

Semiotic Broadening of Sign:

A Semiotic Analysis of the Black Color-Sign

ABSTRACT

The purpose of writing this article is to show the symmetrical function of linguistics semantics and semiotics. This article explores how semantic broadening in natural languages can be generalized to semiotics, the study of signs and symbolic communication. This study demonstrates that signs, whether members of verbal or non-verbal systems, can be studied similarly to semantic broadening. After introducing the process of semantic broadening, the discussion of the function of this process in semiotics is narrowed down to a case study of the black color-sign. The research method of this analysis is based on qualitative methodology and by collecting data based on a simple assumption which shows that semiotic broadening is a superordinate term that can have explanatory adequacy and can be expanded to verbal and non-verbal signs.

Keywords: Sign; Color; Black; Semantic Broadening; Synchronic Analysis; Diachronic Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Discussion around semantic broadening – a semantic change process – was initially introduced by Bréal in 1897 (Bréal, 1897). Bréal was one of the founders of historical-philological semantics (Geeraerts, 2010) in which he divided a number of processes affecting the semantic change of words into intervals. According to Bréal (1897), semantic broadening means when the meaning of a word changes to a broader than its earlier meaning. This process is also known as semantic generalization, semantic expansion, or semantic extension (Fromkin, 2019). Therefore, semantic

broadening is a process whereby a word with a specific or limited meaning is expanded upon through time. For instance, the word 'business' originally meant the state of being busy but has since been broadened to encompass all kinds of work activities. Similarly, the word 'bird' was previously used to only refer to young birds in their nests but now implies any bird. Lastly, the word 'thing' meant a public assembly, however, its definition has been extended so broadly that it can now refer to an entity of any kind. These examples represent diachronic broadening, the semantic process in which a word within a given temporal interval (i) has a limited meaning, but in the next temporal interval (j) it loses its earlier meaning. Contrastingly, another kind of semantic process known as synchronic broadening describes the situation in which broadening leads to the same word having multiple meanings. For instance, the phrase 'to see' has its original meaning but can alternatively mean 'to understand'. Another example is the phrase 'to run' which, by the process of semantic broadening, can also be used to refer 'to work'.

Debate about semantic broadening was and is always a part of lexical semantics – the study of meaning. In lexical semantics, a word is a meaningful unit and thus, it is unsurprising that all semantic textbooks deal with 'meaning' at the word level. However, semantic broadening can also occur at the phrase or sentence level, for example: 'it rings a bell', 'rise to the bait', and so on. Furthermore, non-verbal signs (or symbols) can also be subject to semantic broadening, a process known as 'semiotic broadening'. For instance, a 'no entry' traffic sign can be hung on a door, or distressed jeans, which once could have inferred poverty, are now considered fashionable. Accordingly, the main discussion of this article deals with examples of semiotic broadening.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology selected for this research is based on qualitative approach by considering the Pastoureau (2008) which is the most comprehensive research on black color, although based on

subject and not time. In this paper, the writer selected randomly the main meaning of this sign as a narrative for black. Using this narrative is the main core of this analysis. After selecting these core narrative, the researcher tried to analyze the change path of this sign according to the assumption of the writer.

INTENTION OF SIGN

Every sign, be it from the linguistic and/or non-linguistic sign system, should refer to an object other than itself. The terms ‘sense’ (Frege, 1892), ‘concept’, ‘signified’ (Saussure, 1916), ‘thought’ (Ogden and Richards, 1923), or ‘intension’ (Carnap, 1956) are relatively synonym from different points of view in such a situation, what is important here is that each sign must have a ‘meaning’ outside its physical form. However, a sign can only be interpreted in context. In other words, the sign must be used in context in order to be meaningful. For example, a ‘no entry’ sign is a member of the traffic sign system and will show a kind of prohibition when present at the beginning of an alley or street. However, if one was to hang the same ‘no entry’ sign on a door, it could provide additional information or indicate a hazard. Similarly, and when used in the appropriate context, a rose could be a sign of love but in a flower shop it is not.

