SIGN IN COMMUNICATION PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

Although many linguists wrote about a psychic nature of the sign, in contemporary studies various schemes and descriptions of communicative processes continue virtually without human consciousness participation. However, the sign emerges, lives and dies on the quiet of individual consciousness beyond the immediate material connection with word forms, let alone the subject that it substitutes. Its life is short – it flashes for that short moment when thoughts about the object and the selected word form intersect and merge in the focus of active consciousness. The sign is an act and a unit of consciousness and does not leave the limits of consciousness. The thought gets a specific language form only during the concept verbalization phase.

INTRODUCTION

In the process of information transmission (concept verbalization) we deal mostly with the substance (contents), and then pay attention to the form. Recalling events from the remote past, often we cannot exactly reproduce specific heard or pronounced words, as well as the syntactic structures. We remember events, feelings, images, we recall the general contents of the discourse. With minimum time for pondering, depending on the language competence level, the grammar and syntactic shaping often occurs automatically with the use of famous models and stereotypes. This means that the language form adapts itself to the consciousness, and not vice versa.

There is a general provision that for an individual a word becomes a sign only after it enters as a linking and mediating element into the system of stable associations between objects and phenomena of the world which shape a definite mental construct (concept) upon which the sign meaning is built.

The term “sign” in its classical interpretation implies a certain referent which is an incentive (push) for generation of thoughts: the sign is an external impetus or process which occurs inside the organism initiated by the impetus.

We can assume that the structure presented by F. de Saussure is not a full-scope language sign, it is mnemonic (from Greek «memory»). The form of mnemonic storage is a separate combination of electrochemical impulses: each new representation of interaction with the environment activates the existing mnemonic structure and builds a mental memory inventory. This inventory forms a base for the perception mechanism as cognitive interaction with the environment having orienting nature.

In the scheme proposed by F. de Saussure, according to the latest studies in cognitive science, the term notion can be substituted for concept, because the concept as a quantum of structured knowledge is broader than a notion [1]. Along with notional attributes, it can include subjective stylistic components and the object’s image. The acoustic image can be denoted as image of sound form, since the sound form may have a graphic image in addition to the acoustic one.

We consider the language sign as a discontinuing unity of the mental and the physical, not to mention that the physical contains the mental. The language sign is a real combination of the physical and the psychical, but the language sign arises only in human consciousness, and not in objective reality. A perceived word form, like a “switch”, updates the concept in our consciousness. It does not keep it inside, i.e., in the communication process the perceived word form as a signal activates a relevant concept in the consciousness [2], [3].

Language sign understanding

Thus, in our opinion, the language sign includes a sign form (graphic or acoustic) and a mnemonic structure (sound form image and concept). If any external referent is involved into the sign situation, then consciousness will react to it as a sign, and we will have the sign in its classical interpretation. We point out that C.K.Ogden and I.Richards, unlike G. Frege, draw a border between the sign form which fully belongs to the objective material world, and its substance which never goes beyond the limits of human consciousness: words themselves mean nothing. They stand for anything or “have a meaning” only when the conscious subject (thinker) uses them.
According to the misperceived assumption about dialectic unity of the sign substance and form, the material form often acts as a «special container» for the meaning, a material means of its transportation from point A to point B. Cf.: the meaning is a set of data (information) that correlates with the objects and phenomena of extralinguistic reality which is transmitted through the sound shell of the word. In human language the signifier «enshrouds» the signified which possesses all its properties [4]. Similar examples are quite frequently encountered in linguistic literature: among the changes of the thought generated and expressed by the language, it is important that when outwardly pronounced, the thought ceases to be property of its creator. It becomes public, starts to live its own life. This circumstance enables capitalization of human thought and its history. These statements originate from the forgotten assertion by W.Humboldt that the speech process cannot be compared with a simple transfer of material. In the communication process the listener, as well as the speaker, must reconstruct the meaning of the expression by means of its intrinsic power. All that he/she perceives, relates only to the stimulus which causes the identical phenomena [5].

