

Components and Dimensions of Linguistic Sign*

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As presented in the lucid studies by Coseriu (1970) and after him by Malmberg (1977), the thoughts about the character of a sign in general can be found in philosophical literature already from the times of Plato's *Cratylus*, but namely of Aristotle who was actually the first one to study the relationship between the thing and its name which constitutes the cornerstone of any semantics. Hence it was already in the antiquity that the wide stream of thought about the nature of the linguistic sign started, and it was oriented above all on defining the basic components of the linguistic sign and its dimensions by which it is incorporated into the system of linguistic signs as well as into the relationships with the extralinguistic reality and with its user.

A certain culmination of philosophical thought concerning the sign in general is represented by Peirce's widely based attempt at specifying the three aspects of a sign, or at the logical classification of its basic features. Peirce was the first to point out the three aspects of the sign: the aspect of its nature, the aspect of the object and the aspect of its user.

As to the aspect of the nature of a sign (*Zeichenaspekt*) Peirce differentiates *qualisign*, *sinsign* and *legisign*. However, the very sense of these three types remains rather unclear, in spite of numerous attempts at interpretation and at utilizing them in theoretical research. Much larger was the reaction to Peirce's triad of icon, index and symbol, expressing the relationship to the objective reality (*Objektaspekt*): with the icon a certain similarity with the object is presupposed; index is not a reflection but rather a reference to the object; symbol is fully independent of the object. It need not be stressed that above all the thoughts concerning this relationship of the sign to the object, and its dependence or independence of the object have been present in all the philosophical literature dealing with the sign.

Peirce's triad *rheme*, *dicent* and *argument*, evidently reflecting the logical notions term, proposition and argument, did not arouse so much attention. The attempt of Bense (1967) remained without any marked response.

As can be seen from these notes, Peirce did not devote special attention to the inner components of the linguistic sign.

Discussions explicitly aimed at the linguistic sign start only with de Saussure (1916). These discussions went in two directions: some researchers investigated the linguistic sign as a component of the system, others as a component of linguistic communication. More or less parallel with these two directions followed the distinction between the bilateral and the unilateral character of the linguistic sign.

The communication attitude to the sign in general as well as specifically to the linguistic sign started to be distinctly manifested in Morris's theory who directed the attention to the question what signs and what values must a human being master for being able to act (cf. Posner 1979). Morris's approach was not limited only to the linguistic sign; on the contrary, within the conception of behaviouristic theory of behaviour he understood the sign as a preparatory stimulus, which in the absence of the subject satisfying the impulse evokes such a chain reaction which would be evoked by the very subject satisfying the impulse.

Of course, into this definition there can also be filled in a word, as a preparatory stimulus, i.e., a sequence of signs bound to a certain communicated or communicable content. This theory engenders a thesis that became the basis for the unilateral theory of the linguistic sign. It assumes that only this particular sequence of sounds can function as linguistic sign. In

contemporary linguistics this idea is developed and enriched above all by Solncev (1971) and Panfilov (1979).

An attempt at explaining the linguistic sign from the point of view of formal logics was made by Cmorej (1985). He bases his analysis on the fact that the term 'to denote' has several meanings. However, he complicates his situation by considering the above term for nearly synonymous with the expression 'to represent' when he says that a sign is something that represents, denotes something else. Within the sense of denotation he identifies linguistic sign, on the one hand, with any physical (acoustic, graphical) or abstract object formed according to the rules of some language, and on the other hand, with any ideal element of the abstract system. But this polysemantic character of the concept (or preferably of the expression, or of the naming unit) 'linguistic sign' according to Cmorej leads to splitting into two different signs, the physical sign being the realization of the ideal sign, and the ideal sign representing the acoustic (as well as graphical) physical signs. This means a distinct dualistic (not bilateral) conception: according to Cmorej there exist two signs one of which is the realization of the other one (i.e. in a certain situation it actually represents it) and the other one is the representation of the first one. If we pursued this idea thoroughly it would mean that separately, autonomously there exist both acoustic and ideal linguistic signs. To presuppose a separate ideal linguistic sign within the above conception would, however, as demonstrated by Panfilov (1979), be considerably idealistic. Nevertheless, Cmorej later abandons this idea and conceives of the sign as a unilateral entity representing only the signifying objects and phenomena but not what they signify. From this it follows that some objects and phenomena (more exactly perhaps certain linguistic expressions) have the function of signifying extralinguistic objects. In our view, Cmorej arrives at an absurd conclusion by analysing the inner structure of linguistic sign based on the literal, formal understanding of the term 'denotational sign' or *signifiant*. If the component S_1 is understood as something that is signifying and the component S_2 as something signified, the relationship $S_1 - S_2$ should be understood as a relationship of signification, and then S_1 is actually a sign because it has the function of signifying the component S_2 .

