



University of Tikrit

College of Education for Humanities

English Department

M.A. Studies/ Semantics



SEMIOTICS

Submitted by:

Jasmine Kaisar Ibrahim

Submitted to:

Asst. Prof. Muhammed Barjis Salman (PH.D)

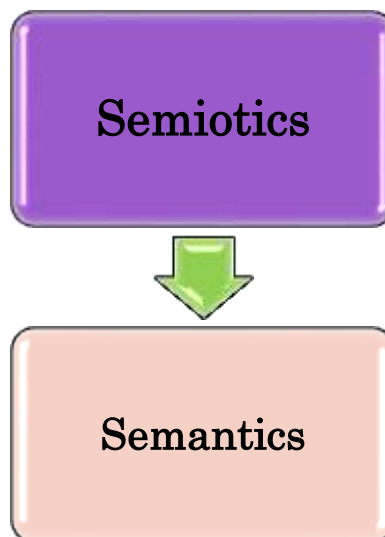
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Introduction

The relation between semantics and semiotics is likely to be direct. Since semiotics is the science of signs (Strazy, 2005:947) while semantics is the study of the linguistic meaning of morphemes, words, phrases, and sentences (Aronoff and Miller 2003). Through investigating the nature of words, for example, they are regarded as representatives of ideas and concepts. Semantics and Semiotics could be separated in theoretical sense, yet they are inseparable in practics. Semiotics being broader and more general, it includes the human attempts to decode the signs that are vaguely exist around him. These signs be images, music, objects, sentences or utterances stand for something else, and something human needs to comprehend. Semantics, on the other hand, is a linguistic level that deals mainly with meaning and the containter of that meaning which is word. The latter being the the signfier represents the concept that human tries to make sense of. In this respect, the relationship is likely to be straightforward. In an attempt to understand the essence of this relationship and the nature of bond, it is necessary to have an overview of semantics, its origin and development, semiotics, the distribution of signs and the association between the two. Moreover, a brief view to the domain of semiotics and its impact on other methods of communication is desirable.

The Direct Relation Between Semiotics & Semantics:



1- Some Definitions of ‘Semiotics’:

Semiotics, also called **semiology**, the study of **signs**. It was defined by one of its founders, the Swiss linguist **Ferdinand de Saussure**, as the study of “the life of signs within society.” Although the word was used in this sense in the 17th century by the English philosopher **John Locke**, the idea of semiotics as an interdisciplinary field of study emerged only in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the independent work of Saussure and of the American philosopher **Charles Sanders Peirce**

According to John Saeed (2016) who has cited the words of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1974) when he stressed that ‘the study of linguistic meaning **‘Semantics’** is a part of this general study of the use of sign systems and this general study is called **‘Semiotics.’** Saussure’s idea of linguistic sign consists of signifier and signified.

2- The Relation among ‘Semiotics’; ‘Linguistics’; & ‘Semantics’:

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols. This includes the study of how meaning is conveyed through the use of various signs and symbols, as well as the ways in which these signs and symbols are interpreted by people. **Linguistics** is the scientific study of language. This includes the study of the structure, history, and use of language. The relationship between semiotics and linguistics is that they are both concerned with the study of how meaning is conveyed through language. Semiotics is concerned with the use of signs and symbols, while linguistics is concerned with the structure and use of language.

Semantics is the study of meaning in language. This includes the study of the relationships between words and their literal and figurative meanings, as well as the ways in which meaning is communicated through language. The relationship between semantics and semiotics is that they are both concerned with the study of meaning. Semantics is concerned with the literal meaning of words, while semiotics is concerned with the ways in which meaning is conveyed through the use of signs and symbols.

3- Sign:

Sign is regarded as the convergence point between form and meaning. The form, on one hand, is concrete like sounds, the meaning, on the other hand, is abstract (cognitive or mental). According to John Saeed (2016) Signs have few characteristics: “neither form nor meaning but simultaneously both”. A form without its meaning can't be a sign nor is a meaning.

☉In semiotics, a sign is anything that communicates a meaning to the interpreter. It can be a motion, gesture, image, sound, pattern, or event that conveys meaning, word, number, photograph, painting, and road sign.

