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Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles S. Peirce and Karl Bühler: In search of a common denominator for sign conceptions

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**Ferdinand de Saussure,
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In search of a common denominator
for sign conceptions**

**1. Introducing a matrix for a typological overview
of sign conceptions**

The topic presented here is set against a historical background of epistemological positions of Platonism, Aristotelianism (modified through Cartesianism), and Stoicism (for the discussion of terms see Koyré 1961 and Sebeok, ed. 1986), according to which sign-oriented semiotic objects are specified either as a bilateral (dyadic) sign, whose two parts, the signifier and the signified, constitute a twofold psychological unity, or a trilateral (triadic) sign, where its sign-vehicle, its meaning (an interpretant generating one or more signs) and its object of reference constitute a threefold unity, or else a unilateral (monadic) sign in which its sign-vehicle and its referent are treated as separate entities. To begin the explanation of the divergences in the formulation of sign-conceptions, with regard to the status of their constituents as existing concretely and mentally, that is, residing in the intraorganismic and extraorganismic reality of communicating individuals, it will be important to apply a common denominator (as elaborated in Figure 1).

the sign = ○ as an entity, a unity, a relation
or a relational network

the relation = —

E = extraorganismic (concrete, sensible)
I = intraorganismic (mental, intelligible)
S = stimulus (sign-vehicle, signifier, expression)
R = reaction (referent, signified, content)

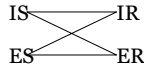


Figure 1. A matrix for the typology of sign conceptions based on their ontological status

2. The dual character of the linguistic sign

2.1. Platonic *logos* and Saussurean *parole*

It was Plato (427–347 B.C.), a Greek philosopher who initiated the dualistic idealism, assuming that speech and thought are inseparable and that both capabilities form a unity, called *logos*. On the basis of the belief that *speech* is a faithful replica of *thought*, the followers of Plato put forward a postulate to study verbal activities for gaining knowledge about of how the mind of humans works (for references to Plato, following Chajim Heymann Steinthal, 1823–1899, 1863/1890: 51–112, and Ernst Hoffmann, 1880–1952, 1925: 34, see Pazukhin, 1983: 15–17).

2.2. The sign as a Oneness of two separable psychic sides

Undoubtedly, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), a Swiss linguist, might have been inspired by the Platonic idea of *logos* when he introduced in his lectures the category of *parole* underlying both speaking and thinking simultaneously (cf. Saussure, 1916/1922: passim and 101).

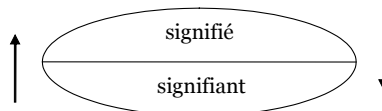


Figure 2. F. de Saussure's terms *signifié* and *signifiant*

However, as not exactly fitting within the context of Platonism – even though appealing to duality – one has to consider Saussure’s conception of the sign as a twofold mental unity composed of *signifié* and *signifiant* (cf. Figure 2), usually rendered as ‘signified’ and ‘signifier’ or equated with ‘signification’ and ‘signal’ in an incorrect translation of Roy Harris, (cf. Saussure, 1916/1949/1972 [1983: 67]), in which both parts of the sign are considered as a oneness of two inseparable sides, being in equal degree psychic (cf. Fr. *concept & image acoustique*, from Figure 3, with Eng. *concept & sound image* in Figure 4, and *concept & sound pattern* Figure 5).

Le signe linguistique unit non une chose et un nom, mais un concept et une image acoustique. ...

Le signe linguistique est donc une entité psychique à deux faces ...

Ces deux éléments sont intimement unis et s’appellent l’un l’autre (Saussure, 1916/1922: 98–99).

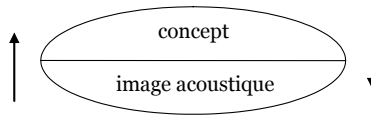


Figure 3. F. de Saussure’s *concept* and *image acoustique* as mental constituents of a bilateral sign

The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. ...

The linguistic sign is then a two-sided psychological entity. ...

The two elements are intimately united, and each recalls the other (Saussure, 1916[1959: 65–66]).

