

WUT 2020
10th International Conference “Word, Utterance, Text: Cognitive, Pragmatic and Cultural Aspects”

IMAGES AS UNITS OF THE SEMIOTIC SPACE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The article examines the use of an image in the analysis of the semiotic space of interacting sign systems that are of different types: verbal, nonverbal and mixed sign systems, i.e. the systems that include both verbal and nonverbal elements. The sign systems constituting the semiotic space are defined as secondary semiotic modeling systems that have additional superstructure. The latter is considered to be complicated sense structure consisting of five levels: objective, evaluative, hedonistic, conceptual and archetypal levels, each level forming with the appropriate sense components. Moreover, the sign systems can be divided into initial and new ones. The semiotic space develops around an initial sign system, as new sign systems created on the basis of the initial one are included into it (the semiotic space). An image is defined as an integrated sense phenomenon that includes the sense components of different types (objective, evaluative, hedonistic, conceptual and archetypal). The author suggests using images and their sense components to analyze the semiotic space of interacting verbal, nonverbal and mixed sign systems. The article demonstrates the stages and results of the analysis of the “tree” image and its sense components in the initial verbal sign system and in the new mixed sign systems that create the semiotic space. It has been shown in the article that the use of images as the analysis units helps investigate the transposition processes, the processes of sense creation and development in the semiotic space.

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Keywords: Semiotic space, sign system, secondary (semiotic) modeling system, image, sense components, transposition.



1. Introduction

The study of sign systems is playing an essential part in modern society due to rapid development and spread of multimedia for mass communication. As a result of active use of multimedia means to create the digital mass media content (Zhumash, 2019), promote brands (Shumakova, 2019) and design efficient advertisements (Selemeneva, 2019), the new media and multimedia genres (Davletshina, 2017) that have their own peculiarities and values for modern society have been developing, e.g. the web-documentary has appeared (Antonova, 2016). Modern society tend to visualize more information than earlier (Kozhemyakin, 2018; Salmin, 2016; Savinova & Harunzheva, 2016; Yegorova, 2018) and develop virtual communication (Glukhov, 2018) using visual means. Researchers examine the opportunities of the semiotic approach to analyze different types of esthetic communication that are by their very nature visual: the semiotic analysis of design to develop the systems of graphic signs (Khomenko, 2018), perception of signs and symbols in theatre (Alesenkova, 2017), role of signs in fine art (Balkind & Karpova, 2017) and films (Yevgrafova, 2018). Ilyin and Fomin (2016) suggest developing general semiotics as an interdisciplinary approach that will integrate all the social and humanitarian studies and applications of signs.

When speaking about sign systems and multimedia it is crucial to draw attention to several points: firstly, pictorial representation of information often dominates; secondly, interaction of various sign systems takes place; and lastly, this interaction leads to the creation of semiotic space. Thus, they raise an important issue regarding the role of images in the semiotic space formed as a result of the interaction of various sign systems.

2. Problem Statement

This section considers the explication of some methodological issues based on the ideas of semiotics, linguistics and systems theory that contribute to the investigation of the role of images in the semiotic space of interacting sign systems. The research methodology includes the following.

- Natural language is a primary sign system, since it serves as “an interpretant” for all sign systems functioning in the society (Benveniste, 1976). Other sign systems either are built upon the primary system of natural language (for example, fiction) or exist in parallel with it (for example, music and painting) (Ivanov, 1978), with natural language being used to describe any sign systems. This issue allows developing universal metalanguage to describe sign systems of various types (verbal, nonverbal, and mixed, that is, including both verbal and nonverbal elements).
- Lotman’s theory of semiosphere, or semiotic space, as a semiotic continuum that is full of semiotic entities of different types (Lotman, 2019) forms the basis for this research on the semiotic space as unity of various interacting sign systems. The sign systems interaction during their transposition is of special interest. Transposition is defined as transfer of multiple elements from one sign system into another one. For example, translation into foreign languages is transposition from one verbal system into other verbal sign systems; film adaptation of fiction is transposition from a verbal system into a mixed sign system. In recent research works, film adaptation has become one of the widely discussed problems. The Russian researchers have focused on the features of the screen versions of the Russian and English

dramatic texts (Levina, 2017; Vysochanskaya & Germanovich, 2017), Russian and English prose fiction (Levina, 2019; Rybina, 2019), English epic texts (Dmitruk, 2019). Examining the differences between the original text and its screen versions, Dmitruk (2019) concludes that fiction texts have multilayered structure that is not shown exactly in films; a film reveals only one or several “layers” but not all of them.

