

Semiotics and Second Language Instruction Research*

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0. Introduction: Cultural Semiotic Fundamentals

Within societies, individuals organize themselves in institutions, this organization being regulated by means of various semiotic systems. Thus, it is quite consistent if in attempting to describe these sign systems – as in Soviet cultural semiotics, for example¹ – one also proceeds from the premise “that one of the essential prerequisites of people’s living together in an orderly manner, of their development and of overcoming problems of ensuring the conditions of their existence consists

* The term “Second Language Instruction Research” refers mainly to the investigation of institutionally organized second (or foreign) language learning and teaching processes. Insights from both Foreign Language Learning Research and Second Language Acquisition Research are integrated.

in their ability to store and to communicate information by means of signs, sign systems and combinations of these, and — as far as is necessary — to produce it more or less systematically for expressly set aims” (EIMERMACHER 1974: vii). The totality of the sign systems used in a certain society — more precisely: the hierarchy and correlation of the sign systems — makes up in the end what is constitutive of the culture of this society. But not only natural language is constitutive of culture; rather, it is one semiotic system among others, such as that of clothing, architecture, the arts, music, and also table manners, nonverbal behavior and so on: “Although each presupposes an immanent system, the individual sign systems function only in interaction with each other, by finding support in each other. No sign system possesses a mechanism that could ensure its functioning in isolation. It follows from this that in addition to the method that makes it possible to develop a number of autonomous sciences in the realm of semiotics a further one is admissible: from the perspective of this method all (of the others) would be regarded as partial aspects of the *semiotics of culture*, of the study of the functional correlation of different sign systems” (LOTMAN et al., 1973: 57). According to this, it is well to retain the insight that language as an isolated phenomenon cannot be constitutive of culture, that “language and culture are inseparable in their actual historical functioning” (LOTMAN/USPENSKIJ 1971), that language in its actual functioning fits into the more general system of culture and forms a complex whole with it.

Still, natural language as a semiotic system has a special place among the other sign systems inasmuch as it alone can perform a comprehensive metasemiotic function and can act as an interpreter of all sign systems.² Thus, natural language is on the one hand a partial semiotic system of a given culture and on the other hand it is used to describe other partial systems of this culture and to communicate about them.

But individuals do not organize themselves only in different institutions, but also in different social systems; to this end different sign systems are of service to them. However, despite the differences in organization, relations between various societies or cultures are possible because on the one hand the societies are (more or less) open, and on the other, semiotic systems exist only as dynamic systems.³ But this

intercultural interplay can only come into force if phenomena from outside the own culture area are at all understood to be "alien". The two different tendencies that can appear here are essentially dependent on the attitude to the "own" and to the "alien" culture and the esteem in which they are held: "When a culture collides with semiotic systems located outside of itself, this also leads it to a semiotic reevaluation of itself and creates the presuppositions for the transition to a dynamic state. But the fact should not be neglected that such a collision can also bring about the opposite effect: to the extent that the own culture is taken to be the only 'correct' one and the alien culture to be 'non-culture', they can become immune to each other (...). The basis for mutual penetration can be established only by experiencing an 'own' and an 'alien' culture as different, as systems that one understands to be both correct (each in its own sphere)" (LOTMAN 1974: 433f.).

On the one hand the necessity, probably dating back thousands of years, to come to grips with the members of an alien society and their culture (which was always connected with further pragmatic ends), and the special status that natural language has in the totality of semiotic systems of a culture (see above) on the other hand, have led to the establishment in most contemporary societies of an institution, *second language instruction*, with the special task of *imparting knowledge of foreign languages and cultures*.

The scientific discipline *second language instruction research* examines the field of "teaching and learning second and foreign languages" as an independent field of school teaching and education in societies.⁴ Second language instruction research is not, however, an explicitly semiotically oriented discipline; even though it may be the natural thing to do, it must be admitted that language teaching research has for all intents and purposes not yet approached its object with an explicitly semiotic mode of inquiry.⁵ From a semiotic point of view — considering the indissoluble correlation of language and culture — the task of second language instruction research can be defined as follows.

Second language instruction research has the task of:

- (a) examining the process of formation of sign relations in a second (or further) language and culture in terms of regularities; and
- (b) of interpreting the results of the examination with a view to optimizing the second language teaching and learning process.

On the basis of its specific epistemic interest, language teaching research is situated in a concrete social praxis that exerts an influence on the object of investigation itself by means of several factors. Such bundles of factors — which shall be examined below — are influenced among other things by:

1. questions of language policy:
What languages are taught or learned, and why?
2. questions of psychology of language:
What conceptions are there of the process of sign formation in second and foreign language acquisition?
3. methodological questions:
How are corresponding processes of sign formation planned and implemented in foreign language teaching?

1. Language Policy and Language Choice

In contrast to situations in which the motive for trying to come to terms with another culture can be attributed to *immediate* contact between members of two different social systems, today this is *mediated* in most societies by the institution of foreign language teaching (see above). Furthermore, this mediated contact is not restricted to living languages and cultures, but can also come about by means of historical linguistic and cultural relics. Although the need for knowledge of a second (or further) language is determined also by direct contact between living languages and cultures, and although it might be assumed that language planning is conducted according to this need, the example of Latin in the school and higher education system of the Federal Republic of Germany shows that reasons other than current contact influence language policy.

Among others, the following reasons are adduced for learning Latin as a *foreign language*:⁶

- that the study of the presuppositions of the life and thought of another culture conveys an understanding of the relativity of human standards of value and of human views;
- that translation from one language into another is conducive to one's ability to express oneself in one's native language;
- that Latin, by means of the contrast with the native language, conveys an ability to think critically about language and an

understanding of the function of language in general.

The assumed semiotic functions of these properties, which are attributed especially to Latin but in our opinion can be acquired by instruction of *any* language (provided they are among the aims of the course and the appropriate methodological procedures are used), are relevant both (a) to the native language and (b) to the foreign language. With respect to the native language it is assumed that the interpreter is changed by knowing Latin such that he perceives or interprets the signs of his own culture differently. With respect to the foreign language it is assumed that cognitive structures are developed by means of Latin that are of fundamental importance for the processes of language learning and which, as cognitive abilities, thus improve the ability to learn languages in general.

