

## A Semiotic Exploration of Human Language: Nature, Characteristics, and Linguistic Equality

### การสำรวจภาษาของมนุษย์ตามหลักสัญศาสตร์: ธรรมชาติ ลักษณะเฉพาะ และความเท่าเทียมทางภาษา

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#### Abstract

Human language is a complex semiotic system that facilitating communication and distinguishing humans from other species. This article examines human language through a semiotic perspective, incorporating foundational theories from Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce. It investigates how signs, symbols, and interpretation shape linguistic communication and critiques notions of linguistic superiority by advocating for linguistic equality. The study synthesizes existing semiotic theories while incorporating recent discussions on multimodal communication and linguistic diversity. A case study illustrating semiotic principles in a real-world communication scenario highlights the practical application of semiotics, elucidating how messages are transmitted through signals (any message sent from one party to another) and channels (mediums used to transmit these signals). The findings emphasize the necessity of recognizing all human languages as equally valuable within their respective cultural contexts, rejecting the idea of linguistic superiority based on structural, historical, or biological factors. This study contributes to contemporary semiotic debates and language inclusivity by integrating theoretical and applied perspectives.

**Keywords:** Communication, Human language, Linguistic diversity, Semiotics, Sign systems

#### บทคัดย่อ

ภาษาของมนุษย์เป็นระบบสัญศาสตร์ที่ซับซ้อนซึ่งอำนวยความสะดวกในการสื่อสารและแยกแยะมนุษย์จากสิ่งมีชีวิตชนิดอื่น บทความนี้จะตรวจสอบภาษาของมนุษย์ผ่านมุมมองของสัญศาสตร์ โดยนำทฤษฎีพื้นฐานจาก Ferdinand de Saussure และ Charles Peirce มาใช้ บทความนี้จะศึกษาว่าสัญลักษณ์และการตีความมีอิทธิพลต่อการสื่อสารทางภาษาอย่างไร และวิจารณ์แนวคิดเรื่องความเหนือกว่าทางภาษาโดยสนับสนุนความเท่าเทียมกันทางภาษา การศึกษาค้นคว้าครั้งนี้จะสังเคราะห์ทฤษฎีสัญศาสตร์ที่มีอยู่แล้ว โดยนำการอภิปรายล่าสุดเกี่ยวกับการสื่อสารหลายรูปแบบและความหลากหลายทางภาษามาใช้ กรณีศึกษาที่แสดงให้เห็นหลักการสัญศาสตร์ในสถานการณ์การสื่อสารในโลกแห่งความเป็นจริงเน้นให้เห็นถึงการประยุกต์ใช้สัญศาสตร์ในทางปฏิบัติ

โดยจะอธิบายให้เห็นว่าข้อความถูกส่งผ่านสัญญาณ (ข้อความใด ๆ ที่ส่งจากฝ่ายหนึ่งไปยังอีกฝ่ายหนึ่ง) และช่องทาง (สื่อที่ใช้ในการส่งสัญญาณเหล่านี้) อย่างไร ผลการศึกษาเน้นย้ำถึงความจำเป็นในการยอมรับว่าภาษาของมนุษย์ทุกภาษามีคุณค่าเท่าเทียมกันในบริบททางวัฒนธรรมที่เกี่ยวข้อง โดยปฏิเสธแนวคิดเรื่องความเหนือกว่าทางภาษาตามปัจจัยทางโครงสร้าง ประวัติศาสตร์ หรือทางชีววิทยา การศึกษานี้มีส่วนสนับสนุนการอภิปรายด้านสัญศาสตร์ร่วมสมัยและการรวมเอาภาษาเข้าไว้ด้วยกันโดยบูรณาการมุมมองเชิงทฤษฎีและเชิงประยุกต์

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Language and Semiotics Perspective

Language is a dynamic and structured system characterized by rules and structures, including grammar and vocabulary, enabling precise conveyance of meaning. It evolves and adapts to social contexts, cultural norms, and individual needs, serving as a crucial tool for communication, collaboration, and social cohesion. Humans can connect, express empathy, negotiate, and form social bonds through language while shaping their identities and cultural values. It is the primary means of expressing thoughts, ideas, emotions, and experiences, allowing for the sharing of knowledge, stories, and perspectives. Language also facilitates cooperation and collaboration, enabling people to coordinate actions and work together toward common goals. Additionally, it plays a key role in transmitting cultural knowledge and values across generations and influences how humans think and perceive the world. Language continually adjusts to new technologies, social trends, and cultural shifts as an evolving and adaptable entity.