Of course, this conclusion would be correct only under the presupposition that what denotes (*signifiant*) would be taken literally. But the linguistic sign in fact stands for the extralinguistic object or phenomenon as a whole, as a dialectic unity of those components which quite conventionally are referred to as the *signifiant* and the *signifié*. Within this unity, what is signified does not have to be separately signified and the *signifiant* cannot stand instead of the *signifié*. It is only linguistic sign as a whole, whatever its internal structuring, that has the ability and the function to stand instead of something else, but the latter is outside the language.

At the head of the theories analyzing linguistic sign as a systemic element there is de Saussure's thesis (cf. recently Krampen 1979) that linguistic sign is a bilateral unit one component of which (*signifié* – that what is signified) is formed by the notional aspect, labelled as concept by de Saussure, the other component (*signifiant* – that what signifies) is formed by the acoustic aspect labeled as *image acoustique*. Concerning the relationship of these two components discussions existed as to the arbitrariness of linguistic sign or, more exactly, as to the arbitrariness of the relationship between the signifying and the signified components.

A good summary of these discussions that were initiated above all by de Saussure's not very exact definition of arbitrariness who as if identified arbitrariness and non-motivation, is presented by Conrad (1985). By analysing various delimitations he comes to the conclusion that arbitrariness can be understood in four ways: as non-motivation, as non-naturalness, as non-causality and as non-indispensability. He himself is inclined to accept the latter conception and points out that it is in compliance with the generally accepted opinion of the conventionality of

linguistic sign. Nevertheless, it is necessary to state that whichever of the four delimitations is taken for the starting point, this will not change anything on the fact that linguistic sign in this sense is bilateral and that only as a whole, as a unity of what is signified and what signifies can it stand instead of the objects of extralinguistic reality.

Much attention has also been paid to the problem what within such conception of linguistic sign can be perceived by the senses, i.e. on the basis of what linguistic sign can function within communication. Pointed out was above all the fact that linguistic sign must have some material bearer. Morris and after him Král' (1974) postulate the material sign vehicle, Klaus (1963) speaks about the sign entity, *Zeichenkörper*, and more recently Piperek (1983) presupposes a special bearer of the sign which is closely related to the substance of the expression, but is outside the linguistic sign itself.

It is evident that the presupposition of a concrete linguistic vehicle perceivable by the senses is based on the communication attitude to the linguistic sign. In Klaus' approach this attitude is negatively reflected in the attempt to introduce into the bilateral theory of the linguistic sign the theoretical system of Morris's communication theory. The positive contribution of Klaus lies in his distinguishing the semantic and the sigmatic relationship: if the linguistic sign is an element of the system, it indispensably has to have the possibility to stand not only instead of the objects in the real world (the semantic relationship), but also instead of the ideal objects expressed by the language (the sigmatic relationship).

It would be improper to see in de Saussure's conception of the linguistic sign, in his notions of *concept* and *image acoustique*, any traces of the theory of reflection. However, *signifié* undoubtedly encompasses some reflection elements. *Signifié* certainly cannot be identified with the object of the real world, as had been indicated by Lohmann (1942 –1943). Neither does this notion belong in the sign, as could be indicated by de Saussure's expression *concept*. Neither objects (whether real or ideal) nor notions can form part of the sign because this would contradict the basic function of the sign, i.e. to stand instead of something else. In addition, concepts do not constitute components of the linguistic sign because they function as components of the thought or logical sphere, hence do not belong into the language.

Only the semantic elements can belong in the signified component of the linguistic sign, in particular, those semantic elements that are to some extent generalized, whether they are called *semes*, *sememes* or *semantic features* (Horecký 1980). Meanwhile, it is necessary to presuppose that these semantic features are variously differentiated (distinguished are at least *categorial*, *identification* and *specification* semantic features) and are structured in certain areas.

Into the signified component of the linguistic sign there obviously cannot belong any concrete sounds, or *phones*, but only *phonemes* understood as reflection realities – as objects (Král' 1974, Horecký 1977, Pauliny 1977). However, even within such conception as a rule not isolated phonemes are concerned and within the concrete linguistic sign not the whole linguistic system is concerned, but there are set sequences (*phonematic structures*) to which a particular content is bound, or certain structures of semantic features are bound. However, neither this link is direct but it is mediated by *onomatological* and *onomasiological* structures (Horecký 1980).