The cited papers often contain descriptions in transitory meaning terms. In the routine of everyday consciousness and relevant social stereotypes which became «scientific», the authors fail to notice how they leave the limits of ontology and enter the domain of convenient and customary explanations, although those have nothing to do with reality. Such situation has no fatal nature, because the primary purpose of language is to reach an agreement. Besides, the criticized opinions of fellow linguists are mere «childish tricks» compared to the statements in all languages and at all times that the sun rises and sets, electricity runs through wires, time flies etc.

A text or a sign viewed without the denoting person do not contain any intrinsic energy and cannot organize themselves structurally. Material forms of words and texts which consist of the words are as dead as the paper on which they are written. Their meanings do not «arise» in texts due to any properties or «boiling energy» and do not enter the language personality consciousness, but are created by a person. They emerge in the language personality consciousness in the course of sign creation and decoding. This approach originates from ontology of the world in which the ideal (thought, notion, meaning) and the material (sound or graphic form) do not mingle and are not «attached» to each other in any circumstances.

This approach is explained by the fact that technically during communication no thought transfer takes place. The speaker believes that his/her listener is identical to him/her, therefore, the cognitive domain of the latter is identical to his/her own cognitive domain (which is never true), so, he/she is really surprised when a “misunderstanding” takes place. The listener creates information on his/her own, thus reducing the uncertainty by interactions in the proper cognitive domain.

**Model of communication process**

Each perceived word, gesture, flavour, taste, image is immediately interpreted by sensations. In addition, the process of remembering of the new occurs, as a rule, against the background of the positive or negative, but sufficiently strong emotional impulse which “opens doors” in the new area of neural connections. In other words, language processes as well as thinking are closely connected to sensuous and emotional expressive analyzers involved as an effective support in the process of the language information reinforcing from the stream of impressions and their memory retention. Language words function in a foggy cloud of varied contexts playing the part of designation and communication as symbols requiring for its understanding and using an additional activity – interpretation.

The above statements form the foundation of our sign communication process hypothesis:
The top part of the sign scheme is a proper signal system which includes an object (referent) and a symbol, or a word (its graphic or sound form). The bottom part of the scheme reflects only the psychic part of the sign, i.e., its codification and decoding in consciousness. It includes a sound or graphic «imprint» of a word form (language sign form image) in consciousness and a concept (notion about the object, personal meanings, object image, scheme, frame etc.). Respectively, the word form is directly linked with the image of this form in consciousness. The latter is also connected straightly with the concept (a thought about an object or a phenomenon). We interpret the sign as a bilateral essence, as unity of the material and the ideal (F. de Saussure says that only the top psychic part represents the sign itself) [7]-[12]. As for a real object (e.g., a notch on a tree, crossed arms and legs during conversation, a stone on a road etc.), if the situation is a sign or signal one for the person, the reaction to this situation may be a thought about it; as a rule, it is not chaotic, but belongs to a frame, a scheme, a representation, an image, i.e., represents a structural part of the concept (the scheme top).

In this case, the thought about the object may be not expressed in speech and will remain at the image apprehension level. When communication takes place (e.g., one needs to inform about the danger signaled by the sign), before the sound is produced, it is required to pass the phases of «concept→word psychic image→word», i.e., from the referent counter-clockwise till the word.

In an internal dialogue (monologue) the sound (graphic) form is not produced; the sign is understood at a sensual, imagery or language level, i.e., at the level of a concept and/or a verbalized concept.

In the initial phase the contents of a statement conceived by a speaker or a writer is not a sign one, because it is not vested into a sign form. To enter the recipient’s consciousness, the contents enter the domain of «physiological elements» which help to vest it into a sound or graphic form. The form is «built up» till the sign, exclusively in the sense that the message sender’s consciousness which controls its part of the communication act is assured, that the output sign corresponds to the initial idea. The listener does not receive the sign, but its form as configurations of sound vibrations or imprints on paper, i.e., a text as a material object.

