

## **ОНОМАСІОЛОГІЯ І СЕМАСІОЛОГІЯ**

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### **LINGUAL SEMIOTICS VS HERMENEUTIS: TOWARD A CONCEPT OF INTERPRETATION**

*There is more work in interpreting interpretations  
than in interpreting things  
(Montaigne)*

The generally acknowledged definition of hermeneutics as “the art of interpretation as transformation” [1, p. 1] reflects the leitmotif of this science which is the processes of human understanding and interpretation of texts. This paper suggests that semiotics has much to offer those interested in the capacity of the language to mediate between the human speaker and a world of meanings, and greater attention to the tradition of semiotic scholarship can enrich and substantiate assumptions about interpretation and understanding that have been developed in hermeneutics. I suggest that research in the field of hermeneutics is by its very nature informed by semiotic thought, although this link is not often made explicit in research writing.

Hermeneutics began not as contemplation of essences, not even as a methodology of interpretation, but as the practical matter of transmitting messages. The Greek word *hermeios* referred to the priest at the Delphic oracle. This word and the more common verb *hermēneuein* and noun *hermēneia* point back to the wing-footed messenger-god Hermes, from whose name the words are apparently derived. In his article “Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics” (a fairly detailed history of hermeneutics from ancient times to the present which was written as an encyclopedia article) [2] G. Gadamer points out that hermeneutics is a term that covers many different levels of reflection, as is frequently the case with Greek words that have become part of the terminology in our scholarly disciplines. He mentions that even in the earliest Greek usage of the word *hermēneia* and *hermēneuein* there is a certain ambiguity. Hermes was the messenger of the gods who brought the messages of gods to human beings. As he is depicted in Homer, Hermes literally repeats the same words that the gods had told him to tell a human person. But often, especially in ordinary usage, the business of the *hermeneus* [interpreter] was more precisely that of translating something foreign or unintelligible into the language everybody speaks and understands [2, p. 44]. The Greeks credited Hermes with discovery of language and writing – the tools which human understanding employs to grasp meaning and to convey it to others. Martin Heidegger, who sees philosophy itself as interpretation, does not connect hermeneutics with Hermes. When Heidegger was asked about the

word *hermeneutics* in his dialogue with a Japanese, he obliquely says that “the noun *hermeneus* is referable to the name of the god Hermes by a playful thinking that is more compelling than the rigor of science” [3].

Thus, traced back to their earliest known root words in Greek, the origins of the modern words *hermeneutics* and *hermeneutical* suggest the process of “bringing to understanding” especially as this process involves language, since language is the medium par excellence in the process. In his “Hermeneutics” Richard Palmer emphasizes that the mediating and message-bringing process of “coming to understand”, associated with Hermes, is implicit in all of the three basic directions of meaning of *hermēneuein* and *hermēneia* in ancient usage. These three directions, using the verb form (*hermēneuein*) are: 1) *to express* aloud in words, that is, to say; 2) *to explain*, as in explaining a situation; and 3) *to translate*, as in the translation of a foreign tongue [4, p. 13]. All the three meanings may be expressed by the English verb “to interpret”, yet each constitutes an independent meaning of interpretation.

Moving on to the generally accepted definition of semiotics as a theory of signs we should note that from the very beginning (Hippocrates and Parmenides in the fifth century B.C.) *semeion* (Greek for sign) was used as a synonym for *tekmerion* (evidence, proof or symptom) and an intrinsic connection between a *semeion* and what it signifies was claimed [5, p. 185]. The theory of signs was variously developed by Epicureans and especially the Stoics, as a way of proceeding by inference from what is immediately given to the unperceived, and was thus analogous to a doctrine of evidence, particularly medical. The Greek doctrine of signification, with strong medical overtones, acquired the designation *semeiotiké*, from *sēma* ‘sign’, *sēmeiōtikos* ‘observant of signs’ [6, p. 27]. Thus in the philosophic systems of antiquity the problem of sign was treated in the context of connection of words, things and their names which in gnoseology is generalized as the problem of correlations of signs and their denotata.