Semiotics, the study of signs and meaning-making processes, provides a framework for analyzing how language functions beyond its structural elements. Building upon Saussure's structuralist approach and Peirce's triadic model, semiotics help uncover the intricate relationship between linguistic signs and social meaning. While existing literature has extensively analyzed semiotic structures, this study aims to bridge theoretical semiotics with practical linguistic applications.

### 1.2 Research Gap and Objectives

Despite the well-established theories of semiotics, limited studies explore their relevance in discussions of contemporary linguistic diversity. This article seeks to:

- 1) Critically examine how semiotics influences linguistic communication and meaning-making.
- 2) Demonstrate the application of semiotics in real-world scenarios through a case study.
- 3) Challenge linguistic superiority by promoting the recognition of all human languages as equally valuable.
- 4) Synthesize traditional semiotic theories with modern linguistic research to provide a contemporary perspective on linguistic equality.

By achieving these objectives, the article will offer readers a thorough understanding of human language, enhancing their knowledge of linguistics, semiotics, and related fields. Furthermore, it will promote a deeper appreciation for the complexity and importance of language in human communication and culture.

### **1.3 Key Areas of Semiotic Analysis**

Semiotics provides a systematic approach to analyzing language as a structured system of signs. This includes its components—phonemes, which are one of the smallest units of speech that make one word different from another (For example, the difference between "pin" and "pan" depends on the vowel, i.e., the phonemes /ɪ/ and /æ/), morphemes, the smallest unit of language that has its meaning, either a word or a part of a word (For example, "Worker" contains two morphemes: "work" and "-er"), syntax, which deals with the grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence (For example, the company's board meeting starts at 10.00a.m every Monday) and their roles in forming coherent messages (Mingers & Willcocks, 2017). Beyond structural analysis, semiotics examines how meaning is created and conveyed through linguistic signs, uncovering the interplay between signs, meanings, and their cultural or social contexts (Thellefsen et al., 2018). Additionally, the semiotic lens extends beyond verbal language to encompass multimodal communication, such as gestures, visual symbols, and auditory cues. This comprehensive view helps researchers understand how meaning is generated and interpreted in various communicative and cultural settings.

### **1.4 Relevance of Semiotics to Linguistic Diversity and Inclusivity**

Language reflects and shapes cultural norms, values, and identities, functioning as both a cultural artifact and a tool for social interaction. Researchers can explore language's role in constructing social identities and negotiating power dynamics by investigating language through a semiotic perspective. Moreover, semiotics also challenge notions of linguistic superiority, promoting recognition and celebration of linguistic diversity. This perspective underscores the equal importance of all human languages, fostering inclusivity and respect for diverse linguistic practices and traditions. In addition, semiotics enriches our appreciation of human culture and communication by deepening our understanding of language and paving the way for interdisciplinary research and a more inclusive worldview (Halliday, 2010)

## **2. Theoretical Framework: Semiotics and Language**

### **2.1 Defining Semiotics and Its Core Components**

Semiotics studies how meaning are transmitted through signs and symbols. It consists of three key elements: the signifier (physical form), the signified (concept), and interpretation. Peirce expanded this with his triadic model, introducing the interpretant as the cognitive process linking signs and meaning. In this view, language is not merely a set of words but an evolving system of symbolic representation.

## **2.2 Theories of Semiotics in Linguistic Studies**

### **1) Saussure's Structuralism and Language as a System**

Saussure's linguistic sign theory focuses on the signifier and signified two inseparable sign components. The signifier is the physical form or sound pattern associated with a sign, while the signified is the mental concept or meaning represented by that sign. Saussure emphasized the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified, highlighting shared conventions within a specific linguistic community. He distinguished between synchrony and diachrony in language study, focusing on the relationships and structures within a given language system and the historical development of language over time. He introduced the concepts of *langue* and *parole* to differentiate between the abstract system of language and its concrete manifestations. Saussure's ideas were foundational in developing structuralism, a theoretical framework that examines the underlying structures and systems within different disciplines. His contributions to semiotics and linguistic sign theory revolutionized language study and laid the groundwork for subsequent developments in linguistics and semiotics.

