

**ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКАЯ, ПРИКЛАДНАЯ И СРАВНИТЕЛЬНО-СОПОСТАВИТЕЛЬНАЯ
ЛИНГВИСТИКА/THEORETICAL, APPLIED AND COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS**

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DECODING PRINT MEDIA TEXTS IN TERMS OF SEMIOTICS

Research article

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Abstract

As the essential part of our modern society, media is rather important in production and communication of the addresser's messages. It also performs critical functions in decoding the meaning of every message sent to the addressee. The purpose of the article is to consider the process of decoding information and to analyze the encoded print media messages in terms of semiotics. It is emphasized that semiotics as the study of signs helps to decode the hidden meaning of the relevant messages for the addressee. F. de Saussure's model of the two parts of the sign, Ch. Peirce's 3-type categorization of signs, R. Barthes's relationship between denotation and connotation in the signification process, U. Eco's idea about the aberrant decoding, M. Meagher's two dominant positions of a symmetry in the decoding process — were some of the most significant contributions to semiotics. The semiotic analysis is one of the key approaches of the print media course. Print media texts show that there may be several layers of signification operating at once to give rise to much more complex hidden meanings. The author of the article says that decoding of print media texts by addressees is based on their individual experience, previous knowledge, cultural background, social status and even on their logic. The article summarizes that decoding print media texts by means of semiotic analysis discloses the interaction between words and images and the way they create different meanings for the addressee.

Keywords: decoding the message, semiotic analysis, aberrant decoding, cultural myths, archetype.

ДЕКОДИРОВАНИЕ ТЕКСТОВ ПЕЧАТНЫХ СМИ С ТОЧКИ ЗРЕНИЯ СЕМИОТИКИ

Научная статья

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Аннотация

Являясь неотъемлемой частью нашего современного общества, средства массовой информации играют весьма важную роль в производстве и передаче сообщений адресата. Они также выполняют важнейшие функции по расшифровке смысла каждого сообщения, отправляемого адресату. Цель статьи — рассмотреть процесс декодирования информации и проанализировать закодированные сообщения печатных СМИ с точки зрения семиотики. Подчеркивается, что семиотика как наука о знаках помогает расшифровать скрытый смысл соответствующих сообщений для адресата. Модель двух сторон знака Ф. де Соссюра, классификация Ч. Пирса о трех типах знака, идея Р. Барта о связи между денотативным и коннотативным значением слова, идея У. Эко об aberrantном декодировании, две доминирующие позиции симметрии М. Мигера в процессе декодирования — лишь некоторые работы ученых, которые внесли огромный вклад в семиотику. Семиотический анализ — один из ключевых подходов в курсе «Печатные СМИ». Тексты печатных СМИ показывают, что в них может быть несколько уровней значения, действующих одновременно и порождающих гораздо более сложные скрытые смыслы. Автор статьи утверждает, что расшифровка смысла текстов печатных СМИ адресатами основана на их индивидуальном опыте, предыдущих знаниях, культурном происхождении, социальном статусе и даже на их логике. В статье делается вывод о том, что декодирование текстов печатных СМИ с помощью семиотического анализа раскрывает взаимодействие между словами и изображениями и то, как они создают различные смысловые значения для адресата.

Ключевые слова: декодирование сообщения, семиотический анализ, aberrantное декодирование, культурные мифы, архетип.

Introduction

It is hard to imagine our modern society without media. Media forms diversity makes it possible to convey meanings verbally, visually, graphically and by interfaces. The way the messages are transmitted and interpreted by addressees is a matter for discussion [2]. Media forms usually produce and transfer meanings in different ways. Due to semiotics, these meanings are able to be decoded by the addressee better.

The process of addressee's interpreting the message is called *decoding*. It is preceded by the process of addresser's making the message, called *encoding*. The addresser's mission will be completely possible if that message is sent through a *transmitter*. The transmitter is a necessary channel for communication, a medium such as a newspaper, a magazine, video and others. Its task to deliver a valuable message for further decoding [4].

As soon as the addressees possess the message, they start decoding the meaning of it [6]. Message decoding in semiotics can be presented as studies about symbols and signs as the language and visual tools to provide a special inner view into the message. The purpose of the semiotic analysis is to discover secret meanings of the corresponding message for the addressee.

Discussion

In the print media course, the semiotic analysis is one of the critical issues. Semiotics studies signs in the culture how they deliver the meaning. It can be any aspect of print, audio-visual or digital media. Semiotics is a complex field in which you need to have basic knowledge and skills. When you use the semiotic analysis to decode a print media text, you should use it alongside with the theoretical framework and terminology compared with other linguistic fields.

Advanced research in the field of semiotics was done due to such outstanding scientists as Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Pierce, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco and others [1], [5], [8], [10].

F. de Saussure's model of the sign and the signification process can be shown as follows: sign = signifier + signified [10].

(signifier) *sun* → (signified) ☼

The *signifier* (acoustic image) cannot exist without the *signified* (meaning of the word). These two parts of the sign operate in tandem. The signified as the mental concept is triggered at the moment the signifier is perceived. *Signs* can be both simple and complex. Most analysed print media texts can be regarded as complex signs. They are comprised of a lot of signifiers and signifieds combined into a larger, united signification of the sign. Though in print advertisements, the simple signs can often be used as a very effective tool of persuasion.