The statement that a word is a sign existing to denote and express a thought about the content and directing to this content was distinctly formulated by Plato (428 – 347 B.C.): “names signify the essence of things” [7, p. 676]. He compares sign to a gravestone (σήμα), which covers the soul hidden under it. And at the same time this gravestone is a sign (σήμα), because with the help of it the soul denotes what it wants to express [7, p. 634].

The conviction that the word is a sign of idea was developed by Aristotle (384 – 322 B.C.). He states that the sign is the evidential precondition of the existence of things and indicates that (1) in discussion about signification of words, one has to consider the relation or relations between three terms: words, affections of the mind and things; (2) significative words are so by convention [8]. The correct interpretation of Aristotle’s utterance has been a moot question for 2.300 years, however it is worth noticing that the beginning of his *Peri Hermeneias* may be read as an attempt to distinguish between words, intelligible significata and denotata. Thus the

foundational question of sign, knowledge and interpretation is brought to the fore though it is not formulated explicitly.

Classical definition of sign is attributed to St. Augustine (354 – 430 A.D.) In his *De Doctrina Christiana* he defined a sign as something which besides manifesting itself to the senses also indicates to the mind something beyond itself. This definition is wide enough to make everything which is accessible to the human mind an object of a semiotic science. St. Augustine imposes some limitations through pointing out the conventional character of signs and defines them as “those which living beings mutually exchange for the purpose of showing, as well as they can, the feelings of their minds, or their perceptions, or their thoughts. Nor is there any reason for giving a sign except the desire of drawing forth and conveying into another’s mind what the giver of the sign has in his own mind” [9]. Augustine discusses different classes of signs, including the signs which have been given to us by God, and which are contained in the Holy Scriptures and were made known to us through men – those, namely, who wrote the Scriptures. With St. Augustine hermeneutics is actually entwined with semiotics. Assuming that no one uses words except as signs of something else, he dwells upon cases when two or more interpretations are put upon the same words of Scripture. He believes that any of the interpretations of the words should be in harmony with the truth. And if a man in searching the Scriptures endeavors to get at the intention of the author through whom the Holy Spirit spoke, whether he succeeds in this endeavor, or whether he draws a different meaning from the words, but one that is not opposed to sound doctrine, he is free from blame so long as he is supported by the testimony of some other passage of Scripture.

John Deely drew attention to one more figure who must be assigned a privileged position in semiotic historiography being the earliest systematizer of the doctrine of signs: John Poinset (1589 – 1644) [10]. In his *Treatise on Signs* J. Poinset points out that in our experience, signs bring together social and natural phenomena The sign is something neither preclusively natural nor preclusively social, but both inclusively. All signs as such acquire their signification and exist actually only within some living being’s experience [10, p. 118]. This statement turns out to be of special importance to further development of the notion of interpretation. Fully cognizant of the importance of *signum* in the theology and religious thought of patristic and medieval time, J. Poinset made “the actual first attempt to thematize philosophically the being proper to signs as the universal means of communication” [10, p. 123]. He finds the ontology in our experience of the way in which things appear to be relative and this fundamental idea can be considered the foundation of explaining the nature of sign through the philosophic category of relation [11]. Thus J. Poinset was able to provide the semiotic approach to the hermeneutic problem of how we can come to know any reality, external to our minds by showing that ideas in their existence as “private” (*esse in*) are transcendental relations serving to ground in their proper being (*esse ad*) relations to objects which by definition are accessible to many in communication and public life.

One more philosopher of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (much better known than John Poinsett whom John Deely called a “neglected figure in the history of semiotic inquiry”), was John Locke (1632 – 1704) who actually injected the Greek word *semeiotiké* into the mainstream of English philosophical discourse. Locke declared the “doctrine of signs” to be the branch of his division of sciences: logic, physics and ethics. He treats words as signs of ideas and emphasises that the work of mind consists in the perception of the meaning of those signs of ideas. Locke explains *idea* as the term denoting everything that is the object of human thought: “everything that human soul can be occupied with in the process of thinking” [12, p. 95]. He treated words as sensory signs of ideas which people use “to show their ideas and to exhibit them before others; and thus in their primary or immediate meaning words denote only ideas which are in the mind of the person who makes use of those words [12, p. 462]. In the context of interpretation it is very important to highlight Locke’s idea that we can use any signs to designate our ideas to ourselves but one and the same sign should refer to one and the same idea: “If the main goal of the language used to transform a message is to be understood, then words <...> are of little use for this goal if they do not generate the same idea in the hearer which they designate in the mind of the speaker” [13, p. 218]. Umberto Eco believes that J. Locke made an attempt to introduce philosophic common sense which might control natural language [13, p. 296]. He was also the first to attract attention to the specificity of language systems in reference to the *language – culture* correlation. J. Locke emphasized the ability of mind to repeat, combine and multiply ideas and substantiated that people belonging to different cultures produce such combinations of ideas which other people do not possess because of differences in the modes of life and traditions.

