

## Quest for the Essence

de Saussure on the sign: *signifiant* ~ *signifié*. From Stoic theory of 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. The semeion is the relation between the semainon (signifier) and the semainomenon (signified). **Обозначающее ~ обозначаемое**. St. Augustine: signans and signatum. In the medieval theory: Ockham's "double cognition" of any sign.

346) Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). Founder of American semiotics. de Saussure was interested in comparative sign systems. Peirce calls signs *representamina*. Three cardinal types. (1) icon – factual similarity between the two. a picture of an animal ~ the animal pictured. (2) index – a factual existential contiguity between the two. Association by contiguity. Smoke > fire. Crusoe's discovered footprint as index to the existence of another person. Accelerated pulse > fever. (3) symbol – learned, imputed contiguity. A conventional connection. Don't confuse with *symbolism*.

See Plato's Cratylus. de Saussure stressed the arbitrariness of the verbal sign. Not everyone fully agreed (Jespersen). Benveniste: for the native speaker the arbitrariness falls aside, and the bond between the signans and signatum is a necessity. Cf. the Swiss German peasant woman: "Warum sagen sie *fromage*? *Käse* ist doch viel natürlicher."

349) Predominance of one over the other, not absolute. Likeness aided by conventional rules, e.g. perspective in schools of painting, villains in progile; in ancient Egypt only en face. A pointing finger (index) in South African is damnation. For Peirce, any symbol involves some sort of index.

He will now answer Plato's question: by what kind of imitation (mimesis) does language attach signans to signatum?

350) Veni, vidi, vici. "The president and the secretary of state" – unmarked order, reflects priority in standing. Two classes of icons. Images: simple qualities of the signatum. Diagrams: relation between their parts. Bar graphs. The relations correspond. "Veridically iconic, naturally analogous to the thing represented." Any algebraic equation is an icon, but not the signs themselves. "Language is a kind of algebra." The order of elements is iconic.

In Russian, the order SVO, SOV, VSO, VOS, OSV and OVS all occur:

Lenin chitaet Marksa, Lenin Marksa chitaet, Chitaet Marksa Lenina, Marksa Lenin chitaet, Marksa chitaet Lenin. But only SVO is unmarked. Children use this order exclusively. If a child hears Papu ljubit mama, he may misinterpret it, as if one had said Papa ljubit mamu. Syntax is presented iconically, not morphologically, for the child. (cool)

If clause precedes then clause in all neutral word order. Subject first, "the only independent term in the clause" singles out what the message is about. Cf. the subject in Chomsky theory: it is an *external* theta role, vs. the object. A hierarchy here. Role of

subject as agent: the mother is obeyed by the child. Inomissibility of the subject (also in Chomskian theory). "Predication is so different from all other semantic acts that the forced reasoning levelling subject and object must be rejected."

Cf. modern graph theory and language. Initial and final limit of sequence, immediate neighborhood and distance, centrality and peripherality, symmetrical relations, elliptical removal. We could translate syntax into a set of graphs.

352) Also in morphology, as we have seen. affixes, esp. desinences, have a restricted set and selected use of phonemes. The only consonants in English productive inflection are the dental continuant and stop and their combination *st*. Of 24 obstruents in Russian, only 4 are used inflectionally. (What are they?)

IE *altus*, *altior*, *altissimus*, high, higher, highest. Signans of the plural echoes the meaning of a natural increment, never the reverse. Polish *znam* ~ *znamy*, *znasz* ~ *znacie*, *zna* ~ *znaje*. The real endings in Russ nouns are longer in the pl than in the sg. The sign is not completely arbitrary.

Fr. Berger 'shepherd' is not totally arbitrary. Polish instrumental in nouns, pronouns, adjectives, always has + nasal. Russ *m* occurs in the instr, dat, and locative cases (+ marginal) but never in the other cases.

de Saussure's two drifts in language. The unmotivated sign and the grammatical instrument. Sanscrit was maximally motivated, French totally unmotivated (ha). But he ignored syntax. Whorf: the *patternment* of language overrides *lexation*.

354) Unmotivated Fr. *ennemi*. But: *ami et ennemi*. fath-er moth-er broth-er. ten, -teen, ty. three, thirty, third, etc. eleven and twelve.

Berlin *zwei* > *zwo*. But in natural languages there is an attraction. Russ *sem'* and *vosem'*, *devjat'* and *desjat'*. Blends and portmanteaus, as in Jabberwocky as annotated by Humpty Dumpty.

355) "Multilateral Force or Farce?" Sila solomu lomit. In lexemes this is latent, in syntax and morphology it is patent and obligatory. Basic meaning of a lexemes and its secondary or transferred meaning: *star*. Either metaphoric or metonymic.

Replacement of grave C or V by acute, compact by diffuse, continuous C by abrupt, unchecked by checked, in American languages = a diminutive idea'. The reverse is an augmentation. Here the latent synesthetic value inherent in features.

356) See esp. poetry. Mallarmé: *ombres* is actually shady but *ténèbres* suggests darkness, and he felt deceived by the acute vowels, also by *jour* meaning day and *nuit* meaning night. Read Fr verse and see how *nuit* darkens and *jour* lightens by proximity to surrounding words. Cz *den* and *noc* fit perfectly. Low tonality of grave or flat = heaviness, high tonality = lightness.

357) analysis of phonemes in Jules Romain's *Les amours enfantine*. Vowels show interplay of grave- acute, flat-plain, diffuse-compact.

The dogma of arbitrariness is invalid. His principle of the linearity of the signans has been shaken by Jakobson's distinctive features.

Peirce: a symbol may have an icon and/or an index incorporated into it.

Metalogicus by John of Salisbury: *nominantur singularia, sed universalia significantur*. "Single things are named, but universals are signified." A genuine symbol is a symbol that has a general meaning. And this meaning in turn can only be a symbol. *Omne symbolum de simbolo*. (Is this right for medieval logic? Michael Fitzgerald always took exception to this.) A symbol is itself a kind and not a single thing. *Bucephalus is a horse*.

An icon has being as it relates to past experience. It exists as an image in the mind. An index has the power of present experience. The being of a symbol consists in the real fact that something surely will be experienced if certain conditions are satisfied. Every word is a symbol, every sentence is a symbol, every book is a symbol. To the *hic et nunc* of the index he opposed the general law of the symbol.

359) Xlebnikov: the homeland of creation lies in the future; thence wafts the wind from the gods of the word."

This was an address to a general audience of academics by Jakobson in 1965, when he was 69. I had just met him at the first meeting of students and teachers at Harvard. He told the story about the linguist who had found some interesting old Hittite texts. "And what was their content?" Jakobson asked the linguist, in his thick accent (meaning — what were they about). The linguist was dumbfounded — he couldn't recall, because "he was so interested in the morphophonemics..." (general laughter in the hall). Point: *language in all of its manifestations...*