Linguistic sign understood in this way, as a very distinctly structured form, can schematically be represented in the following way:

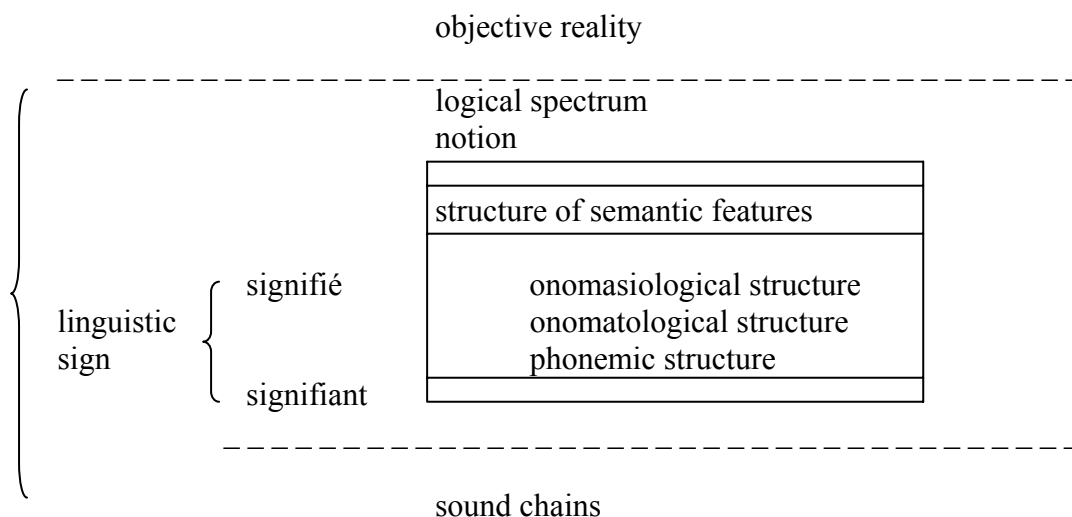


Figure 1

It would be incorrect to understand the relationship between what signifies and what is signified – especially if these components are understood in the indicated sense – as being arbitrary in the sense as if it were an incidental or unmotivated assignment. It is actually the inclusion of the onomasiological or onomatological structure into the signifying component of the linguistic sign (as it is on these levels that the concrete form of the linguistic sign is determined as far as its linguistic or lexical realization is concerned, above all in the case of derived or polylexical naming units) which shows that in most cases the motive for this assignment can be found. Moreover, as stressed e.g. by Neumann (1974), the linguistic sign as a whole, i.e. the unity of the signifying and the signified components, is a result of creative human activity aimed to build the language as a system of elements and rules suitable for creating texts. Neumann refers to this joining as the third component of the linguistic sign, i.e. the so-called prescription rule.

However, it has to be stated that in fact this is not the third component of the linguistic sign (in the sense that the linguistic sign would be trilateral), but it is rather a pragmatic dimension known already from the time of Morris, a result of creating and using the particular linguistic sign within its practical utilization in the linguistic community, i.e. it is a dynamic component of the sign (Kráľ 1974).

With regard to the above it would be difficult to agree with the solution suggested by Piperek (1983). Also in the opinion of this author the linguistic sign should be understood as being a trilateral or three-component form including the expression, the meaning and the sense, because here the sense is the feature of the whole (bilaterally understood) linguistic sign which is manifested only within linguistic communication. It is rather the Morrisian pragmatic dimension.

Also Desheryeva (1985) considers the linguistic sign for a trilateral or even quadrilateral form (in the case of a predicative sign). She delimits the nominative sign as composed of three elements, i.e. $S = (m, n, s)$ where m is the form or means of signification, n is the signified component (concept) connected with the referent and s is the syntagmatic value delimited by the specific character of the signified component, by its semantic combinability, valency as well as grammatical value. In the predicative sign (which on the

whole is identical with the utterance) she even considers four elements: $S = (m, n', s, p)$ where m is the form of the expression or utterance, n' is the signified component (concept) connected with the fragment of the reality or with the situation, s is the syntagmatic value, the selectivity of the nominative signs, and finally p includes predication specified as modality and sense localization expressed by the statement.

Already at first sight it can be seen that the sign is understood as a set of components while the hierarchic ordering of these components is not differentiated. It is probably evident that the components m and n , or m and n' are on a level different from all the other components in the above definitions. The components s and p concern the form composed of m and n and they represent the qualities, the features of this form, of the linguistic sign as a whole. Such organization could be represented by the formulae $S = ((m, n), s)$ or $S = (m, n), s, p)$. The author herself at another place of her work also ascribes the features s and p to the word which is approximately identical to the linguistic sign $S = (m, n)$. In addition, very striking is also the similarity of the components s and p with Morris's syntactic and pragmatic dimension. But even if these dimensions were to be considered for components of a sign, it would be more appropriate to situate them into the signified component within our conception (cf. the Figure) as qualities of the semantic features because valency and grammatical value to a large extent stem also from the occurrence and configuration of semantic features.