- To describe the connection between sign systems during their transposition we use the terms “initial (sign) system” and “new (sign) system”. Consider, for instance, the transposition from a novel into a film: the novel is an initial system of the verbal type, and a film is a new system of the mixed type.
- The notions of a secondary modeling system and additional superstructure (Ivanov, 2002) allowed us to define the sign systems as the secondary modeling systems with additional superstructures organized according to some laws. We suggest that the additional superstructure is a combination of objective, conceptual, evaluative, hedonistic and archetypal sense components that constitute the sense levels respectively – more details about each type of sense components and sense levels in (Ronzhina, 2016).

The ideas above provide a methodological basis for the research of the semiotic space of interacting sign systems.

3. Research Questions

The research focuses on the development of the metalanguage units that will be efficient enough to reveal and describe the interaction of verbal, nonverbal and mixed sign systems within the semiotic space. To achieve this, we introduce such terms as “image”, “sense component”, “functor”.

We completely agree with Slovikova (2016) when she defines “image” as an integrated sense combination that includes a system of sense components. However, unlike her idea that “image” is a textual category, that is, a category of verbal sign systems, we think that “image” is a semiotic category that belongs to verbal, nonverbal and mixed sign systems. Moreover, we suggest that an image as an integrated sense combination could include dozens of sense components of different types: objective, evaluative, hedonistic, conceptual and archetypal. Firstly, these sense components could be actualized with verbal and/or nonverbal means in the sign systems within the semiotic space. Secondly, they could be implicit and constitute the potential of an image. Take, for example, the sense components of the “tree” image. *A way* is an archetypal sense component of the image that is actualized in the story «The Legend of Sleepy Hollow» (Irving, 2017), that is, in the initial verbal sign system. As new sign systems created on the basis of the story form the semiotic space around it, the quantity and quality of the sense components of the image change (that will be shown below). *A way* is transformed into *the way to the underworld*, an archetypal sense component that is actualized in the film “Sleepy Hollow”, that is, a new mixed sign system.

The sense components of each type constitute the respective sense levels (objective, evaluative, hedonistic, conceptual and archetypal) the combination of which forms the “additional superstructure” of a sign system. Virtually analogous levels of sense can be found in the work of Slovikova (2016) who discusses the levels of objects, ideas, evaluations, emotions, and generic existential sense connected with the historic memory of the humanity. These ideas were based on Myshkina’s contradictory-synergy theory (Myshkina, 1998).

Some images actualized by verbal and/or nonverbal means in sign systems are called “functors”. This term is used in logics (Carnap, 1947), logic grammar (Curry, 1961), linguistics (Stepanov, 2012), contradictory-synergy linguistics (Myshkina, 1998); it is also used in our works on linguistic semiotics (for example, Ronzhina, 2016). In this writer’s view, a functor is a verbal or nonverbal or verbal-nonverbal unit which actualizes an image that includes several sense components and influences the sense development and sense levels formation in sign systems within semiotic space. Images that function as functors are a kind of central units of the whole semiotic space that ensure its unity.

4. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the research is to investigate if the unit “image” is applicable to the research of the semiotic space of interacting sign systems. The research aims to answer the following questions. First, what is the potential of the initial sign system for the whole semiotic space? Second, how can the analysis of images reveal this potential? Third, how can images be used in the study of the sense creation and development? And lastly, what is the role of images in the interaction of sign systems within the semiotic space?

5. Research Methods

To study the role of the image and its sense components in the interaction of various sign systems within the semiotic space, it is sufficient to go through the following three stages of the functor-semiotic analysis (Ronzhina, 2016): 1) to carry out the definition analysis of the units that actualize the image in order to reveal the sense components of different types; 2) to examine the actualization of the sense components of the image in the initial sign system; 3) to examine the actualization of the sense components of the image in the new sign systems.

The following sign systems of different types have been analyzed in order to achieve the research purpose: “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”, a gothic story by American author Irving (2017); “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” [“Легенда о Сонной Лощине”], a Russian translation by A. Bobovitch (Irving, 2014); “Sleepy Hollow”, a film based on the original story and directed by T. Burton.

The first story is an initial verbal sign system around which the semiotic space *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* forms. The second verbal sign system and the third mixed sign system are new because they were created as a result of the transposition of the initial system: translation from English into Russian and film adaptation of the original story respectively.

