

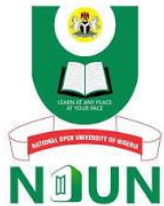


**COURSE
GUIDE**

**ENG 936
SEMIOTICS**

Course Team

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NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

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Printed: 2021

ISBN: 978-978-058-067-4

ENG 936 SEMIOTICS

Semiotics is a study of the science of signs and sign systems, spanning the logical and functional aspects of onomastics, kinesics, proxemics and their interactions with language in culture and society. It is also concerned with the signs of power and the power of signs in social practice, and the role of the New Media, especially the internet in the reinventions and reuses of signs. Socio-cultural meaning making beyond the linguistic thus becomes point of focus in this course.

Introduction

There are three modules in this book. The three modules have been subdivided into units. The first module introduces you to Semiotics as the study of meaning through signs and symbols. In this module the essential elements of signification will be highlighted. The second module introduces you to symbols, icons, indices and symbols, while the third module treats nominalism, realism and conceptualism. In the third module, the basic elements of semiotics according to Morris (1938) are discussed extensively. They include: syntactics, semantics and pragmatics. In this book the role of language in meaning making is further emphasized. You will find out in this course that although there is perhaps no sharp distinction between human and non-human signaling and between language and non-language, there are certain properties of adult language at least, having to do with its grammatical complexity and its descriptive function, which as we shall see, may appear to be unique to language and associated more particularly with its verbal component. If the possession of these properties is made a defining characteristic of language, then it can be said correctly that languages are fundamentally or qualitatively different from all other signaling-systems.

Objectives

At the end of the three modules, you should be able to:

- define Semiotics
- explain the notion of Signification
- explain the relationship between sign and meaning
- discuss the domains of meaning: syntax, semantics and pragmatics.

Working through this Material

To complete this course, you are advised to read the study units, read recommended books and other materials provided by NOUN. Each unit contains self-assessment exercises, and at points in the course you are required to submit assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of the course, there is a final examination. The course should take you about fifteen weeks to complete. You will find all the components of the course listed below. You have to allocate your time to each unit in order to complete the course successfully and in time.

Course Material

The major components of the course are:

Study units

Textbooks

Assignment File

Presentation schedule

CONTENTS	PAGE
Module 1 Semiotics	6
Unit 1 What is Semiotics?	6
Unit 2 Historical Perspective	7
Unit 3 Signification	8
Unit 4 Some Authors in Semiotics	11
Ferdinand de Saussure	
Charles Sanders Peirce	
Unit 5 Cognitive Semiotics	20
Finite Semiotics	
Pictorial Semiotics	
Module 2 Symbols, Icons, Indices and Symptoms	23
Unit 1 Signs	23
Unit 2 Icons	25
Unit 3 Indices	26
Unit 4 Symbols	27
Unit 5 Semiotic Elements and Classes of Signs	28
Structural Semiotics	
Pictorial Semiotics	
Cognitive Semiotics	
Social semiotics	
Module 3 Conceptual Rules and Meaning	33
Unit 1 Conceptualism, Realism and Nominalism	33
Unit 2 Reference, Sense and Denotation	36
Unit 3 Syntax	38
Unit 4 Semantics	40
Unit 5 Pragmatics	41

The next section presents the three modules and the separate units.

Module 1 Semiotics

The meaning of linguistic expressions is commonly described in terms of the notion of signification*: that is to say, words and other expressions are held to be signs* which, in some sense signify* or stand for other things. Many writers, in discussing the notion of signification have drawn a distinction between signs and symbols or between signals and symbols, or between symbols and symptoms. Unfortunately, however, there is no consistency in the way various authors have defined these terms.

Unit 1 What is Semiotics?

Semiotics (also called semiotic studies) is the study of sign process (semiosis), which is any form of activity, conduct, or any process that involves signs, including the production of meaning. A sign is anything that communicates a meaning; that is not the sign itself, to the interpreter of the sign. The meaning can be intentional such as a word uttered with a specific meaning, or unintentional, such as a symptom being a sign of a particular medical condition. Signs can communicate through any of the senses, visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory or gustatory.

The semiotic tradition explores the study of signs and symbols as a significant part of communications. Unlike linguistics, semiotics also studies non-linguistic sign systems. Semiotics includes the study of signs and sign processes, indication, designation, likeness, analogy, allegory, metonymy, metaphor, symbolism, signification, and communication.

Semiotics is frequently seen as having important anthropological and sociological dimensions; for example, the Italian semiotician and novelist Umberto Eco proposed that every cultural phenomenon may be studied as communication. Some semioticians focus on the logical dimensions of the science. However, they examine areas belonging also to the life sciences—such as how organisms make predictions about, and adapt to, their semiotic niche in the world (see semiosis). In general, semiotic theories take signs or sign systems as their object of study: the communication of information in living organisms is covered in biosemiotics (including zoosemiotics and phytosemiotics). Semiotics is not to be confused with the Saussurean tradition called semiology, which is a subset of semiotics.

Unit 2 Historical Perspective

The importance of signs and signification has been recognized throughout much of the history of philosophy, and in psychology as well. The term derives from the Greek: σημειωτικός, romanized: sēmeiōtikos, "observant of signs" (from σημείον sēmeion, "a sign, a mark"). For the Greeks, "signs" occurred in the world of nature, and "symbols" in the world of culture. As such, Plato and Aristotle explored the relationship between signs and the world. It would not be until Augustine of Hippo that the nature of the sign would be considered within a conventional system. Augustine introduced a thematic proposal for uniting the two under the notion of "sign" (signum) as transcending the nature-culture divide and identifying symbols as no more than a species (or sub-species) of signum be formally proposed. A monograph study on this question would be done by Manetti (1987).

These theories have had a lasting effect in Western philosophy, especially through scholastic philosophy. The general study of signs that began in Latin with Augustine culminated with the 1632 *Tractatus de Signis* of John Poincot, and then began anew in late modernity with the attempt in 1867 by Charles Sanders Peirce to draw up a "new list of categories." More recently, Umberto Eco, in his *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, has argued that semiotic theories are implicit in the work of most, perhaps all, major thinkers.

Unit 3 Signification

Ogden and Richards (1923:23) distinguish symbols as “those signs which men use to communicate with one another”, where Pierce (1940:104), who also treats symbols as a ventional nature of the relation which holds between sign and significatum (see also Miller, 1951:5). Morris (1946:23-27) who follows Pierce quite closely in certain respects, says that “a symbol is a sign...which acts as substitute for some other sign with which it is synonymous” and that “all signs not symbols are signals”, Buhler (1934:24-33) describes the utterance as a symptom of what is in the speaker’s mind, a symbol of what is meant or signified, and a signal to the hearer (cf. Ullman, 1957:68; 1962:12), whilst Cherry (1957:7) employs the word, ‘sign’ for “any physical event used in communication” and reserves ‘symbol’ for ‘religious’ and cultural symbols interpretable only in specified historical contexts”, such as the Crown, the Cross or Uncle Gbenga.

From the various definitions, it will be clear that there is no single standard interpretation of any one of sign and symbol in the literature. The term ‘signal’ has already been introduced in order to refer to whatever is transmitted along some channel of communication and can be interpreted by the receiver as a code. Thus, the encoding and decoding processes are context-dependent. However, Signification is commonly described as some triadic relations, which may be further analysed into three triadic relations: two basic and one derivative. This kind of analysis is conveniently illustrated as it was drawn by Ogden and Richards (1923:11) and subsequently by many others writing on semantics or communication, by means of a diagrammatic representation in the form of a triangle.

