

THE TOPICALITY OF TEACHING SEMIOTICS IN COMMUNICATION AND LINGUISTICS IN THE UNIVERSITIES OF THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

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. (I.A. Richards)

Semiotics is only slowly establishing itself as a discipline to be respected and is a quite new field of Science, which has started to be included into the Program of just few Universities in Bishkek whilst other universities that are located at 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.

In order to have a clear idea of Semiotics it is necessary to systematize all the known models of communication to have a clear idea of the science of Semiotics to develop student's critical thinking abilities.

Consequently, the purpose of present article is to acquaint with general semiotic main concepts and terminology of modern semiotics, history of its origin and development along with teaching students to conduct semiotic and linguistic text analyses applying semiotic devices and methods on different levels of linguistic hierarchy, basic ideas connected with semiotics and semiotic schools. Thus, the actuality of selecting this topic as its objectives are closely connected and came out from definite reasons of necessity to apply Semiotics in Kyrgyz universities (particularly at the Departments of Communication and Linguistics).

The use of semiotic methods to reveal different levels of meaning and, sometimes, hidden motivations can lead to better understanding foreign culture in the field of cross cultural communication as well as improve communication between people of the same culture. Thus, the topicality of the addressing Semiotics is quite evident.

As a specialist, who is deeply interested in Semiotics and practicing it, I would like to give short information about the urgency to study it more deeply and develop it.

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. [Semiotics](#), or the study of signs (from the Greek *semion*, a sign), is a scientific,

literary, and philosophical discipline 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, semiotic studies, or semiology is the study of sign processes (semiosis), or signification and communication, signs and symbols, both individually and grouped into sign systems. It includes the study of how meaning is constructed and understood. This fact makes Semiotics vital both for communication and linguistics. 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.

The field of Semiotics was most notably lead by the Vienna Circle and presented in their International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, in which the authors agreed on breaking out the field, which they called "semiotic" into three branches: 1. **Semantics**: Relation between signs

and the things they refer to, their denotata. 2. **Syntactics**: relation of signs to each other in formal structure. 3. **Pragmatics**: relation of signs to their impacts on those who use them.

The term “semiotics” means an interpreter of signs, was first used in English by Henry Stubbs in 1670, in a very precise sense to denote the branch of medical science relating to the interpretation of signs. 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.

Charles Peirce defined what he termed “semiotic” as the “quasi-necessary”, or format doctrine of signs, which is philosophical logic pursued in terms of signs and sign processes.

Charles Morris followed Peirce in using the term “semiotic” and in extending the discipline beyond human communication to animal learning and use of signals.

Ferdinand de Saussure, however, viewed the most important area within semiotics as belonging to the Social Sciences.

However, Semiotics is frequently seen as having important anthropological dimensions. One of the outstanding semioticians Umberto Eco proposes that every cultural phenomenon can be studied as communication, despite the fact that some other semioticians focus on the logical dimensions of the science.

In 1823 John Locke referred it to Physics, exactly to medicinal physiology, semiotics, and method of curing.

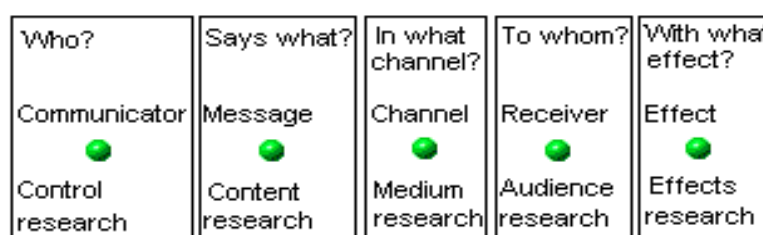
Semioticians classify signs or sign systems in relation to the way they are transmitted (modality). In [semiotics](#), a **modality** is a particular way in which the [information](#) is to be [encoded](#) for presentation to humans, i.e. to the type of [sign](#) and to the status of reality ascribed to or claimed by a sign, text or genre.

This process of carrying meaning depends on the use of codes that may be the individual sounds or letters that humans use to form words, the body movements they make to show attitude or emotion, or even something as general as the clothes they wear. To coin a word to refer to a thing, the community must agree on a simple meaning (a denotative meaning) within their language. But that word can transmit that meaning only within the language’s grammatical structures and codes i.e. here we deal with syntax and semantics. Codes also represent the values of the culture, and are able to add new shades of connotation to every aspect of life.