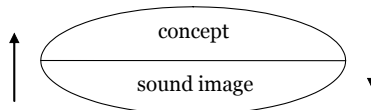


Figure 4. W. Baskin’s translation of of *concept* and *image acoustique* as two sides of a bilateral sign

A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern. ...

The linguistic sign is, then, a two-sided psychological entity. ...

These two elements are intimately linked and each triggers the other (Saussure, 1916/1949/1972[1983: 66]).

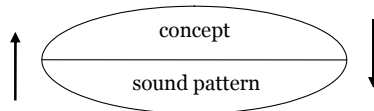


Figure 5. The Saussurean *concept* and *image acoustique* in R. Harris' translation as 'concept' and 'sound pattern'

An absolute psychologist definition of the sign, which unites, in Saussure's view, not a thing and a name but a concept and an acoustic image (rendered as "sound image" or "sound pattern"), probably originates in the late rationalist phase of Aristotelian heritage (cf. the opinion of Eugenio Coseriu, 1967: 81–112), developed under the influence of Cartesian thought by the authors of the Port-Royal Grammar. As Jacques Bourquin (1991: 346, points out "The grammar belongs to the rationalist current of thought ... deeply influenced by René Descartes (1596–1650)", French philosopher and mathematician (for details see also Crystal, 1987: 84). Although published anonymously, the authorship of this grammar, the so-called *Grammaire générale et raisonnée* [A general and reasoned grammar] of 1660, has been ascribed to Claude Lancelot (1615–1695) and Antoine Arnauld (1612–1694). In such an understanding the linguistic sign according to Saussure is viewed as a two-sided mental entity, which unites not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-pattern.

2.3. The unity of speech and thought in *parole* as the realization of language

F. de Saussure's lectures, however, exhibit inconsistency in rationalistic presentations of the sign as a unity of two mental sides: *concept* 'concept' (interpreted also as 'image' or 'notion') and *image acoustique* 'acoustic image'. One of his chapters devoted to the problem of the linguistic value (Saussure, 1916/1922: 155–169) shows explicitly his adherence to a Platonist unity of (external) expressions and (internal) thoughts.

The Saussurean conception of the duality of language may be interpreted as a Platonic heritage when recalling his metaphorical illustration which states that the unity of speech and thought in the realization of language may be com-

pared to a sheet of paper where it is impossible to cut up the first side without cutting up the second one; similarly, in a language, one is not able to separate either sound from thought, or thought from sound (cf. Saussure, 1916/1922: 157). The domain of linguistic study is thus placed by Saussure in the borderland where the elements of two orders are combined into a unity of linguistic form.

2.4. Hjelmslevian *expression* and *content* as two functives united by a *Sign Function*

The Hjelmslevian view of sign, inspired by the Saussurean conception of *parole*, resembles the Platonic notion of *logos*, but it reflects also the Aristotelian way of delimiting the *substance* from *matter* through *form*. Louis Trolle Hjelmslev (1899–1965) confirmed Ferdinand de Saussure's claim as to the duality of the sign, but he proposed to regard its two sides in terms of "functives," i.e., expression form and content form connected by a sign function. Hjelmslev rejected the widespread opinion of logicians that the sign is to be described as something that stands for something else. In Hjelmslev's view, the sign is not an expression that points to a content outside the sign itself, but a two-sided entity that acts in two directions: to the outside, i.e., to the substance of expression, and to the inside, i.e., to the substance of content (cf. Hjelmslev, 1943 [1953/1961/1963: 13 and 52–58]).

As a Platonist, Hjelmslev believed that the so-called sign function unites both internal mental facts with external physical facts which men have at their disposal. Appealing to his terminology, one may say that the amorphous mass of thought (the matter of content) as well as the amorphous phonic continuum (the matter of expression) are organized by the form of each plane into the substance of expression and the substance of content. Although Hjelmslev treated the substance as a part of the matter (the purport) organized by the form, he in fact favoured Saussure's statement that language is a form and not a substance (cf. Saussure, 1916/1949/1972 [1983: 111]).

3. Language in a triadic sequence or a unified triangle

3.1. The mediating role of human intellect

It was Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), the pupil of Plato, who introduced to the original dyad, consisting of the sound and thought of man, a third element, namely, the things in reality he learns and communicates about. In comparison to Plato, Aristotle made progress by distinguishing the thought about reality from

the expression of this thought in words (called *lexis*), as two heterogeneous phenomena.