There are two major theories that describe how signs acquire the ability to transfer information:

1. Saussure's Theory: According to Ferdinand de Saussure, a sign consists of two components (**dyadic relation**): **the signifier and the signified**. **The signifier** is the physical form of the sign, such as a word or an image, while **the signified** is the concept or meaning associated with the sign. Saussure believed that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and based on social convention.

2. Peirce's Theory: Charles Sanders Peirce proposed a different theory of signs. He defined a sign as **a triadic relation** involving three elements: **the sign, the object, and the interpretant**. **The sign** represents the object and is interpreted by the interpretant.

4- Types of Signs:

Charles Peirce, an American philosopher, categorized the signs we use to communicate ideas with each other into three types: icon, index and symbol. **The main difference between each broad category of signs is the quality of the physical relationship between the signifier and signified.**



A) An Icon: is a sign whose form has actual characteristics of its meaning”. Icons have obvious physical connections between the signifier and their meanings. **Note:** [an icon resembles its referent](#) (Such as a road sign for falling rocks).

An icon is a sign that bears a physical resemblance to the thing it represents. It is a direct imitation or representation of the object or concept. For example, a photograph of a tree is an icon because it resembles the actual tree. Icons have a visual similarity to what they represent, making the connection between the signifier (the form of the sign) and the signified (the concept or object being represented) clear and immediate.



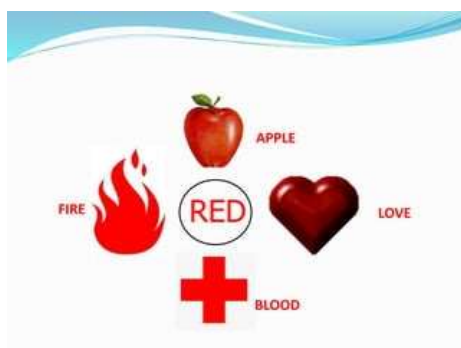
B) An Index: is a sign that shows evidence or indicates the presence of the thing it represents. Unlike icons and symbols, **indexes do not rely on resemblance** or cultural conventions. Instead, they have a direct causal or correlational relationship with what they represent. For example, smoke is an index of fire because the presence of smoke implies the presence of fire. Indexes are based on observable connections or relationships between the signifier and the signified. They provide evidence or point to the existence of something



C) A symbol: has no inherent resemblance to what it represents. The connection between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and must be culturally learned. Symbols are conventional and rely on shared cultural knowledge and understanding. For example, numbers and alphabets are symbols. The shape of a letter or the sound it represents has no physical connection to the concept it represents. The meaning of symbols is derived from cultural associations and conventions.



Examples contain more than one type of sign.



5- Models of Signs:

5.1 The Dyadic Saussurean Semiotic Model:

The Saussurean semiotic model, developed by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, is a foundational framework in the field of semiotics, which is the study of signs and symbols and their meanings. Saussure's model is often referred to as **the dyadic model** of semiotics. At the **core** of Saussure's model is the distinction between **the signifier and the signified**. The **signifier** refers to the physical or sensory form of a sign, such as a word, sound, or image. The **signified**, on the other hand, refers to the concept or meaning associated with the sign. Saussure emphasized that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, meaning that there is no inherent connection or resemblance between them.

Saussure also argued that these two elements are inseparable and exist in a mutually dependent relationship. The signifier and the signified together form a sign, and their relationship is described as a signifying chain, where signs are connected to one another through their differences and relations. Furthermore, according to him, language is a system of signs, and the meanings of signs are determined by their differences from other signs within the system.

One example of the Saussurean semiotic model can be found in the analysis of a traffic sign. Let's consider **a common traffic sign**. In Saussurean semiotics, the sign is composed of two parts: the signifier and the signified. In the case of **the traffic sign**, **the signifier** would be the actual physical **shape and design** of the sign itself, including its colors, symbols, and textual elements. **The signified** refers to the meaning conveyed by the sign.