### **2) Peirce's Triadic Model and Linguistic Interpretation**

Peirce's triadic model of signs, known as semiotics or Peircean semiotics, is a comprehensive framework for understanding the nature of signs and their relationship to meaning. The model consists of three interrelated components: the sign object, the representamen, and the interpretant. The sign object represents the actual object, concept, or event to which the sign refers, while the representamen is the physical or mental form representing the sign object. The interpretant is the mental process or understanding triggered by the sign, referring to the meaning or interpretation the sign conveys to the interpreter. Peirce's model emphasizes the dynamic nature of signs and the interpretive processes involved in meaning-making. It acknowledges that the meaning of a sign is not fixed but depends on the interpretant, which can vary among individuals, cultural contexts, and historical circumstances. The model aligns with the view that language is a dynamic and context-dependent system, recognizing that the meaning of linguistic signs can evolve and change over time.

Peirce's triadic model of signs broadens the understanding of signs beyond Saussure's dyadic model, emphasizing the interpretive dimension and the relational dynamics involved in signification. It has profound implications for studying language, semiotics, and communication, offering a comprehensive framework to analyze the complexities of linguistic signs and their role in meaning-making.

### **3) Contemporary Research in Semiotics and Linguistics**

Contemporary research in semiotics and linguistics delves into an intricate relationship between language, signs, and meaning, exploring how these elements shape our understanding of the world and culture. Key areas of study include Linguistic Semiotics, which

examines how linguistic signs such as words and phrases convey meaning and function as a sign system, and Visual Semiotics, which investigates the significance of visual signs, such as images and symbols, in communication. Gatkowski & Kopytowska (2018). Social and Cultural Semiotics focus on interpreting and using sign systems within specific social and cultural contexts, highlighting their role in shaping cultural norms and values (Moerdisuroso, 2017). Cognitive Semiotics explores the mental processes involved in conceptualizing and understanding signs. At the same time, Digital Semiotics, a growing field, investigates the semiotic aspects of digital communication, including social media and online interactions (Hutson et al., 2024). Discourse Analysis emphasizes how language creates meaning and constructs social realities in context, and Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language investigate the philosophical underpinnings of meaning and communication (Simoes & Hautz, 2024). These interdisciplinary approaches, often applied in anthropology, sociology, psychology, and art history, enrich our understanding of cultural phenomena and human behavior.

#### **4) The Relationship between Signs, Meanings, and Interpretation**

The relationship between signs, meanings, and interpretation is crucial to understanding how communication and semiosis (the process of creating and interpreting signs) occur. The following is an explanation of their relationship. Signs are the fundamental units of communication and semiotics. They can be words, images, sounds, gestures, or any other meaningful form. Signs function as representations or pointers to something else beyond themselves. For example, the word "tree" is a sign that represents the concept or object of a tree. Meanings are associations, concepts, or ideas connected to signs. They are the mental representations or interpretations that individuals attribute to signs. Meanings are not inherent in signs; they are constructed and assigned by individuals or within specific cultural and social contexts. Meanings can be conventional, culturally determined, or subject to individual interpretation (Li & Karakowsky, 2001).

Interpretation refers to the process of assigning meaning to signs. It involves understanding, making sense of, and deriving significance from signs. Interpretation occurs within a context, influenced by individual perspectives, cultural knowledge, and shared codes or conventions. Interpretation is a dynamic process that can vary among individuals and across different cultural or social groups. The relationship between signs, meanings, and interpretation can be understood as follows.

The connection between signs and their meanings is crucial. Signs act as carriers of meaning and have a referential relationship to the meanings they represent. The "red traffic light" sign signifies the need to stop or halt. The relationship between signs and meanings can either be conventional, where a shared understanding exists within a linguistic community, or subjective, where individuals attribute personal meanings to signs. Interpretation involves understanding or decoding the meanings associated with signs. It requires making sense of signs within specific contexts and using cultural, linguistic, and contextual knowledge to derive

intended or inferred meanings (Bowcher, 2018). Personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, social norms, and individual perspectives all influence interpretation, and different interpreters may derive slightly different interpretations from the same sign based on their unique contexts and prior knowledge. It is worth noting that the relationship between signs, meanings, and interpretation is fluid and context-dependent. Meaning is not fixed or inherent in signs; rather, it emerges through the interpretive processes of individuals or within specific cultural and social contexts. The interpretation of signs is a multifaceted and ongoing process that involves negotiating shared meanings and creating new interpretations based on individual experiences and cultural influences. Understanding the connection between signs, meanings, and interpretation is crucial in linguistics, semiotics, communication studies, and cultural studies, as it offers insights into how communication happens, how meaning is formed, and how individuals derive significance from signs in various contexts (Fatemi, 2014).

