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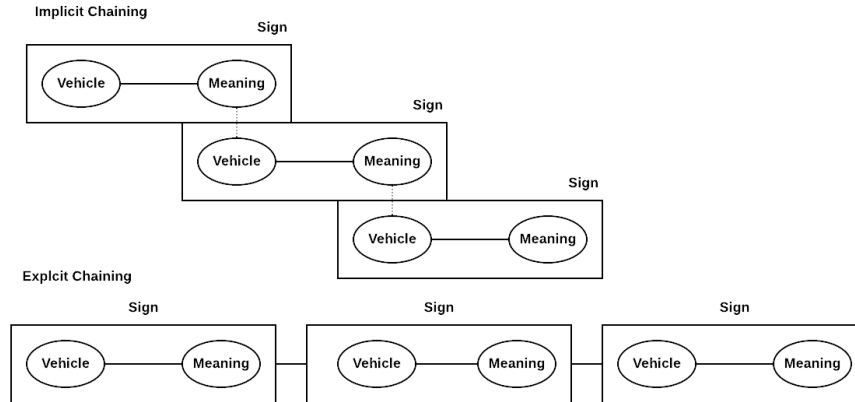
Modeling Meaning Dyadically

Meaning through relations

Something can mean something else. In order to derive further meaning about something, we need to relate it to what it means. The potential arbitrariness of these relations infers that anything can mean something else if it is related to mean so. To interpret something toward an alternative meaning would be to interpret it as a **sign**. Different interpretations of the same information could conceive different signs; different meanings. This interpretation process is known as **signification**. If signification is paramount to meaning-making, we will begin our pursuit by formally modeling the sign.

Dyadic foundations

Early conceptions of the sign consisted of two parts: the **sign-vehicle** and its **referent**. The relationship between the two form the **meaning**. Philosophers have not always been clear about the ontology of these two relata. The potential physical and psychological instantiations of each need formalized within our model. If the referent can be reinterpreted again as a sign-vehicle of another sign then the process of signification could continue. If this were indeed the case, then the content of any two relata could take either form depending on their relation within a sign. This would in turn affect the ontological properties of both the vehicle and the referent. Alternatively, instead of reinterpreting referents, new relationships could be made among already formed signs. These two concatenation strategies would affect the order of sign creation and interpreted relations.

The first strategy of implicit chaining connects signs by merging relata; a reinterpretation of referent to a sign vehicle. The second strategy of explicit chaining introduces a new interpreted relation between existing signs.

Initial questions

Our initial description of signs begets further questions that a model would need to address. In regards to relation:

- how are relations formed to make signs and/or connect signs?
- are relations directional, bidirectional, or directionless?
- how do referents get reinterpreted as a sign vehicle?
- are relations always binary?

In regards to meaning:

- through signification, what does immediate self-referential signs imply?
- through signification, what does non-immediate cyclic signs imply?
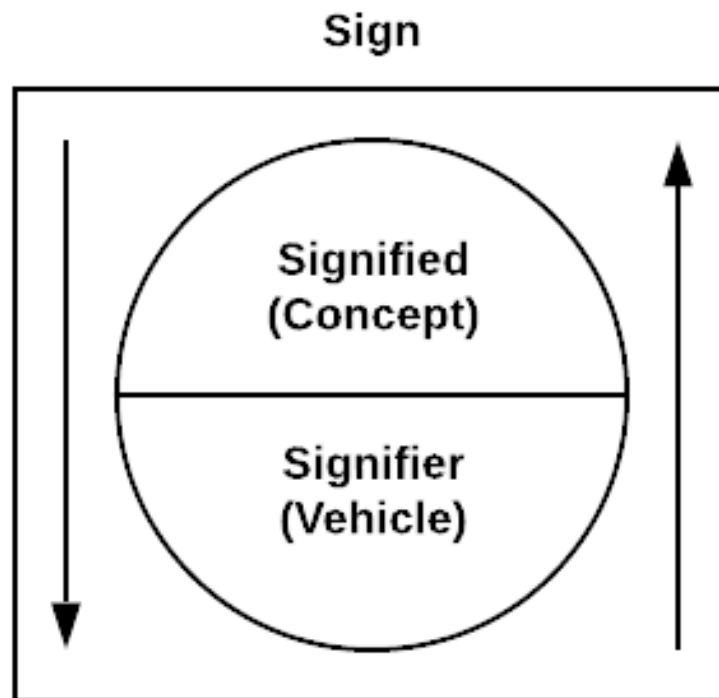- when does signification terminate?

In regards to structure:

- in what order . . .

Saussure's model

Ferdinand de Saussure's model of the dyadic sign is another conceived starting point for meaning-making. The original conception was an evenly split circle. Each slice is labeled differently as **signifier** and **signified**. The signifier is the form which the sign takes. The signified is the concept it represents. Upward and downward arrows are drawn on each side of the circle. The original intention

of these arrows was unlikely to express a bidirectional relationship. Instead it shows that the two relata come to together to form the sign. The signifier is similar to the sign vehicle conceived earlier. Referent has been changed to the signified; the concept pointed to by the signifier. They are said to be inseparable relata that together form a sign.

Sign

Signified
(Concept)

Signifier
(Vehicle)

From Saussure's perspective, both the signifier and the signified were purely psychological. The signifier is not just a mental image or sound of what was seen or heard. It is the impression made in the mind. Saussure also wants to make it clear that the signified is not to be confused with the traditional referent on physical reality.

Extension of realms

Interpretation results