Therefore, when a driver sees the traffic sign, they interpret the signifier (the physical attributes of the sign) based on their prior knowledge and cultural context, which leads them to understand the signified (the meaning or concept conveyed by the sign). This understanding allows the driver to respond appropriately by slowing down and preparing for the upcoming sharp curve.

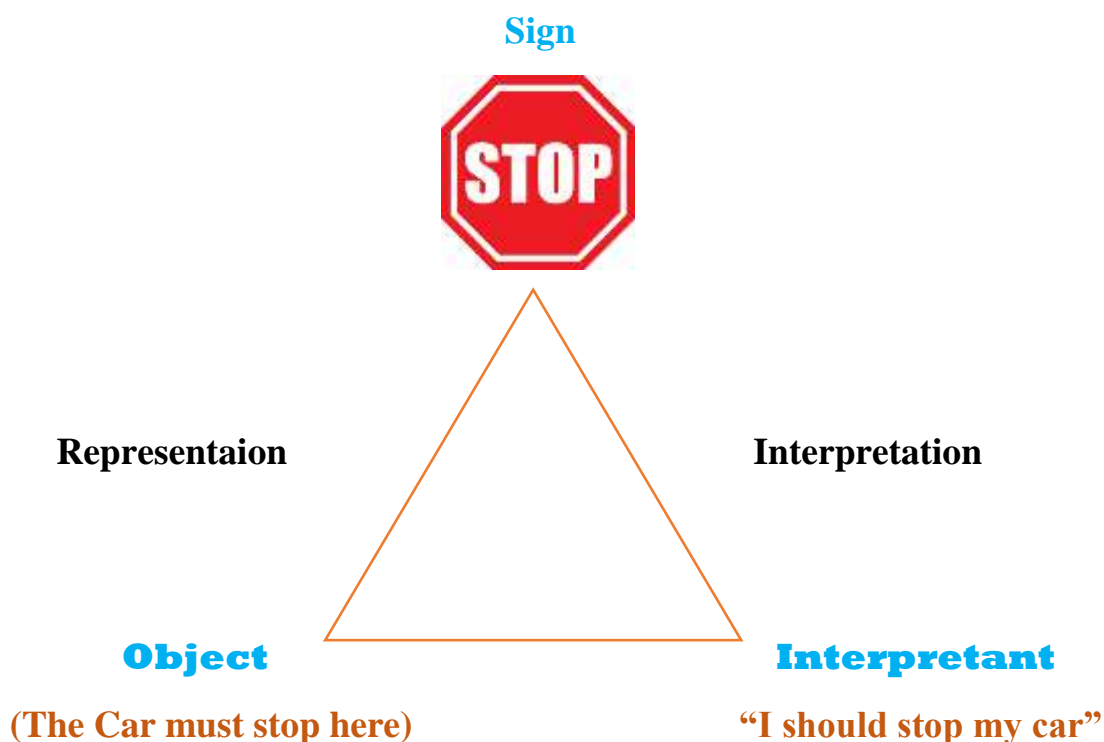
5.2 The Triadic Peircean Semiotic Model:

The Peircean semiotic model, also known as Peirce's **triadic model** of signs, is a framework developed by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. It provides a way to understand the process of semiotics, which is the process of signification or meaning-making. He identified three basic elements in the semiotic process: **the sign, the object, and the interpretant**. Each of these elements plays a specific role in the creation and interpretation of signs. **Sign:** is the basic unit of semiosis. It is something that stands for or represents something else. Peirce divided signs **into three categories**: icon, index, and symbol. **Object:** is the thing or concept that the sign refers to or represents. It can be something concrete or abstract. The object exists independently of the sign and the interpretant. **Interpretant:** is the mental or cognitive effect that the sign produces in an interpreter. It is the understanding or meaning that the interpreter derives from the sign. The interpretant can be immediate, immediate but incomplete, or final.

Here's an example to illustrate Peirce's semiotic model:

Let's say you receive a text message on your phone that reads, "**See you at the coffee shop at 5 pm.**" In this case, **the text message serves as the sign, the coffee shop is the object, and your understanding or interpretation of the message is the interpretant.**

Another example about Peircean Semiotic Model:



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