This discussion will be incomplete without referring to sign language, which, according to linguistic terms, is as rich and complex as any spoken language, despite the common misconception that they are not "real languages."

### **5) Sign Language**

Sign language refers to any form of communication that uses bodily movements, especially of the hands and arms, when spoken communication is impossible or preferred. Many believe this practice is older than speech itself. Sign language can be expressed in various ways, from simple gestures such as grimaces, shrugs, or pointing to more complex combinations of coded manual signals reinforced by facial expressions and sometimes supplemented with words spelled out in a manual alphabet. Sign language serves as a means of communication when vocal communication is not an option, such as between speakers of different languages or when one or more participants are deaf (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). Sign languages are often misunderstood and undervalued as "real languages." However, linguists have thoroughly studied numerous sign languages and have found that they exhibit fundamental language properties (Sandler & Lillo-Martin, 2006; Baker et al., 2016). This means that sign languages are as intricate and multifaceted as any spoken language. For instance, sign languages exhibit the properties of the duality of patterning and recursion (Bross, 2020). It is important to note that sign languages are not mime, as their signs are conventional and often arbitrary. It may not have a direct visual relationship with their referent, as most spoken languages are not onomatopoeic (Pirot & Ali, 2021). While iconicity is more prevalent in sign languages than spoken ones, the difference is not absolute. Additionally, sign languages have complex grammar and can be used to communicate about any topic, from the concrete to the abstract. (Taub, 2001). The visual modality of sign languages enables a more comprehensive expression of the human preference for close connections between form and meaning, which is present but constrained in spoken languages. It is crucial to understand that sign languages are not visual representations of spoken languages created by educators or

simply a code of the surrounding spoken language community (Pinker, 1995). Similar to spoken languages, sign language varies from one country to another. Each country typically has its version of sign language unique to its region and culture. For instance, American Sign Language (ASL) differs from Australia's Auslan sign language, which differs from the British Sign Language (BSL) used in the United Kingdom. A person fluent in ASL may find it challenging to understand someone using a local version of sign language in Sydney, Australia, since the signs and gestures used are different, such as different dialects and accents in oral language (National Geographic Society, 2024).

### 3. Analysis of the signifier and the signified in human language

To analyze the relationship between linguistic signs and their meanings, it is essential to examine the signifier (the physical or auditory form of the sign) and the signified (the concept or meaning it represents) (Stawarska, 2015). This is how it can be done:

- 1) Select a specific word or phrase from a language to analyze.
- 2) Determine the signifier, which can be a sound pattern, a written symbol, or a gesture representing the sign. For example, in the word "cat," the sound pattern /kæt/ or the written symbol "c-a-t" is the signifier.
- 3) Explore the concept or idea associated with the linguistic sign, which is the signified. In the case of "cat," the signified would be the concept of a minor, domesticated feline animal.
- 4) Remember that meanings can be conventional (commonly understood within a linguistic community) or contextual (varying based on specific situations, cultural references, or individual interpretations).
- 5) Analyze whether the signified is influenced by conventional usage or if it carries additional or nuanced meanings in specific contexts.

One potential next step in your investigation is to examine the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Please take a moment to reflect on how the signifier connects to the concept it represents and consider any cultural or associative connections. It is essential to analyze how the signifier may differ across languages or dialects yet still convey a similar or related signified. Remember that the relationship between signifier and signified can vary between languages, cultures, and individual speakers, so it may be necessary to analyze how they differ or overlap in different linguistic contexts. It is also essential to consider the potential for linguistic and cultural relativity when interpreting and understanding signs.

To complete the process, it is crucial to contextualize the analysis. This means placing the analysis of the signifier and the signified in a broader linguistic, cultural, and social framework. It is essential to consider the impact of cultural norms, historical factors, and social dynamics on the interpretation and meaning of signs. By examining how contextual factors influence the relationship between the signifier and the signified, analyzing these factors in human language can lead to understanding the complex connections between linguistic signs

and their meanings (Chandler, 2019). This analysis comprehensively explores how language represents and communicates ideas, concepts, and experiences.