Half a century later when Friedrich Schleiermacher’s (1768 – 1834) hermeneutical inquiry exploded on the modern scene as a methodology for the interpretation of all texts, the problem of interpretation was raised to a new world of understanding and explanation. The role played by semiotic inquiry in the development of this methodology seems crucial. Actually we can identify three major intellectual trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> century inquiry that underlies interpretation: structuralism, logicism and hermeneutics [14]. Structuralism involves making use of the methods of structural linguistics or structural anthropology, particularly as they have been developed by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1913) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908 – 2009). Logicism is associated with the science of logic as devised by Charles Peirce (1839 – 1914) and his pupil Charles Morris (1901 – 1979). Hermeneutics focuses upon the actors as subjects, the role of the interpretative community, and the generation of multiple perspectives. In this article it is considered justified to place these three very different approaches under a common semiotic heading. There are several arguments to support this statement. Firstly, F. de Saussure conceived of the new science of semiology as related to social psychology and devoted to the investigation of the general principles of signs. With this conceptual shift,

he established a unified discipline of broad theoretical scope and predicated upon the concept of sign. The latter is the fundamental unit of linguistic analysis defined as a “two-sided psychological entity□ linking a concept and a sound pattern [15, p. 66]. The concept is not a thing in the world, but rather a mental image of that thing. Similarly, the sound pattern is not a physical sound, rather it is the hearer’s cognitive interpretation of a sound. The concept and sound pattern are thus both mental entities and independent of any external object.

Since words are the prime example of conventional signs, Saussure focuses exclusively on the system of linguistic conventions (*langue*) that makes actual utterances (*parole*) understandable to language users. He considered *langue* a purely formal set of relations that conjoins the two components of the linguistic sign arbitrarily – the sensory signifier and the intelligible signified. The study of the signifier was to yield a set of oppositions (the phonological system) that provides sonorous substance with linguistic form. The study of the signified would be concerned with the semantic grid that segments extralinguistic reality into meaningful linguistic units (words). The language system can be understood as a sequence of linked signs: “(w)hether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonetic differences that have issued from the system□ [15, p. 120]. What was specially important for hermeneutic studies was the idea that sign context is more important than the idea or sound since the value of the sign may change without affecting its meaning or sound because a neighbouring sign has changed. The semantic value of every particular signified would be derived solely from its opposition to other signifieds coexisting with the grid.

Saussure’s fundamental insight that behind every utterance is a linguistic code shared by speakers, was disseminated through Europe and provided both semiotic and hermeneutic studies with a theoretical focus. His approach was adopted and extended by Russian Formalists, the Prague Linguistic Circle, the Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen and American Structural Linguistics. It received major support from Claude Lévi-Strauss who developed the field of structural anthropology. Structuralism has been particularly influential in literary theory through the writings of Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrillard. It has however, been subject to criticism, most notably by Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Paul Ricoeur and Pierre Bourdieu.