The Aristotelian triadic sequence was reinterpreted by William of Ockham (*alias* Occam, an English scholastic philosopher, 1285–1347) in his *Summa Logicae*, written between 1323 and 1326, giving rise to the nominalist triangle. However, the translated terms of Aristotle: *res – intellectus – vox* [‘thing – intellect – voice’] were replaced by Ockham with *res – conceptus – terminus* [‘thing – concept – term’] (cf. Ockham, c. 1323/1951).

For Aristotle, concepts mediated between things and words, while in Ockham’s depiction concepts were tied to things by a natural bond, and the relation between words and things was based on a convention. According to Rostislav Pazukhin (1983: 61–63), Ockham believed that thinking activities can be carried out not only by manipulating words in an acoustic or in a voiceless mental form but also that mental acts can be performed without words (verbal thinking vs. pure thinking).

Against the background of medieval conceptualism, the ideas of Aristotle were modified by his rationalist continuators from the Port-Royal School. According to a rationalist hypothesis, the thinker was supposed to operate with concepts directly and to make use of words only when his accounts of reasoning were to be communicated to others.

As far the relation between reality, thought and language is concerned, the Aristotelian threefold sequence reappeared in the assumption of the spiritual intermediate world (Germ. *die geistige Zwischenwelt*) put forward by the followers of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), a German philosopher and linguist (widely known for his seminal work *On language* 1836[1988]). In the 20th century, the Aristotelian triad found its expression in the works of Edward Sapir (1884–1939) and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897–1941), known under the label of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis regarding the conception of linguistic determinism in human cognition, but with the stress on the sequence: “language, thought and reality” (cf. Whorf, 1956). The Aristotelian idea of the mediating role of the human mind, through Scholastic thinking, underwent further modifications. It is still continued by the interpreters of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) and Charles William Morris (1901–1979) with regard to the relationships between human actions and various signs created by man (cf. Morris, 1938/1975 and 1964 in a thorough discussion of Susan Petrilli, 2013: 1–34).

C.S. Peirce elaborated (around 1897) the concept of a trilateral sign, or a triad, as an ideal unity of three constituents. This concept, however, cannot be uniformly interpreted. From one formulation, distributed in his various writings, one can conclude that Peirce understood (1) the sign as the *representamen*, the sign-vehicle that is able to stand for its object and to signify its interpretant, which produces another sign referring to the same object (cf. Figure 6).

From another, one might view (2) the sign as a triadic relational structure that participates in generating different interpretations of meaning by producing other signs determined by the same object (cf. Figure 7).

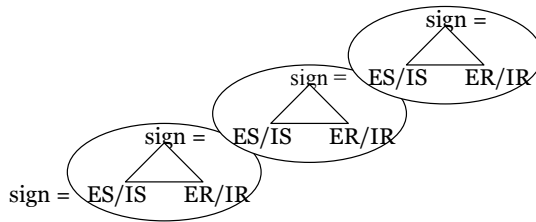


Figure 6. Depicting the trilateral sign of C.S. Peirce

A sign or representamen is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen (CP 2.228, c. 1897).

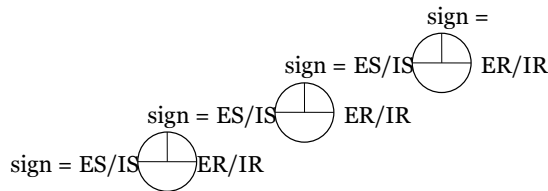


Figure 7. An alternative view of the sign as a triadic relation according to C.S. Peirce

