

Glossary of Semiotic Terms

About this document

This document is an exercise in the curation of 65 specifically semiotic terms. The definitions of each are put under constraints, those being: The definition is relatively consistent with other definitions of the term, and that the definition resonates with my personal background and interests.

The Terms

1. **Biosphere**

The part of the earth's crust, waters, and atmosphere that supports life.

2. **Code**

A specific set of paradigmatic and syntagmatic conventions according to which texts are produced and interpreted.

3. **Conative Function (of communication)**

A function of language or, more generally, communication, that is focused on, and concerned with influencing the behaviour of, the addressee, and thus concerned with persuasion.

4. **Conceptual metaphor**

A metaphor (or figurative comparison) in which one idea (or conceptual domain) is understood in terms of another.

5. **Conceptual metonymy**

A contingent, i.e., non-necessary, relation within one conceptual domain between a source meaning and a target meaning, in which the source meaning provides mental access to the target meaning.

6. **Connotation**

The associated or secondary meaning of a word or expression in addition to its explicit or primary meaning.

7. **Context**

The environment (physical and social) in which signs are produced and messages interpreted.

8. **Conventional sign**

Any of various signs, such as words or symbols, that acquire their function through linguistic custom.

9. **Denotation**

The literal or primary meaning of a word, in contrast to the feelings or ideas that the word suggests.

10. **Deconstruction**

The view that texts can be deconstructed into a series of differences (oppositions) and, thus, that they do not refer to anything outside of themselves in any 'true' fashion.

11. Diachronic

Concerned with the way in which something, especially language, has developed and evolved through time.

12. Discursive symbols

Discursive Symbols occur over a period of time. Hence, it is not possible to perceive the whole unit except through the cognitive process of short-term memory.

13. Emotive function (of communication)

The addresser's emotional intent in communicating something.

14. Firstness

In Peircean theory, the first level of meaning derived from bodily and sensory processes.

15. Haptics

The perception of objects by touch and proprioception, especially as involved in nonverbal communication.

16. Gesture

Semiosis and representation by means of the hands, the arms, and to a lesser extent the head.

17. Gesticulants

The gesture units accompanying speech.

18. Grammar

The set of rules that explain how words are used in a language.

19. Hyperreality

An image or simulation, or an aggregate of images and simulations, that either distorts the reality it purports to depict or does not in fact depict anything with a real existence at all, but which nonetheless comes to constitute reality.

20. Icon

A sign in which the signifier has a direct (non-arbitrary), simulative connection to its signified or referent.

21. Image schema

The recurring structures of, or in, our perceptual interactions, bodily experiences, and cognitive operations that portray locations, movements, shapes, and so on in the mind.

22. Interpretant

The effect of a sign on someone who reads or comprehends it.

23. Index

A sign in which the signifier has an existential connection to its signified or referent.

24. Infinite semiosis

the signified is endlessly commutable—functioning in its turn as a signifier for a further signified.

25. Kinesics

The study of the way in which certain body movements and gestures serve as a form of nonverbal communication.

26. Langue

The abstract knowledge of how certain signs and their relations can be used and interpreted.

27. Metalingual function (of communication)

A communicative function by which the code being used is identified.

28. Modernism

A philosophical movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that was based on an underlying belief in the progress of society.

29. Myth

A story that aims to explain the origin of life or of the universe in terms of some metaphysical or deistic entity or entities.

30. Narrative

Something told or written, such as an account, story, or tale.

31. Natural sign

A sign produced by nature.

32. Oculistics

A subcategory of kinesics, is the study of eye movement, eye behavior, gaze, and eye-related nonverbal communication.

33. Object

What a sign refers to.

34. Paradigm

A set of linguistic items that form mutually exclusive choices in particular syntactic roles.

35. Paradigmatic

A structural relation between signs that keeps them distinct and therefore recognizable.

36. Parole

The actual utterances of language, both written and spoken.

37. Phatic function (of communication)

A communicative function by which contact between addresser and addressee is established.

38. Poetic function (of communication)

A communicative function based on poetic language.

39. Postmodernism

A late 20th century style and concept in the arts, architecture, and criticism that represents a departure from modernism and has at its heart a general distrust of grand theories and ideologies as well as a problematical relationship with any notion of "art".

40. Poststructuralism

A movement in semiotics countering the structuralist notion that signs encode some aspect of reality.

41. Presentational symbols

In contrast to discursive symbols, these symbols are an 'all-at-once' sensory experience.

42. Proxemics

The branch of knowledge that deals with the amount of space that people feel it necessary to set between themselves and others.

43. Referential function (of communication)

A communicative act in which there is a straightforward connection between the act and what it refers to.

44. Representamen

In Peirce's theory, it is the physical part of a sign.

45. Representation

The process by which referents are captured and organized in some way by signs or texts.

46. Secondness

In Peircean theory, the second level of meaning derived from relating signs to one another or to other elements (including sign makers and sign users).

47. Semiotics

A general philosophical theory of signs and symbols that deals especially with their function in both artificially constructed and natural languages and comprises syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics.

48. Semiosphere

The world of signs, codes, and texts to be differentiated from the biosphere (the physical, life-supporting environment).

49. Semiosis

The comprehension and production of signs.

50. Signifying order

Provides the means for the developing human being to organize the raw information that is processed by his or her senses into meaningful wholes.

51. Sign (abstract)

An object, quality, or event whose presence or occurrence indicates the probable presence or occurrence of something else.

52. Sign (Pierce)

In Peirce's theory of signs, a sign is something that stands in a well-defined kind of relation to two other things, its object and its interpretant sign.

53. Sign (Saussure)

In Saussure's theory of signs, a sign is composed of the signifier, and the signified.

54. Signal

An emission or movement that naturally or conventionally triggers some reaction on the part of a receiver.

55. Signified

That part of a sign which is referred to.

56. Signifier

That part of a sign that does the referring, the physical part of a sign.

57. Structuralism

The study of the structures (signs, texts, codes) generated by semiosis.

58. Symbol

A sign that represents a referent through cultural convention.

59. Symptom

A bodily sign that stands for some ailment, physical condition, or disease.

60. Synchronic

The study of signs at a specific point in time (usually the present).

61. Syntagm

An orderly combination of interacting signifiers which forms a meaningful whole.

62. Syntagmatic

A structural relation that guides the combination of signs or parts of signs in a coherent and consistent way.

63. Text

A 'larger sign' put together in terms of a specific code.

64. Thirdness

In Peircean theory, the third level of meaning derived from symbolic processes.

65. Unlimited semiosis

the signified is endlessly commutable—functioning in its turn as a signifier for a further signified.