Crucial for the development of hermeneutic theory was the critical reaction to Saussure and formalism by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 – 1975) and his followers. Bakhtinians claimed that the dichotomy between *langue* and *parole* and the privileging of the abstract system over actual speech failed to account for the communicative nature of the language as a medium of exchange. For them every sign (utterance) was an ideological product, a direct or oblique reply to other signs (utterances) in an ongoing dialogical process that is the culture of a given collectivity. These ideas concerning a possibility of a

“virtual” dynamic interaction between the reader and the author have become central for hermeneutic analysis. The reader’s state of mind and his or her culture provide a context for understanding and interpretation of the text. The word, the grammatical form, propositions, and statements separated from the utterance (from the speech act) are viewed as “technical signs” at the service of a signification that is only potential. The individuation and actualisation of this potential of language operated by the utterance allows us to enter an other “sphere of being”: the “dialogical sphere” [16]. Such “dialogic” quality of signs embraces several aspects that set the Bakhtinian understanding of signs clearly apart from the structuralist notions. For the structuralist, words are units of language whose meanings are defined by their relationships to other words. From a Bakhtinian point of view, such properties characterise words only as objects of a particular social practice and as a product of a particular societal attitude to language. They are used to position the speakers with regard to their hearers. They also position the speaker in relation to the referential objects of speech. Finally, Bakhtin’s view on sign-sign relationships is quite different from the Saussurean and post structuralist emphasis on distinction as the constitutive determinant of the sign. A poetic description of the sign’s dialogic relationship to other signs can be found in his essay “Discourse in the Novel”: “But no living word relates to its object in a singular way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that it is often difficult to penetrate. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group. The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue” [17, p. 276]. Thus, trying to give an account of the sign as it appears to its user in the tasks of expressing oneself or trying to make sense of the other’s utterance, reveals the potential of semiotic approach in hermeneutic studies.

The second most comprehensive programme for the general science of signs – anglo-american pragmatism – was charted by US philosopher Charles S. Peirce (1839 – 1914). His brilliant work was enormous in scope and can be viewed as a new insight into the interpretation process. Ch. Peirce first published his idea of pragmatism in an article entitled “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” that appeared in 1878 [18]. He writes: “A clear idea is defined as one which is so apprehended that it will be recognized wherever it is met with, and so that no other will be mistaken for it. If it fails of this clearness, it is said to be obscure” [18, p. 286]. The basic premise here is that an idea is only clear if it produces the effect of recognition. It is not enough for this effect to

occur in an individual's consciousness. It must be experienced by a community of believers. For Pierce, all cognition is a semiotic process that is mediated by signs. To understand the meaning of a concept one needs to examine its various contexts of use. However, meaning can only properly be understood with reference to those logical concepts that establish a belief which in turn becomes a habit of thought. He explains these relationships as follows: "About forty years ago my studies of Berkeley, Kant and others led me, after convincing myself that all thinking is performed in signs, and that mediation takes the form of a dialogue, so that it is proper to speak of the "meaning" of a concept, to conclude that to acquire full mastery of that meaning it is requisite, in the first place, to learn to recognize the concept under every disguise, through extensive familiarity with instances of it" [cit. from 19, p. 50].

Ideas concerning the interpretant of the sign [20] can be applied for further development of the hermeneutic inquiry the focus of which is on the interpreter who is supposed to apprehend the ideas of the author in the process of interpretation.

Thus the value of semiotic perspective is twofold – it offers a kind of unity to the disciplines dealing with interpretation of "mentalities" and it allows for new understandings of the progress for a universal hermeneutics as the art of dealing with time-bound, context-sensitive, interpreter-dependant dynamic processes.

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### **Андрейчук Н. І. Мовна семіотика vs герменевтика: до поняття інтерпретації**

У статті обґрунтовується положення про нерозривний зв’язок лінгвосеміотики та герменевтики у контексті тлумачення поняття інтерпретації та постулюється, що семіотичні студії збагачують та доповнюють ідеї стосовно інтерпретації та розуміння текстів, які є засадничими для герменевтичних студій. Показано динаміку розвитку поняття інтерпретації у ключових герменевтичних та семіотичних проектах та виявлено точки їхнього перетину.

Основоположною думкою статті є переконання авторки, що динамічна інтеракція між читачем і автором, яка перебуває у фокусі герменевтичних студій, здійснюється у процесі інтерпретації, яка забезпечує розкриття структур смислу через варіативність мовних знаків та виявлення їхніх відношень. Положення про знакову природу комунікації, випрацювані семіотикою, дозволяють тлумачити механізм керування процесом інтерпретації тексту через встановлення зв’язку



його знакового втілення з конкретними „денотативними“ подіями та ідентифікацію ментальних стереотипів, сформованих культурою.