A Sign, or Representamen, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its Object, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its Interpretant, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object. The triadic relation is genuine, that is its three members are bound together by it in a way that does not consist in any complexus of dyadic relations. That is the reason the Interpretant, or Third, cannot stand in a mere dyadic relation to the Object, but must stand in such a relation to it as the Representamen itself does. Nor can the triadic relation in which the Third stands be merely similar to that in which the First stands, for this would make the relation of the Third to the First a degenerate Secondness merely. The Third must indeed stand in such a relation, and thus must be capable of determining a Third of its own; but besides

that, it must have a second triadic relation in which the Representamen, or rather the relation thereof to its Object, shall be its own (the Third's) Object, and must be capable of determining a Third to this relation. All this must equally be true of the Third's Thirds and so on endlessly; and this, and more, is involved in the familiar idea of a Sign; and as the term Representamen is here used, nothing more is implied. A Sign is a Representamen with a mental Interpretant. Possibly there may be Representamens that are not Signs. Thus, if a sunflower, in turning towards the sun, becomes by that very act fully capable, without further condition, of reproducing a sunflower which turns in precisely corresponding ways toward the sun, and of doing so with the same reproductive power, the sunflower would become a Representamen of the sun. But thought is the chief, if not the only, mode of representation (CP 2.274, c. 1897).

With reference to the latter understanding of the subject matter of semiotics, it is worth emphasizing Peirce's idea of continuous semiosis, the limits of which are demarcated by the ultimate interpretant of the sign. It points the way towards a dynamic view of sign action that generates an interpretant itself. However, since every sign can generate an interpretant, which is another sign in turn, and every interpretant can be a sign, the distinction between the two terms is analytically relative in the view of Joseph Ransdell (1931–2010), presented in the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics* (ed. Sebeok, 1986: 675–681). What is more, as far as any given sign is itself an interpretant of a prior sign of the same object, it seems obvious that the distance between the sign and its object is greater when more intermediating signs are generated in the process of interpretations.

As important for the theory of sign production, it is appropriate to mention another philosopher, namely Gottlob Frege (1848–1925), who was interested in resolving the problem of how to approximate the meaning of a given sign through the explanation of its senses. Frege is usually mentioned as the originator of a triadic scheme (developed around 1892), in which three elements: *Zeichen*, *Sinn*, *Bedeutung* (interpreted as: 'sign,' 'meaning,' 'indication,' literally: 'sign,' 'sense,' 'meaning') are engaged in grasping the meaning of a sign, as an ideal object, through other signs of the same language (cf. Frege, 1892: 100, as discussed by Eco, 1976/1979: 60–61).

3.2. The semantic triangle and its interpretational variants

As closer standing closer to Aristotle than to Ockham, one should consider the semantic triangle known under the names of Ogden and Richards (1923/1949), in which all three constituents form separate entities, and only one of them is a sign (cf. Figure 8).

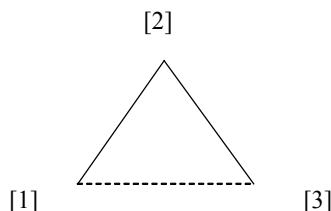


Figure 8. Separate constituents of a semantic triangle

Comparing interpretations of the semantic triangle, one encounters more or less appropriate epistemological substitutes for the three original terms. The variability of names for the three [1–3] constituents of a semantic triangle can be traced in the proposals of various authors, for example:

– Charles Kay Ogden and Ivor Armstrong Richards: [1] symbol – [2] thought (or reference) – [3] referent. The relationships between three constituents were described as correct: [1] symbolizes (a casual relation) [2], adequate: [2] refers to (other casual relations) [3], and true: [1] stands for (an imputed relation) [3] (cf. Ogden and Richards, 1923/1949: 11);

– Gustaf Stern: [1] word – [2] meaning – [3] referent (cf. Stern, 1931/1963: 37);

– Stephen Ullmann: [1] name – [2] sense – [3] thing (cf. Ullmann, 1952: 22).

There are, however, also adherents of the concept of a semantic triangle who have tried to make use of a bilateral sign conception, as for example:

– John Lyons: [1] form – <WORD> – [2] meaning (concept) – [3] referent (cf. Lyons, 1968: 404, as illustrated in Figure 9);

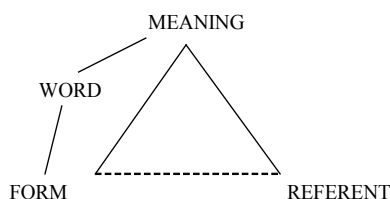


Figure 9. J. Lyons' four constituents within a three-angled scheme

– Pierre Guiraud: [1] symbol, both a signifying form and its acoustic image – [2] reference, i.e., a signified concept – [3] referent, i.e., a named thing (cf. Figure 10, after Guiraud (1955/1972[1976: 21], trans. of terms: Z.W.).