The untenability of the argument that these functions should be bound to Latin shall not be dealt with any further here. The point is rather that learning and teaching foreign languages is not (any longer) a function that can be derived from concrete language contact, but that intermediate authorities responsible for social and educational policy intervene to regulate the process of learning foreign languages. The example of Latin shows clearly that societies always develop their own model of their culture, to which a model of their educational tradition also belongs. In the present case this has led to the educational policy decision to include Latin in the canon of school subjects like a modern foreign language and to support this decision by formal administrative means: language contact, which would normally not be developed to Latin, is established by school language policy. Thus, in addition to the *prestige* that Latin enjoys in the make-up of the own culture model, an artificial need is created by formal administrative support.⁷

In addition to general policy decisions — for example to use a certain language as supranational *lingua franca* for political and/or economic cooperation (cf. English and French in the EEC, Russian in COMECON) — language offerings in educational institutions (especially schools) are influenced in particular by the following factors:

- the need for knowledge of foreign languages in the society;
- the cultural prestige of multilingualism in general and the prestige of individual languages in particular;
- the language choice of the learners.

However, these factors interact closely with each other such that cause and effect cannot always be separated: thus, the prestige of English is based among other things on its considerable usefulness, which for its part influences the language choice of learners. Further indicators of the prestige of a language are principally its geopolitical distribution (as official or foreign language) and the cultural productivity of a language.⁸

Hence, whereas on the one hand the choice of a foreign language by learners depends on external factors such as language planning and the consequent offerings in the education system, the question of the prestige of languages is connected with factors that depend on the learner, which involve the field of attitudes and views and thus also the field of *motivation*: the attitude to another language and culture (and thus also society) can be influenced both positively and negatively by social influences. In extreme cases, collective judgements in the form of autostereotypes and heterostereotypes determine perception and behavior, that is, adequate interpretation of cultural signs of another culture is inhibited by a socially imparted, automatic pattern of perception. One important function of foreign language teaching is therefore to contribute to reducing and overcoming such stereotypes; but it can also be made to perform the opposite function (as for example in Germany during the National-Socialist period) so as to form and strengthen such stereotypes. But even when foreign language teaching involves the requirement of overcoming such stereotypes, this task is not easy to perform since even text books used in contemporary teaching do not always counteract the formation of stereotypes, as shown by relevant text book analyses.⁹

Seen concretely, teaching as an institution is not *per se* a factor that necessarily has a positive influence on the attitude to the alien language and culture. In an empirical study it could be shown, for example, that British school pupils who had taken French at school expressed much more negative attitudes to France and the French than did others of the same age who had had no institutional contact with French.¹⁰

Thus, although foreign language teaching is conducive to the ability to operate with another, "alien" sign system, the "prerequisite for the transition to a dynamic state" (LOTMAN, see above) is not necessarily thus provided. Rather, the attitude of the individual or of the (mem-

bers of a) society to the alien culture must be regarded as a factor in its own right that in the end influences the willingness to try to come to grips not only with the signs (sign systems) of the other culture, but also with the users of these sign systems, the members of the alien culture. The institution of foreign language teaching can in this sense only be regarded as "successful" if it also succeeds in developing, preserving and promoting this willingness.

Whereas in the preceding discussion second language instruction was regarded as an institutionalized educational offer or requirement for monolingual children in an established, monolingual society,¹¹ a different situation is given in many modern industrialized states because of the fact of migration: immigrants are first of all forced to learn the signs (sign systems) of the dominant culture receiving them as well as the rules of their use at least well enough to ensure the functioning of the immigrants as workers. These migrants, socialized in their home culture, retain the sign system of their native language, which can then be used to satisfy communicative needs in the family and with other migrants of the same culture; the development of the competence of these migrants in the foreign language and culture, however, generally remains quite distant from the norms of the target variety.

In contrast to the first generation of migrants, their children normally grow up in two languages and cultures.¹² The normal development of the personality of the children can be negatively influenced in the process: First, the different valuation of phenomena in the "own" and in the "alien" culture can lead to conflicts in the individual and thus inhibit the development of a cultural identity.¹³ There is furthermore the danger that the sign systems of both cultures will only be developed insufficiently and incompletely.¹⁴ For a long period most energy was expended on institutionally promoting the children of these migrants only in the second language to improve their chances in the society receiving them. But more recently the view is gaining support that the command of the native language is of decisive importance for the general cognitive and linguistic development of the child such that omissions in the development of the native language cannot be compensated by extra support in the second language and in the school subjects.¹⁵

But reasons that lead to an institutionalization of teaching in the

languages of origin are in turn of a highly political nature inasmuch as the society can react in various manners with intervention in terms of language education and language policy to the special situation of such individuals who, in the truest sense of the term, live "between the cultures". This depends on whether the phenomenon is recognized to be socially relevant and how it is evaluated by the social and cultural authorities involved.¹⁶

2. Second Language Acquisition Research

Second language acquisition research¹⁷ has gained in importance for language teaching research inasmuch as it has served to uncover and empirically examine assumptions about the nature of acquisition of a foreign language. Because of its claim to universality in discovering potential regularities of second language acquisition, on which foreign language teaching would also have to be oriented, it also makes the claim that it should have direct influence on the regulation of acquisition processes.

Second language acquisition research received its first impulses from contrastive linguistics.¹⁸ The structural inquiries which contrastive linguistics demanded were essentially based on behavioristic learning theory: behavior that is to be learned (receptive and/or productive use of linguistic signs that are new to the user) is positively or negatively influenced by previously learned behavior (the acquisition and use of the sign system of the native language), since learning is possible only on the basis of transfer. No transfer is possible for linguistic structures that lack equivalents in the native language, so that difficulties in learning and interference mistakes are predictable; correspondingly, positive transfer is assumed in the case of structural equivalence or similarity.

