

# Semiotics of Everyday Life Cultural Structures

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## Abstract

The paper deals with linguistic analysis of cultural structure semiotics in the space of everyday life language. The goal of the analysis of everyday life discourse is to discover communicative regularities in the context of quotidian communication on the basis of such research methods as metalinguistics, communication, semiotic analyses and cognitive linguistic description. The research is conducted within the discourses of polycode (also called creolized) texts in The New Yorker (2015). The result of this approach was to offer an account of characteristic features of a quotidian discourse such as visualization as a basic semiotic principle of language semiosis. The iconic (visualization) technique in discourse expresses itself in a creolized text, i.e. a polycode text functioning in mass media communication. We analyzed several types of creolization within a text: repetition, additive, emphatic, appositive, integrative and visual centered texts. So, we have presented evidence that a creolized text is a complex sign which combines verbal and iconic information into a structural, meaningful and functional whole with a unique pragmatic force.

## Keywords

Everyday Life Discourse, Quotidian, Cultural Structures, Mass Communication, Visualization, Iconism, Creolized Text, Polycode Text

Received: August 23, 2015 / Accepted: September 10, 2015 / Published online: October 16, 2015

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## 1. Introduction: The Category of Everyday Life

The philosophical category of everyday life can be defined as the category of being or existence framed with the time-space coordinates of the “now” and “here” of human life. Everyday life is a life itself as a whole with its realities. The culture of everyday life is the culture in a variety of all life aspects, it is what a man is emerged to, where he/she lives and thinks, how they talk and communicate.

The culture of quotidian includes organization of human relationships, communication and behavioral culture, the culture of discussions, political culture, mass media culture, the culture of life styles, etc. Thus, the initial point of an everyday life cultural conceptualization is a man with his consciousness of a world in a form of naïve awareness. Naïve consciousness aimed at understanding of language

functioning, communication of all types and forms was institutionalized as linguistics of naïve metalanguage. The object of naïve linguistics is facts of spontaneous extensive development of the studies of naïve consciousness, with such aspects as mechanisms of metalinguistic activities of the speaker and the hearer, a portrait of metalinguistic personality (individual and collective), types of social interaction of language persons, language politics, problems of popular (folk) linguistics. Naïve metalinguistic awareness as a characteristic of a person in his everyday life practices is in the centre of philosophical and cultural category of everyday life (quotidian), the interest of which is present in a postmodern philosophy in a form of a problem of “quotidian”.

The term “quotidian” (fr. Quotidien; germ. Alltag, Alltagsleben) appeared in the tradition of social humanities as a result of redirecting modern philosophical studies to the analysis of everyday life problems, which touch upon the

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most important processes of cultural unconsciousness (Ross, 1997). Tradition of quotidian studies is rather deep and goes back to Aristotle's philosophy. It got a new impulse with the work of Michel de Certeau (1984) "The Practice of Everyday Life". The works of Erving Goffman (1959) "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life", Pierre Bouvier (1989) "Le Travail au Quotidien. Une Démarche Socio-anthropologique" and Pierre Bourdieu (1979) were also devoted to problems and aspects of language behavior, manners of life and life styles, ways of thought of different social groups and classes, analyzing the category of quotidian.

Today it is again actual to study the category of everyday life in traditions of philosophy, social anthropology, cultural studies and linguistics. As B. Waldenfels argues (1998), the interest to the problems of everyday life today can be attributed as a symptom of vacuum, the genesis of which is accounted with the presence of one-sided rationality. On the other side, the interest to everyday life can be connected with such questions as semiotics of things, mass media culture, archetypes of mass consciousness as regulations of behavior, etiquette, prestige, fashion, advertizing, image making, correlation of high and ordinary forms of culture. A modern cultural reality is based on several common principles: acceptability, copy-making, connection with technical instruments, production and consumption by groups. These principles characterize the everyday life culture, which appears as a culture of common people, a culture written in small letters, a culture of democracy and humanity, which explains the heightening of interest to its studies conditioned by the necessity to differentiate traditional culture from an alternative one, culture as spirituality from non-culture of emptiness and moral and ethical vacuum.