6. Findings

Analysis of the “tree” image in the semiotic space called *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is given.

6.1. The first stage of the analysis

The first stage was to identify the sense components of the “tree” image. Three objective sense components were found with the help of monolingual English and Russian dictionaries (Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Ushakov, 2017) as the initial and new sign systems that constitute the semiotic space are in

these languages. They are as follows: *a plant, a piece of wood, (something in) the form of a tree*. The evaluative (*good / bad*) and hedonistic (*pleasure / displeasure*) sense components are potential in the image. Thirty-nine archetypal sense components identified with the help of the dictionaries and encyclopedias of symbols include the following: *demonic creatures; a way; the way to the underworld; death; regeneration; renewal; rebirth*; etc. (Cirlot, 2015; Krauze, 2018; Tresidder, 2005).

6.2. The second and third stages of the analysis

Two verbal sign systems were analyzed during these stages: the initial system, that is, a gothic story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (Irving, 2017), and a new system, that is, its Russian translation (Irving, 2014). The contextual analysis of the verbal means of both systems identified the actualized sense components of the “tree” image (Table 01).

Table 01. The sense components of the “tree” image in the initial and new verbal systems

Sense Components	Types of Sense Components	Verbal Actualization
<i>a plant</i>	objective sense component	the words “grove” and “walnut-tree” in the landscape description (Irving, 2017; Irving, 2014)
<i>a family</i>	archetypal sense component	a comparison between the two words, that is, “trees” and “families” using the participle “vegetating” of the verb “to vegetate” (Irving, 2017; Irving, 2014)
<i>abundance</i>	archetypal sense component	description of the elm-tree that spread its branches over the Dutch farmer’s stronghold including his vast barn full of the treasures of the farm (Irving, 2017; Irving, 2014)
<i>a way</i>	archetypal sense component	comparison of the tulip-tree in the centre of the road (where Major André had been taken prisoner) with a landmark (Irving, 2017; Irving, 2014)
<i>death</i>	archetypal sense component	

The sense components of the “tree” image are shown in the left side part of the Table; their verbal actualizations in the initial and new verbal sign systems are given in the right side part of the Table. The data given demonstrate that only one objective and four archetypal sense components (from thirty-nine archetypal sense components revealed at the first stage) are actualized in the systems. They are as follows: *a plant; a family; abundance; a way; death*.

6.3. The third stage of the analysis

The analysis of verbal and nonverbal means that actualize the sense components of the “tree” image in a new mixed sign system (that is, the film “Sleepy Hollow” directed by Tim Burton) is carried out during the third stage too. To be exact, the analysis of only two parts of the film (that begin at 46:18 and 01:30:25) is given in the article because of their significance for the “tree” image actualization. Compared to the verbal systems, the mixed system actualizes more sense components and uses verbal and nonverbal means for their actualization (Table 02). Nonverbal means of actualization are divided into five types: 1) the object description, 2) the character description, 3) the process description, 4) the environment description, 5) the sound effects and music. In Table 02, the sense components of the “tree” image, their types, and nonverbal actualization (both examples and types) are given. It is necessary to draw attention to the fact that one sense component could be actualized with the help of different types of

nonverbal means, and the same means could actualize several different sense components (for example, the archetypal sense components *demonic creatures* and *rebirth*). According to Table 02, more sense components of the “tree” image are actualized in the new mixed system (5 archetypal components, 1 hedonistic component and 1 objective component) than in the verbal ones (4 archetypal components and 1 objective component), with the archetypal sense components being essentially different.

6.4. Discussion of the results

In the verbal sign systems, the archetypal sense components *a way* and *death* are actualized in the comparison of the tulip-tree in the centre of the road (where Major André had been taken prisoner) with a landmark (Irving, 2017; Irving, 2014). In the mixed sign system, the archetypal sense component *a way* is transformed into the archetypal sense component *the way to the underworld* through the use of verbal and, especially, nonverbal means (Table 02):

- verbal means: the words of the main character, ‘This is... a gateway, between two worlds...’;
- nonverbal means (the object description): the pathway through the tree, that is surrounded by dead heads;
- nonverbal means (the process description): the roots of the tree are twining the skeleton in the tomb behind the tree, while the Headless Horseman is appearing in front of the tree moving through it.