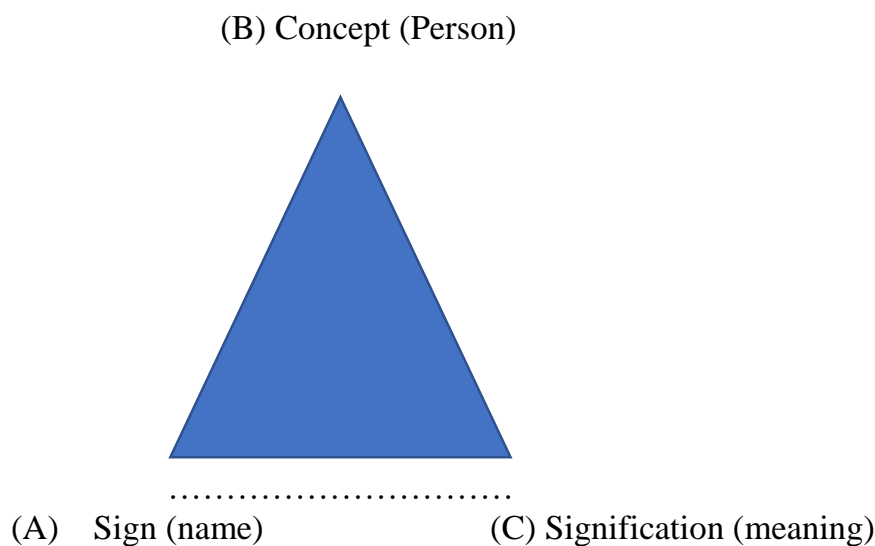


Fig.1. The Triangle of Signification (see Lyons (1977:96))

In Fig.1 above, we have used letters to name the corners of this triangle. Various terms are employed in the literature (see Ullman, 1957:71); for the present at least, we can make do with the three names above for this course. The fact that the relationship between a lexeme (A) and its significatum (C) is indirect, being mediated by a concept (B), is indicated in the diagram by making AC a dotted line, unlike AB and BC, which being continuous represent two more basic relationships. This graphic device is adapted from Ogden and Richards. It is established that Ogden and Richards distinguished a variety of meanings of ‘meaning’. They were especially concerned with problems of misunderstanding and misinterpretation; and they believed that much of this due to the tendency to think that there is some inherent and indissoluble link between signs and what they stand for.

Communication would be improved and clarity of thought facilitated, they claimed, if it was realized that the relationship between words and things was purely derivative – an imputed, non-causal relationship, resulting from their association in the mind of speaker and listener (or writer and reader) during the process of communication.

The AB and BC relations, however, were said to be true causal relations; and the account that Ogden and Richards gave of them can be described in a very general sense, as behaviouristic. Some object (C) in the external world calls forth a thought (B) in the mind of the speaker and this thought in turn elicits from him a sign (A). Ogden and Richards do not draw the distinction that we have drawn between sign and signal as will be seen in Module 4 of this coursebook where we looked at syntax, semantics and pragmatics; they therefore think of the sign as being transmitted, without further processing as it were, to the listener. However, we have inserted the encoding and decoding stage in the process of communication without otherwise affecting their scheme in module 4.

The term used for C by Ogden and Richards is referent; and this term is now quite widely employed by semanticists. It is worth noting, however, that the relations of reference, for Ogden and Richards, holds between B and C, and not between A and C. Attempts have been made to eliminate either B or C, whilst still maintaining the view that the meaning of a word is what it signifies. Ullman (1957:72) argues that C is of no direct concern to the semanticist and that those properties of things which are relevant to determining the meaning of words are abstracted from things and represented in B. Following Saussure’s (1916) analysis (in terms of which the sign is not A, but the composite entity A+B), he describes not only B but also A, as a mental entity, saying that they are dynamically and reciprocally related in the mind). Meaning is therefore a reciprocal relation between A and B, which “enables them to call up one another”.

For example: “when I think of a table, I shall articulate the name required...and the picture of the objects comes to mind” (Lyons 1957:69-70). If ‘money’ is mentioned to you, all the images and representations of money come to mind.

Other scholars, being suspicious of the mentalistic mould within which this account of meaning is cast, have questioned the need for B, thoughts or concepts mediating between words and things. For them the meaning of a word is simply the object or class of objects that it stands for.

There is considerable disagreement about the details of the triadic analysis of signification even among those who accept that all three components, A, B and C, must be taken into account. Should A be defined as a physical or a mental entity? What is the psychological or ontological status of B? Is C something that is referred to on a particular occasion? Or is it the totality of things that might be referred to by uttering the sign (or a signal encoding the sign)? Or, yet a third possibility, is it some typical or ideal representative of this class?

Unit 4 Authors in Semiotics

Ferdinand de Saussure

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), the "father" of modern linguistics, proposed a dualistic notion of signs, relating the signifier as the form of the word or phrase uttered, to the signified as the mental concept. According to Saussure, the sign is completely arbitrary—i.e., there is no necessary connection between the sign and its meaning. This sets him apart from previous philosophers, such as Plato or the scholastics, who thought that there must be some connection between a signifier and the object it signifies. In his *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure credits the American linguist William Dwight Whitney (1827–1894) with insisting on the arbitrary nature of the sign. Saussure's insistence on the arbitrariness of the sign also has influenced later philosophers and theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Jean Baudrillard. Ferdinand de Saussure coined the term *sémiologie* while teaching his landmark "Course on General Linguistics" at the University of Geneva from 1906 to 1911. Saussure posited that no word is inherently meaningful. Rather a word is only a "signifier." i.e., the representation of something, and it must be combined in the brain with the "signified", or the thing itself, in order to form a meaning-imbued "sign." Saussure believed that dismantling signs was a real science, for in doing so we come to an empirical understanding of how humans synthesize physical stimuli into words and other abstract concepts.

Ferdinand de Saussure founded his semiotics, which he called semiology, in the social sciences. It is...possible to conceive of a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life. It would form part of social psychology, and hence of general psychology. We shall call it semiology (from the Greek *semeîon*, 'sign'). It would investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them. Since it does not yet exist, one cannot say for certain that it will exist. But it has a right to exist, a place ready for it in advance. Linguistics is only one branch of this general science. The laws which semiology will discover will be laws applicable in linguistics, and linguistics will thus be assigned to a clearly defined place in the field of human knowledge

Charles Sanders Peirce

Thomas Sebeok would assimilate "semiology" to "semiotics" as a part to a whole, and was involved in choosing the name *Semiotica* for the first international journal devoted to the study of signs. Saussurean semiotics has exercised a great deal of influence on the schools of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism. Jacques Derrida, for example, takes as his object the

Saussurean relationship of signifier and signified, asserting that signifier and signified are not fixed, coining the expression *différance*, relating to the endless deferral of meaning, and to the absence of a 'transcendent signified'. For Derrida, "il n'y a pas de hors-texte" (transl. "there is nothing outside the text").

In the nineteenth century, Charles Sanders Peirce defined what he termed "semiotic" (which he would sometimes spell as "semeiotic") as the "quasi-necessary, or formal doctrine of signs," which abstracts "what must be the characters of all signs used by...an intelligence capable of learning by experience," and which is philosophical logic pursued in terms of signs and sign processes.

Peirce's perspective is considered as philosophical logic studied in terms of signs that are not always linguistic or artificial, and sign processes, modes of inference, and the inquiry process in general. The Peircean semiotic addresses not only the external communication mechanism, as per Saussure, but the internal representation machine, investigating sign processes, and modes of inference, as well as the whole inquiry process in general.

Peircean semiotic is triadic, including sign, object, interpretant, as opposed to the dyadic Saussurian tradition (signifier, signified). Peircean semiotics further subdivides each of the three triadic elements into three sub-types, positing the existence of signs that are symbols; semblances ("icons"); and "indices," i.e., signs that are such through a factual connection to their objects.

Peircean scholar and editor Max H. Fisch (1978) would claim that "semeiotic" was Peirce's own preferred rendering of Locke's *σημιωτική*. Charles W. Morris followed Peirce in using the term "semiotic" and in extending the discipline beyond human communication to animal learning and use of signals.

While the Saussurean semiotic is dyadic (sign/syntax, signal/semantics), the Peircean semiotic is triadic (sign, object, interpretant), being conceived as philosophical logic studied in terms of signs that are not always linguistic or artificial.