Taking account of language contrast in teaching material, that is, of the divergence of two different linguistic sign systems, should, according to the supporters of this view, contribute to avoiding interference mistakes.

Although inquiry into the process of acquisition of foreign languages in the framework of contrastive linguistics proved to be untenable in its original absolute form, it is still regarded within foreign language teaching research as *one* element that is taken into consideration in the conception of teaching strategies. Thus, within second language

instruction research, too, there is support for the opinion that complex structures of a second language that objectively prove to be difficult to teach and to learn in class should be brought to the learner's attention by comparison of structures of the native language and of the second language in order to offer him help in acquisition.¹⁹

However, the differences in the structural field of phonetics/phonology, morphosyntax and vocabulary described in contrastive linguistics do not include the pragmatic dimension of semiotics; only the structural elements of language, only linguistic elements in their systematic character are contrasted. Contrastive linguistics has also been unable to penetrate into the *semantic* dimension, in particular, that is, into questions of the acquisition of meaning, which cannot be regarded as static but must be understood to be a dynamic process.

The so-called *morpheme order studies* begun by BURT and DULAY²⁰ were an important stimulus for second language acquisition research. The authors thought they were able to show in their studies that second language acquisition is not decisively influenced by the native language, but rather follows autonomous developmental sequences that largely correspond to the developmental sequences that occur when the language in question is acquired as a native language. The assumption of a *predetermined acquisition structure* based on the structure of a language and the language processing mechanism of human individuals set off in language teaching research a lively discussion of the validity of the data collected and of the consequences for second language instruction.²¹

A positive result of this tendency is that the static manner of looking at the matter typical of contrastive linguistics was replaced by the observation of acquisition *sequences*, which is more adequate to the gradual (dynamic) development of foreign language competence. But although the acquisition of morphological and syntactic structures of a second language is closely connected with semiotic competence as a whole, the lack of inquiry into the question as to how *meanings* are acquired and expressed by means of linguistic signs remains a shortcoming of this research trend; the acquisition of structures is identified with the acquisition of language as a whole. Yet it should be regarded as a task particularly of foreign language instruction research to examine more closely the process of meaning acquisition and expression,

which is so decisive for *communication*. Foreign language instruction research, too, must take account of the "unity of semiotic", that is, of the interrelation of syntactics, semantics and pragmatics (MORRIS 1938).

The so-called interlanguage hypothesis, the formation of which was decisively influenced by CORDER (1967, 1971) and SELINKER (1972), has proved to be the most fruitful and, in language teaching research, a widely received hypothesis for inquiry into second language acquisition. The interlanguage hypothesis treats language acquisition as a complex process influenced by many factors and thus as a correspondingly varying process. According to this hypothesis, each learner forms, on the basis of his individual learning experience, an idiosyncratic learner language that "contains traits of the basic language and of the second language as well as original features independent of the basic language and of the second language" (BAUSCH/KASPER 1975:15).

The discussion of the interlanguage hypothesis cannot be traced here;²² but the examination of learning processes, learning strategies and communication strategies resulting from it has led to a differentiated view of the factors relevant to language acquisition. The fundamental variables, which themselves have to be further differentiated, are: (a) the learning subject with his individual set of previous qualifications; (b) the conditions in which learning takes place; (c) the target variety. In foreign language instruction research *processes* are defined as spontaneous activities that are not subject to the learner's influence, whereas strategies are intentional activities that are applied by the learner and are consciously controlled or are at least accessible to consciousness.²³

By means of the interlanguage hypothesis it has been possible to overcome the formal aspect of inquiry into language acquisition in favour of a procedure that includes pragmatics, that is, the conditions of communication. As evidence of the communicative orientation of interlanguage research KASPER's inquiry (1981) may be cited as an example; on the basis of an analysis of pragmatic aspects of learner language it yields the following questions for further research:²⁴

- How are communicative and grammatical competence related to each other?
- Which learning strategies are most successful in developing a

learner language? Can the learner strategies that might thus be discovered be induced by appropriate teaching strategies?

- What is the function of explicitly imparted metacommunicative knowledge in acquisition processes?
- What communication strategies can compensate for pragmatic deficits in intercultural communication?

These questions demonstrate the close link of the cultural semiotic aims discussed at the beginning with foreign language teaching research: the examination of acquisition regularities is a presupposition for the effective organization of controlled and institutionalized acquisition processes that would be appropriate to the learner's needs. The "success" of the processes of acquisition of second languages manifests itself in the ability and willingness of the individual successively to learn the signs (sign systems) of a second culture and by means of this acquisition process to place the absolute validity of the semiotic systems of his own culture in perspective. Not until he has recognized the relativity of semiotic (linguistic and non-linguistic) action in different cultures can the individual develop communication strategies that help to avoid and overcome intercultural misunderstandings.

Methods of foreign language teaching take these aims to various degrees into account.

3. Methods of Second Language Instruction

3.1. It follows from the above that second language acquisition is a process in which the learner acquires a new sign system by successively learning single signs as well as the rules of their combination. In the case of controlled teaching the fundamental conception of the essence of the acquisition process plays a decisive part in forming the method of teaching or of the single step in teaching. Among the central questions²⁵ in didactics and methodology of foreign language teaching that are the subject of continual discussion and that exert an influence on the conception of methods, one is directed at the role of the native language: Is reference to the native language a help or a hinderance in developing the sign system of the target language?²⁶

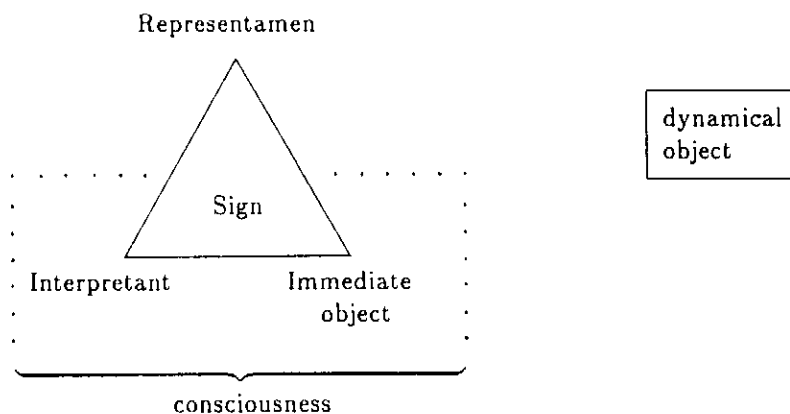
3.2. Prelinguistic or nonlinguistic understanding of intentions and meanings is at the basis of language acquisition.²⁷ The acquisition of linguistic meaning relationships is accordingly to be interpreted as a

correlation of what is already understood or known with the linguistic expression.