### **3.1. An analysis of semiotics and its contemporary relevance to linguistic studies.**

As discussed above, semiotics is a field of study that examines signs and symbols and their interpretation within different contexts. Developed primarily by scholars such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, semiotics has evolved into a multidisciplinary approach that spans linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and beyond (Yakin & Andreas., 2014). Its contemporary relevance to linguistic studies lies in its ability to provide a framework for understanding how meaning is constructed and communicated through language. One of the semiotics' key contributions to linguistic studies is its emphasis on the arbitrary nature of linguistic signs. Saussure posited the concept of the signifier (the form of the sign) and the signified (the idea or meaning associated with the sign), highlighting that the relationship between them is arbitrary. This insight challenges the notion of language as a direct reflection of reality and underscores the importance of understanding how signs acquire meaning within specific cultural and social contexts.

Furthermore, semiotics offers valuable tools for analyzing various aspects of language beyond mere words and sentences. It allows researchers to explore the significance of linguistic phenomena such as metaphor, irony, and ambiguity, which play crucial roles in communication but are often overlooked in traditional linguistic analyses (Thellefsen & Friedman, 2023). Semiotics enriches our understanding of language use and its effects on interpretation and discourse by examining how these rhetorical devices function as signs. Moreover, semiotics provides a framework for studying the role of non-verbal communication in linguistic interaction. Gestures, facial expressions, intonation, and other non-verbal cues are integral to communication and contribute to the overall meaning conveyed in linguistic exchanges. Semiotic analysis helps elucidate how these non-verbal elements function as signs that complement or sometimes even contradict verbal messages, shaping the interpretation of communicative acts (Agustia & Kurniawan, 2022).

In addition, semiotics offers insights into the relationship between language and power. Through discourse analysis informed by semiotic principles, researchers can uncover how speakers use language to construct social hierarchies, reinforce ideologies, and exert control over individuals and groups. By examining linguistic signs within their broader sociopolitical contexts, semiotics contributes to critical inquiries into issues such as language ideology, linguistic discrimination, and the representation of marginalized communities. (Barrett & Dovchin, 2019). Furthermore, in the era of digital communication and new media, semiotics are especially relevant. The proliferation of visual, multimodal texts in digital environments necessitates new analytical tools for understanding how images convey meaning, videos, emojis, and other non-linguistic symbols. Semiotics offers a robust framework for analyzing the complex interplay of verbal and visual signs in online discourse, shedding light on phenomena such as meme



culture, emoji usage, and the semiotics of social media platforms. Semiotics continues to be an essential theoretical framework in linguistic studies due to its comprehensive approach towards meaning-making and communication. It explores the complex interconnections between signs, symbols, language, and culture, which enhances our knowledge of linguistic phenomena and their impact on society. Semiotics provides valuable insights into how language shapes and reflects human experience in diverse contexts. Overall, it enriches our understanding of language and its significance in shaping our lives (Zlatev, 2018; Ollerhead, 2019; Qadha & Mahd, 2019).

### 3.2 Applied Semiotics: A Case Study in Communication

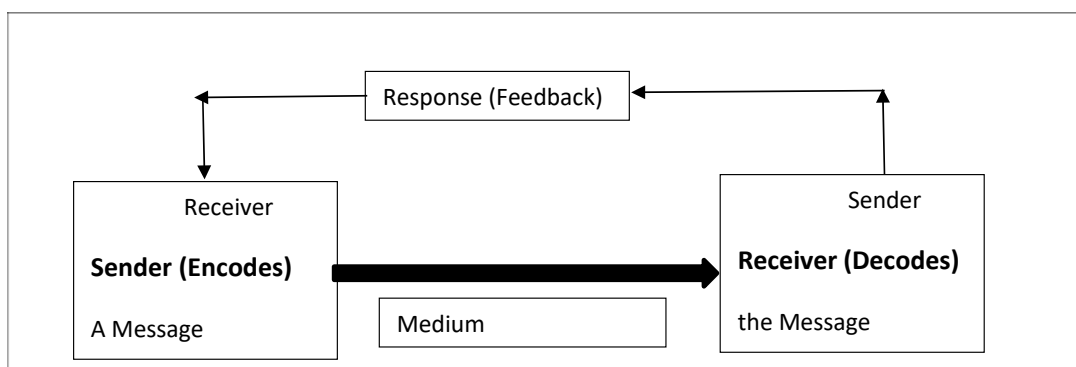
To illustrate semiotic principles in real-world contexts, consider a restaurant scenario in which a customer requests a “Coca-Cola,” and the waiter responds affirmatively as follows.