The reason why this article is established within the frames of both Linguistics and Communication in parallel is that Semiotics generalizes the definition of a sign to encompass signs in any medium or sensory modality. Thus broadens the range of sign systems and sign relations, and extends the definition of language in what amounts to its widest analogical or metaphorical sense and is closer to some of the humanities as well, including literary theory and to cultural anthropology.

Semiotic methodology was successfully employed by the US Information Agency using a paradigm developed by Ohio University psychiatrist, Dr A. James Giannini.

The main problem of communication was defined by the outstanding American scholar of politics G.D. Lasswell the following way: *Who says what to whom in which channel with what effect?* There were lots of answers for the questions. His formula is considered to be classical, and can be encountered in any textbook on The Theory of Communication, Mass Communication, Social Psychology, Sociology, and Political science. The Lasswell formula is given in the form of a table included in the program of the Theory of Communication in one of the American Universities.



The Lasswell Formula

Consequently, we seem as a species to be driven by a [desire to make meanings](#): above all, we are surely *Homo significans* - meaning-makers. Distinctively, we make meanings through our creation and interpretation of 'signs'. Indeed, according to Peirce, 'we think only in signs' ([Peirce 1931-58, 2.302](#)). Signs take the form of words, [images](#), sounds, odours, flavours, acts or objects, but such things have no intrinsic meaning and become signs only when we invest 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.

The two dominant models of what constitutes a sign are those of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure offered a 'dyadic' or two-part model of the sign. He defined a sign as being composed of:

- 1) a 'signifier' (*signifiant*) - the *form* which the sign takes; and
- 2) the 'signified' (*signifié*) - 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'.

If we take a linguistic example, the word 'Open' (when it is invested with meaning by someone who encounters it on a shop doorway) is a *sign* consisting of:

a *signifier*: the word **open**;

a *signified concept*: that the shop is open for business.

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 (the word 'open') could stand for a different signified (and thus be a different sign) if it were on a push-button inside a lift ('push to open door'). Similarly, many signifiers could stand for the concept 'open' (for instance, on top of a packing carton, a small outline of a box with an open flap for 'open this end') - again, with each unique pairing constituting 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](#))

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 noted that his choice of the terms *signifier* and *signified* helped to indicate 'the distinction which separates each from the other' ([Saussure 1983, 67](#); [Saussure 1974, 67](#)).

Taking into account the information above I would like to emphasize the importance of introducing Semiotics into the educational program of universities in Kyrgyzstan as such course is quite well known and taught even in secondary schools of not only Europe, but also Asia and etc. Despite this fact, we neither have this subject even in the programs of Higher Schools of our country nor have we well trained academic staff in Semiotics.

Developments on different semiotic aspects (philosophy, linguistics, culture, literature, translation) can be found in contemporary philosophy of language. One of the main tasks of the present research is to synthesize all of them within the frame of general semiotic concept. First of

all there are different conceptions and methods to research Semiotics, that will help structuralize appropriate researches and further apply them in teaching Semiotics.

Semiotics and almost all its fields has already become an important part of present science and the elements of semiotic approach present in almost all the scientific field.

Despite the fact that Kyrgyz –Turkish Manas University considered to be one of the youngest universities with its 15 years' existence, it started including Semiotics as a must class in its Program from 2010-2011 academic school year. And it can be explained by several urgent reasons and its topicality as the 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 a foreign words.

In a larger scale, it is planned to spread this subject among all the universities in Kyrgyzstan as it has a practical value in every field.

Applied sources:

1. Chandler, Daniel (2001): *Semiotics: The Basics*. London: Routledge
2. Chandler, Daniel (1994): *Semiotics for Beginners* [WWW document] **URL** <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/semiotic.html> [*Date of Visit*]
3. Saussure, Ferdinand de (1974): *Course in General Linguistics* (trans. Wade Baskin). London: Fontana/Collins [still the most widely-cited translation, dating from 1959]
4. Saussure, Ferdinand de (1983): *Course in General Linguistics* (trans. Roy Harris). London: Duckworth [beware of the rendering of *signifiant* as 'signal' and *signifiũ* as 'signification' instead of the more usual 'signifier' and 'signified']
5. Thibault, Paul J (1997): *Re-reading Saussure: The Dynamics of Signs in Social Life*. London: Routledge
6. Eco, Umberto (1976): *A Theory of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press/London: Macmillan
7. Eco, Umberto (1984): *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press
8. Peirce, Charles S (1966): *Selected Writings*. New York: Dover