The analysis of everyday life culture organized as a semiotic independently functioning system, can be held on a semiotic platform through some a priori concept generating structures or cultural structures. Cultural structures can be interpreted as transcendental forms of a discourse which: 1) precede the person's act of concepts' generation, 2) structure and format mechanisms of separate feelings, 3) enable to input meanings and senses into persons' actions and impressions (Vijk, 2011).

## 2. Everyday Life Cultural Structures

The meaning of the term "quotidian" varies in the works of different authors. For example, Kasavin, I. N, Schavelev, S. P. (2004) understand it in a social anthropological aspect as a cumulated experience of a group translated in the process of learning languages, rituals, etc. In a methodological aspect it

is a static image of the world in which creative innovative processes are artificially stopped and only stable constant undoubted foundations of human activities are revealed, such as traditions, rituals, categorical systems. Everyday life as an unchangeable list of human behavior reactions to the world is reflected in various models of behavior existing in cultures presenting themselves in codices of social etiquette, regulating the choice of speech patterns in different communicative situations.

In a process of learning languages everyday life means the necessity to remember and train definite grammar rules, set phrases and clichés such as sayings, idioms, citations and phrases of authoritative people and celebrities. In a linguistic anthropological aspect everyday life culture reflects itself in a tendency of interdiscourse communication which is most evident in mass media and a web communicative space. It is the web and media communicative forms that are rich with language clichés, and are characterized by allusiveness of its discourse, permeated with references, hints, allusions to some famous contexts, words, expressions, and citations, to songs, novels, films. As a result, a global hyper textual space emerges, where everything is connected with everything, today relates with yesterday and tomorrow simultaneously.

The phenomena of interpenetration of languages of everyday life semiotics are widely spread today. Now these processes are so diverse and various that it is possible to say about transcultural tendencies in a global discourse. Interrelations of western and eastern, of northern and southern cultures can be observed worldwide, together with interrelation of synchronic and diachronic cultural processes. Thus, characteristic features of everyday life cultural structures are as follows: co occurrence, a cycling nature, a rhythmic pattern of events of common life; a hermeneutic nature of life spaces; conservatism and stability of cultural forms; mediocrity and a massive character of forms and objects; reference to private life; a philistine behavior and domesticity.

A most prominent feature of everyday life cultural structure is visualization and clarity, i.e. all objects of the world must be perceived as definite, clear, visual, as images rather than concepts. Consequently, it is possible to assume a semiotic nature of everyday life while a human experience is a space with semiotic systems of specific organization, and visualization is a special way of coding the content of everyday life. Visualization in the code presents an iconic principle of codification, which reveals itself in an affect of embodiment, corporeality, physicality, bodily full images, in the usage of schemas, pictures, graphics, cartoons etc. Visualization is typical of the forms of mass media discourse: newspapers, magazines, electronic papers, Internet sites, a modern prose exploiting images of male and female sexuality.

Visualization as a code of everyday life cultural structures expresses itself in creolization of a text or in its polycode nature.

### 3. Creolization

A creolized text is a complex text formation where verbal and iconic elements (i.e. signs in a form of pictures, diagrams, images) constitute an integral visual structural meaningful and functional unity directed at a complex pragmatic influence on an addressee (Telminov, 2009). The unity of a creolized text is conditioned by a communicative cognitive goal of an addressee and by a common topic. The liaison is provided by a tight correlation of verbal and iconic components at different levels: meaningful, verbal and communicative. At a semantic level the cohesion is ensured by a correlation of semantic connection of signs of both codes (verbal and iconic, which have the same conceptual meanings). There are compositional and semantic relations between the components of a creolized text, which means that a picture correlates with a word, a sentence or a text. Categories of temporality and locativity present themselves by means of verbal and iconic elements.