Suppose a thirsty individual enters a restaurant or hotel, sits at a table, calls a waiter, and says, “Coca-Cola, please.”

The waiter will likely respond by saying “Right” or “OK” and will bring a Coke shortly.

Analyzing this situation from a semiotic perspective reveals that the signal in this interaction is the sound produced: /,koʊ. kə'koʊ.lə/. This signal is transmitted from the speaker’s mouth to the waiter’s ears along the oral-auditory channel. The message is encoded as /,koʊ. kə'koʊ.lə/, though its form could be altered—for example, “Coca-Cola, Buddy”—which would convey a different meaning or nuance.

When the waiter replies, “Right” or “OK,” it indicates the message has been successfully decoded. This scenario represents a simple yet common real-world example of human interaction, demonstrating the communication process involved, illustrated in the diagram below.



Semiotic analysis reveals:

- **Signifiers:** The spoken words and auditory signals.
- **Signified Concept:** The understood request for a beverage.
- **Interpretation:** The waiter’s recognition and confirmation of the request.

This example demonstrates how linguistic communication relies on shared conventions and

interpretative processes. Similar frameworks apply to non-verbal and cross-cultural communication.

The example above shows how human language operates as a semiotic system, where signs convey and interpret meaning within specific contexts. It is an acceptable demonstration of the complexity and efficiency of our communication methods.

So far, semiotics has centered on some features standard to all communication systems. However, we will now explore our primary interest : human language.

Recorded literature indicates that the attention of linguists, anthropologists, sociolinguists, and psychologists has attracted different aspects of human language for generations (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). The first thing that comes to mind when discussing human language is its uniqueness among all communication systems, highlighting how versatile language is. To understand this language characteristic, consider what the traffic lights can convey. GO, READY, and STOP, only a few messages. Likewise, the number of messages that animals can convey is limited. However, people can talk about anything under the sun using human language. Given this ability, it is worth discussing in some detail what enables humans to use language so remarkably.

### **3.3. A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols.**

Bloch and Trager (1942, p. 5) define language as "A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols using which a social group co-operates." Examining this definition reveals that each keyword is a language characteristic. Thus, it can be concluded that a language is a set of symbols.

For example, (returning to the restaurant scenario) the signal: Coca-Cola consists of at least four symbols: /,koʊ.kə'koʊ.lə/. The substance of these symbols is the sound produced by the mouth. Hence, they are vocal symbols. A symbol is a form that stands for some real thing, i.e., some meaning. Thus, there are different symbols for different meanings.

The term 'vocal' may need further clarification because the language can be written and spoken. When symbols are produced with the mouth, a phonic medium is used. However, the same symbols can be created by drawing bits of lines on paper with a pen or a pencil. This method is called a graphic medium. This transferability of the medium appears to be a unique feature of language. Then, if language can be both spoken and written, the question next arises as to why language is defined as vocal symbols. In a language discussion, linguists are generally concerned with spoken language or the 'primacy' of language. The primacy of speech means that speech is fundamental, and writing is only secondary. There are many reasons to justify this view. Some of them are stated below.

- **Structural priority:** People write what they speak. This does not mean that spoken language and written language are identical. This only means that writing is a device that transfers the phonic medium to a graphic medium. Furthermore, over 3,000 languages are spoken worldwide, but only a few hundred have established writing systems. Based on this

premise, one cannot conclude that unwritten languages are not languages. On the other hand, there is no language, which is only written and not spoken (Dunn et al., 2011).

- **Historical priority:** Human beings have spoken languages for millions of years, but the history of writing is not even five thousand years old (Lyons, 1981).

- Every human speaks a language daily, but most do not read or write.

- **Biological priority:** Spoken language is natural, whereas written is artificial. Written language can be said to be man-made because every human child acquires spoken language without conscious learning (Lyons & Le Page, 1981).