From a semiotic point of view the acquisition of linguistic meanings can be described with reference to PEIRCE's sign theory and the implied conception of the sign as a triadic relationship between representamen, interpretant and object.²⁸ *Representamen* is to be understood here as a "vehicle", as a sign bearer in its material constitution. In the case of the *object* the immediate object and the dynamical object must be distinguished. The *dynamical object* is the real (or fictive) reference object that is the object of the semiosis without being a part of it, that is, which exists independently of the semiosis; the *immediate object* in contrast is a part of the signitive relation, it is, as the object of the representation, a "mental representation" (§5.473).²⁹ The *interpretant*, too, is to be assigned to the realm of signitive consciousness. It is a "mental effect" (§1.565) brought about in the consciousness of the interpreter and is to be understood as a "significance" (§8.179), which does not correspond to a certain individual object (§1.542). As SAUSSURE's *signifiant* and *signifié* are to be understood as psychic correlates, so too can PEIRCE's interpretant and immediate object be understood as entities that are to be ascribed to the consciousness of the interpreter (cf. fig. 1).

This interpretation means that the acquisition of linguistic meaning relationships is to be understood fundamentally as the formation and consolidation of new triadic relationships. This process can only occur on the basis of previous acquaintance with what the sign designates or on the basis of an idea of it (§8.179).³⁰ In the case of first language acquisition this presupposition can only be fulfilled on the basis of experience with the dynamical objects of reality, a process that PEIRCE terms "collateral experience" (§8.314) or "collateral observation" (§8.179).³¹ In the case of the acquisition of meaning relationships in a foreign language, too — as in first language acquisition — the triadic relationship between interpretant, representamen and immediate object is to be internalized and habitualized. Depending on the extent to which the cognitive system and the native language of the learner are developed and available, however, there are various possible ways for foreign language teaching to teach meaning. These various possible ways to convey meaning are used differently in the individual methods.

Fig. 1:



3.3. Before the direct method (see below) triggered the discussion of method in foreign language didactics about the turn of the century, a discussion that basically has lasted until the present day, the *grammar-translation method* dominated unopposed the teaching of foreign languages. It had been developed in analogy to the teaching of the classical languages Greek and Latin. Correspondingly, its principal features are: (a) deductive teaching of rules and of knowledge of language, partially by means of comparison of languages; (b) translation (that is, both to and from the foreign language) as a skill-oriented exercise form; (c) exclusive use of the native language in the teaching process. Although in contemporary conceptions of teaching the grammar-translation method is regarded as obsolete and no longer receives support as a method, in actual teaching a series of individual features and procedures of the method are still quite wide-spread.³²

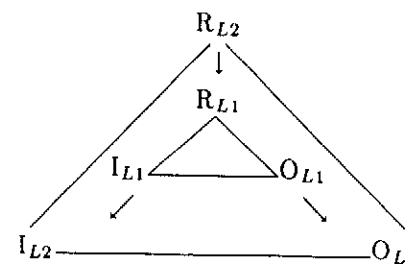
In the grammar-translation method the acquisition of the sign system of the target language is consciously linked to the sign system of the native language. The methodical steps — which can sometimes overlap in the actual sequence — can be described as follows:

- (1) The rules of combination (R) of signs (S) of the foreign language (L_2) are explained metalinguistically (*meta*) in the native language (L_1);
- (2) the individual signs of the foreign language (S_{L_2}) are introduced, translated into the native language and described (metalinguistically) with respect to their structural properties;
- (3) sign combinations (as a rule sentences or texts) in the native language or in the foreign language [$n(S_{L_1/L_2})$] are translated into corresponding sign combinations of the other language on the basis of the material learned in steps 1 and 2. This can be illustrated by the following diagram:

$$\begin{array}{l}
 (1) \quad R_{L_2} \leftarrow (\text{meta})L_1 \\
 (2) \quad S_{L_2} \leftarrow S_{L_1} + (\text{meta})L_1 \\
 (3) \quad R_{L_2}, n(S_{L_2}) \longleftrightarrow n(S_{L_1})
 \end{array}$$

Meanings are taught as follows: The presentation of the L_2 representamen, which by itself, lacking the triadic relationship for the interpreter, that is, the learner, cannot set off a sign process, is followed by the presentation of the L_1 representamen, with which the learner can link both an L_1 interpretant and an L_1 object. The learner can therefore infer the L_2 object and correlate it with the L_2 interpretant only by means of this indirect sign relation in the native language. It follows that the teaching of signs of the foreign language is based exclusively on linguistic factors, whereby contextual/pragmatic elements are neglected, thus promoting interference by the native language (cf. fig. 2).