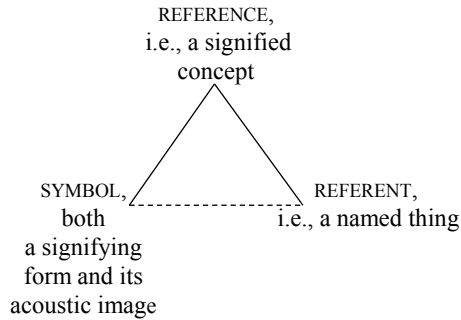


Figure 10. P. Guiraud's placement of bilateral sign within the scheme of a semantic triangle

The most remarkable divergence occurs in the interpretations of the term *symbol* used by Ogden and Richards. Therefore, the beginner in the field of linguistic semiotics has to choose from amongst different proposals. He must decide whether the “symbol” is a *word*, a *name*, a *form* of a word, or whether it may be considered as oneness in two manifestations, i.e., *both a signifying form and its acoustic image*.

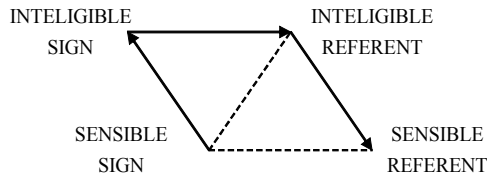


Figure 11. J. Lyons' and P. Guiraud's constituents of a semantic triangle illustrated within the framework of a semantic quadrangle

J. Lyons introduced the term *word* as a unity of form and meaning, whereas P. Guiraud treated “the physical form” and “its mental reflection” as the two sides of a symbol. While Lyons referred the *form* to a mental part of the word bound to meaning, Guiraud treated it as a concrete part of the bilateral sign in the Saussurean sense. To identify divergences in the formulations of the semantic triangle, one has to check the ontology of its constituents in comparison with those distinguished in particular conceptions of a unilateral sign.

One can clearly understand why it was impossible to place the four constituents into the angles of a triangle when comparing the sign conception of

P. Guiraud (1971[1974] and 1971[1975]), where four separate entities (as visualised in Figure 11 and interpreted in 1–4 phrases) are to be distinguished in the following definition: “un signe est un stimulus – c’est-à-dire une substance sensible – dont l’image mentale est associée dans notre esprit à celle d’un autre stimulus qu’il a pour fonction d’évoquer en vue d’une communication” (Guiraud, 1971: 29).

- (1) the sign itself (= SENSIBLE SIGN),
- (2) the mental image of the sign (= INTELLIGIBLE SIGN),
- (3) the mental image of the referent (= INTELLIGIBLE REFERENT), and
- (4) the referent itself (= SENSIBLE SIGN).

The sign is a stimulus (1), i.e., a sensorial substance, the mental image (2) of which is associated in our mind with the image (3) of another stimulus (4), and the function of which is to evoke the latter for communication (cf. Guiraud, 1971[1974: 29]: 29, the interpretation after the French original and its Polish translation is mine: Z.W.).

4. Detaching the sign from its referent

4.1. The implicational nature of the sign

Along with Plato and Aristotle, one should mention the Stoics, who made a major contribution to the theory of sign and meaning in antiquity. The main source of our knowledge about their teachings, including those of Chrysippos (c. 280–296 B.C.), are the critical treatises (*Against the Logicians; Against the Mathematicians or Against the Grammarians*) of Sextus Empiricus (fl. c. 180–200 A.D.), one of the representatives of the Skeptics (cf. Sextus Empiricus 1933–1949, discussed by Izydora Dąmbska, 1973). The importance of the Stoics for the foundations of semiotics has been recognized in at least four areas (for details see Sebeok, 1976: 27; Rollin, 1976: 41–44; as well as compare the views of David Savan in the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*, ed. Sebeok, 1986: 976–982 and 954–957; furthermore, also Teresa E. Hołówka in the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*, ed. Sebeok, 1986: 939).