Table 02. Nonverbal actualization of the sense components of the “tree” image in the new mixed sign system

Sense Components	Types of Sense Components	Nonverbal Actualization	Types of Nonverbal Actualization
<i>a plant</i>	objective sense component	visual representation of the big old tree	the object description
<i>displeasure</i>	hedonistic sense component	the face of the character expressing displeasure with what he sees	the character description
<i>the way to the underworld</i>	archetypal sense component	the pathway through the tree, that is surrounded by dead heads	the object description
		the roots of the tree are twining the skeleton in the tomb behind the tree, while the Headless Horseman is appearing in front of the tree moving through it	the process description
<i>demonic creatures</i>	archetypal sense component	the roots of the tree are twining the skeleton in the tomb behind the tree, while the Headless Horseman is appearing in front of the tree moving through it	the process description
<i>rebirth</i>	archetypal sense component		
<i>regeneration</i>	archetypal sense component	the horseman’s skull is covering with muscles and skin	the process description
		thunder, loud disturbing music	the sound effects and music
		thunder, lightning, wind, thunderstorm	the environment description
<i>death</i>	archetypal sense component	visual representation of blood and dead heads when the way to the underworld closes, the main negative character’s hand left outside stops moving signaling death	the object description
		the main positive character is chopping and pulling away loose bark, and the tree is dripping more blood	the process description
		the Horseman takes the main negative character with him to the underworld	

It is essential that the archetypal sense components *death* and *the way to the underworld* are actualized together in the mixed system, like the components *death* and *a way* in the verbal systems, but the component *death* is actualized more completely in the mixed system because of the use of various nonverbal means (Table 02): for example, nonverbal means of the object description (visual representation of blood and dead heads; when the way to the underworld closes, the main negative character's hand left outside stops moving signaling death) and of the process description (the main positive character is chopping and pulling away loose bark, and the tree is dripping more blood; the Horseman takes the main negative character with him to the underworld).

In the mixed system, nonverbal means actualize such archetypal sense components as *demonic creatures*, *rebirth*, *regeneration* that are closely connected with the components *death* and *the way to the underworld* (Table 02). All the archetypal sense components above are connected with the objective sense component *a plant*, as the image of the "monstrously huge tree" is the key image of the parts chosen for the analysis (that begin at 46:18 and 01:30:25).

There are some differences in the way the archetypal sense components *a family* and *abundance* are actualized in the verbal and mixed systems. In the verbal systems, verbal actualization of the "tree" image itself helps actualize these components: 1) *a family* is actualized with the help of a comparison between the two words, that is, "trees" and "families" using the participle "vegetating" of the verb "to vegetate" (Irving, 2017; Irving, 2014); 2) *abundance* is actualized by the description of the elm-tree that spread its branches over the Dutch farmer's stronghold including his vast barn full of the treasures of the farm (Irving, 2017; Irving, 2014) (see Table 01). In the mixed system, these sense components are actualized through the whole story line: the Headless Horseman (archetypal sense component *demonic creatures*) is killing people who belong to one family or are connected with this family (archetypal sense component *a family*) in order for the person who is controlling the horseman to receive the family inheritance (archetypal sense component *abundance*).

The given examples show that the verbal and nonverbal means of the "tree" image actualization are functor units that connect the sense components and, thus, enable the sense creation and development in the initial and new systems.

The "tree" image, as has been seen, includes a number of the sense components of different types. These components constitute its internal implicit sense potential which is actualized partially in the initial verbal sign system or more completely in the new mixed sign system when it joins the semiotic space *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. In addition, the analysis of the verbal and nonverbal actualization of the "tree" image has demonstrated its significance for the sense development in the sign systems interacting within the semiotic space.

7. Conclusion

The following conclusions may be drawn from these Findings. The use of images as units to analyze sign systems within semiotic space allows 1) defining the sense potential of an initial verbal system (in particular identifying the hidden archetypal level of sense), 2) revealing and describing how this potential is fulfilled in initial and new sign systems of various types, 3) demonstrating the sense

creation and development processes (in other words, the sense dynamics) in sign systems of various types, 4) investigating the interaction of sign systems of various types within a semiotic space.

Thus, the results of the survey suggest that images are the units of great importance to particular sign systems and to semiotic space that includes these systems. An image plays the role of a linking element between the sign systems interacting within the semiotic space. To put it another way, it functions as a hyperlink in a computer document that will take you to another document if you click on it, so it can be referred to as a hyperimage that will take you to another image or sign system.

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