

# Margaret Kilpeck - Paper-Related Activity #1: Glossary of Semiotic Terms

---

**Abstract:** This activity highlights sixty-five terms significant to our recent study of semiotics and compiles a glossary of the words and their definitions. The words touch on many facets of the study of semiotics, including the ideas of notable names such as Saussure and Peirce. The end result is a glossary of some of the most significant concepts and definitions in the realm of semiotics. The definitions were gathered from a variety of sources, and many focus on the implications of the term in the field of linguistics.

---

## Terms:

- 1) Biosphere- The environment and/or culture to which a species has become adapted.
- 2) Code- A system of signs that functions as a sort of blueprint of meaning, belief systems, common knowledge (language); sets provisions for how to process and interpret things
- 3) Conative Function (of communication)- An aspect of communication that relates to the receiver and how the message effects them
- 4) Conceptual Metaphor- The understanding of one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain (ThoughtCo)
- 5) Conceptual Metonym- In linguistics, a figure of thought that uses one concept to reach a target meaning (Oxford Bibliographies)
- 6) Connotation- (1) A 'secondary' (often emotional) meaning (or a range of associations) evoked by a word beyond its explicit denotation or literal meaning. (2) The process by which sociocultural (or personal) associations are produced as a reader decodes a sign or text in any medium in a particular context.  
(Oxford Reference)
- 7) Context- The environment (physical and social) in which signs are produced and messages are interpreted (Danesi)
- 8) Conventional Sign- A sign which is man-made and holds a learned and/or assigned meaning; does not come from nature
- 9) Denotation- The relationship between a linguistic sign and its direct content, often considered the primary meaning of the sign (Cognitive Linguistics)
- 10) Deconstruction- Originated by Jacques Derrida, an approach that emphasizes the internal workings of language and conceptual systems, the relational quality of meaning, and the assumptions implicit in forms of expression; often portrayed by 'oppositions'
- 11) Diachronic- Relating to how signs and codes (particularly language) change over time
- 12) Discursive symbols- A symbol which occurs over a period of time rather than being perceived as a whole in one given moment (CSUN)

- 13) Emotive function (of communication)- The task carried out by the sender of a message by conveying their emotions by means of their message
- 14) Firstness- In Peircean theory, the first level of meaning derived from isolated perception and the processes of the body and mind; derived from iconicity
- 15) Gesture- Movement of the hands, arms, and head, to a lesser extent, as a way to carry out semiosis and representation and convey meaning.
- 16) Gesticulant- The gesture unit accompanying speech that carries meaning in and of itself (Danesi)
- 17) Grammar- A set of rules that sets the framework for how a “language” (whether that be a natural human language or some form of representation to convey meaning) is composed and how it must act
- 18) Haptics- The study of touching patterns during social interaction and the subsequent meanings conveyed (Danesi) 38
- 19) Hyperreality- In semiotics and postmodernism, a state in which there is no clear distinction between what is reality and what is a simulation of reality.
- 20) Icon- A sign in which the signifier has a direct (non-arbitrary), simulative connection to its signified or referent (Danesi)
- 21) Image schema- A term used by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson that denotes a mental pattern formed by our sensory experiences that is used particularly in metaphor as a source domain to provide understanding of yet other experiences
- 22) Interpretant- One third of Peirce’s triadic model of a sign, the sense made of the sign in the mind of the observer (Semiotics and UID)
- 23) Index- A sign that puts referents in relation to each other, to sign users, or to the context or contexts in which they occur; in Peircean theory, is the main idea of the concept of secondness (Danesi)
- 24) Infinite semiosis- The idea that interpretants are further signs that have their own interpretation, and these signs were interpretation of former signs; a never-ending cycle of interpretant-sign relationship (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)
- 25) Kinesics- The study of the way in which certain body movements and gestures (innate, learned, and mixed) serve as a form of nonverbal communication and convey meaning (Oxford Languages)
- 26) Langue- In Saussurean theory, the abstract knowledge of how certain signs and their relations can be used and interpreted; in language, this denotes a system of internalized, shared rules governing a national language’s vocabulary, grammar, and sound system (Literariness)
- 27) Metalingual Function (of Communication)- An aspect of language in which the message refers to the code being used (Graci notes)
- 28) Modernism- A set of ideas which include progress, optimism, rationalism, the search for absolute knowledge, and a quest for perfection (Graci notes)