The perception of a creolized text is based on a formation of a unified whole concept organized with a verbal text concept and a visual concept plus the knowledge and concepts of an individual cognitive space of an addressee.

Illustration is the most significant element of the text, its visual and compositional center as it draws the attention of a recipient instantly and directly, forming a dominant point of a linguistic illocution.

Iconic elements of a creolized text produce a world picture, a scale of values, esthetic and ethical ideals of a nation, forming a conceptual sphere of everyday life culture. The basic functions of visualization in a creolized text are: symbolic (the expression of abstract ideas and concepts); illustrative (presenting information in pictures); argumentative (confirmation of verbal information) (Anisimova, 2003).

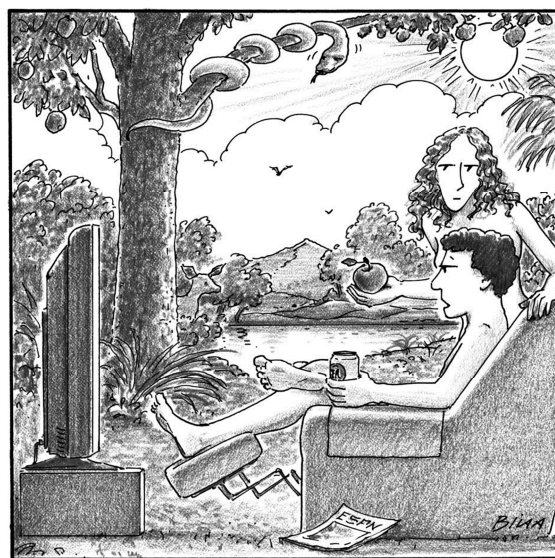
An iconic visualization makes the information more convincing, influences directly the mind of a person addressed. On the other hand, a picture can express an idea indirectly, evasively, metaphorically, while there is a possibility of various interpretations of the meaning of the message.

We assume that, according to ways of correlation between verbal and non-verbal informational parts of a text, the following types of a creolized text can be identified: a) repetition texts, where an iconic information repeats the information of a verbal text; b) additive texts, where iconic

elements bring a new additional information; c) emphatic texts where iconic elements specify some aspects of the verbal information, that exceeds in size the iconic one; d) appositive texts, where the meaning of a picture contradicts with the meaning of the verbal information, and this produces a comic effect; e) integrative texts, where a picture is integrated into the informational structure of a verbal text and forms a semantic whole with the latter; f) visual centered texts, where visual information dominates over a verbal one, the latter only explains or comments the visual part (see also: Telminov, 2009).

We illustrate these types of creolization with the cartoons at the pages of The New Yorker (<http://www.newyorker.com/humor/issuecartoons/2015/07/20>) as follows.

Picture 1 presents the text that can be identified as additive, where an iconic element of the text adds the new additional information to the verbal component. The integral meaning of the whole text produces a comic effect, as the verbal meaning of the story contradicts with the picture meaning.



Picture 1. "No, thanks."



Picture 2. Father and Son.

Picture 2 presents the text that we call repetitive, as an iconic information of the image repeats the information of a verbal part of the text: *"You're right—this is way better than a standing desk."* The comic atmosphere is created with the absurdity of similarity between the positions of both personages: the child and the adult, though they feel equally comfortable.

Picture 3 illustrates the appositive text, as the meaning of a picture contradicts with the meaning of the verbal information: *"Nonsense, Dad—you look fabulous!"*

The image of "Dad" is a picture of melted wax going to extinction, so the information of an iconic element contrasts the verbal information, which produces a humorous effect.