For communication purposes, the speaker does not associate the meaning of the sign, i.e., the thought about a nomination object, with air vibrations or letters on paper, which are then transponded to the listener, and the latter does not separate the substance from this means of transportation and does not include it directly into his/her knowledge system. The substance remains in consciousness; thus, it does not enter the message receiver’s consciousness. Consequently, the sign stayed in the message sender’s memory, and he/she sent material signals as air vibrations or configuration of letters on a carrier. Upon receipt of the signifiers, i.e., word forms, the message receiver launches his/her mechanisms of transformation of material signals into biological, neuron ones. As a result, a word form image emerges in his/her consciousness on the basis of a linguistic code.

The communicative time pressure conditions set strict requirements to the nature of the link between the form and the substance of the language sign. They determine the link of each form with just one substance both at output and input of the communicating consciousness, i.e., the systemic unambiguousness of the language form at the moment of its real functioning. Thus, the signal is standardized, which is also important. An individual perceives a certain range of signs effectiveness by watching the others use them and by using them himself/herself. Using the signs in specific configurations, the organism gains knowledge about the sign purpose, its potential as a «tool».
The process of meaning production

Until «the linguistic turn» in philosophy, it was the philosophy of «noncommunicating consciousness.» Philosophers like M. Buber, M. Bakhtin, G. Deleuze, J. Derrida shattered the stable objective and conceptual world to accommodate the communication philosophy, the philosophers of the linguistic tradition have managed to approach it from the other side. The linguistic turn meant such construction of reality interpreted it as a communicating reality and from this perspective thus clarifies things. In the opinion of L. Wittgenstein, K.-O. Apel and other communication philosophers, this reality can be perceived only from the potential participation in the communication. It is impossible to learn the internal rules and norms if one does not take part in the communicative game (L. Wittgenstein) or is not inside the lifeworld (J. Habermas). The language as a new universal of the philosophical reflection of reality, as a new metaphor of being (language is the house of Being, according to M. Heidegger) allowed the philosophers to deviate from the philosopheme of consciousness and to construct the world anew as a linguistic givenness.

There is a more careful approach to the philosophy of sign: in the semiotic world where the circulation of information acts as the main energy source, a failure in the information networks leads to incredible catastrophes. On the whole, modern information society faces the common shortage of reality, power, life with dangerous consequences.

To reiterate, each verbal and mental act is performed by the speaker with an intention to achieve a definite goal, produce a desired impact on the listener. By taking into account the modality and the pragmatic orientation of the communicants, it is necessary to consider the context of the communication as well as analyze the communicants’ real expressions. It makes sense to further illustrate the above schemes of the verbal and mental processes with specific cases.

Let us assume that in a forest one of the communicants has noticed a notch on a tree and wants to tell his companion about it. Firstly, mental properties (i.e. the decision to tell about the notch) are determined by the events with physical proper ties representing the primary cause of the intentional behavior. Thus, the first phase starts when the observer notices the notch, and the combination of the reflected rays impacts his eye retina. Since the eye is a living tissue, it receives the rays as signals converted to nervous system signals connected with the brain operation. It results in a visual object being a signal for the system responsible for recoding of these signals taking into account the knowledge available in the mind. The signal is originally «clear» to those brain structures to which it is addressed.

If the perceiving consciousness is able to correlate the image with the thought (idea, concept) about the meaning of the notch on the tree, then a reference, i.e. understanding, is formed. For this this image of the signifier and the significatum of the sign (respective idea, concept) must be united into a sign in the consciousness. A thought (concept) cannot be separated from the signifier, just as colour cannot be separated from the object. That is why a thought cannot be propagated or penetrate through the human body.

In the next phase the person has to share the information he has just received with his companion. It is clear that in the communicative time pressure all the subsequent phases are momentary: they are automatic and habitual. First, there occurs a purpose, an intention to pass the information about the sign which has just been seen. This phase provides for verbalization of the respective concept which correlates with the image of a required sound form. The form of a word sign is not a sound, but a phoneme which offers the necessary sound range and maintains the main properties of the phonic side of speech. If this form and association become an act of consciousness of the language speaker who enters into communication, then we can acknowledge that a sign was formed.

