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Discourse in Postmodern:
Interpretation or Disruption of the Communicative Function of a
Language

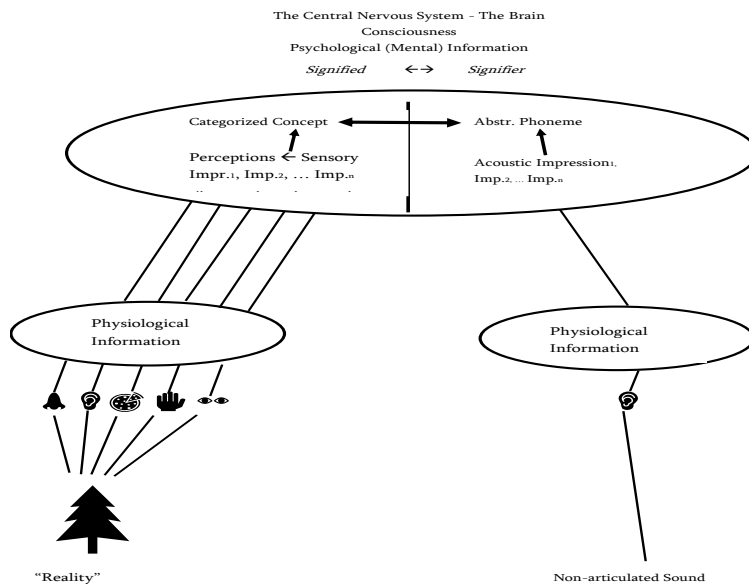
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The communicative function of language involves not only the transmission of a message containing information but also the decoding and understanding of this message. According to Roman Jakobson, in addition to the actors (res. *addresser* and *addressee*) and the information itself, communication requires a unified, whole cultural background (res. *discourse*).

The linguistic sign, which, as a symbiotic whole of meaning and form, functions only in a society that creates a unified discourse for all individuals speaking a particular language.

According to Ferdinand de Saussure, a sign is a dyadic whole comprised of a form (*signifier*) and a meaning (*signified*). A *linguistic* sign is a product of complicated psychophysiological processes rather than a pure nomenclatural link between *a thing* and *a name* — it is a link between *a concept* and *a sound* pattern. A sound pattern is the hearer's psychological impression of a sound as given to it by the evidence of its senses. This sound pattern may be called a 'material' element only in that it is a representation of our sensory impressions. The impressions formed by sense organs create human perceptions. Thus, sound patterns may — and must — be distinguished from another element associated with it within a linguistic sign. This element is of a more abstract kind: *a concept*, which is a result of abstraction, generalization, and categorization of specific sensory impressions, unified as specific perceptions.

Fig. 1. Saussure: The dynamic psychophysiological process of sign formation



However, perceptions — especially the ones giving abstract concepts, which have no corresponding *denotata* — could be manipulated, as sense organs are subjective and, to a certain extent, create perceptions individually. For example, the sign LOVE refers to a concept that, based on an everyday understanding, encompasses a range of strong and positive emotional and mental states, from the most sublime virtue or good habit, the deepest interpersonal affection, to the simple pleasure. Merab Mamardashvili, a Georgian philosopher and politician in the 1990s, mentioned that the whole discourse of the sentence *I love my leader* with an accepted conventional conceptual meaning, based on an actual matter of facts, was changed step by step in the Soviet discourse and became associated with the sentence *I am a slave of my leader*. Thus, the sign itself has acquired two meanings: (1). LOVE, as it was shared within the majority of social groups, and (2). LOVE, as it worked for a particular social group referred to as dissidents. Consequently, one sign was deconstructed as having two meanings: *to love - to be a slave*; that is, a sign appeared with two signified concepts unifying with one signifier. It is such a kind of deconstruction that could be manipulated and forced via the socialization of various text interpretations and/or by modeled chronic.

