

Lexical vs semiotic, full vs partial: redefining iconicity in the study of lexicons.

It has been most often assumed in the study of lexicons that it should follow from the semiotic existence of three types of signs, namely iconic, deictic and symbolic signs (Pierce, 2020), that:

- any lexical unit within lexicons should belong to one of these categories;
- any lexical unit that is not an icon nor a deictic must be a symbol;
- lexical units cannot be semiotically composite, and for instance cannot be partly iconic.
- because the form of symbols is defined as an arbitrary one, proximity between the forms of «underived» symbols should be assumed to be coincidental.

The aim of the communication will be to show that in the studies of lexicons, all such assumptions are problematic due to the widespread existence of lexical differentiation on the one hand, and because of the existence of partial iconicity on the other hand.

Lexical differentiation (LD) will be defined as a relation between two or more words/signs, which:

- i) are not derived from one another;
- ii) have partly distinct forms and partly distinct meanings;
- iii) share a large part of both their form and meaning.

It will be shown that because lexicons such as the French lexicon are extensively structured by LD-based relationships, the idea that grammatically-minimal words/lexemes - i.e. underived words such as the French noun *porte* (door) - should be considered as being symbols with arbitrary forms and the idea that what is not derived should be considered as simple (Hockett, 1954), should be dropped: the fact for sets of underived words to routinely have overlapping forms and meanings should be acknowledged as resulting from the existence of networks/webs of *lexical iconicity*, in contrast with classical *semiotic iconicity* as a property of individual signs. Examples of lexical differentiation in French will be provided, ranging from simple pairs such as:

<i>porte</i>	\pɔʁt\	door	<i>porche</i>	\pɔʁʃ\	porch
<i>navigu-er</i>	\navig\	to navigate	<i>navire</i>	\naviʁ\	a ship
<i>poème</i>	\pɔɛm\	poem	<i>poète</i>	\pɔɛt\	poet
<i>futile</i>	\fytil\	futile	<i>utile</i>	\ytil\	useful

to extensive examples of morphosemantic overlaps within large lexical webs.

The consequences of that distinction will be drawn regarding classical issues such as sound symbolism and phonaesthemes. It will also be shown that lexical web iconicity often coexists with semiotic iconicity in onomatopoeia in French once prosody is considered. In other words, it will be shown that onomatopoeia as iconic signs in French are simultaneously part of lexical webs resulting from lexical differentiation - whose other members are not semiotically characterized as iconic when considered individually - and prosodically iconic.

Regarding partial iconicity, It will first be shown that because semiotic iconicity may only be a property of minimal *signs*, it cannot be transferred as such to non-minimal signs (e.g. words), even when it remains as a backgrounded layer in the meaning of such words.

It will for instance be shown that the form *cuckoo* as an iconic sign mimicking the sound produced by a bird, becomes only partly iconic when it metonymically becomes the name of a bird, mostly non-iconic when it refers to female cuckoos or when it is used as an hyperonym and rigid designator (Kripke, 1980) for a class of 144 species of cuckoos and its members, with only one species having males that are actually producing the cuckoo song (Nemo, 2023). In other words, it will be shown that many (non-minimal) signs may not be said to be semiotically iconic, even if they do presuppose some backgrounded and partial iconicity, and that this type of observation must be extended in reality to all non- minimal signs, in other words to most signs within any a lexicon, which may be proven to be semiotically composite, with either layers of iconicity associated with layers of indexicality or layers of arbitrariness associated with layers of indexicality (Cadiot, 1997) .

References

- Baudouin de Courtenay, Jan Nieciśław. 1895. *Versuch einer Theorie phonetischer Alternationen: Ein Kapitel aus der Psychophonetik*, Strassburg/Crakow.
- Cadiot, Pierre. 1997. Sur l'indexicalité des noms. In D. Dubois (ed.), *Catégorisation et cognition: de la perception au discours*, 243-269. Paris: Editions Kimé.
- Dingemanse, M., Blasi, D. E., Lupyan, G., Christiansen, M. H., & Monaghan, P. 2015. Arbitrariness, iconicity, and systematicity in language. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 19(10), 603-615.
- Hockett, Charles Francis. 1954. "Two Models on Grammatical Description," in: *Word*, 10, 210-234. *Readings in Linguistics*, vol.1, 386-399.
- Kripke, Saul. 1980. *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Nemo, F. 2019). "Arbitrariness of the Sign, Arbitrariness of the Word, Arbitrariness of the Morpheme". In *The Arbitrariness of the Sign in Question*. Jean-Yves Beziau, (editor). London: College Publications. 25-46;
- Nemo, F (2023, to appear) « Indexicality in the minimal/non-minimal (or less minimal) sign relationship ». In *Indexicality: The role of indexing in language structure and language change*. Peter Juluus Nielsen & María Sol Sansiñena Pascual(eds). Mouton de Gruyter.
- Peirce, Charles 2020. *Selected Writings on Semiotics 1894-1912*. Bellucci Francesco (ed.). Berlin/Boston: Mouton de Gruyter.