Thus, gradually there is built a lexico-semantic system which consists of signs, exist in the real consciousness and in real time. Every moment it is represented in the consciousness with an actual meaning, moreover, the individual knows how to manipulate this sign. The native language code is natural for a person, since the meanings of words and their combinations, as a rule, are absolutely clear to him. In this sense, the natural codes are “transparent” for the self-organizing system, as though directly providing it with information.

Then there develops the speech implementation phase. Once the sign leaves the active attention zone, and «a vacant space» emerges for subsequent signs, it gives start to the mechanisms of consecutive transformation of
psychic signals to biological ones and, finally, to motorial signals which cause sound vibrations. The speech implementation phase ends when the material sound form is produced. The speech activity phase starts, i.e., word signs are being shaped. This is a process of creation of material language forms capable of crossing the real space which separates the communicants, to impact the listener’s receptors and, thus, launch the mechanisms of the sense (knowledge) construction.

This phase begins, when the sign exits the active attention zone of its creator and moves to the operative memory. The signs present in the operative memory act as the support for establishment of links between the speech context (the described situation) and the language environment of the respective word.

Therefore, the discovered sign and its sound form belong to one field, and the images of the same form and contents – to the other field. This dichotomy is explained by the difference in properties of the substances under analysis. So, the notch on the tree does not possess the property of being reflected in the human consciousness, it gains possession of such property only within the individual consciousness [13], [14].

It was noted above that the speech perception mechanisms have been studied even less than the speech production mechanisms, and in the reality everyone creates his/her knowledge based on his/her own world view and thesaurus. The process of a message perception has a reverse nature and starts in the listener’s consciousness from transmission of neuron signals – the result of the drum membrane transformation. On the basis of the language code they evoke a sound form image, which in its turn is accompanied by a related conventional subject image (the notch on the tree). Upon receipt of the signifier, i.e., the word form, the recipient of the message launches his/her mechanisms of translation of material signals into biological neuron ones, and, as the result, a word form image emerges in his/her consciousness on the basis of the linguistic code [15], [16].

Due to the language system knowledge, the consciousness bearer associates it with an image of relevant content (meaning). Their merger into a dialectic unity leads to formation of a sign whose main characteristics coincide with those which were in the consciousness of the message sender. Thus, the sign is created, and it becomes clear what the subject of the message sender’s thought was.

The process of production of the meanings involves all the nervous system divisions whose receptors receive external signals. Unlike the traditional interpretation of verbal and mental processes built on simple analogies, when the communicants act as sign manipulators, this approach foresees that the communicants become sign generators. There are generators of special type which “serve” only their consciousness, when there is a need “to share” its current concern with another consciousness, and the whole body acts as the means.

CONCLUSION

The interaction of the entire concept volume in the conditions of a permanent «communicative time pressure» (minimum time for perception and reaction in the speech flow) would not satisfy the most important principle of saving which foresees using minimum cognitive efforts in the verbal and mental processes. Omission of this and other above factors will produce fragmented knowledge which will not bring us closer to the synthesis in understanding of the language and thinking phenomenon.

In the communication process no information transfer by means of a language occurs, because the listener creates information, reducing uncertainty by interactions in his/her own communicative and cognitive domain. Every language speaker acts exclusively within his/her cognitive domain. The language has the function to orientate the person in his/her cognitive domain. Therefore, actually, the speaker has no physical possibilities to transmit the substance using associated language means, i.e., the sense which he/she associates with this form in his/her consciousness.

It’s possible to suppose that invariant meanings of polysemantic words are systemically important units which demonstrate the non-reflectivity of the language system level in relation to the speech level. It should be noted phenomenology has always taken interest in such language system universal units revealing. LE includes the programme for all (or almost all) particular meanings of a word and, vice versa, each variant has subtle reference to a model which manages the process of transferred meanings semiosis.
REFERENCES