

Connotation in semiotics according to Roland Barthes approach

Feyrouz Bouzida*

Abstract

Semiotics also called semiology has been first defined by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand De Saussure as the science of signs in the early twentieth century in his book “cours de linguistique general”. As semiology is concerned of signs in language, it has allowed the proliferation of a number of perspectives that paved the way to other cultural phenomena that raised the study of signs through its denotative and connotative meanings. Roland Barthes is one of the main figures of semiology; he has developed his semiological approach with a new spirit that refers basically to denotation and connotation in relation to photographic images as a system of signs. Barthes also has claimed that the term connotation can be applied to semiotic modes other than language.

Connotation is a term used by Roland Barthes to describe the interaction that occurs when the sign meets the feelings and the values of the users through their culture. In this second level of signification, connotation deals with the subjective meanings and interpretations of the sign. Furthermore, the Barthesian approach suggests a new semiological doctrine that allowed the analysis of the sign system in order to prove how even nonverbal communications are opened to different interpretations.

According to Barthes, the visual sign is related to the aesthetic and ideological factors that are related to subjective interpretations at the second level of signification in order to explain how meaning is created through complex semiological interactions. Thus, semiology uses a wide variety of signs including: images, adverts, and films to provide the recipients with knowledge they need to have the ability to analyze and reproduce meanings.

Key words: semiology, connotation, sign, image.

* - Emir Abd-el-Kader University

Introduction

With the rise of structuralism school in the late of the 19th century and the early 20th century many issues were investigated such as semiology which is a science studies the sign process established, by Ferdinand de Saussure. These ideas greatly stimulated the development of new semiological approaches led mainly by Roland Barthes who studied semiology with a new spirit .The Barthesian approach emerged to study other nonverbal signs within the linguistic ones and in each case there is a signifier and a signified. Barthes, additionally, used to analyze the sign system in two levels denotation and connotation.

Connotation for him refers to what signs signify and how meanings are constructed and understood. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explain one of the main significant semiotic analyses according to Roland Barthes who developed the idea of connotation in the sign system that gave a new identity and a new way of sign analysis which is opened to many meanings and interpretations.

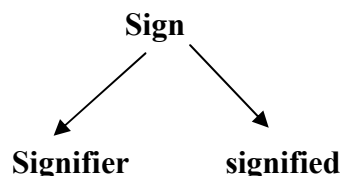
1- What is semiology?

Semiotics has been first defined by Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist as 'the science of signs '(Sibhan Chappman, Christopher Routledge 2009). De Saussure postulated that semiology is the general science of signs in which linguistics would form only one part. On the other hand, Roland Barthes has inverted Saussure's declaration, i-e linguistics is not part of the general science of signs, it is semiology which is a part of linguistics. Barthes proclaimed that semiology is a mere subset of linguistics, therefore, semiology according to him aims to take in any system of signs whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects '(Roland Barthes 1968) these signs constitute a system of significance.

2- The structure of the semiological sign

The semiological sign is a compound relation (R) of the signifier, the plane of expression (E), and the signified, the plane of content (C). Hjelmslev in this subject suggested an important idea about the sign, thus; each plane refers to two main strata form and substance.

Roland Barthes did not come out too much from de Saussure's perception of the sign as a compound system of two main components (the signifier and the signified), 'not a thing and name but a concept and a sound image '(Ferdinand de Saussure 1915).



2-1 Features of the sign

We can explain the main features of the sign in the following table:

| The sign | The nature |
|------------------|--|
| Signifier | The signifier has a material nature whether in the form of sounds, objects or images; also the signifier is associated to the signified. |
| Signified | The signified is the mental representation of things, it has a psychological and abstract nature that is given by the signifier |

In addition, Barthes suggests that the semiological sign like objects, gestures, photographs are often objects of everyday use, he said 'we propose to call these semiological sign whose origin is utilitarian and functional, sign functions (Roland Barthes, 1968), for instance, clothes are used for protection and food for nourishment. Therefore, every usage is converted into a sign.

3- What is connotation in the system of signification?

The system of Signification according to Roland Barthes is the relation (R) between the two planes of the sign (E R C).

Signification = E R C

Connotation is derived from 'the Latin verb con-noto which refers to an implied or accompanying feature as the prefix "con" suggests (Siobhan Chapman and Christopher Routledge, 2009). In Oxford dictionary connotation "is an idea suggested by a word in addition to its main meaning' (Oxford advanced learner's dictionary 2000).

Roland Barthes has suggested that connotation is a term used to explain the way in which signs work. Furthermore, It is the implication evoked by words or statements and images over what they actually denote, also' connotative signs can be personal and individual or general and universal '(J.A Cuddon 1998). According to Barthes connotation is used 'to describe one of the three ways in which signs work in the second order of signification' (John Fisk 1992). This term is influenced by the subjective factors and the values of the user's culture. For Barthes, 'connotation being itself a system comprises

signifier, signified and the process which unites the former to the latter (signification) ‘(Roland Barthes 1968).