- 29) Myth- A combination of paradigms and syntagms that make up an oft-told story with elaborate cultural associations; heavily studied by Barthes
- 30) Narrative- A representation of human events put together to portray reality in a specific way, studied most closely by semiotician Algirdas Greimas
- 31) Natural sign- An occurrence that takes place
- 32) Oculistics- The study of eye behavior as a component of communication and conveying meaning
- 33) Object- In Peircean theory, one of the three aspects of the sign, which is what the sign refers to (in a denotational sense)
- 34) Paradigm- A set of linguistic items that form mutually exclusive choices in particular syntactic roles
- 35) Paradigmatic- relating to the way different words or language items can be chosen to play a particular part in a language structure
- 36) Parole- In Saussurean theory, the concrete usage of the code in question to represent something; in language, this denotes the actual oral or written communication of the language code by a member who uses that code
- 37) Phatic function (of communication)- Aspect of communication represented by a habitualized communal message that is designed to establish, acknowledge, or reinforce social relations (Graci notes, (Danesi))
- 38) Poetic function (of communication)- Aspect of language that is represented by any message constructed to deliver meanings iconically or poetically (Graci notes, (Danesi))
- 39) Postmodernism- Is associated (by contrast with modernism) with exhaustion (the end of progress), pessimism, irrationality, disillusionment with the idea of absolute knowledge and the possibility of perfection (Graci notes)
- 40) Poststructuralism- Semiotic movement that countered the structuralist notion that signs encode some aspect of reality; rather, signs construct reality (Danesi)
- 41) Presentational symbols- Complete units that are used to stand for something and can be interpreted as a whole (CSUN)
- 42) Proxemics- A theory of non-verbal communication that explains how people perceive and use space to achieve communication goals (Communication Studies)
- 43) Referential function (of communication)- Aspect of communication process in which the role is to convey information; in Jakobson's model of language function, this function revolves around the context of the communication (Oxford Reference)
- 44) Representamen- In Peircean theory, one of three parts of the sign; the physical representation of the sign (ie. the actual cup of coffee)
- 45) Representation- The process by which referents are captured and organized in some ways by signs or texts (Danesi)
- 46) Secondness- In Peircean theory, the second level of meaning that is derived based on indexicality, relating signs to other things (including those who make and interpret the sign)

- 47) Semiotics- The study of signs and anything that stands for or represents something else (PressBooks)
- 48) Semiosphere- A term introduced by Jurij Lotman to denote the environment that regulates and shapes perception and cognition adaptively (Danesi)
- 49) Semiosis- The process of how meaning is created and communicated
- 50) Signifying order- Concept of Barthes' that posits there are two methods of signification in semiotic systems: denotation and connotation
- 51) Sign (abstract)- Something that stands for something to someone
- 52) Sign (Peirce)- Consists of three parts- representamen, object, and interpretant- that all play a different role in conveying meaning
- 53) Sign (Saussure)- Consists of two parts - signifier and signified
- 54) Signal- Natural sign produced instinctively by the bodies of all animals to convey specific physical needs or in reaction in particular stimuli (Danesi)
- 55) Signified- In Saussurean theory, the part of the sign that is referred to; the concept being represented
- 56) Signifier- In Saussurean theory, the part of the sign that does the referring; the physical part of a sign
- 57) Structuralism- One of the central aspects of semiotics, linguistics, and psychology which posits that the meaning conveyed by a form relies on its structure, and this shapes how we grasp and understand the world (Danesi)
- 58) Symbol- A sign where the relation between signifier and signified is purely conventional and culturally specific (Thomas Streeter, UVM)
- 59) Symptom- A natural sign produced by the body to convey a meaning that something is not right
- 60) Synchronic- Relating to the study of signs and codes at a specific point in time (Danesi)
- 61) Syntagm- An orderly combination of interacting signifiers which forms a meaningful whole. In language, for example, a sentence is a syntagm of words (Oxford Reference)
- 62) Syntagmatic (in linguistics)- Relating to the way different words or language elements can be combined to make language structures (Cambridge Dictionary)
- 63) Text- A composite structure of smaller sign elements organized in a coherent way according to a specific code to convey a particular meaning/message (Danesi)
- 64) Thirdness- In Peircan theory, the third level of meaning that is largely based on symbolism and derived from culture and experience
- 65) Unlimited Semiosis- Term coined by Umberto Eco to describe an idea used by many semioticians to refer to the endless ability of a signifier to serve as another signified (Oxford Reference).