Peirce would aim to base his new list directly upon experience precisely as constituted by action of signs, in contrast with the list of Aristotle's categories which aimed to articulate within experience the dimension of being that is independent of experience and knowable as such, through human understanding.

The estimative powers of animals interpret the environment as sensed to form a "meaningful world" of objects, but the objects of this world (or "Umwelt", in Jakob von Uexküll's term) consist exclusively of objects related to the animal as desirable (+), undesirable (-), or "safe to ignore".

In contrast to this, human understanding adds to the animal "Umwelt" a relation of self-identity within objects which transforms objects experienced into things as well as +, -, 0 objects. Thus, the generically animal objective world as "Umwelt", becomes a species-specifically human objective world or "Lebenswelt" (life-world), wherein linguistic communication, rooted in the biologically underdetermined "Innenwelt" (inner-world) of humans, makes possible the further dimension of cultural organization within the otherwise merely social organization of non-human animals whose powers of observation may deal only with directly sensible instances of objectivity.

This further points that human culture depends upon language understood first of all not as communication, but as the biologically underdetermined aspect or feature of the human animal's "Innenwelt", was originally clearly identified by Thomas A. Sebeok. Sebeok also played the central role in bringing Peirce's work to the center of the semiotic stage in the twentieth century, first with his expansion of the human use of signs ("anthroposemiosis") to include also the generically animal sign-usage ("zoösemiosis"), then with his further expansion of semiosis to include the vegetative world ("phytosemiosis"). Such would initially be based on the work of Martin Krampen, but takes advantage of Peirce's point that an interpretant, as the third item within a sign relation, "need not be mental.

Peirce distinguished between the interpretant and the interpreter. The interpretant is the internal, mental representation that mediates between the object and its sign. The interpreter is the human who is creating the interpretant. Peirce's "interpretant" notion opened the way to understanding an action of signs beyond the realm of animal life (study of "phytosemiosis" + "zoösemiosis" + "anthroposemiosis" = biosemiotics), which was his first advance beyond Latin Age semiotics. Other early theorists in the field of semiotics include Charles W. Morris. Max Black argued that the work of Bertrand Russell was seminal in the field.



Fig. 2: Colour codes for hot and cold-water representations

Color-coding hot- and cold-water faucets (taps) is common in many cultures but, as this example shows, the coding may be rendered meaningless because of context. The two faucets (taps) probably were sold as a coded set, but the code is unusable (and ignored), as there is a single water supply.

Semioticians classify signs or sign systems in relation to the way they are transmitted. 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 (see lexical words), 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 (see syntax and semantics in module 4). Codes also represent the values of the culture, and are able to add new shades of connotation to every aspect of life.

To explain the relationship between semiotics and communication studies, communication is defined as the process of transferring data and-or meaning from a source to a receiver. Hence, communication theorists construct models based on codes, media, and contexts to explain the biology, psychology, and mechanics involved. Both disciplines recognize that the technical process cannot be separated from the fact that the receiver must decode the data, i.e., be able to distinguish the data as salient, and make meaning out of it. This implies that there is a necessary overlap between semiotics and communication. Indeed, many of the concepts are shared, although in each field the emphasis is different. In *Messages and Meanings: An Introduction to Semiotics*, Marcel Danesi (1994) suggested

that semioticians' priorities were to study signification first, and communication second. A more extreme view is offered by Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1987; trans. 1990: 16), who, as a musicologist, considered the theoretical study of communication irrelevant to his application of semiotics.

Major efforts in semiotics

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), a noted logician who founded philosophical pragmatism, defined semiosis as an irreducibly triadic process wherein something, as an object, logically determines or influences something as a sign to determine or influence something as an interpretation or interpretant, itself a sign, thus leading to further interpretants. Semiosis is logically structured to perpetuate itself. The object may be quality, fact, rule, or even fictional (Hamlet), and may be "immediate" to the sign, the object as represented in the sign, or "dynamic", the object as it really is, on which the immediate object is founded. The interpretant may be "immediate" to the sign, all that the sign immediately expresses, such as a word's usual meaning; or "dynamic", such as a state of agitation; or "final" or "normal", the ultimate ramifications of the sign about its object, to which inquiry taken far enough would be destined and with which any interpretant, at most, may coincide. His semiotics covered not only artificial, linguistic, and symbolic signs, but also semblances such as kindred sensible qualities, and indices such as reactions. He came c.1903 to classify any sign by three interdependent trichotomies, intersecting to form ten (rather than 27) classes of sign.

Signs also enter into various kinds of meaningful combinations; Peirce covered both semantic and syntactic issues in his speculative grammar. He regarded formal semiotics as logic per se and part of philosophy; as also encompassing study of arguments (hypothetical, deductive, and inductive) and inquiry's methods including pragmatism; and as allied to, but distinct from logic's pure Mathematics. In addition to pragmatism, Peirce provided a definition of "sign" as a representamen, in order to bring out the fact that a sign is something that "represents" something else in order to suggest it (that is, "re-present" it) in some way:

"A sign, or representamen, 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. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea."

Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944) studied the sign processes in animals. He used the German word *umwelt*, "environment," to describe the individual's

subjective world, and he invented the concept of functional circle (funktionskreis) as a general model of sign processes. In his *Theory of Meaning* (Bedeutungslehre, 1940), he compared the semiotic approach to Biology, thus establishing the field that now is called biosemiotics.

Valentin Voloshinov (1895–1936) was a Soviet-Russian linguist, whose work has been influential in the field of literary theory and Marxist theory of ideology. Written in the late 1920s in the USSR, Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Russian: Marksizm i Filosofiya Yazyka) developed a counter-Saussurean linguistics, which situated language use in social process rather than in an entirely decontextualized Saussurean langue.

Louis Hjelmslev (1899–1965) developed a formalist approach to Saussure's structuralist theories. His best-known work is *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, which was expanded in *Résumé of the Theory of Language*, a formal development of glossematics, his scientific calculus of language.

Thure von Uexküll (1908–2004), the "father" of modern psychosomatic medicine, developed a diagnostic method based on semiotic and biosemiotic analyses.

Roland Barthes (1915–1980) was a French literary theorist and semiotician. He often would critique pieces of cultural material to expose how bourgeois society used them to impose its values upon others. For instance, the portrayal of wine drinking in French society as a robust and healthy habit would be a bourgeois ideal perception contradicted by certain realities (i.e. that wine can be unhealthy and inebriating). He found semiotics useful in conducting these critiques. Barthes explained that these bourgeois cultural myths were second-order signs, or connotations. A picture of a full, dark bottle is a sign, a signifier relating to a signified: a fermented, alcoholic beverage—wine. However, the bourgeois take this signified and apply their own emphasis to it, making "wine" a new signifier, this time relating to a new signified: the idea of healthy, robust, relaxing wine. Motivations for such manipulations vary from a desire to sell products to a simple desire to maintain the status quo. These insights brought Barthes very much in line with similar Marxist theory.

Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917–1992) developed a structural version of semiotics named, "generative semiotics", trying to shift the focus of discipline from signs to systems of signification. His theories develop the ideas of Saussure, Hjelmslev, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Thomas A. Sebeok (1920–2001), a student of Charles W. Morris, was a prolific and wide-ranging American semiotician. Although he insisted that

animals are not capable of language, he expanded the purview of semiotics to include non-human signaling and communication systems, thus raising some of the issues addressed by philosophy of mind and coining the term zoosemiotics. Sebeok insisted that all communication was made possible by the relationship between an organism and the environment in which it lives. He also posed the equation between semiosis (the activity of interpreting signs) and life—a view that the Copenhagen-Tartu biosemiotic school has further developed.

Yuri Lotman (1922–1993) was the founding member of the Tartu (or Tartu-Moscow) Semiotic School. He developed a semiotic approach to the study of culture—semiotics of culture—and established a communication model for the study of text semiotics. He also introduced the concept of the semiosphere. Among his Moscow colleagues were Vladimir Toporov, Vyacheslav Ivanov and Boris Uspensky.

Christian Metz (1931–1993) pioneered the application of Saussurean semiotics to film theory, applying syntagmatic analysis to scenes of films and grounding film semiotics in greater context.