Piotrovskiy (1985) also suggests the differentiation of four components in the linguistic sign: the name as an internal psychic image of the signified component, the designation as an element in the system of social experience corresponding to the referent, the referent as a holistic image of the real or ideal object in the brain of the language bearer, and finally the connotation as a sum of the emotional, evaluating and sensual associations. It is evident, as also suggested by Desheryeva, that the connotation concerns the bilateral sign as a whole, hence it cannot stand on the same level as the name and the designation. With regard to including the referent in the sign it is necessary to object that if it is put into the brain of the bearer of the language, in fact it does not constitute part of the language but of the extralinguistic conceptual (notional) system. In Piotrovski's conception it would rather belong into the environment of the sign. We agree with his opinion that the signal does not belong in the sign. Nevertheless, in communication we cannot do without it, hence our entailing two types of linguistic signs – systemic and communication ones – seems to be more convenient.

A bilateral linguistic sign both components of which are structured, as can also be seen from Figure 1, is an ideal object existing in language as a system serving not only for communication but also for the signification of real objects and thought values or, in a wider context, cultural values of mankind, and for storing them.

So that such ideal objects can be used within communication, so that they can be transferred from the sender to the recipient, the member of the particular linguistic community has to have at his/her disposal concrete means that can be perceived by the senses. It is true that during each communication (in each particular case) this sequence of sounds is again and again carried out through articulation movements, nevertheless, it is evident that the ordering of sounds is not arbitrary but that in the mind of each member of the linguistic community these sequences are stable, formed beforehand as chains which are in the direct relationship with the phonemic structures of the given linguistic sign and through them with the entire linguistic sign. Hence, such sequence of sounds, such chain of sounds also represents something, i.e. the ideal objects – the linguistic signs; that is why it has the

character of linguistic sign. Only in this sense can Cmorej's conception of the semiotic character of the *signifiant* be considered valid. However, with the remark that the signified component is not simply what is signified; rather it is an ideal object, a systemic linguistic sign. In contrast to the linguistic sign as an ideal object (which we could denote as a systemic linguistic sign) this type of linguistic sign can be termed as a communication linguistic sign. The signifying component of this communication linguistic sign is formed by the above-mentioned sequences of sounds, while its signified component is represented by ideal systemic linguistic signs:

Communication	Sound Sequence
Linguistic Sign	Systemic Linguistic Sign

Figure 2

In literature on the linguistic sign the supposing of two types of linguistic signs is not quite new. It is used by Melnikov (1980), but his solution is exactly opposite to ours. Speech signs are considered by him to be the representatives of artificial referent, the linguistic signs are considered for the images of these referents. In Král's work (1974) such duality is markedly manifested in the thesis that it is necessary to distinguish the linguistic sign and the sign, the linguistic sign and the word as elements of two different levels or systems. Neumann (1979) comes to the conclusion that linguistic communication is conditioned by the existence of some storage of meanings which can be used by the participant of communication within a particular communication act.

To distinguish the nominative and the predicative linguistic signs, as suggested by Desheryeva (1985), is in this sense not necessary above all because the predicative signs are on a different level than the nominative signs. The point is namely that the nominative linguistic signs which we could compare to our systemic signs, create in each language a certain storage into which the communication partners reach within the communication acts, while utterances or assertions or the predicative signs joined to them do not form such a storage, they are construed or produced within each communication act according to the particular situation.

The above outlined relationships between the linguistic sign and the word or the meaning of the word can be more consequentially resolved when supposing the existence of two linguistic signs – the communicative one and the systemic one.

The systemic linguistic sign, as we have indicated, is structured in a certain way. This structure can be carried out by a non-derived word, a derived word, as well as a compound word, but also by a polylexical naming unit. On the one hand it is evident from the above that the linguistic sign is not equal to a word. On the other hand it can easily be shown that also a non-derived word (but also all the other types of naming units) can stand for the notions having very differing contents, e.g. the word *root* in botany, stomatology and linguistics). The meaning of the word, but in general also the word itself, is not an element from the area of semiotics, but from the area of semantics, or lexicology and lexicography. In semiotics or in the theory of linguistic sign there is no point in speaking about the meaning or the meanings of the linguistic sign, including both the systemic and the communicative signs.

In other words: linguistic sign is above all an ideal object the role of which is to stand for the objects in the real world, but also for other objects within their being stored in the

social consciousness of the particular linguistic community. During linguistic communication these ideal linguistic signs are selected and with the help of communicative linguistic signs are transferred to the recipient, the concrete utterances having a sign character -- they stand instead of certain situations, but they are not linguistic signs within the suggested conception.

As it is inconceivable that for each object there would exist a special sequence of sounds, as a result of human work special linguistic means have been constituted -- the means of naming and the relational means (i.e. lexical and grammatical) -- which, however, can be related to several linguistic signs (polysemy, homonymy). Moreover, due to various reasons the situation also arises that for one linguistic sign several lexical means are created (synonymy).

Note

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