- **There is no logical connection between the form and its meaning.**

A linguist can understand that language is spoken for specific reasons. With that in mind, the importance of the term 'arbitrary' in Bloch and Trager's (1942) definition is highlighted. In natural languages, vocal symbols are arbitrary, meaning there is no logical connection between a symbol's form and meaning. For instance, the word 'pen' has no inherent link to the object it represents. This word only refers to a writing utensil through a collective agreement among English speakers. Occasionally, some words in a language may be onomatopoeic, such as 'crow,' 'flutter,' and 'splash,' which resemble their corresponding sounds. However, this is not a commonality among all words. Arbitrariness extends beyond words to sentence structures (Monaghan et al., 2014).

For instance, there is no logical reason why "He is a doctor" is a statement and "Is he a doctor?" is a question. It is merely an agreement among English speakers to interpret them as such. Language's arbitrariness makes it so versatile since we are not limited in our ability to assign forms to various meanings. Without arbitrariness, creating words for abstract concepts such as democracy and kindness would be impossible. The beauty of arbitrariness is that anything can represent anything.

- **Duality of human language**

Another characteristic distinguishing human language from other communication systems is its efficiency, which stems from duality. Language forms consist of units ranging from the smallest unit, phonemes, to larger units, such as syllables, morphemes, and words. Phonemes and syllables have no meaning, while morphemes and words are meaningful. This means that meaningful units are composed of meaningless units. For example, the word "umbrellas" has nine phonemes, which make up three syllables: ʌm, brel, la;z. Neither phonemes nor syllables hold meaning individually, but they can create meaningful units when combined. In the case of "umbrellas," the two morphemes, umbrella+s, have meanings as complete words. This duality is essential to language because it enables us to create unlimited words from just a few phonemes (Yule, 2010). In contrast, if each phoneme or syllable carried a distinct meaning, our vocabulary would be constrained. Thus, language's arbitrary nature and dual aspects are essential characteristics that contribute to its effectiveness as a communication system.

According to Bloch and Trager, the keyword "System" is an essential language element. A language is a collection of symbols and a system of symbols. This was first introduced by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in 1959. To better understand this, imagine a game of chess. The chessboard, pieces, and rules for moving them make up the game. Similarly, language games have phonemes, morphemes, and words, along with rules for using them in speaking or writing (Fromkin et al., 2011). For instance, in the English language system, the sentence "Peter ate a piece of bread" is correct, while "ate a piece of bread Peter" or "A piece of bread ate Peter" are not. The system's rules are invisible but can be discovered through the operation. The symbols and rules form the system, also known as "structure." If people cannot understand or produce a language for various reasons, it becomes limited in use, even if it has all the other characteristics of a language. However, human language is productive, and this characteristic is explored in the next section.

- **Productivity of human language**

Humans possess an exceptional ability to produce and comprehend an infinite number of utterances that have never been heard or spoken before, as stated by Chomsky in 1965. This is mainly attributed to the productivity of human language, which permits the creation of novel sentences, except for conventional expressions such as "Good morning," "How are you?" and "I'm fine. Thank you." (Pagel, 2017). Despite the limited number of phonemes, morphemes, and words in a language, we can use them to generate uncountable sentences, which is exclusive to human communication. On the other hand, animal signals have fixed messages as our "Good morning." Chomsky emphasizes that the productivity of language results from its structure dependence and recursiveness, where specific grammatical constructions can be extended limitlessly by applying the same rules repeatedly. For instance, noun phrases can be coordinated indefinitely, such as Jack and Jill and Annie and Frank went dancing (Robins, 1980).

According to Hockett's (1960) study on the origin of speech, four unique design features distinguish human communication. One such feature is displacement, which enables communication across time and space. This means that people can discuss past and future events. Yule (2010) supports this idea and notes that displacement also enables people to talk about people, places, and things (such as angels, fairies, Santa Claus, Superman, heaven, and hell) that are known to exist. Additionally, Firth (cited in Widdowson, 1971, p. 102) comments on another characteristic of human language.

The moment a conversation starts, whatever is said is a determining condition for what in any reasonable expectation may follow. There is a positive force in what you say, and there is a negative side, too, because what you say shouts out most of the language of your companion, leaving him only a limited range of possible responses.

After carefully analyzing Firth's claims, it is evident that our ability to express ourselves is limited by the social rules, norms, and ethics that have already been established

in our respective societies. While human language also incorporates other aspects, such as language functions, use, and rules, this article does not delve into those topics.