Eliseo Verón (1935–2014) developed his "Social Discourse Theory" inspired in the Peircian conception of "Semiosis".

Groupe μ (founded 1967) developed a structural version of rhetorics, and the visual semiotics.

Umberto Eco (1932–2016) was an Italian novelist, semiotician and academic. He made a wider audience aware of semiotics by various publications, most notably *A Theory of Semiotics* and his novel, *The Name of the Rose*, which includes (second to its plot) applied semiotic operations. His most important contributions to the field bear on interpretation, encyclopedia, and model reader. He also criticized in several works (*A theory of semiotics*, *La struttura assente*, *Le signe*, *La production de signes*) the "iconism" or "iconic signs" (taken from Peirce's most famous triadic relation, based on indexes, icons, and symbols), to which he proposed four modes of sign production: recognition, ostension, replica, and invention.

Paul Bouissac (born 1934) is a world-renowned expert of circus studies, known for developing a range of semiotic interpretations of circus performances. This includes the multimodal dimensions of clowns and clowning, jugglers, and trapeze acts. He is the author of several books relating to the semiotics of the circus. Bouissac is the Series Editor for the *Advances in Semiotics Series* for Bloomsbury Academic. He runs the *SemiotiX Bulletin* which has a global readership, is a founding editor of the *Public Journal of Semiotics*, and was a central founding figure in the Toronto Semiotic Circle. He is Professor Emeritus of Victoria College,

University of Toronto. The personal, professional, and intellectual life of Bouissac is recounted in the book, *The Pleasures of Time: Two Men, A Life*, by his life-long partner, the sociologist Stephen Harold Riggins.

Julia Kristeva (born 1941), is a student of Lucien Goldmann and Roland Barthes, Bulgarian-French semiotician, literary critic, psychoanalyst, feminist, and novelist. She uses psychoanalytical concepts together with ?? semiotics, distinguishing the two components in the signification, the symbolic and the semiotic. Kristeva also studies the representation of women and women's bodies in popular culture, such as horror films and has had a remarkable influence on feminism and feminist literary studies. Some applications of semiotics include:

The representation of a methodology for the analysis of "texts" regardless of the medium in which it is presented; for these purposes, "text" is any message preserved in a form whose existence is independent of both sender and receiver;

By scholars and professional researchers as a method to interpret meanings behind symbols and how the meanings are created;

Potential improvement of ergonomic design in situations where it is important to ensure that human beings are able to interact more effectively with their environments, whether it be on a large scale, as in architecture, or on a small scale, such as the configuration of instrumentation for human use; and

Marketing: Epure, Eisenstat, and Dinu (2014) express that "semiotics allows for the practical distinction of persuasion from manipulation in marketing communication." Semiotics are used in marketing as a persuasive device to influence buyers to change their attitudes and behaviors in the market place. There are two ways that Epure, Eisenstat, and Dinu (2014) state in which semiotics are used:

- a. Surface: signs are used to create personality for the product; creativity plays its foremost role at this level.
- b. Underlying: the concealed meaning of the text, imagery, sounds, etc.

In some countries, the role of semiotics is limited to literary criticism and an appreciation of audio and visual media. This narrow focus may inhibit a more general study of the social and political forces shaping how different media are used and their dynamic status within modern culture. Issues of technological determinism in the choice of media and the design of communication strategies assume new importance in this age of mass media.

John Locke

John Locke (1690), himself a man of Medicine, was familiar with this "semeiotics" as naming a specialized branch within medical science. In his personal library were two editions of Scapula's 1579 abridgement of Henricus Stephanus' Thesaurus Graecae Linguae, which listed "σημειωτική" as the name for "diagnostics," the branch of medicine concerned with interpreting symptoms of disease ("symptomatology"). Indeed, physician and scholar, Henry Stubbe (1670) had transliterated this term of specialized science into English precisely as "semeiotics," marking the first use of the term in English:

"...nor is there anything to be relied upon in Physick, but an exact knowledge of medicinal physiology (founded on observation, not principles), semeiotics, method of curing, and tried (not excogitated, not commanding) medicines"

Locke would use the term sem(e)iotike in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (book IV, chap. 21), in which he explains how science may be divided into three parts.

All that can fall within the compass of human understanding, being either, first, the nature of things, as they are in themselves, their relations, and their manner of operation: or, secondly, that which man himself ought to do, as a rational and voluntary agent, for the attainment of any end, especially happiness: or, thirdly, the ways and means whereby the knowledge of both the one and the other of these is attained and communicated; I think science may be divided properly into these three sorts.

Locke then elaborates on the nature of this third category, naming it "σημειωτική" (Semeiotike), and explaining it as "the doctrine of signs" in the following terms:

Thirdly, the third branch [of sciences] may be termed σημειωτική, or the doctrine of signs, the most usual whereof being words, it is aptly enough termed also Λογική, logic; the business whereof is to consider the nature of signs the mind makes use of for the understanding of things, or conveying its knowledge to others.

Yuri Lotman would introduce Eastern Europe to semiotics and adopt Locke's coinage ("σημειωτική") as the name to subtitle his founding at the University of Tartu in Estonia in 1964 of the first semiotics journal, Sign Systems Studies. Having gone through the major epochs in semiotics, the next unit dwells on cognitive semiotics.

Unit 5 Cognitive Semiotics

Cognitive semiotics is the study model of meaning-making, applying methods and theories from semiotics, linguistics, psychology, cognitive science, computational modelling, anthropology, philosophy and other sciences. Contrary to classical cognitive science, cognitive semiotics is explicitly involved with questions of meaning, having recourse, when possible, to semiotic terminology, although developing it when necessary. As against classical semiotics, cognitive semiotics aims to incorporate the results of other sciences, using methods ranging from conceptual and textual analysis as well as experimental and ethnographic investigations.

Cognitive semiotics has many sources. The first person to suggest the integration of the cognitive sciences and semiotics seems to have been Thomas C. Daddesio (1994). The Argentinean researcher Juan Magariños de Morentin has long been using the term "cognitive semiotics" to describe his own Peircean approach to semiotics (missing direct reference dating first time using "cognitive semiotics"). This is also the name of a web forum which he directed for many years. Several other prominent semioticians have been known to subscribe to a cognitive approach, such as Irene Mittelberg in gesture studies and Jean-Marie Klinkenberg in pictorial semiotics.

Per Aage Brandt founded a Center for Semiotics in 1995 at Aarhus University and subsequently a Master Education in Cognitive Semiotics, to investigate the connections between semiotics and cognitive science (with a strong focus on cognitive linguistics), and he has had several followers along this line such as Line Brandt (Center for Semiotics at Aarhus University), and Todd Oakley (Case Western Reserve University). The Center for Semiotics is currently constituted by Frederik Stjernfelt, Peer Bundgaard, Mikkel Wallentin, Svend Østergaard, Riccardo Fusaroli and Kristian Tylén. Bundgaard published an anthology in Danish which brings together texts from cognitive science, cognitive linguistics, and semiotics. Stjernfelt has combined the inspiration from Peirce with that from Husserl. Wallentin is conducting neuro-imaging investigations. Tylén and Fusaroli develop behavioral and neuroscientific experimental approaches to sign usage and linguistic conversations.