Fig. 2:³³

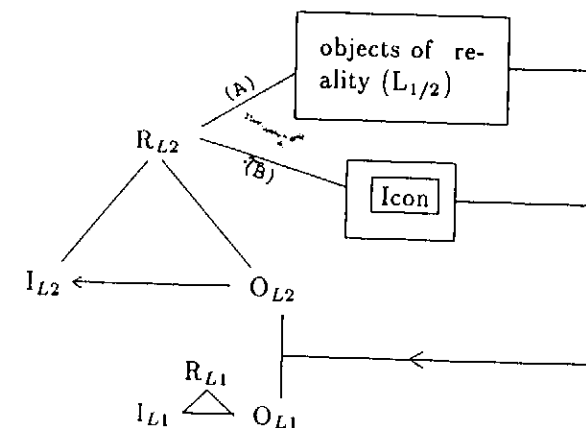


3.4. About the end of the nineteenth century, a reform movement, whose most prominent supporter was VIËTOR, came out against the neglect of communicative learning and use of the foreign language due to the grammar-translation method. VIËTOR's programmatic work "*Der Fremdsprachenunterricht muß umkehren! [Foreign Language Teaching Must Reform!]*" (1882) can be regarded as the birth certificate of the so-called *direct method*. What was common to the positions of the reformers, who diverged from each other on certain points, was a new, psychologically founded view of foreign language acquisition. Borrowing from the psychology of association, especially WUNDT's reflections, it was henceforth assumed that the process of acquisition of a second language could and should run analogously to the process of first language acquisition. This assumption can be characterized from a semiotic perspective as follows: by means of presentation (on the part of the teacher) and repetition (on the part of the learner) exclusively in the target language a triadic relationship between representamen, interpretant and object can be formed directly so that the associative connection to the native language and the resulting interference in the process of learning the foreign language can be excluded.

The process of inferring meaning was here supposed to be supported by showing objects and/or by making illustrative gestures. Semiotically interpreted, this means that the L_2 representamen that is presented is given access to the immediate object simultaneously either (A) by indexical reference (deixis) or ostension, or (B) by imitative presentation of objects of reality in the form of iconic pictographs³⁴ or contiguity signs.³⁵ The objects of reality are as a rule not (re)presented here in culture specific differentiation, so that links to both languages and cultures are gained by means of the immediate object. In contrast to the grammar-translation method, however, the triadic sign relationship of the native language is not given a central role in the process of teaching meaning in the direct method. But here, too, interlinguistic interferences remain possible because of the connection of the object with the triadic sign relationship of the native language (cf. fig. 3).

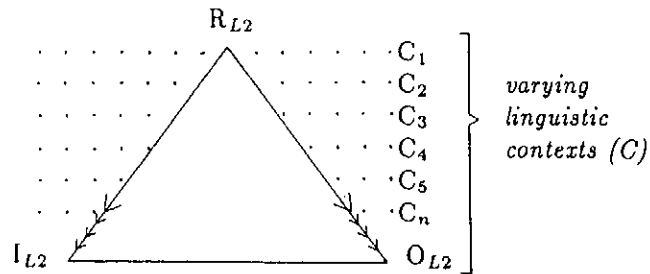
3.5. The practice of using only one language in the process of teaching as begun by the direct method was continued by the audio-lingual and the audio-visual method. In accordance with its behavioristic orientation the *audio-lingual method* aimed at foreign language acquisition

Fig. 3:



sition by means of the repetition of language patterns (mimicry memorization and pattern drill), that is, by means of *imitation* and *habitualization*. Here, meanings were supposed to be acquired in the context of varying structures of the target language, similarly to first language acquisition. But because of the feeling of uncertainty in the "effort after meaning" (BARTLETT 1932) it is, contrary to the requirement and the intention of the method, as a rule necessary to take recourse to the meaning structures of the native language. Thus, the audio-lingual method restricts itself to the *verbal* context in teaching meaning and neglects the pragmatic contextual situation of language acquisition and use: verbal stimuli, which are drilled principally in the language laboratory, are followed by verbal reinforcement. Here the reinforcement of the structure and the ability to *reproduce* it are implicitly and falsely identified with language acquisition as a whole.³⁶ It turns out that linguistic material can be used here without ensuring that a (meaningful) sign process takes place. An interpretation and explanation of how this happens is that the L_2 representamen is repeated by the learner with the aim of inferring the meaning, without his being able to assign interpretant or object; but it is not until this assignment has taken place that the necessary triadic relationship and thus also a sign generating process arises (cf. fig. 4).

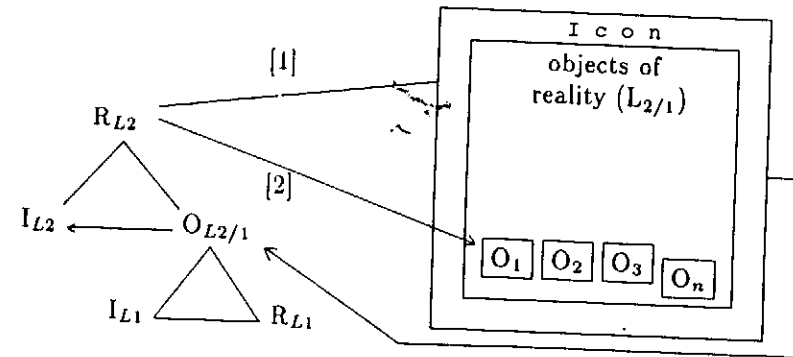
Fig. 4:



3.6. The *audio-visual method* on the other hand is characterized by a fuller incorporation of extralinguistic (situative) features as a help in acquisition of meaning. It attempts to make the meanings conveyed by the linguistic signs decodable for the learner by means of the presentation of objects of reality with visual media *before* training imitative (re)productive skills. The teaching of meaning on the part of the teacher and the inference of meaning on the part of the learner take place in two *phases*: Whereas the learner is supposed to receive a global impression of the total situation through a first presentation by auditive and visual media, in a second phase the teacher brings out the single constitutive elements, particularly lexical items, on this basis, taking recourse especially to the visual material and elements from previous lessons.³⁷ This working out of the meanings of the target language following the first presentation can be designated as *semantization discourse*.