(1) The Stoics treated signs as corporeal phenomena that reveal something that is real but non-evident through conditional implications;

(2) The Stoics distinguished between logical inferences, as ideal and incorporeal by nature, and psychological judgments expressed in corporeal sentences;

(3) The Stoics viewed all signs as existing materially either in a sensible or intelligible form of a both cosmic and human soul in the activities of speaking and thinking. Only the meanings of the signs inferred through logical reasoning were considered as possessing an ideal form of existence;

(4) The Stoics noticed that signs occur not only in the realm of humankind but also among animals, although only humans can combine the past and the future with the present and speak about signs that are designates (referents) of other signs.

St. Augustine (Aurelius Augustinus Hipponensis, A.D. 354–430, one of the Latin fathers in the early Christian Church; bishop of Hippo in North Africa), a medieval philosopher, although a Platonist with respect to metaphysical matters in theology, is included among the continuators of Stoic thinking on the basis of his views regarding the semiotic nature of language. It was he who placed signs among things whose function is to signify other things, and who put forward the idea of “meta-designation”, i.e., the ability to speak in signs about other signs, amongst the main characteristics of human beings. One of the most quoted definitions of sign is his statement (cf. Augustinus, 1962):

Signum est enim res praeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire [A sign is that thing which, besides the impression it makes on the senses, causes something else beyond itself to come under one’s knowledge] (Augustinus, 397[1958]. *De doctrina Christiana, Liber secundus* I (1). – trans. Z.W.).

One must note, however, that St. Augustine’s attitude to the nature of meaning is, in fact, Aristotelian. It is probable that his doctrine of *verbum interius* (‘the inner word’), seen not as a replica of the spoken word of any language known by speakers, but identified with mental images, may well have its source in Aristotelian beliefs. Having identified meaning with thoughts of things that are developed in the mind of humans, Aristotle believed that while words of national languages differ from one another, their mental counterparts must have a universal character for all men.

In the same context, as has been revealed by Rostilav Pazukhin (1983: 63), Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (A.D. 475?–525?), Roman philosopher and statesman, interpreted mental images as specific natural signs of things. The compromise between the Augustinian tenet of the heteromorphism of speaking and thinking – including the assumption that thoughts could be formed by means of mental signs before they were expressed in words – and the Boethian interpretation of Aristotle (cf. Boethius, 1877/1880) found their reflection in the sign theory of Ockham (c. 1323]/1951).

As a result of Ockham’s nominalist views (mentioned above in the context of Aristotle) the logical theory of propositions was developed, asserting that there are two varieties of sentences having dissimilar structure and composition: mental sentences (*propositiones mentales*) and spoken sentences (*propositiones vocales*). However, in investigative practice, modern logicians who adopt a positivistic attitude toward language understand the *propositional con-*

tent as referring to an ideal or abstract counterpart of a sentence, the bearer of truth or falsity.

Along these lines, it might be appropriate to emphasize that the contemporary usage of the term *proposition* has reflected the Stoics' mode of reasoning, when stressing the conditional character of logical inferences. To sum up, one should add that the teachings of the Stoics not only influenced the Scholastic thought of the Middle Ages, but have also survived within the terminology of modern propositional logic developed from a positivistic and objectivistic point of view.

4.2. The linguistic functionalism of Karl Bühler as a heritage of stoic tradition

Stoicism is embodied in the conception of the sign put forward by Karl Ludwig Bühler (1879–1963), which also stands on psychological foundations as far as the theory of apperception is concerned. For Bühler (1934/1965: 28–36, and 1934/1982[1990: 34–36]), the principal property of a sign was seen in its representational function (*die Darstellungsfunktion*). In Bühler's interpretation, the sign was defined as a sensible phenomenon standing for something else, and functioning as a tool of communication. With reference to "the principle of abstractive relevance" (*das Prinzip der abstraktiven Relevanz*), Bühler stated that not all concretely realized features of the sign are important for the fulfilment of its communicative function (*die Mitteilungsfunktion*). However, some of them, which constitute its functionally relevant features, may appear as redundant in the event that they become reduced without disturbing the process of communication, and supplemented by receivers through their apperception (i.e., through the traces of their memorized experiences). Karl Bühler contributed to the instrumentalist functionalism of the Linguistic Circle of Prague, which resulted in the distinction between phonetics and phonology. The instrumentalist view of language, exposing the functionality of elements that play a serviceable role in relation to their users or makers, arose, however, in the intellectual climate of opinion prevailing in art and architecture.