Thus, if the intension of an expression is exposed, the same sign can be used with a different meaning/s. A crescent symbol can have multiple meanings, for example: [1] on a chronographic watch a crescent would refer to ‘night’, [2] when situated atop a dome it could indicate a mosque, and [3] in the movies, when depicted on a samurai helmet, it would infer the rank of ‘commander’. However, a question now arises: Are we are dealing with one sign with multiple meanings or with different signs with the same form? Answering this question is not a simple task due to a lack of literature and documentation used for understanding the truth value of the answer. For instance, the flags of many Muslim countries use similar color combinations in conjunction with a star and

crescent, and the same numbers (e.g., seven and twelve) are repeatedly used to represent hours, weeks, months and so on. There is no valid evidence for showing the historical background of using these signs. However, an acceptable assumption can be made; if a sign with ‘C1’ concept develops into ‘C3’ concept, there should be an intermediate concept like ‘C2’ or the concepts should share the same path. If this assumption is accurate, one should be able to use a sign as an example and test the validity of this proposition. For instance, the semantic change of borrowed French word ‘toilet’ [= a cloth for wrapping, as C1], using euphemistically for ‘lavatory’ as C4 must have a historical path. It shows that C1 restricted to ‘a cloth covering a dressing table’, as C2. By the function of metonymy, C2 changed to C3 expressing the meaning of ‘the table and dressing at it’, as in ‘do one’s toilet’ and finally used as C4.

NARRATIVE OF BLACK

The concept of any kind of sign is a piece of individual information. When we ask somebody about the meaning of a sign, the answer is usually the definition of that sign expressed using several words or sentences. Using a book by Pastoureau (2008), the writer collected all sentences from various cases associated with the ‘black’ color sign. The narrative (1) shows the sentences from ‘a’ to ‘u’.

(1)

- a. When there is no visible light color, there is black.
- b. Black represents darkness.
- c. Black is evil.
- d. Black means night.
- e. Black is the color of underworld.

- f. Black is the color of mourning.
- g. Black is the color of death.
- h. Black means the end.
- i. Black means secret.
- j. Black refers to magic.
- k. Black refers to violence.
- l. Black was worn by craftsmen.
- m. Black is the color of humility.
- n. Black is a sign of penitence.
- o. Black means power.
- p. Black means importance.
- q. Black refers to fascism.
- r. Black means north.
- s. Black means mystery.
- t. Black means unknown.
- u. Before God create light, the universe was black.

Due to the irrelevancy of temporal, local, social, and cultural features, the sentences in narrative (1) are collectively neutralized. The sources for collecting sentences ‘a’ to ‘u’ were poor and the writer had limited information with which to deal with the truth value of these propositions. All sentences in narrative (1) could change or perhaps not even be valid according to time and location. Hence, the assumption is that if we were to only deal with the propositions from ‘a’ to ‘u’, we can conclude that the truth value of each sentence depends on a specific possible world and a specific moment or interval. Thus, we can use the logical index $\langle w_n, i_n \rangle$, whereby ‘w’ represents the

possible world and 'i' refers to the interval. In this situation, our convention is that $\langle w_1, i_1 \rangle$ is earlier than $\langle w_2, i_2 \rangle$ which will be indicated by (2).

(2) $\langle w_1, i_1 \rangle < \langle w_2, i_2 \rangle$

In such a situation, there is a somewhat causal string which shows the process of semiotic shifting from each sentence of the narrative (1) to another. If, for instance, in a possible world 'w₂' and an interval 'i₅', the sentence (1) d [black means night] was relevant, then the causal string would show that (1) d must be supported by (1) b [black represents darkness]. In other words, if (1) b within the logical index of $\langle w_2, i_4 \rangle$ was relevant in a possible world and interval, then the semiotic broadening of (1) b to (1) d must be (3).

(3) $[b \langle w_2, i_4 \rangle] < [d \langle w_3, i_5 \rangle]$

(3) Shows that 'b' in a possible world as W and at a time of I must exist before d in the same w and i. By the assumption of the writer, this is how we can explain the semiotic broadening of signs. If, in a local and temporal 'A', a specific sign has a concept, then the broadening of this concept should have a valid cause.