Since 2009, there is also a Centre for Cognitive Semiotics (CCS) at Lund University (Sweden), which is headed by Göran Sonesson, who has long been working in the direction of cognitive semiotics, integrating semiotic theory with experimental studies, mainly with application to the study of pictures. Sonesson started collaborating with the linguist Jordan Zlatev around 2001 and organized a number of research projects together with him, before adopting the label "cognitive semiotics". Other members of the

CCS are, notably, Mats Andrén, who has published a number of gesture studies, partially in collaboration with Zlatev, and Sara Lenninger, who is working with Sonesson on the semiotics of pictures. The particular direction taken by cognitive semiotics in Lund consists in experimental studies which are geared to elucidate fundamental semiotic concepts such as sign, index, icon, etc., as well as their precursor notion such as imitation, mimesis, empathy and intersubjectivity. The research at CCS centers on the phylogeny and ontogeny of human semiosis, employing apes and children, respectively, as research subjects

Finite semiotics

Finite semiotics was developed by Cameron Shackell (2018, 2019), and it aims to unify existing theories of semiotics for application to the post-Baudrillardian world of ubiquitous technology. Its central move is to place the finiteness of thought at the root of semiotics and the sign as a secondary but fundamental analytical construct. The theory contends that the levels of reproduction that technology is bringing to human environments demands this reprioritisation if semiotics is to remain relevant in the face of effectively infinite signs. The shift in emphasis allows practical definitions of many core constructs in semiotics which Shackell has applied to areas such as human computer interaction, creativity theory, and a computational semiotics method for generating semiotic squares from digital texts.

The theory called finite semiotics, proposes that the growing effects and challenges of technology as well as signs themselves, can be better understood by examining our cognition in finite, quantitative terms. Two illustrative applications of the theory are developed (see Shackell, Cameron 2019) for details. The first addresses the ethical problem of accountability for technology's effects by introducing a new concept of cognitive externalities. The second derives a computational method for automating opposition analysis, a technique central to applied semiotics.

Pictorial semiotics

Pictorial semiotics involves the study of pictures as particular vehicles of signification. Pictorial semiotics is the study of images, pictorial codes, and visual media as sign systems. This includes images in various forms, such as paintings (see Sonesson 1988). Pictorial semiotics is intimately connected to art history and theory. It goes beyond them both in at least one fundamental way, however. While art history has limited its visual analysis to a small number of pictures that qualify as "works of art", pictorial semiotics focuses on the properties of pictures in a general sense, and on how the artistic conventions of images can be interpreted through pictorial codes. Pictorial codes are the way in which viewers of pictorial

representations seem automatically to decipher the artistic conventions of images by being unconsciously familiar with them.

According to Göran Sonesson, (1988) a Swedish semiotician, pictures can be analyzed by three models: (a) the narrative model, which concentrates on the relationship between pictures and time in a chronological manner as in a comic strip; (b) the rhetoric model, which compares pictures with different devices as in a metaphor; and (c) the Laokoon model, which considers the limits and constraints of pictorial expressions by comparing textual mediums that utilize time with visual mediums that utilize space.

The break from traditional art history and theory—as well as from other major streams of semiotic analysis—leaves open a wide variety of possibilities for pictorial semiotics. Some influences have been drawn from phenomenological analysis, cognitive psychology, structuralist, and cognitivist linguistics, and visual anthropology and sociology.

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. Define Semiotics from the traditional point of view.
2. What is the relationship between a word and what it signifies?
3. Attempt tracing a history of semiotics
4. Who are the early linguists and mention their notable contributions to Linguistics?
5. Discuss the major efforts in the development of semiotics

Module 2 Signs, Icons, Indices and Symbols

Much recent work in the theory of signs has been strongly influenced by the writings of C.S. Peirce and in this module we shall look at some of the terms he employs for different kinds of signs. The term that Peirce uses to refer to the theory of signs is ‘semiotic’. This is the same term that Locke used in his *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690). It comes from the Greek word, meaning “to signify” and having originated in Greek medicine for diagnosis by means of bodily symptoms, it was employed by the Stoic philosophers to include both logic and epistemology. Most authors nowadays however, use semiotics as the noun and semiotic as the corresponding adjective and this is the usage that will be adopted in this module.

Unit 1 Symbols

Peirce’s definition of symbol rests upon the conventionality or arbitrariness of the relationship between the sign and its signification. The importance of arbitrariness as one of the design features of language has already been mentioned. Symbolism is a characteristic of every language. One of the philosophical controversies which gave birth to traditional grammar and determined its subsequent development turned on this very question: is the relationship between the form of a word and its meaning natural or conventional? Few linguists would put the question in such general terms these days. Saussure (1916) made what he called “the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign (that is to say, the conventionality of the relationship between form and meaning) one of the most basic principles of his whole theory; and most linguists have followed him on this point (even though they have not always accepted the Saussurean notion of the linguistic sign). They are all agreed that, whatever might have been the case at some earlier stage of man’s evolutionary development, in all known languages the connection between a word and what it stands for is, with relatively few exceptions, arbitrary.

What is meant by the term ‘arbitrary’, in this context, may be explained, as it commonly is, by means of an example, the word ‘cake’ has earned for itself different translations from different languages in Nigeria with similar conceptual frame in the minds of the users of the word. In Yoruba and other languages, “akara” is translated as “cake” while it could also be a “cookie”. It could be translated as ‘fried bean cake’ or ‘fried bean paste’. “Igi” has different representations in English as ‘tree’, ‘wood’, ‘cross’, ‘stem’, ‘root’, etc. but in Yoruba language and others, it is not differentiated. In English there is a word ‘tree’, in German there is a word ‘Baum’ and in French

there is a word 'arbre'; and each of these words, we will assume, has the same signification; it may be used to refer to the same class of objects. These three words are quite different in form; and no one is more naturally appropriate to signify trees than are the other two.

A symbol is painted in our brain immediately a name is called. That is the arbitrariness being talked about. Granted that there is no intrinsic reason (no reason in nature, to use a traditional formulation) why the English lexeme 'tree' should be associated with the forms tree and trees (rather than say, with bodge and bodes), a number of more interesting questions can be raised in connection with the principle of arbitrariness; and here we find considerable disagreement among scholars. Must there be some lexeme 'tress' in English, regardless of the forms with which it is associated? Indeed what does it mean to say that a language must have (or need not have) a lexeme semantically equivalent to the English 'tree'?

Unit 2 Icons

Pierce's term for non-arbitrary signs is 'icon'. He distinguishes icons from symbols, in one passage, as follows: 'An icon is a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant, even though its object had no existence; such as a lead-pencil streak as representing a geometrical line. A symbol is a sign which would lose the character which renders it a sign if there were no interpretants. Such is any utterance of speech which signifies what it does only by virtue of its being understood to have that signification. The distinction between icons and symbols, as Pierce describes them is far from clear. Iconicity is said to be dependent upon some natural resemblance, geometrical or functional, between the sign and its object. But the whole notion of resemblance holding independently of our recognition of the relevant features by virtue of which two things are similar is, to say the least, suspect. And our recognition of the semblance between a sign and its object (to talk in Pierce's terms) is frequently based upon our knowledge of certain cultural conventions of interpretation. It follows that 'iconic' cannot be equated with 'natural' (i.e. unlearned) and what is cultural on the other hand, and between what is arbitrary and what is non-arbitrary, on the other, it would appear that icons are a subclass of non-arbitrary signs in which the resemblance may be either natural or cultural. An icon is representative of a symbol although with cultural or natural colours. Iconicity is a kind of resemblance between form and meaning.

Unit 3 Indices

Pierce's third main category of signs is even more heterogeneous than the other two. The explicit definition which he gives of the term index runs as follows: "An index is a sign which would at once lose the character which makes it a sign of its object were removed, but would not lose that character which makes it a sign if there were no interpretant (1940:104)". This definition is so phrased as to make symbols, icons and indices, in theory at least, non-intersecting categories. Pierce goes on to say, by way of illustration, that a piece of mould with a bullet-hole in it is an index: 'for without the shot there would have been no hole; but there is a hole there, whether anybody has the sense to attribute it to a shot or not'. Just how this definition applies to other examples that he gives is, however, unclear: a man's rolling gait is "a probable indication that he is a sailor"; "sundial or a clock indicates the time of day": "a rap on the door is an index" – and, in general, anything which "focuses the attention" or "startles us" is an index (1940:108). So too are demonstrative pronouns, because "they call upon the hearer to use his powers of observation, and so establish a real connection between his mind and the object (1940:110)"

Unit 4 Symptom

The use of the term, 'symptom' is close to the sense in which it is used in medicine; and the art of diagnosis. By interpreting symptoms as signs, is to refer to its first definition or use as 'semiotic' in Greek (cf. Morris 1946:285). The term 'symptom' is in fact quite widely employed in the literature in the sense it has just been given here as signs; it is not subject to the same degree of fluctuation from one author to the next as 'symbol' or 'signal'.