The presentation of the L_2 representamen in the audio-visual method is thus accompanied by iconic signs that represent objects of the target culture. In addition, the culture specific character of these objects is to be taken account of inasmuch as the L_2 representamen is presented in the context of situatively correlated objects. This culture specific bond is preserved in the focussing on the iconic signs representing objects of reality that takes place in the semantization discourse (2) by means of indexical reference (cf. fig. 5):

Fig. 5:



Thus, the process of teaching and of inferring meanings in the audio-visual method has in parts a form quite similar to that of the direct method. Still, there are essential differences — also from a semiotic point of view:

- (1) In the audio-visual method there is as a rule no indexical reference to objects of reality but rather to iconic representations of them.
- (2) The iconic representation in the audio-visual method is static and two-dimensional, but permits a higher level of iconicity in comparison to the pictographic and contiguity-oriented representation of the direct method.
- (3) Objects of the target culture can be depicted at a maximal level of iconicity. This holds true particularly of objects whose cultural specificity is especially appropriate for iconic representation (for example English 'bread' and French 'baguette' or German 'Brot') and/or which differ essentially from those of the culture of origin (for example Russian 'samovar' and English 'teapot'). Cultural interference cannot, of course, be fully excluded by these means, but the cultural semiotic connection to signs of the culture of origin can be put into perspective.
- (4) Teaching meaning takes place in the context of relatively fixed teaching phases, whereby the global understanding of the sense precedes the semantization of single signs.

- (5) The objects are not focussed upon in isolation from their situative and culture-specific context, but are placed from the beginning (in the first phase) in a situative total context that *models* a communicative situation outside the learning situation. The connection to the culture specific context is preserved when focussing on single elements in the explicative second phase.

3.7. Of course, the forms of teaching meaning, which are differently accentuated in the various methods, can in actual teaching practice be combined with each other and can complement each other in various ways. Typologically, the individual procedures can be summarized as follows:

1. Explanation with the aid of pictorial representations
 - 1.1. In a new lesson:
 - 1.1.1. Referring/pointing to depicted objects
 - 1.1.2. Referring/pointing to a situation
 - 1.2. In a known lesson:
 - Referring/pointing to a situation
 - 1.3. Not contained in the text book:
 - 1.3.1. Objects
 - 1.3.2. Situations
 - 1.3.3. Blackboard drawings
2. Explanation by showing objects
 - 2.1. From the actual learning situation (class)
 - 2.2. Especially provided
3. Explanation by reference to common knowledge
 - 3.1. Related to experience in the teaching situation
 - 3.2. Related to general experience
4. Explanation by presentation without images
 - 4.1. Demonstration/imitation
 - 4.1.1. Actions (kinetic imitation)
 - 4.1.2. Onomatopoetic imitation
 - 4.1.3. Imitation of gestures and facial expression
 - 4.1.4. Portrayal in the form of play using a larger situative context (class as backdrop)
5. Explanation by means of (variation of) the verbal context
6. Explanation by means of familiar vocabulary (cooperative semantization)
 - 6.1. Paraphrase
 - 6.2. Description/definition
 - 6.3. Synonyms/antonyms
 - 6.4. Hyponyms/hypernyms
7. Stating the equivalent in the language of origin.

The various procedures for teaching meaning in the target language can no longer be supported with the argument that interference by the native language can thus be eliminated from the process of acquisition (perhaps even completely).³⁸ Arguments for the application of semantization procedures using the target language can, however, be adduced in the following context of justification:

- (1) Semantization procedures using the target language are necessary when bilingual teaching is not possible because of the constellation of the learner group or because of the teacher-learner constellation (learner groups with heterogeneous native languages; teachers who lack a command of the native language(s) of the learner group);
- (2) They are a methodic means of training a *part* of the skill of listening comprehension in the target language;
- (3) With diversified structuring and application they can promote interest and motivation, and intensify the learning process.

It follows from point (3) that the procedures for teaching meaning cited above are not restricted to teaching methods using only the target language and can retain their value for language acquisition in bilingual forms of teaching. Even more: a multimodal internalization and habitualization can be attained by means of bilingual meaning teaching and the additional use of further procedures of meaning teaching. Thus, the acquisition of signs of the foreign language can be intensified by producing complex connections of representamen, interpretant and immediate (under certain circumstances also the dynamical) object through multiple perception and processing mechanisms.³⁹

The demand to take account systematically of multimodal coding immediately leads to questions of the situative and contextual structuring of teaching as an independent and specially organized form of communication and interaction.⁴⁰ Consideration of this question can be left up to the field of *pragmatics*. The pragmatic analysis yields data that can help foreign language teaching research to structure and model the process of formation of signs in teaching and learning discourses with reference to linguistic behavior as observed in use in real situations.

4. Educational Objective: Intercultural Competence

Semiotics has had an explicit influence on second language instruction research and second language teaching particularly by means of *linguistic pragmatics*. MORRIS's distinction of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic dimensions of semiotics, and the development of the pragmatic dimension in the discussion of the concept of situation,⁴¹ of speech acts and linguistic behavior,⁴² and of communicative competence⁴³ has prompted foreign language didactics:

- to work out the structure of authentic speech situations and to develop the linguistic ability to act in these situation according to specific roles;
- to compile catalogues of topics and situations with attributions of speech functions and linguistic intentions;
- to emphasize the communicative needs of the learner and to relegate grammatical progression as a control factor determining instruction to the background.⁴⁴

The reorientation demanded by communicative didactics has not remained without contradiction in foreign language teaching research. Referring to the function of morphological systematization as well as of systematization of sentence and text syntactics, some warn that syntactic learning⁴⁵ might be neglected and demand that pragmatic principles be integrated into the teaching and learning process without abrogating the principle of systematic development of grammatical competence. Sometimes fundamental doubt is expressed that pragmatics can make a contribution to foreign language teaching at all, since the recognition and use of communicative functions are held to be *communicative universals*.⁴⁶ Of course, the learner of a foreign language does not need to learn that, for example, *questions* or *statements* can have the function of *requests*, or that there are speech acts such as "agreeing", "refusing", "warning", and so on, because he has learned these as communicative functions in the course of enculturation in his native language. However, he needs to know the adequate linguistic means to be able to decode and use these speech acts correctly in communication. Thus, pragmatics still provides a framework for the analysis of situations of linguistic behavior specific to language and culture that helps to overcome the reduction of second language instruction exclusively

to the learning of language.

