

HABILITATION THESIS

Semiotic dimensions of verbal communication

Senior Researcher Mihaela MOCANU, PhD

Abstract

The habilitation thesis entitled *Semiotic dimensions of verbal communication* summarizes the research directions and scientific outcomes the candidate has obtained since 2011, the year she defended her Ph.D. dissertation until the present date. The topic suggested by the title points to the research interests related to the field of communication sciences and the option for a semiotic approach to the phenomenon of communication, supported by the conceptual and methodological apparatus of disciplines such as linguistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, computational linguistics. In addition to the research directions, our thesis also presents a series of research projects carried out by the candidate as director or member of the research team.

The thesis is structured in three parts: the first chapter describes the candidate's professional and scientific background; the second chapter presents the candidate's research activity and her most relevant research outcomes after obtaining the Ph.D. degree, and the third part includes the academic career development plan. Thus, the proposed topic for the habilitation thesis falls into five research directions: (1) the semiotic dimension of communication; (2) the semiotics of political discourse; (3) the semiotics of journalistic discourse; (4) the semiotics of Romanian greetings; (5) the use of digital technologies in the analysis of public discourse. The use of the research tools specific to several disciplines with which the communication sciences intersect not only through the object of research but also through the general objective of the analytical approach, allowed us to develop an integrative perspective on public discourse as a significant and functional entity in its various aspects.

Our option for a semiotic approach to verbal communication acts is based on the belief that a unified perspective, that would grasp and exploit the connections between disciplines and the interactions between the various fields of knowledge, proves much more fruitful than any fragmented, disciplinary perspective on the object of research. Situated at the borderline between anthropology, sociology, social psychology, philosophy, linguistics, and the disciplines of communication, semiotics claims a wide range of research fields and integrative methodological approaches, starting from the premise of meaning as the common denominator of all these sciences. A semiotic approach dominated by the perspective of the sign, the semiotic approach

favors the analysis of communication as a significant ensemble, which bears the mark of the context that generates it. The semiotic approach aims at describing the mechanisms and strategies of communication in relation to the parameters of the communication situation, while the use of a variety of research tools contributes to a complex perspective on the structure and functionality of communication. We cannot speak of a process of signification, of semiosis, outside a communication situation, since signs only realize their signifying potential within a concrete act of communication. From this perspective, the “semiotic situation” or semiosis is in a relation of interdependence with the communicative situation: semiosis refers to the process by which an individual communicates with the help of signs, whereas the communicative process, in turn, only becomes possible due to the systems of signification. Using Saussure’s sheet of paper metaphor we could describe signification and communication as the two sides of the same sheet, functioning in a relationship of mutual conditioning.

As a research approach, the semiotics of communicative acts aims at relating the production of meaning to other types of social production and to social relations. Comprising a mainly theoretical approach to communication, since it aims at identifying generally valid principles, semiotics is interested in the functioning of communication acts, investigating the relationships between the semiotic system, culture, and reality. In the semiotic approach, the stress falls on the stages of the communication process, on the text itself, and the relations it has with the production and reception of culture. Semiotics is interested in the role held by communication in legitimizing and preserving values, as well as in the manner in which these values render communication its meaning. According to semiotics experts, communication is unavoidable and various interpretations of the same sign do not indicate a failure in communication, since different interpretation scales reflect social and cultural differences between the participants in communication. The reasons for these differences in interpretation are rooted in culture and society rather than in the communication process itself. Communication systems become possible only within a specific culture and their interpretation reveals the appurtenance to a particular culture.

The theoretical approach to the semiotics of verbal communication, developed in the first section of the chapter dedicated to the research directions, is completed by a series of semiotic researches applied to verbal communication acts in the political and journalistic areas. A separate section deals with the semiotics of greetings which, as semiotic expressions of politeness, reflect not only a behaviour code agreed upon at the community level but also information regarding the

relationship between the speakers and the cultural tradition they belong to. The use of digital techniques for the processing of natural language has provided the prerequisites for objectifying the analysis of political and journalistic discourse. The use of digital tools in the analysis of semiosis mechanisms and communication strategies has facilitated the approach of circumscribing the features of verbal communication, in its discursive occurrences, on the one hand in relation to their functions and effects, and on the other hand to the discursive skills of the speakers.

Our habilitation thesis capitalizes on the results of research published in various books and articles, each of the sections detailing the research directions containing specific bibliographical references. The development of theoretical perspectives is corroborated with the results of applied semiotic research using the methodological tools of communication sciences and natural language processing. The last section of the thesis, corresponding to the third chapter, outlines our academic career development plan and our intentions regarding our involvement in the activities of the Doctoral School of Communication Sciences. Our position as a doctoral supervisor will facilitate further development of collaborations with young researchers, initiated by the candidate during the research projects implemented so far whose research teams have already included master and doctoral students.