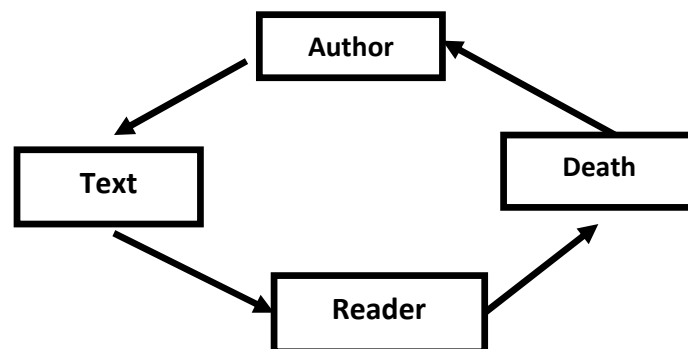
Connotation refers to the multiplicity of the meaning, it is the reproduction of meaning which is built on denotation, For Barthes ‘connotation relies upon the prior existence of denotation, it always works in the borrowed territory of the denoted’ (Harry Jamieson 2007).

4-Connnotation and the death of the author:

Barthes contends that the author can no longer be regarded as the omniscient and holds the total authority and influence in the text. He considers the reader to become as the premier source of power in a work of literature. According to him ‘the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author’ (J.A Cuddon 1998), the secret behind this is the moment of erupting significance and the reader’s birth who give interpretations to the text. It is worth to not that the idea refers to a very important point i-e the intersection happened between semiotics and the deconstructive theory which is one of the main ideas proposed by Jacque Derrida.

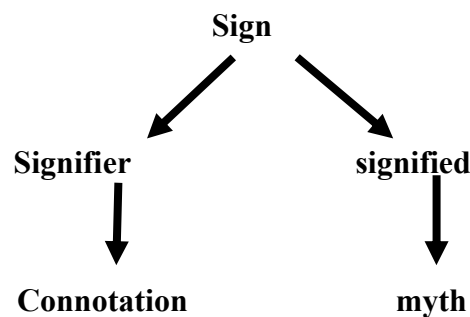
Since semiology deals with ‘how meanings are encoded within signs’ (Brenda Downes and Steve Miller 1998), the idea expresses the way the reader generates meanings from the sign system which is used for communication. Connotation, that is referred to the death of the author, is basically associated with’ the meaning of a word that is broader than its central and primary sense’ (R.L Trask 2007) which tends to be even more ideological, cultural and also personal, so all those associations during reading lead to the birth of the reader or the receiver of the message.

To explain this idea we suggest this model:



5- Myth and connotation

Barthes identified a myth as a type of speech but of course not any type because 'language needs special conditions in order to become a myth' (Roland Barthes 1972). For Barthes a myth is a message that belongs to the communicative system. Although the myth is a type of speech, it cannot be defined by the message objects, thus, it is identified by the way in which it utters this message. He argues that mythology is a part of semiology, formal science, ideology and history. The myth for Barthes is the culture's way of thinking and conceptualizing it, and the existing myth has a common use and understanding in culture before the photograph which stimulates a series of concepts. For Barthes, the myth represents the second order- meaning of the signified as shown in the following drawing:



Barthes argues that myths are the natural result of the dominant social class by a particular history; therefore, these myths must carry history which is the main way to make it available and work. He stressed on the dynamism of myths; they are changeable to meet the needs and culture values. The Barthesian approach described myths as innocent speech not because of its hidden intentions, if they were hidden, but because they are naturalized. On the other hand, the myth consumer takes it innocently through a factual system of facts, whereas it is a semiological system.

4- Connotation in the visual sign

- Rhetoric of the image –

Rhetoric is the art of using language for persuasion in speaking or writing especially in oratory' (J.A Cuddon, 1998). As an art, rhetoric has been used in media language in order to influence and persuade the audience. The image is a visual sign has the power to create connotative meanings and representing the world more than of what is denoted.

The visual signs, this is their initial or primary responsibility, also possess the propensity to set in train a range of secondary significations additional to that denoted. Thus, the way is opened for connotation, the building of additional significations on the basis of an existing denotation' (Harry Jamieson 2007). According to Roland Barthes connotation of the image is influenced by the cultural and mythic factors, in addition, the image is characterized by its structural independence associated to the aesthetic and ideological factors in order to address the audience who give connotative meanings to the sign through.

In his book mythologies, Barthes has mentioned that ‘photography has a power to convert which must be analyzed’ (Roland Barthes 1972). for example in elections candidates adorn their prospectus with a portrait as a means to establish a link between them and the voters , so photography here tends to suggest the physical climate and an ellipse of language. It is worth noting that; connotation of the visual sing/image depends on the existing knowledge of the audience of how things work within the image in media.

Conclusion

To conclude, the process of semiology refers to signs in all their manifestations which involve the signifier and the signified as the principle components. According to Roland Barthes, semiology emphasizes on connotation as one of the major elements in the sign system. In addition, the process of semiology refers to signs in all their manifestations which involve the signifier and the signified as the principle components of this system.

We have seen that signs especially the photographic images as analogues contain an infinite connotations and interpretations from the sign that is firstly denoted. Signs including words and visual images are open to a wide range of interpretation in a chain of related concepts; he called them a myth that carries history as a representation of the second order of signification. It is worth to note that, Barthes semiological approach was highly applied especially in mass media as a qualitative method to analyze the visual and linguistic signs in the field of media. Finally, for us as researchers we need to explore, develop and analyze his thoughts and approaches in order to study the different semiological signs especially those that are related to non verbal communication.

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