For second language instruction, imparting the qualification to communicate as the highest functional objective of language learning means imparting the qualification for intercultural communication. But since a learner cannot go through the entire process of enculturation in a second language and culture in the context of foreign language teaching, educational objectives must be explicitly determined for areas of communicative functional importance that are extracted from the totality of possible speech actions in a certain culture as situative and thematic goal categories. In addition to the most frequently recurring morphosyntactic regularities that can be regarded as the *minimal grammar* to be taught, work has been done on lexical minima in recent years.⁴⁷ The questions of the culture specific dimension of vocabulary that are relevant in this context — for which the works of SAPIR and WHORF has brought about a heightened awareness within foreign language didactics too — clearly show that partial semiotic systems cannot and must not be examined in isolation from the other semiotic systems of a given culture.⁴⁸ In this connection, the efforts of Soviet second language instruction research are interesting; the aim here is to establish the average cultural knowledge of an average Russian in order to gain the basic stock of knowledge that is also to be taught to foreigners.⁴⁹ However, the method of ascertaining this comprehends only a small part of the cultural competence, namely explicit knowledge acquired in the educational institution school.

We designate the ability to understand culturally moulded actions and to perform them in such a manner that they are or can be understood and accepted by members of the target culture as *cultural competence*.⁵⁰ This definition makes it clear that the field of everyday knowledge of a culture acquired during socialization or enculturation which is not necessarily at the disposal of the native speaker in the form of explicit knowledge must also be taken into consideration for teaching *intercultural competence*. In order to avoid intercultural misunderstandings here, all partial semiotic systems relevant in speech acts must be analysed in cultural contrast, whereby the intertwining of verbal and nonverbal components of communicative interaction is especially important.

Thus, for successful contact between cultures or societies at least

rudimentary intercultural competence is necessary; this can be taught only if the teaching process imparts insight into the following facts:

- that each culture as a totality and each semiotic system in it “is understood not as the only one possible, but as one among potentially existent variants” (LOTMAN 1974: 430), and that all culture specific behavior is only one option among possible behavioral variants;
- that cultures as well as single semiotic systems are always dynamic and must not be taken to be static, and consequently that experiences within and knowledge of a culture (particularly of an internally differentiated one) can never be regarded as “closed”;
- that all linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena are subject to a complex culture specific patterning, and that “correspondences” in the culture of origin in the sense of “translations” are at best relative equivalents;⁵¹
- that each culture generates both an automodel of itself and a heteromodel of other cultures, and that the autostereotypes and heterostereotypes arising from them influence intercultural communication; these are just what have to be recognized for what they are and overcome.

NOTES

- 0 The authors thank M. Fleischer and R. Köhler for valuable suggestions and comments.
- 1 Because of the comprehensiveness of its aims, Soviet cultural semiotics — namely the “Theses on semiotic research into culture” by LOTMAN, USPENSKIJ, IVANOV, TOPOROV, PJATIGORSKIJ (1973) — has a special rank in the field of semiotic research into cultural phenomena. This view is shared also by western researchers such as WINNER (1981: 2) in her discussion of the state of the art; also KOCH (1986: 92), who recognizes in the work of the Moscow and Tartu schools the groundwork of the attempt “to define and to structure more clearly culture as the genuine object of the discipline of semiotics.”
- 2 BENVENISTE 1969: 131
- 3 cf. LOTMAN 1974: 430
- 4 cf.: “Sprachlehrforschung” (1983: 12ff.).— With regard to the relevant topic areas there are some significant overlappings with traditional “foreign language education” or “foreign language methodology”. The same holds true for parts of second language instruction research (cf. note 17).
- 5 Exceptions to this are particularly studies such as, e.g.: DUHAMEL 1976, KÖHRING/SCHWERDTFEGER 1976, MELENK 1980, and FONTANILLE (ed.) 1984. In our opinion, however, it is not only second language instruction research that profits from the semiotic orientation by gaining a “scientific discipline as a framework of reference” (KÖHRING/SCHWERDTFEGER 1976: 56) such that “semiotics can serve as a bridge” (MELENK 1980); semiotics can also profit from language teaching research: This holds true both for intercultural and for culture typological questions, which can be made substantially more concrete, and also for research into the processes of emergence and development of signs on the basis of a semiotic competence that is already developed and operational.
- 6 We stress the fact that in the school subject canon in the Federal Republic of Germany Latin is treated on a par with living languages. It is only against this background that the fact that

- Latin competes with modern foreign languages can be understood.
- 7 cf. also BAUR 1983: 18f.
 - 8 cf. CHRIST 1980: 57f., HAARMANN 1974, KLOSS 1974
 - 9 cf. e.g. NEUNER (ed.) 1979, KRAUSKOPF 1985
 - 10 HERMANN 1978: 85f.
 - 11 The assumption of a monolingual society is, of course, an idealization, since the speakers of dialects and sociolects can, according to definition, be regarded as bilingual. (cf. AMMON/KNOOP/RADTKE (eds.) (1978).
 - 12 cf. EHLICH 1981, who develops a model of the development of knowledge of language in various generations of migrants.
 - 13 cf. BOOS-NÜNNING 1983, FTHENAKIS et al. 1985: 183ff.
 - 14 see e.g. STÖLTING 1980, SKUTNABB-KANGAS/TOUKOMAA 1976
 - 15 It is particularly the UNESCO-study by SKUTNABB-KANGAS/TOUKOMAA (1976) that made it clear that those children of migrants (from Finland to Sweden) who had a poor command of their native language also only reached a low level in the second language. It is characteristic of such "semilingualism" that the deficient cognitive basis in the native language results in the children's remaining behind monolingual children in their cognitive linguistic development in *both* languages. But with a continuous and normal development beyond the tenth year of life the children developed the same cognitive linguistic abilities as monolingual children of the reference linguistic community.
 - 16 The Council of the European Communities adopted a policy guideline on 25th July 1977 calling upon the member states to provide children of migrants with teaching in their native language and in the study of their native country. The languages offered in the educational institutions of the receiving countries are thus increased step by step. This increase becomes especially manifest when the languages of origin can also be chosen by the children of the receiving country as part of the foreign language offerings. - On the origin of the policy guideline cf. BOOS-NÜNNING et al. 1983.
 - 17 In contrast to second language instruction research, second lan-