Such situations are assisted by cultural revolutions — as I'd like to interpret Modernism and Postmodernism. They may be outstanding for developing a culture based on creative individual impressions, but, at the same time, they could be dangerous for everyday communication, as they foster a lack of clarity regarding the following question: *What meaning was meant by the speaker?*

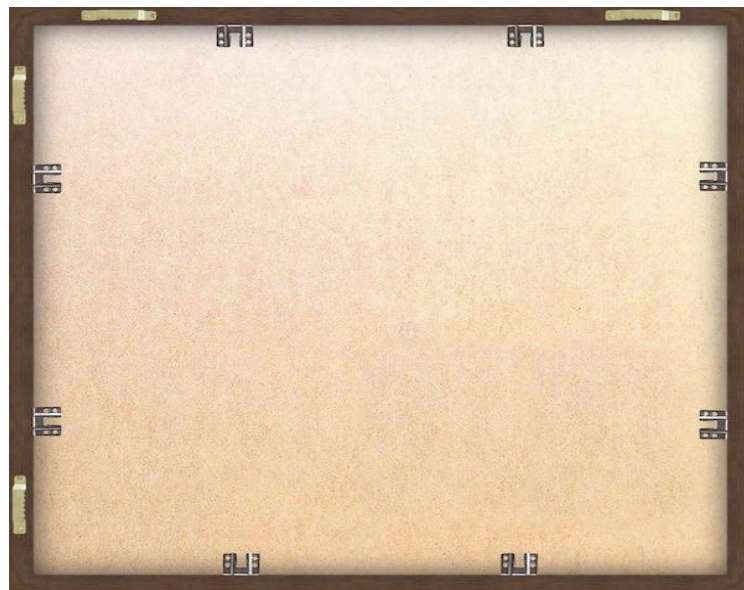
Modernism is characterized by the experimental radical break of traditional forms of a sign (fig.2), whereas postmodernism is characterized by the deconstruction of the

conventional meaning of a sign as it is shared in society (fig.3), logically resulting in the disappearance of a content of socially conventional common “sign”.

Fig. 2. Example of Modernism: Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*

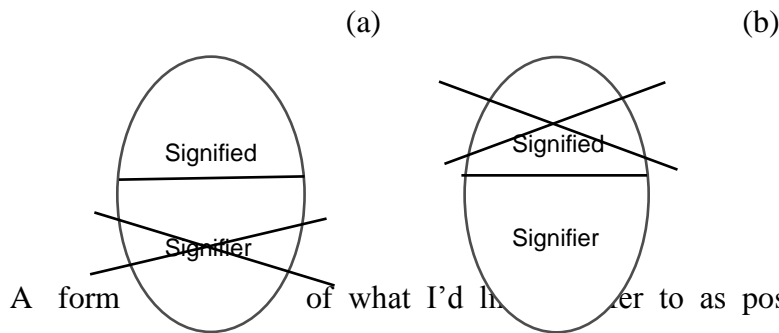


Fig. 3. Example of Postmodernism: Marmont Hill Collection, *Beauty and Flowers*



The difference between Modernism and Postmodernism may be represented by Figure

Fig. 4. Deconstruction of Sign in Modernism (a) and Postmodernism (b)

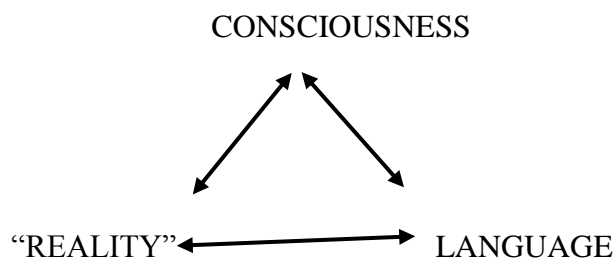


A form of what I'd like to refer to as postmodern sign establishes a symbiotic relationship not with the concept, reflecting perceptions that are common for all society, but with specific, individual, discursively divided perceptions based on particular impressions: The sound pattern now marks the concept, which is formed within the discourse that is created based on the *specifically* grouped perceptions. This matter hinders the realization of the communicative function of language: If the abstraction of specific perceptions, i.e., concepts, among the speakers of one language is not socialized — respectively, unified — and mirrors perceptions and impressions operating only in particular sub-discourses, communication becomes impossible to even between people speaking the same language as a SIGN formed in this way no longer allows common understanding: The decoding-identification of the sign becomes possible only in divided sub-discourses of sub-societies. Communication between such deconstructed sub-discourses is more akin to “translation” and thus naturally relates to motivation – Does anyone want to “translate”? Of course, unified discourse still functions for the whole society, but only as one of the sub-discourses, which keeps the possibility to continue human practical activities within the universe.