Semiotics also recognizes the role of context in shaping the meaning of language. Its internal structure does not solely define language but is profoundly influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which it is used. Pragmatics, the study of language in context, explores how meaning is constructed through the interaction of language users, their intentions, and the situational context.

#### **4. Linguistic Equality and the Semiotic Perspective**

##### **4.1. Language Diversity and Cultural Significance**

Human languages are not just communication tools but also integral to a community's cultural heritage and identity. Each language carries unique cultural knowledge, traditions, and expressions, contributing to human culture's diversity. Preserving and valuing all languages is crucial for safeguarding cultural identities and promoting diversity. Language also shapes cognition and worldview, influencing our thinking, perception, and interaction with the environment.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis suggests that linguistic structures influence perception and thought. For example, some languages have multiple words for "snow," allowing speakers to perceive and describe different types of snow more precisely (United Language Group, 2017). Additionally, Language helps us categorize and classify the world around us. For instance, some languages have specific terms for colors that others do not, which can affect how speakers of those languages perceive and differentiate colors (Malik-Moraleda et al., 2023). Meanwhile, different languages use various methods to describe spatial relationships. For example, some languages use absolute directions (north, south, east, west) rather than relative directions (left, right, front, back), influencing how speakers navigate and perceive space (Cottier, 2023).

Another characteristic of language concerns time. How languages encode time can affect how speakers think about and experience time. For example, some languages consider future events closer or more immediate than others, influencing planning and future-oriented behaviors (Lancaster University, 2017). Moreover, language reflects and reinforces social structures and cultural norms. For example, formal and informal address forms in Japanese or Spanish can shape how speakers perceive social relationships and hierarchy (Shashkevich, 2019), while a language's specific vocabulary and grammatical structures can affect memory and cognitive processes. Being multilingual enhances cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, and cultural empathy. Learning multiple languages broadens individuals' intellectual horizons and equips them with valuable skills for a globalized world (Dickinson et al., 2004; Barac & Bialystok, 2012; Chibaka, 2018). For instance, languages with gendered nouns might

influence how speakers perceive objects and attribute characteristics to them (Elpers et al., 2022).

In summary, language is not just a tool for communication but also a framework for understanding and interpreting the world. It shapes our thoughts, perceptions, and interactions in profound ways. Different languages offer diverse perspectives, conceptual frameworks, and ways of organizing knowledge. The existence of multiple languages provides a broader range of insights, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of human experiences, thought, and creativity. Languages are crucial for effective communication and understanding and for sharing ideas, emotions, and information. Promoting the use and preservation of all languages strengthens social bonds and promotes mutual understanding among diverse linguistic communities. Recognizing individuals' linguistic rights contributes to a more equitable and inclusive society, valuing and supporting the existence and vitality of all languages (Baldwin et al., 2007; UNESCO Office Bangkok and Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific, 2008; Szoszkiewicz, 2017).

#### **4.2 The Fallacy of Linguistic Superiority**

Historically, dominant languages have marginalized minority languages through linguistic homogenization, which refers to diverse languages and dialects becoming more uniform due to various social, economic, and political pressures. This often results in the dominance of specific languages at the expense of others. Semiotics challenge this by demonstrating that all languages function as equally valid sign systems. Language endangerment, driven by globalization and policy decisions, threatens cultural diversity and knowledge preservation.

#### **4.3 The Role of Semiotics in Promoting Linguistic Inclusivity**

By analyzing linguistic diversity through a semiotic framework, scholars can advocate for policies that support multilingualism and linguistic rights. Research on multimodal semiotics further underscores the importance of non-verbal languages, such as sign languages, in communication.

### **5. Conclusion**

This review synthesizes foundational semiotic theories with contemporary linguistic research, emphasizing the role of signs, interpretation, and meaning-making in human language. Integrating a real-world case study demonstrates semiotics' practical applications and challenges linguistic superiority narratives. Future research should explore empirical applications of semiotic theory in multilingual societies to support language preservation efforts. A semiotic perspective enriches linguistic studies and fosters an inclusive appreciation of global linguistic diversity. Finally, it highlights the necessity of protecting all human languages, which are equally complex and productive regardless of their origin or geographical location. The more language is examined, the more its wonder and excitement are appreciated, which holds for all languages worldwide.

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