The instrumentalist functionalism, the main principles of which are summarized by Elżbieta Magdalena Wąsik (2011: 123–142), arose in the "climate of opinion", prevailing in Austria, Switzerland and then in Germany after World War I, which promoted the perspectives of purpose-and-need-oriented rationalism in architecture, utility products, and environmental urbanist constructivism. Within an instrumentalist approach to function, the main attention of researchers was paid to abstractively relevant features inherent in the structure of elements playing a serviceable role with regard to human needs and social requirements. Through the mediation of constructivism in the applied arts, in-

strumentalist functionalism turned into a kind of functionalist structuralism, aimed at the demarcation of what is typical and general from what is accidental and individual, researchers were interested to determine what is functionally relevant and irrelevant in the structure of their objects of study.

As a mode of thinking and tendency among intellectuals and architects, functionalism was opposed to expressionism. The propagators of functionalism postulated to consider the needs of average people in producing utility goods which conform rationally to the requirements of everyday life and are not falsified by abundant ornament and useless form. The rationalist principle demanded that architecture and the applied arts reflect pure relationships between humans and their environment, while taking account of their biological, social and culture-creative nature. The followers of the rationality principle in art and architecture exposed the adequacy of function in relation to purpose. and argued that beauty is the mirror of what grows as a result of appropriate use for specified purposes.

In Bühler's instrumental model of language (*das Organon Modell der Sprache*, cf. Figure 12), the sign was defined as a sensible phenomenon standing for something else (*aliquid stat pro aliquo*) and functioning as a tool by means of which one person communicates to another person about the real things and states of affairs lying beyond the sign itself. For Bühler, the fundamental property of the sign was seen in its symbolic function, i.e., its semantic capacity to represent other objects.

Bühler defined the communicative function of language along with the symbolic function of its signs in terms of a threefold performance of language, while considering the role of the linguistic sign in its relation to the sender as a symptom, in its relation to the receiver as an appeal signal, and in its relation to the extralingual reality as a symbol („Dreifach ist die Leistung der menschlichen Sprache, Kundgabe, Auslösung, Darstellung". Bühler, 1934/1965: 28).

The circle in Figure 12 (adapted from Bühler, 1934/1965: 28 in conjunction with the respective terms translated into English; cf. also Bühler, 1934/1965[1990: 35]) illustrates the phenomenon of the sound, that is, the actual word spoken. The triangle demonstrates the linguistic sign and shares common space with the circle in some areas, while extending beyond it in other areas. This overlapping exposes the two key features of the relationship between the sign and its physical realization. Where the circle overlaps the triangle, the phenomenon of the sound contains more acoustic information than the sign does. The triangle also envelops space beyond the circle. This means that some part of the message may be missing, due to either misspellings or omissions on the part of the sender, or because the channel is subjected to interference. In this case, receivers are still able to fill in the gaps to create a meaningful

message when they can mentally supply what has been lost. This phenomenon is what Bühler has called an “apperceptive enlargement” (*eine apperzeptive Ergänzung*).

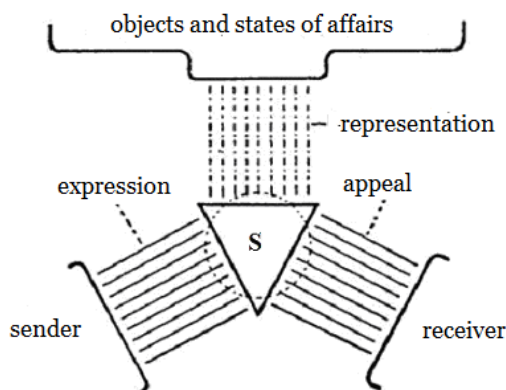


Figure 12. K. Bühler's instrumental model of language

The sign conception of Karl Bühler was developed by Leon Zawadowski, Professor of general linguistics at the University of Wrocław in the 1950s and 1960s (cf. Leon Zawadowski in: Meier, 1961: 225; Zawadowski, 1970: 28–49). Leon Zawadowski presents in detail the so-called “linguistic theory of language” based on the inductive methodology of structuralist functionalism, in his handbooks of 1966, *Lingwistyczna teoria języka* (A linguistic theory of language), and 1975, *Inductive Semantics and Syntax: Foundations of Empirical Linguistics*. The core of his theory constituted the definition of language as a semantic system with grammar and universal lexicon in a functional and ecological sense, i.e., a system that can be used everywhere by everyone for every task as a set (of classes) of text elements serving to communicate about the (set of classes of referents in the) extratextual reality.