This state of language, according to the theoretical approach of Wilhelm von Humboldt, actually produces a more complex picture.

Generally speaking, information exists in three dimensions: Reality, Consciousness, and Language.

Fig. 5. Three Forms of Information



Relations between these forms of information are bilateral: Each defines and is defined by the other. For Humboldt, a language is not a simple product of human mental activity – *the*

ergon, but rather *the energeia* that creates the reality, and the linguistic picture of worldview is the only “reality” of humans. Thus, if we follow his approach, based on sub-discourses, virtual, parallel worlds are created, and communication between people in these virtual spaces is extremely restricted.

Such circumstances are characteristic and valuable for a sign in general. Always and in any stage of cultural development, there existed interpretations, and they were encouraged. However, in the new world, because of the developed technologies — Internet Spaces, Social Networks, and Telecommunication — there are exceedingly strong mechanisms to create socially stable sub-discourses competing with the whole discourse, which continues to function even only as one of the parallel ones.

The “communicative system” reacts to this chaotic situation in its way and, to preserve the referential function of a language, which, it can be said, is the primary one, tries to overcome this paradoxical case: A language must provide information about the factual world, however, on the contrary, it now refers to virtual, shattered “realities” created by specific, socially divided sub-discourses.

For example, in the Georgian language, a type of discourse marker appeared in colloquial speech, primarily, among the newer generation: *oyon(d) mart la* (‘but truly, really, undoubtedly’).

Examples:

(1) *dila-s* *k’arg-i* *amind-i* *iq’o,* *oyon(d)*
martla.

morning-DAT good-NOM weather-NOM be.PST.S.3.SG but.only.just really
‘The weather was good in the morning, but really.’

(2) *c’a-vid-e-t* *k’ino-shi, oyon(d)* *martla.*

PR-go.PST-SBJ-IMP.S.1.PL cinema-in but.only.just really

‘Let’s go to the cinema, but really.’

This phrase has lost its referential meaning and has become a *tag*-type functional, discourse-marker meaning: *Do not interpret the information, understand it literally!*

One of the newest strategies for saving communication seems to go even further: A language, on the one hand, seeks to minimize — if not completely abandon — the information system based on speech sounds. Speakers try to communicate only with the help of so-called keywords and give listeners the possibility to create their own interpretation-understandings; on the other hand, at the same time, they find a way to overcome this paradoxical situation by increasingly turning to visual forms of information coding that are allowed and encouraged based on new computer and TV technologies dominating in the modern space of mass media.

Yet, another strategy for overcoming the postmodern “empty” sign’s implementation from culture to life seems to be the appearance of a new direction in art and, more widely, in culture – Metamodern. Metamodernism tries to fill the “empty” content by keeping plurality, sometimes uniting opposite meanings into one oxymoronic concept: *hero-cowardly*, *evil-God*, *sunny-night*, *dead-alive*, etc. It encompasses the paradoxes, alternate realities, and swings of emotion that accompany life.

The conceptualization of metamodernism, and its identification as a trend, gave a name to a sensibility that many had observed separately and now can treat as *a thing*.

Humans yearn for meaning and demand change, perhaps even the rising of a secular spirituality on top of the organized religion’s ruins. Metamodernism overcomes this situation and offers a reflection of the pluralistic dichotomy of the world. However, on the other hand, metamodernism promotes the setting up of ambivalent and mentally problematic concepts.

Be it as it may, humans are social beings and communication is their main distinguishing feature. Therefore, humans seem to be bound to find a way to solve this crisis of communication.

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