

## 11 Semiotics and Stylistics

Semiotics is concerned with the study of **semiotic (sign) systems** – codes, of which the primary place in the human communication is held by the natural language. Sign systems generate meanings and their intricate networks encode all aspects of social life (Doubravová 2002).

### 11.1 *Types of Code and Modes*

Codes can be divided into several types (Fiske 1989): a) **regulatory** codes controlling behaviour, such as traffic code, and **signifying** (communicative) codes, b) **analogue** codes, structured along a continuum (e.g., interpersonal distance), and **digital** codes which categorize continua into discrete units (e.g., proxemic 'space bubbles'- intimate, personal, social and public), c/ **presentational** codes which are used only in the immediate context of their production (i.e., in interpersonal communication: speech, gestures, facial expressions, dress); the main carrier of presentational codes being the human body which transmits *behaviourial* (gestures), *commodity* (dress), *genetically produced* (height, voice) codes; and **representational** codes which produce texts which transform presentational codes which, via technological apparatuses (print, photography, film, radio, television) are used outside the context of their production (i.e., in mediated, mass communication), d) **denotational** codes (objective and impersonal, such as scientific codes) and **connotational** codes (reflect social, moral, aesthetic values); the latter are structured according to the sets of social values, hence also *ideological codes*.

On the higher level of analysis, however, codes operate within symbolic **modes** (here: the total range of elements, operations and principles of which particular codes are subsets); the **primary symbolic modes** are *lexical* (verbal language), *social-gestural* (facial expressions, gestures, proximity, food habits, clothing), *iconic* (communicates spatial characteristics of objects and relations between them), *logico-mathematical* and *musical* codes (Gross 1989). Moreover, these primary modes may blend and render more complex messages; e.g., an advertising jingle blends lexical, social gestural and musical modes. The modes do not easily translate between themselves (e.g., abstract concepts are difficult to represent by body language).

### 11.2 *Types of Sign*

Of stylistic relevance is the well-known Peircean typology of signs: a) **iconic sign** (*icon*) is based on the resemblance to their referent – photograph, stylized WC door silhouette; iconicity is present in onomatopoeia (*buzz, splash, cuckoo*), simile (*hungry as a wolf*), metaphor, paralanguage (gestures), suprasegmental (tempo, rhythm, pitch) and syntactic (word order, FSP) features, as well as in the way some actions and/or procedures are rendered in some genres (Narration, Description, see 6.3), b) **indexical sign** (*index*) is based on some type of causal link with referent, e.g., pointing with one's forefinger (see 5.1.1); indexicality is also utilized in the use of pronouns, anaphora, implicature, means of characterization (regional and class accent), etc.; **symptoms** are spontaneous signs of the internal state of the sender (e.g., *ouch* when used as an exclamation expressing reaction to sudden pain), c) **symbolic sign** (*symbol*) is based on unmotivatedness (arbitrariness, conventionality) of the relationship between referents and signs; symbolicity is present in the majority of words in the lexicon, but also elsewhere, e.g., in patterns of colours used in traffic signals.

Besides, there are the s.c. *mixed signs* which, besides their major property, may reveal some features of other signs, e.g., the warning **DANGER** is a symbol and an icon, just as the gesture 'thumbs down'. When signs initiate a specific action, they act as *signals* (words, traffic lights). Some signs can be *graded* (voice volume, hands of an analogue clock), others are *discrete* (words of language, digital clock, photograph, Morse code, photograph).

The phenomenon of 'motivatedness' of signs forwards the concentration on the form and structure of message (see Poetic function, 3.4) which is by no means reserved to 'literary' language only; it is present in journalism, everyday communication (each user of language is creative, innovative), essay writing, speechmaking, advertising, or even in scientific language (cf. metaphors in scientific terminology: *abdominal wall*). In fact, there is little reason in strictly separating 'poetic' language from 'non-poetic' (neutral, unmarked, denotative, plain) language, although it appears that the language of poetry, along with languages of other arts, has evolved into separate codes, secondary to the verbal code (cf. Hoffmannová 1997).