- guage acquisition research studies uncontrolled acquisition processes. On the aims and methods of second language acquisition research cf. CLAHSEN/MEISEL/PIENEMANN 1983, MCLAUGHLIN 1982, KLEIN 1984.
- 18 FRIES 1945, LADÓ 1957; cf. BAUSCH 1973
 - 19 cf. e.g. BAUSCH/RAABE 1978, EDMONDSON/HOUSE 1979: 161, RAABE 1974
 - 20 DULAY/BURT 1973, 1974
 - 21 cf. BAUSCH/KASPER 1978 and KNAPP-POTTHOFF/KNAPP 1982 with further references
 - 22 on this point see BAUSCH/KASPER 1978, KIELHÖFER/BÖRNER 1979, KNAPP-POTTHOFF/KNAPP 1982
 - 23 cf. FAERCH/KASPER (eds.) 1983
 - 24 see KASPER 1981: 452f.
 - 25 A further central question, which shall not be dealt with in this context, concerns the role of metalinguistic reflection or raising topics to awareness in the teaching process (cf. e.g. KRASHEN 1982).
 - 26 cf. BUTZKAMM 1973, WELLER 1981
 - 27 cf. MACNAMARA 1972, HÖRMANN 1976
 - 28 Although such studies as those of ULLMANN 1975 or BENTELE 1984, which deal with questions of acquisition and development of linguistic meaning relationships from an explicit semiotic perspective, refer to PEIRCE's reflections on the theory of signs, they neglect certain problems relevant to our question. An exception to this is NÖTH's 1983, 1985: 314ff. proposals; some essential aspects with regard to methodology, which are treated by us below, have been dealt with for the first time by NÖTH from a semiotic perspective. The "simplifications" of PEIRCE's reflections on the theory of signs in the following do not claim to be an exact "exegesis" of his works. This is hardly possible within the framework of the present essay both because of PEIRCE's contradictory exposition itself and because of numerous contradictory interpretations of his works. PEIRCE's categories are only a point of departure, the concepts used and their interpretation are to be taken only in the sense in which they are defined in the text.

- BAUR/GRZYBEK 1986 point out that, in the course of meaning acquisition in particular during *second* language instruction, processes can be observed that are comparable to riddle structures.
- 29 The paragraphs cited here and in the subsequent text refer to those of the eight volume edition of the "*Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*".
- 30 Such a view could under certain circumstances make the immediate object appear to be an iconic representation of the dynamic object in the consciousness of the interpreter, which would be the necessary presupposition for the acquisition of the interpretant. Such an interpretation could have equivalents in neuropsychological mechanisms as indicated by IVANOV 1978 or GRZYBEK 1984a. However, this question requires more detailed study. In any case, questions about foreign language acquisition can be posed here too from a neurosemiotic perspective. (cf. BAUR/GRZYBEK 1984, GRZYBEK 1983, 1984a).
- 31 From a semiotic perspective, a parallel arises here to the above mentioned psychological studies of MACNAMARA 1972 und HÖRMANN 1976 (cf. note 24).
- 32 cf. KÖNIGS 1983: 410
- 33 Figures 2-5 do not, of course, claim to depict the totality of the processes taking place in foreign language acquisition. Rather, each focusses on what is specific to the teaching method in question.
- 34 cf. EKMAN/FRIESEN 1969
- 35 cf. ECO 1973: 64.- A contiguity sign would be for example closing the hand as if (!) holding a gun (that in reality is not there!) and making a motion with the index finger as if (!) pulling the trigger. Such a contiguity sign must be distinguished from an iconic imitation of the gun itself.
- 36 cf. FRIES 1945, LADO 1957, RIVERS 1964
- 37 on the audio-visual methode cf. FIRGES/PELZ 1976
- 38 cf. BUTZKAMM 1973, KIELHÖFER 1978, WELLER 1971
- 39 cf. BAUR/GRZYBEK 1984, 1985a
- 40 on the analysis of pragmatic aspects of communication in learning situations cf. EHLICH/REHBEIN 1986

- 41 cf. BAYER 1977
- 42 cf. e.g. REHBEIN 1977
- 43 cf. HABERMAS 1971
- 44 cf. PIEPHO 1974
- 45 cf. HÜLLEN 1979a,b; CHRIST 1977; KLEINEIDAM 1985: 36ff.
- 46 DIGESER 1983: 56f.
- 47 see HÜLLEN/RAASCH/ZAPP (eds.) 1977.- On the grammatical minimum in particular see: KAUFMANN 1977, CHRIST 1979, KLEINEIDAM 1985.- Also of interest in this connection are EISMANN's (1983) reflections on a minimum stock of gestures or PERMYAKOV's studies on a paremic minimum (i.e., a minimum stock of proverbs, proverbial sayings and similar types of dicta). - See on this point GRZYBEK 1984b.
- 48 cf. BELYAYEV 1959, SPILLNER 1978, MÜLLER 1981
- 49 VEREŠČAGIN/KOSTOMAROV 1973
- 50 cf. also GÖHRING 1976 (particularly p. 187f.)
- 51 cf. LOTMAN 1974: 435. - Similar reflections pointing in the same direction are made within the framework of study of the country and culture as a part of language teaching research and/or didactics and methodology of foreign language teaching (cf. BAUR 1983, particularly 26f.).

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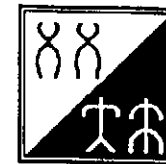
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Part I

edited

by

WALTER A. KOCH



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