4.3. The interpretation of Karl Bühler in Leo Zawadowski's linguistic theory of language

Taking linguistics as a point of departure, Zawadowski treated the sign as a token of a type of text-elements that represents a token belonging to another type of elements, called referents or extratextuals. He also opted to consider complexes of characteristic (functional) features of texts and extratextuals as signifier and meaning (i.e., the signified), as illustrated in Figure 13 (adapted for didactic purposes from Zawadowski, 1975: 84).

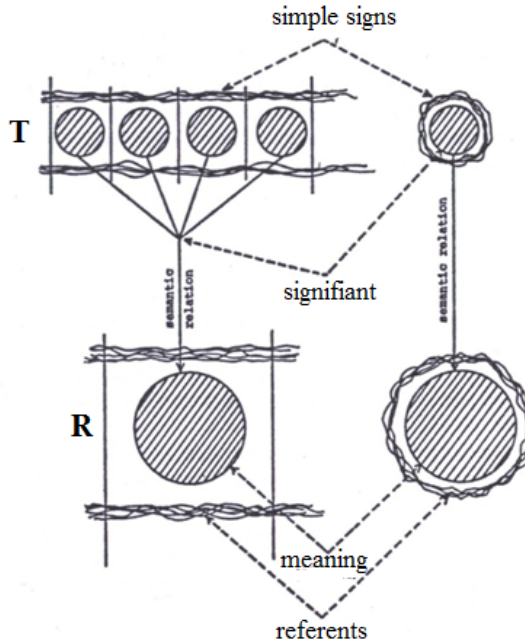


Figure 13. Delimitation and abstraction of differential and non-differential features in the sequence of simple sign (T) and its referent (R) as meaning

Zawadowski (1975: passim and 84) distinguished between the sets of individual and normal-usage features, on the one hand, and the mass of characteristic properties of the simple sign as a text-element and its referent, standing in a semantic relation of representation (T and R), on the other. By this he subsumed meaning-bearers and meanings to the same category of observable objects. For example, his description of the T-element contained such features as, in particular: (1) the boundary of the total mass of sounds, (2) the independent characteristic set, i.e., independent part of a phonic social norm, and (3) the minimum differential set (phonemic, phonological, 'relevant,' 'functional,' or 'distinctive').

Accordingly, in the description of the referent understood as an R-element of extratextual reality, one can find respectively: (1) the boundary of the total mass of referent, (2) the independent characteristic set, i.e., fundamental meaning (norm of referent), and (3) the minimum differential set (minimum differential meaning). Regarding the individual and social features of signs and their referents, Zawadowski labelled them as accidental features and reserve non-differential features, being redundant as such.

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Summary

The subject matter of this article constitutes the contribution of three leading scholars, Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce and Karl Bühler, to semiotics against the typological approach to sign conceptions prevailing in the philosophy of linguistics. It has considered the ontological status and cognitive approachability of the category of sign, as to whether it is a mental or concrete entity, and whether its material shape possessing a spiritual replica in the mind of its users can be approached as an ideal or real object. As to its forms of manifestation, specified in terms of sensible or intelligible, empirically available or rationally assumable forms of being, the question has been deliberated whether the sign should be examined subjectively or objectively, and whether it should be defined as a separate phenomenon or as a complex of related phenomena. These and other controversies have been exhibited as having their roots in three schools of epistemological thought resultant from the views about the nature of language in relation to reality.

Słowa kluczowe: epistemologia, ontologia, gnozeologia, semiotyka, znak, język, lingwistyka

Keywords: epistemology, ontology, gnoseology, semiotics, sign, language, linguistics