Значущість семіотичної перспективи для герменевтичних студій розглядається у двох ракурсах: 1) встановлення певної „спорідненості“ дисциплін, які торкаються питання інтерпретації текстів; 2) нове бачення напрямів розвитку універсальної герменевтики.

*Ключові слова:* герменевтика, семіотика, структуралізм, логіцизм, інтерпретація.

### **Андрейчук Н. И. Лингвосемиотика vs герменевтика: к вопросу об интерпретации**

В статье обосновывается тезис о неразрывной связи лингвосемиотики и герменевтики в контексте истолкования понятия интерпретации и постулируется, что семиотические исследования обогащают и дополняют идеи, относящиеся к интерпретации и пониманию текстов, которые являются основополагающими для герменевтических исследований. Показано динамику развития понятия интерпретации в ключевых герменевтических и семиотических проектах и установлено точки их пересечения.

Основная мысль статьи выражается в убеждении автора, что динамическая интеракция между читателем и автором, пребывающая в фокусе герменевтических исследований, обеспечивается в процессе интерпретации, который состоит в раскрытии структур смысла через вариативность языковых знаков и установление их отношений. Утверждение о знаковой природе коммуникации, постулируемое семиотикой, обеспечивает возможность объяснения механизма управления процессом интерпретации текста через установление связи его знакового воплощения с конкретными „денотативными“ событиями и идентификацию ментальных стереотипов, сформированных культурой.

Значимость семиотической перспективы для герменевтических исследований рассматривается в двух ракурсах: 1) установление определенной „родственности“ дисциплин, изучающих интерпретацию текстов; 2) новое видение направлений развития универсальной герменевтики.

*Ключевые слова:* герменевтика, семиотика, структуралізм, логіцизм, інтерпретація.

### **Andreichuk N. I. Lingual semiotics vs hermeneutics: toward a concept of interpretation**

The article substantiates the inseparable unity of lingual semiotic and hermeneutic studies in the context of the interpretation process. It is postulated that semiotic studies enrich and complement the ideas concerning the interpretation and understanding of texts that are fundamental to hermeneutical researches. The dynamics of the development of the concept of interpretation

in the great semiotic projects is presented and points of *semiotics* – *hermeneutics* intersection are discovered.

The author expresses the belief that the dynamic interaction between the reader and the author, which makes the focus of hermeneutical studies, is realized in the process of interpretation. The latter reveals the structures of meaning through the variability of linguistic signs and establishing their relationships. The theses concerning the sign nature of communication which were elaborated in semiotics, allow to expose the mechanism of text interpretation through establishing ties between its sign embodiment and concrete “denotative” events, as well as the identification of mental stereotypes shaped by the culture.

The value of semiotic perspective for hermeneutic studies is viewed from two angles: 1) securing a certain “congeniality” of research in the field of text interpretation; 2) new vision of possible directions of universal hermeneutics development.

*Key words:* hermeneutics, semiotics, structuralism, logicism, interpretation.

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### **РОЗМЕЖУВАННЯ ВИПАДКІВ ОМОНІМІЇ З-ПОМІЖ НЕОАБРЕВІАЦІЙ ФРАНЦУЗЬКОЇ МОВИ**

Утворення абревіацій – процес безперервний, що помітно активізувався сьогодні у зв'язку з політичними і соціально-економічними змінами, які відбуваються в сучасному суспільстві, з розвитком комп'ютерних технологій тощо. Дослідження неоабревіацій тісно пов'язано з вивченням динамічних інноваційних процесів, що мають місце у лексиці французької мови на певному часовому зрізі.

Оновлення лексичного складу мови за рахунок входження різних типів абревіацій та відсутність спеціальних робіт з їх дослідження викликає настійливу потребу у вивченні процесів новітньої абревіації. Доцільність та необхідність дослідження неоабревіацій передусім зумовлена кількісним зростанням інновацій у словниковому складі сучасної французької мови. Семантичні питання неоабревіації потребують ретельного перегляду та переосмислення. Так, зокрема, питання правомірності вияву омонімії в різних видах скорочених слів. Актуальним є і вияв специфіки розвитку омонімії усічених слів, а також