Unit 5 Semiotic Elements and Classes of Signs

The first semiotic class to be mentioned in this course book is the structural semiotics. It was founded by the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure in the nineteenth century (1913). Structural semiotics borrows concepts from structural linguistics to analyse the structure of meaning in non-linguistic systems, from poetics to the traffic code. For example, the formal characteristics of language resemble the rules of chess, the monetary system, or the rules of etiquette. These code systems dictate the conventions for play, value creation and social behaviour and have the potential to generate an infinite number of games, transactions and social interactions bound by formal conventions. In the last century, writers such as Jakobson (1990), Sebeok (1966), Barthes (1972), Greimas (1984) among others have extended structural semiotics to a wide range of meaning systems.

Social semiotics

Social semiotics is the study of the social dimensions of meaning, and of the power of human processes of signification and interpretation (known as semiosis) in shaping individuals and societies. Social semiotics focuses on social meaning-making practices of all types, whether visual, verbal or aural in nature (Thibault, 1991). These different systems for meaning-making, or possible "channels" (e.g. speech, writing, images) are known as semiotic modes (or semiotic registers). Semiotic modes can include visual, verbal, written, gestural and musical resources for communication. They also include various "multimodal" ensembles of any of these modes (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001).

Social semiotics can include the study of how people design and interpret meanings, the study of texts, and the study of how semiotic systems are shaped by social interests and ideologies, and how they are adapted as society changes (Hodge and Kress, 1988). Structuralist semiotics in the tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure focused primarily on theorising semiotic systems or structures (termed *langue* by de Saussure, which change diachronically, i.e. over longer periods of time). In contrast, social semiotics tries to account for the variability of semiotic practices termed *parole* by Saussure. This altered focus shows how individual creativity, changing historical circumstances, and new social identities and projects can all change patterns of usage and design (Hodge and Kress, 1988). From a social semiotic perspective, rather than being fixed into unchanging "codes", signs are considered to be resources which people use and adapt (or "design") to make meaning. In these respects, social semiotics was influenced by, and shares many of the preoccupations of pragmatics

(Charles W. Morris) and sociolinguistics and has much in common with cultural studies and critical discourse analysis.

The main task of social semiotics is to develop analytical and theoretical frameworks which can explain meaning-making in a social context (Thibault, 1991).

Linguistic theorist, Michael Halliday, introduced the term 'social semiotics' into linguistics, when he used the phrase in the title of his book, *Language as Social Semiotic*. This work argues against the traditional separation between language and society, and exemplifies the start of a 'semiotic' approach, which broadens the narrow focus on written language in linguistics (1978). For Halliday, languages evolve as systems of "meaning potential" (Halliday, 1978:39) or as sets of resources which influence what the speaker can do with language, in a particular social context. For example, for Halliday, the grammar of the English language is a system organised for the following three purposes (areas or "metafunctions"):

- Facilitating certain kinds of social and interpersonal interactions (interpersonal),
- Representing ideas about the world (ideational), and
- Connecting these ideas and interactions into meaningful texts and making them relevant to their context (textual) (1978:112).

Any sentence in English is composed like a musical composition, with one strand of its meaning coming from each of the three semiotic areas or metafunctions. Bob Hodge generalises Halliday's essays [2] on social semiotics into five premises:

1. 'Language is a social fact' (1978:1)
2. 'We shall not come to understand the nature of language if we pursue only the kinds of question about language that are formulated by linguists' (1978:3)
3. 'Language is as it is because of the functions it has evolved to serve in people's lives' (1978:4).
4. Language has 'metafunctions', which in English are: ideational ('about something'), interpersonal ('doing something') and textual ('the speaker's text-forming potential') (1978:112).
5. Language is constituted as 'a discrete network of options' (1978:113)

Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress's *Social Semiotics* (1988) focused on the uses of semiotic systems in social practice. They explain that the social power of texts in society depends on interpretation: "Each producer of a message relies on its recipients for it to function as intended." (1988:4) This process of interpretation (semiosis) situates individual texts within discourses, the exchanges of interpretative communities. The work of interpretation can contest the power of hegemonic discourses. Hodge and Kress give the example of feminist activists defacing a sexist advertising billboard, and spray-painting it with a new, feminist message.

"Text is only a trace of discourses, frozen and preserved, more or less reliable or misleading. Yet discourse disappears too rapidly, surrounding a flow of texts." (1988:8)

Hodge and Kress built on a range of traditions from linguistics (including Noam Chomsky, Michael Halliday, Benjamin Lee Whorf and sociolinguistics), but the major impetus for their work is the critical perspective on ideology and society that originates with Marx.

Hodge and Kress build a notion of semiosis as a dynamic process, where meaning is not determined by rigid structures, or predefined cultural codes. They argue that Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist semiotics avoided addressing questions about creativity, movement, and change in language, possibly in reaction to the diachronic linguistic traditions of his time (the focus on the historical development from Indo-European). This created a "problematic" legacy, with linguistic change relegated to the "contents of Saussure's rubbish bin" (1988:16-17).

Instead, Hodge and Kress propose to account for change in semiosis through the work of Charles Sanders Peirce. Meaning is a process, in their interpretation of Peirce. They refer to Peirce's triadic model of semiosis, which depicts the "action" of a sign as a limitless process of infinite semiosis, where one "interpretant" (or idea linked to a sign) generates another. The flow of these infinite processes of interpretation are constrained in Peirce's model, they claim, by the material world (the "object"), and cultural rules of thought, or "habit". (1988:20)

Social semiotics revisits De Saussure's doctrine of the "arbitrariness of the linguistic sign". This notion rests on the argument that the signifier only has an arbitrary relationship to the signified) — in other words, that there is nothing about the sound or appearance of (verbal) signifiers (as, for example, the words "dog" or "chien") — to suggest what they signify. Hodge and Kress point out those questions of the referent become more complicated when semiotics moves beyond verbal language. On the one hand, there is the need to account for the continuum of relationships

between the referent and the representation. Here, they draw on Pierce's differentiation between iconic signification (e.g. a colour photograph of smoke, where the signifier recreates the perceptual experience of the signified), indexical signification (e.g. a column of smoke, where there is a causal relationship between the physical signifier and the fire it might signify), and symbolic signification (e.g. the word "smoke", where the arbitrary link between signifier and signified is maintained by social convention).

Social semiotics also addresses the question of how societies and cultures maintain or shift these conventional bonds between signifier and signified. De Saussure was unwilling to answer this question, Hodge and Kress claim. This leaves the socially determinist implication that meanings and interpretations are dictated from above, by "the whims of an inscrutably powerful collective being, Society." For Hodge and Kress, social semiotics must respond to the question and explain how the social shaping of meanings works in practice (1988:22).

Social semiotics is currently extending this general framework beyond its linguistic origins to account for the growing importance of sound and visual images, and how modes of communication are combined in both traditional and digital media (semiotics of social networking) (see, for example, Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996), thus approaching semiotics of culture (Randviir 2004). Theorists such as Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen have built on Halliday's framework by providing new "grammars" for other semiotic modes. Like language, these grammars are seen as socially formed and changeable sets of available "resources" for making meaning, which are also shaped by the semiotic metafunctions originally identified by Halliday. The visual and aural modes have received particular attention. Accounting for multimodality (communication in and across a range of semiotic modes - verbal, visual, and aural) is considered a particularly important ongoing project, given the importance of the visual mode in contemporary communication.

Self-assessment questions

1. Explain the notion of Signification
2. Define 'arbitrariness' in clear terms
3. Discuss the following in the world of semiotics:
 - a. Sign
 - b. Icon
 - c. Symbol

- d. symptom
- 4. Attempt a description of semiotics using the semiotic triangle

Module 3 Conceptual Rules and Meaning

Concepts play concrete roles in many traditional and modern theories of meaning. Although conceptualism is controversial, the controversies exist and known by philosophers and psychologists alike and those who even are not. By definition these concepts have been defined below. You are expected to consult other sources for more information on the topics discussed in this module and the earlier ones.

