sensitivity, time and space. He found that while some cultures need a great deal of background and oral information for communication to be successful, other cultures were much more heavily socialised and could infer much more from context requiring much less information in oral (verbal) communication and relying more on non-verbal signals. He also

found differences in the use of interpersonal space and interpretation of time which we will explore further

Firstly, we all have a biological clock which reflects the changing seasons and the fluctuation between night and day, and this varies tremendously depending on where we live in the world. Our personal experience of time also differs from person to person. Each culture has its own ‘beat’ with a different rhythm and feel as you can experience if you move between countries in Asia. Some cultures have a much more linear perception of time, focusing on the importance of deadlines and schedules and the compartmentalisation of time into units, whereas other cultures have a much more open and flexible view of time.

Edward Hall wrote extensively about the differences between monochronic time and polychronic time, by which he meant the perception of time as organised and methodical (‘one thing at a time’) versus the perception of time as more open and flexible, which is typical of Arab, Latin and Asian cultures. Of course, these differences are not either and many cultures share different perspectives in different contexts. The third dimension which Edward Hall investigated was space. We all know that different cultures have different levels of comfort with interpersonal space. You prefer to work: in a separate office by yourself, in an office with at least one other person or in a group in which the desks are arranged so that everyone sees one another?

Japanese office workers tend to prefer option 4, whereas European office workers tend to prefer option 1. Even in Europe there are differences though, as in France it’s typical for the manager to have an office in the centre of the building, whereas in Germany the office is more likely to be in the corner but still closed off from others.

Cultural differences throw a fascinating light on how different cultures behave and also on how signs and symbols are so important to understanding individual cultures and how they will react to different styles of communication and especially the specific message content of those messages. Every message (signal) contains meaning which changes depending on the culture.

Culture comprises all activities people practice, what they eat, how they dress, etc. Cultural diversity makes our country richer by making it a more interesting place in which we to live. Just think how boring a meal would be without Chinese, Mexican,

Japanese, Italian, French, Turkish or Indian food! If we all thought alike imagine how boring the world would be! Cultural diversity also makes our country stronger and better able to compete in the new global economy.

We should focus on the students' own culture and compare the cultures of the others countries to their own, point out the cultural contrasts. Here students expand their cultural knowledge by learning about all cultures of the world.

Students will benefit by gaining solid knowledge of the different world cultures and they must also develop the ability to compare their native culture to other cultures, to evaluate critically and interpret the results of such comparisons, and to apply this knowledge successfully in both verbal and non-verbal communication for both transactional and interactional purposes. In many countries, there is still much intolerance towards and prejudice against other nations and cultures. Intensive intercultural education seems to be a good way to sow the seeds of tolerance, acceptance, understanding, and respect. By exploring foreign and their own culture, students acquire the vocabulary with which to describe values, expectations, behaviours, traditions, customs, rituals, forms of greeting, cultural signs, and identify symbols familiar to them. The aim of these activities is to widen learners' perspectives by getting them to know the cultures of the English-speaking countries and to compare those cultures to their own. We cannot simply judge which culture is better, because each culture has its own advantages and features. For students who go abroad for education, travel-

ling, working if they can combine positive culture elements from two different cultures to their self-development, it would be a competitive advantage in their whole career.

So, from country to country, social taboos, politics, and religious, traditions and values differ. These cultural variables need to be respected if students are to benefit from new experiences. The goal is for students to become aware that norms of behaviour are culturally defined and varied and to foster a certain degree of understanding of culture.

Across cultures, we differ in our language, our monetary systems, our sports, even which side of the road we drive on. But beneath these differences is our great similarity- our capacity for culture. This shared capacity for culture enables our striking group differences. Human nature manifests human diversity.

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