Now, let us using (3) and give some examples by considering 'black knight'. According to literature, a black knight like 'Ivanhoe' had a black robe and a black helmet and represented a person or an enigmatic figure hiding his/her identity. Therefore, for the emergence or creation of this figure, a sentence like (1) i [black means secret] would have needed to be a prerequisite. Thus, and sticking with our example of Ivanhoe, the proposition 'black knight' could then have been broadened to Zorro and thereafter Batman. These figures show us that (1) i is still valid.

In 12th century, the Benedictine monks wore black as a sign of humility and penitence. If the color of a robe needs to be used in this concept and (1) m [black is the color of humility] and (1) n [black

is the color of penitence] seem relevant, we can then imagine that (1) f [black is the color of mourning] expanded to (1) h [black means the end] and, in turn, led to the activation of (1) m and (1) n. In the 14th century, however, black robes were the sign of importance and seriousness. Thus, if (1) p [black means importance] was active in this time, we can assume the broadening of (1) o [black means power] occurred. In these examples, the black color broadened from a sign of humility to a sign of power and thereafter to a sign of importance. Interestingly, the black color of the robes of judges and professors still hold the signs of power and importance today.

Similarly, if darkness is associated with coldness, then we can imagine that (1) b [black represents darkness] expanded to (1) r [black means north] and an expression like the ‘black sea’ emerged.

Now, let us consider expressions like ‘black market’ or ‘blackmail’. The ‘black market’ is used to denote the trade of illegal goods. Thus, one could suppose that ‘black’ was expanded to the concept of ‘illegal’. ‘Black mail’ is an act of nefariously threatening someone to do something they would not normally do. Thus, (1) c [black is evil] could be expanded and could have given rise of (1) o [black means power].

Another interesting example is the black shirt of the Gestapo and the Italian Fascists during the first half of the 20th century. This color was worn by people that could be associated with (1) o [black means power] and (1) p [black means important]. However, for anti-Nazism and anti-Fascism, the same shirt color might be associated with (1) g [black is the color of death] and (1) k [black refers to violence].

If this assumption is acceptable, the causal strength of semiotic broadening of ‘black sign’ can possibly be sequences like (4) to (11).

(4). $a \rightarrow b \rightarrow d \rightarrow u \rightarrow r$

(5). $b \rightarrow e \rightarrow c \rightarrow s$

(6). $e \rightarrow i$

(7). $e \rightarrow g \rightarrow h$

(8). $i \rightarrow j \rightarrow t \rightarrow o \rightarrow q$

(9). $g \rightarrow f \rightarrow n$

(10). $h \rightarrow m$

(11). $o \rightarrow k \rightarrow p \rightarrow l$

Surely, this not the only causal strength of the sentences of narrative (1) and it is only an assumption which is valid for the writer. The writer has no claim to the validity of sequences (4) to (11); these are only examples used to illustrate the semiotic broadening of a sign.

CONCLUSION

In this article, the semiotic analysis of the black color-sign was based on three assumptions. First, the intention of each sign is formed by propositions, which, on account of the experienced nature of each preposition, need to be individualistic. Second, the use of a sign in a different concept must be developed through semiotic broadening, a process which is relevant in a specific possible world and an interval. Third, due to the differences in individual experiences, the number of propositions in a narrative and their relative importance differ from one person to another, while simultaneously being dependent on temporal, local, cultural, and social features of the sign's user.

REFERENCE

Bréal, M. (1897). *Essai de Semantique: Science des Significations*. Paris: Hachette.

Geeraerts, D. (2010). *Theories of Lexical Semantics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fromkin, V. Rodman, R. Hyams, N. (2019). *An Introduction to Language*. 11th ed. Boston: Wadsworth.

Frege, G. (1829).“Uber Sinn und Bedeutung”. *Zeitschrift fur Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*. 100. 25_50.

Ogden, C. K. and Richards, I. A. (1923). *The Meaning of Meaning*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Saussure, F. de. (1916/1983). *Course de Linguistic General*. Paris: Payot.

Carnap, R. (1956). *Meaning and Necessity*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pastoreau, M. (2008). *Black: The History of a Color*. N. J.: Princeton University Press.