Unit 1 Conceptualism, Realism and Nominalism

Let us grant that there exist in the external world a variety of entities of various kinds (persons, animals, plants, etc.); that each such entity is an individual and that is characterized by or possesses certain perceptible or otherwise intelligible properties. In saying this, the metaphysics of everyday usage is being adopted. By concept is to be understood an idea, thought or mental construct by means of which the mind apprehends or comes to know things. In the traditional analysis, concept mediates between words and objects. “Words signify (things) by means of mediating concepts”, it will be recalled, is the slogan which sums this up and we have called the object that is signified by a word – its significatum.

Concepts have often been classified in terms of a number of dichotomies: as simple or complex, concrete or abstract, singular or common, universal or particular. Traditional grammatical distinctions as those drawn between concrete and abstract nouns, are partly dependent upon it, by virtue of the close association of grammatical and logical theory in the Western tradition. In a nutshell, there is a distinction between universals and particulars that especially concerns us in this course book for this is the source terminologically at least of the so-called problem of universals, which has been the subject of intense philosophical controversy from the time of Plato down to our day and in the form of the conflict between nominalism and realism, dominated later medieval logic and metaphysics.

By a universal is meant a concept of the kind that is associated with such words as ‘man’ or ‘beautiful’ when they are used predicatively to ascribe to individuals the property of being a man or being beautiful. The traditional problem of universals has to do with their ontological, not their psychological status. The term concept can therefore be used in two senses: mental concept and objective concept.

For realism there are two major versions in antiquity; the one deriving from Plato which might be called transcendental or extreme, realism and the other from Aristotle. According to Plato, the objective concept exists outside and apart from the individuals which in some way or another, can be said to manifest it. It was however, the alternative, more moderate

version of realism, stemming from Aristotle, which prevailed in the construction of the scholastic synthesis of logic, epistemology and metaphysics; and it was this version that the nominalists were primarily attacking. Some influential modern scholars, such as Frege and Russell, however have held a position which is closer to Plato's and latter-day nominalists have criticized them for it.

The Aristotelian view was that every individual was composed of two distinct, but inseparable principles, matter and form. Matter was the raw stuff of which something was made: it was the individuating principle; that which made an individual unique and different from all other individuals.

The nominalists rejected the view of the relationship between words and things. They held that universals were names which signified individuals and which referred to them in propositions in one mode or another. Only individuals existed and there were no objective, extramental universals. It is important to emphasize that the medieval nominalists did not deny the objectivity of our knowledge of the external world; nor that individuals had properties. They were saying that there was no such entity as redness, but only red things: i.e., individual objects to which by virtue of their similarity in colour, we apply the name 'red'. Universals, therefore, fell victim to what is generally known as Ockham's razor – principle of ontological parsimony or economy, according to which Entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity" or in what is apparently a more authentic, but less usual, form, "plurality should not be assumed unnecessarily". It was objective concepts not mental concepts; that the medieval nominalist rejected as unnecessary.

The intuitive apprehension of an object causes a concept of that thing to arise naturally in the mind. This individual concept is a natural sign of the object and it can be regarded as the meaning of the written or spoken word which, by convention, signifies it in particular languages. You will be required in this course to differentiate conceptual ideology from the nominalist's and the realist's. "Perceiving a cow results in the formation of the same idea or "natural sign" in the mind of the Englishman and of the Frenchman though the former will express this concept in words or writing by means of one conventional sign, 'cow', while the latter will express it by means of another conventional sign, 'vache' (Copleston 1953:54). According to this interpretation of Ockham, therefore he held that the association between a word and a concept was a matter of convention: but that there should be such a concept was not, and all languages would have words for the concepts formed by direct apprehension of objects in the world.

Conceptualism of whatever form, in semantics is open to two serious lines of criticism. First that there is no evidence that the concept is formed in the mind immediately a word is named. Second that image formation is not very important before the concept is given a meaning in the mind. Remember that earlier in this coursebook, it has been said that there is a relationship between the concept and the meaning if the mind is at work. If you hear the word 'table', the concept of a table will come into my mind and if you think a table, the word 'table' will be come up for use as required, there is no evidence to show that concepts of this kind play any part in ordinary language-behaviour.

As a student of semiotics, it is important we let you know that signs, symbols, symptoms discussed in this model have restrictions to language studies. Although in the objectives of this study it was said that this study will enable you understand semiotics beyond the classroom. You have been made to go through the ideas of concepts, realism and nominalism which are all language based and not symbolically related to your immediate environment. This course would have broadened your horizon to enable you understand traffic signs and symbols, danger signs, religious rites and symbols etc., in your environment. However, the module has mainly extended the notion of signification to cover all lexemes with the risk of trivializing it completely. To say that what a word means is what it signifies – unless we then go on to recognize different kinds of signification – is to say no more than what a word means is what it means. For more information (see Lyons 1977:110-114)

Unit 2 Reference, Sense and Denotation

Reference is the image which aids the completion of meaning-making in a context of language expressions. It is the relationship which holds between an expression and what that expression stands for on particular occasions of its utterance. What is meant by saying that an expression stands for something else has been discussed earlier above under semiotics, i.e., “signification” and other related terms. Reference in the English language is important in the study of “coherence” under “composition writing”. Reference is made in writing through the use of ‘pronominals (him, she, etc.), referring expressions (actual names) and anaphors (himself, herself, etc.). Ogden and Richards (1923) employed the term ‘referent’ for any object or state of affairs in the external world that is identified by means of a word or expression and ‘reference’ for the concept which mediates between the word or expression and the referent. This notion of reference is consistent with the philosophical notion of reference.

Reference, truth and existence establish the condition that the referent must satisfy the description has commonly been interpreted by philosophers to imply that the development must be true of the referent. If a distinction is drawn between correct reference and successful reference, one can perhaps maintain the general principle that we can refer correctly to an individual by means of a definite description only if the description is true of the individual in question. Consider the expressions below. Identify the referent and the reference in the five sentences.

- a. The Head of service is wicked
- b. Ogunjobi is the Dean of Arts
- c. The state governor is a dictator
- d. Whoever suspended him is unfair
- e. Everyone loves someone

Sense

Sense is a term used instead of meaning. The distinction of reference and sense is not bound to any single philosophical theory of meaning and it holds independently of such logical considerations as extensionality and the preservation of truth under substitution. Even if it proved possible to eliminate the distinction of reference and sense, for reasons of technical convenience, in the formalization of the logical structure of the proposition

expressed by sentences, the distinction is crucial once we take into account the utterance of sentences in actual contexts.

Denotation

Sense is epistemologically prior to denotation. Therefore, denotation is an alternative method of reduction in meaning-making, i.e. taking sense to be basic in all instances and treating denotation as a derivative relation. We first learn the use of many words in relation to the persons and objects around us and we learn the denotation of some of these words, it seems clear before we can relate them in sense to other words in the vocabulary. A denotative meaning of a word is therefore an alternative sense which the word has in a specific context.

Unit 3 Syntax

It is customary to recognize three areas within the field of semiotics: syntactics (or syntax), semantics and pragmatics. This threefold classification goes back ultimately to Peirce, but was first clearly drawn and made more generally familiar by Morris (1938:6). It was taken up by Carnap (1942:9) who like Morris as well as Bloomfield was a contributor to the International Encyclopedia of Unified Science (Neurath et al., 1939), which had a strong reductionist and physicalist bias; and it was subsequently reformulated by Morris (1946) within the framework of his behaviourist theory of signs. By then Morris felt obliged to point out that the terms ‘pragmatics’, ‘semantics’ and ‘syntactics’ had already taken on an ambiguity which threatens to cloud rather than illuminate the problems of this field, being used by some writers to designate subdivisions of semiotic itself and by others to designate kinds of signs in the object languages with which semiotic deals (1946:217).”