Furthermore, there was a general tendency to categorize signs into 3 types: *iconic signs*, *indexical signs* and *symbolic signs* [8].

- Iconic signs are like exact, obvious images of the signified (*photos, maps, drawings etc.*);
- Indexical signs point to a causal relationship between the signifier and the signified (*footprints, traffic signs, a weather vane etc.*);
- Symbolic signs are with no physical relationship between the signifier and the signified (*mathematical symbols, numbers, Morse code, traffic lights etc.*).

For most people, decoding has become the second nature to such an extent that they do not notice that they are decoding. E.g. Let us consider the car drivers, they interpret the colours of the traffic lights automatically. These symbolic signs as the non-verbal signals encoded by the addresser are the basis for the messages to be interpreted by the addressee. Therefore, a red light is an encoded signal prohibiting the addressees to move ahead. A green light is an encoded signal allowing the addressees to move ahead. It is the context-dependent meaning according to universally agreed upon social codes of road rules [3]. Thus, individuals decode such messages by means of social codes in the society.

Another remarkable contribution to semiotics was the research of the relationship between *denotation* and *connotation* in the signification process [1]. It is known that the lexical meaning of a word may have two components: denotational and connotational. The main function of the word is to denote things or concepts. Undoubtedly, a physicist knows more about the atom than a cook does. But they both understand what the atom is. It is the denotation that makes the communication possible. The second component deals with the stylistic value of the word.

In another example, the word “*sun*” and the concept it signifies (e.g. *the star in the centre of the solar system*) — is the first order of signification. Connotation is the meaning arising from the sign. In fact, it is the recognition of an agreed meaning of a sign. The second order of signification is when a signified becomes a new signifier which is an intricate process (e.g. *light, warmth, happiness, guidance*). In one print media text, there may be several layers of signification working at once. They give rise to much more complex hidden meanings than simply understanding the meaning of a word.

It should be noted that what is decoded does not simply follow from the interpretation of the message. For example, the addresser may have a secret intention to manipulate the addressees (audience) to achieve a desired goal. It is often done by the advertising industry to get more profit from the sales of special products or services.

Decoding is not a simple process for the addressee to interpret the addresser's message. While decoding, it is the addressee who has to find the balance between a signifier and a signified. In fact, the addressees decode the information by means of their cultural signs [11]. The cultural signs are based on addressee's individual experience and previous knowledge, cultural background and social status etc. And when there is a discrepancy between the intended meaning and the interpreted meaning, we deal with the *aberrant decoding* [5]. This failure of communicating the meaning between two sides may happen for a number of reasons, including their different social class and status, ideology and views, cultures and religion.

Fortunately, signs are known to have some sort of balance in them, called a *symmetry* [7]. There are two positions of a symmetry: *the most symmetrical position* and *the least symmetrical position*. In the most symmetrical position, the decoding process is based on the same logic between the addresser and the addressee. For example, if you are a professional golf player (addressee), living in London and you look through your favourite National Club Golfer Magazine issued by the well-known London company (addresser) for a new line of golf equipment and golf outfit. You have much in common with this London company which produces everything necessary for golf. You like the information about golf, you are both from London, you clearly understand the encoded message of this golf company because you and that London golf company decode the message using the same logic.

Let us consider the example of the least symmetrical decoding position. Imagine you are not a Londoner, you hate playing golf and watching all its expensive equipment. The result is sure to be negative after looking through that National Club Golfer Magazine. Probably, you will reject the addresser's message, even if the information is carefully presented in bright colours and with nice fonts. The oppositional reaction occurs because the addressee decodes the message as either deceptive or unreal for that moment. The negative reaction happens when the addressee is biased, has different social status or cultural background.

Another significant contribution to the field was *the concept of a myth*, which still remains essential in any study of culture [1]. A myth is a group of shared cultural connotations that reflect a dominant ideology. *Cultural myths* are one way in which we share ideas about ourselves and make sense of our society. They are part of a higher level of signification.

Myths are often created in the society to gain political goals in election or presidential campaigns. Such myths are called *political* or *technological*, which present a complex interaction of both individual and public consciousness [12]. These myths are built on the *archetype* — the structural inherited elements of the collective unconscious, which are able to transfer some human values from one generation to the other. The archetype representations like symbols can evoke definite images and associations in the addressee's mind [9]. For the archetype:

- “ruler” the main value is to be imperious, ruling, recognizable;
- “destroyer” — to be aggressive, destructive, dangerous;
- “creator” — to be ready to achieve and create something new.

Conclusion

This article proved the importance of doing the semiotic analysis in decoding the hidden meaning of the message in the print media sent to the addressee. The given scientific study emphasized the basic aspects of semiotics regarding such terms as: the sign, three types of the sign, the signifier and the signified as two sides of the sign, the denotation and the connotation in the signification process, the processes of encoding and decoding, the aberrant decoding, the symmetry and its two positions and the concept of a myth. Decoding print media texts in terms of semiotics by addressees is usually based on their individual experience, previous knowledge, cultural background, social status and even on their logic.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Рецензия

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Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Review

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