Morris (1938:6) defines pragmatics as “the relation of signs to interpreters”, semantics as the study of “the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable”, and syntactics as the study of “the formal relations of signs to one another”. These definitions were further developed or redefined freeing the earlier definitions from certain ambiguities and restrictions and to make the three terms “interpretable within a behaviourally oriented semiotics (1946:218-219).” The revised definitions run as follows:

- ii. Pragmatics is that portion of semiotic which deals with the origin, uses, and effects of signs within the behaviour in which they occur;
- iii. Semantics deals with signification of signs in all modes of signifying
- iv. Syntactics deals with combinations of signs without regard for their specific significations or their relation to the behaviour in which they occur”

For the purpose of this course, syntax described conceptually as syntactics is a field of semiotics because what is referred to as lexemes or lexical items were earlier in the days of Morris (1948) and Carnap (1942) known as signs. Carnap’s (1942) distinction of the three areas of semiotics is close to Morris’s earlier formulations, except that it is restricted to natural languages and logical calculi: “If in an investigation explicit reference is made to the speaker, or, to put in more general terms, to the user of the language, then we assign it to the field of pragmatics. If we abstract from the user of the language and analyse only the expressions and their designate, we are in the field of semantics. And if finally, we abstract from the designate also and analyse only the relations between the expressions,

we are in (logical) syntax”. Syntactics/syntax deals with the formal structures of signs, particularly the relation between signs and the objects to which they apply (i.e. signs to their designata, and the objects that they may or do denote). Syntax is the study of structural signs. The branch of semiotics that deals with such formal relations between signs or expressions in abstraction from their signification and their interpreters, or—more generally—with formal properties of symbol systems (specifically, with reference to linguistic signs, syntax) is referred to as syntactics.

Unit 4 Semantics

Charles W. Morris (1901–1979): Unlike his mentor George Herbert Mead, Morris was a behaviorist and sympathetic to the Vienna Circle positivism of his colleague, Rudolf Carnap. Morris was accused by John Dewey of misreading Peirce. In his 1938 *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, he defined semiotics as being grouped into three branches: These branches have been discussed above under syntax in this module 3. Semantics: deals with the formal properties and interrelation of signs and symbols, without regard to meaning. Semantics is a branch of semiotics which deals with structural meaning.

Unit 5 Pragmatics

Pragmatics: deals with the biotic aspects of semiosis, including all the psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena that occur in the functioning of signs. Pragmatics is concerned with the relation between the sign system and sign-using agents or interpreters (i.e., the human or animal users). Semiotics differs from linguistics in that it generalizes the definition of a sign to encompass signs in any medium or sensory modality. Thus, it 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.

Peirce's definition of the term "semiotic" as the study of necessary features of signs also has the effect of distinguishing the discipline from linguistics as the study of contingent features that the world's languages happen to have acquired in the course of their evolutions. From a subjective standpoint, perhaps more difficult is the distinction between semiotics and the philosophy of language. In a sense, the difference lies between separate traditions rather than subjects. Different authors have called themselves "philosopher of language" or "semiotician". This difference does not match the separation between analytic and continental philosophy. On a closer look, there may be found some differences regarding subjects. Philosophy of language pays more attention to natural languages or to languages in general, while semiotics is deeply concerned with non-linguistic signification. Philosophy of language also bears connections to linguistics, while semiotics might appear closer to some of the humanities (including literary theory) and to cultural anthropology.

List of subfields

Subfields that have sprouted out of semiotics include, but are not limited to, the following:

Biosemitotics: the study of semiotic processes at all levels of biology, or a semiotic study of living systems (e.g., Copenhagen–Tartu School). Annual meetings ("Gatherings in Biosemiotics") have been held since 2001.

Comics semiotics: the study of the various codes and signs of comics and how they are understood.

Computational semiotics: attempts to engineer the process of semiosis, in the study of and design for human-computer interaction or to mimic aspects of human cognition through artificial intelligence and knowledge representation. See also cybercognition.

Cultural and literary semiotics: examines the literary world, the visual media, the mass media, and advertising in the work of writers such as

Roland Barthes, Marcel Danesi, and Yuri Lotman (e.g., Tartu–Moscow Semiotic School).

Cybersemiotics: built on two already-generated interdisciplinary approaches: cybernetics and systems theory, including information theory and science; and Peircean semiotics, including phenomenology and pragmatic aspects of linguistics, attempts to make the two interdisciplinary paradigms—both going beyond mechanistic and pure constructivist ideas—complement each other in a common framework.

Design semiotics or product semiotics: the study of the use of signs in the design of physical products; introduced by Martin Krampen and in a practitioner-oriented version by Rune Monö while teaching industrial design at the Institute of Design, Umeå University, Sweden.

Ethnosemiotics: a disciplinary perspective which links semiotics concepts to ethnographic methods.

Film semiotics: the study of the various codes and signs of film and how they are understood. Key figures include Christian Metz.

Finite semiotics: an approach to the semiotics of technology developed by Cameron Shackell. It is used to both trace the effects of technology on human thought and to develop computational methods for performing semiotic analysis.

Gregorian chant semiology: a current avenue of palaeographical research in Gregorian chant which is revising the Solesmes school of interpretation.

Law and semiotics: one of the more accomplished publications in this field is the *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law*, published by International Association for the Semiotics of Law.

Marketing semiotics (or commercial semiotics): an application of semiotic methods and semiotic thinking to the analysis and development of advertising and brand communications in cultural context. Key figures include Virginia Valentine, Malcolm Evans, Greg Rowland, Georgios Rossolatos. International annual conferences (Semiofest) have been held since 2012.

Music semiology: the study of signs as they pertain to music on a variety of levels.

Organisational semiotics: the study of semiotic processes in organizations (with strong ties to computational semiotics and human-computer interaction).

Pictorial semiotics: an application of semiotic methods and semiotic thinking to art history.

Semiotics of music videos: semiotics in popular music.

Social semiotics: expands the interpretable semiotic landscape to include all cultural codes, such as in slang, fashion, tattoos, and advertising. Key figures include Roland Barthes, Michael Halliday, Bob Hodge, Chris William Martin and Christian Metz.

Structuralism and post-structuralism in the work of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Louis Hjelmslev, Roman Jakobson, Jacques Lacan, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, etc.

Theatre semiotics: an application of semiotic methods and semiotic thinking to theatre studies. Key figures include Keir Elam.

Urban semiotics: the study of meaning in urban form as generated by signs, symbols, and their social connotations.

Visual semiotics: analyses visual signs; prominent modern founders to this branch are Groupe µ and Göran Sonesson (see also visual rhetoric).

Semiotics of photography: is the observation of symbolism used within photography.

Artificial Intelligence Semiotics: is the observation of visual symbols and such symbols recognition by machine learning systems. The phrase was coined by Daniel Hoeg in Semiotics Mobility's design process for autonomous recognition and perception. The phrase also refers to machine learning and neural nets application of semiotic methods and semiotic machine learning to the analysis and development of robotics commands and instructions with subsystem communications in autonomous systems context.

Self-assessment questions

1. How would you explain reference, sense and denotation in semiotics?
2. Discuss in clear terms 'syntactics' as a field of semiotics
3. Discuss 'pragmatics' defining the field in semiotics
4. Discuss 'semantics' as related to semiotics from the beginning
5. Reconcile the three fields of semiotics drawing from their definitions from the beginning and the major developments to date

Preparatory Questions for Examination

1. Discuss the contributions of the following linguists to semiotics
 - a. Ferdinand de Saussure
 - b. John Locke
 - c. Charles Morris
 - d. Charles Sanders Peirce
2. How can semiotics help understand your immediate urban environment?
3. How would you differentiate the semiotic fields, diachronically and synchronically?
4. Who is the father of modern-day linguistics? Defend your choice with major contributions of the linguist you have chosen
5. Discuss the following illustratively
 - a. Pictorial semiotics
 - b. Finite semiotics
 - c. Cognitive semiotics
6. List and explain six semiotic types available in semiotic literature

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Signo — presents semiotic theories and theories closely related to semiotics.

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