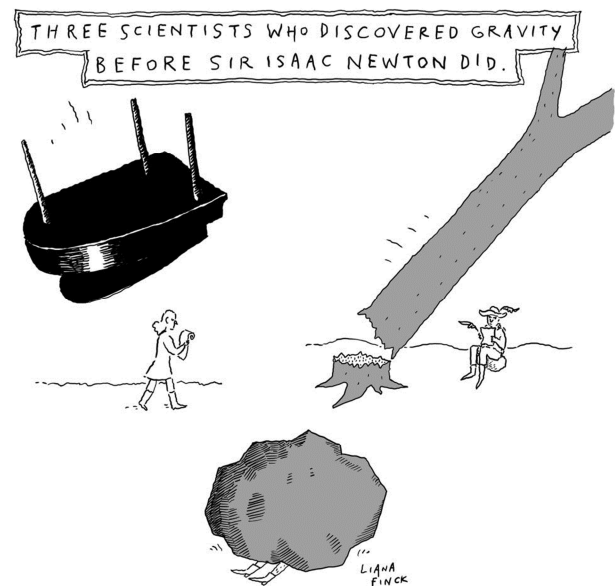
Picture 3. Keeping up Appearances.

Picture 4 is an example of a visual centered text, in which the visual information dominates over the verbal one, the latter only explains and comments the visual part: *"Perhaps I've said too much."* The visual image presents information, that the interviewed person evidently said too long a story with too many details, what made the policemen fall asleep. This type of creolization can also cause a humorous incongruity.



Picture 4. Inquest.

Picture 5 can serve an example of an integrative text, where the iconic element is embedded into the informational structure of the verbal text and forms a semantic whole with it. The picture presents three stories about the people who "discovered" gravity by the price of their lives. The meaning of the verbal information supports the idea: "Three scientists who discovered gravity before Sir Isaak Newton did". This type of creolization contains an allusion (a reference to some other information, an event in history, a person, place, or idea not stated or explained). The reader is expected to know about the allusion, in this case what the role of Isaak Newton was in discovering the law of gravitation. The allusion functions as a form of comic device.



Picture 5. Science.

Picture 6 illustrates the text that can be described as emphatic in which iconic elements, i.e. the image, specify some aspects of the verbal information, that exceeds in size the iconic one. The image here illustrates the meaning of the story, written by the author Bee Wilson "The Pleasure of Reading Recipes": "Recipe readers are always talking about how cookbooks are like novels, and there's a clue here to how we actually read them. Like a short story, a good recipe can put us in a delightful trance. The Oxford English Dictionary defines fiction as literature "concerned with the narration of imaginary events." This is what recipes are: stories of pretend meals. Don't be fooled by the fact that they are written in the imperative tense (pick the basil leaves, peel the onion).<...> As you read, your head drowsily on the pillow, there is no onion, but you watch yourself peel it in your mind's eye, tugging off the papery skin and noting with satisfaction that you have not damaged the layers underneath" (Wilson, 2013). Thus, the iconic element emphasizes the semantics of the verbal information, specifies it in a way (humorous, non-serious).





Picture 6. The Pleasures of Reading Recipes.

## 4. Conclusion

As we observed, the visual information of an iconic element and the semantics of a verbal component in a polycode text are not merely an arithmetical sum of meanings of signs, their meanings integrate and form a complex semantic whole. The act of double coding of information goes on in the process of perception of a polycode text: the concept of the visual information being perceived is added to the concept of the verbal text, the integration of meanings of both concepts creates a united whole meaning of a creolized text. In other words, discourses of both texts blend and the addressed immediately perceives the complex information: an overt direct meaning and a covert discursive meaning aimed as a true illocution of the addressee. Consequently, a creolized text operates as a complex sign which combines verbal and

iconic visual elements into a structural, meaningful and functional whole with a unique pragmatic communicative force.

Evidently, the process of conceptualization of everyday life cultural practices can be interpreted as a definite self-regulating system of cultural structures conditioned by laws of the social symbolic communication system in which an iconic principle of semiosis plays a significant role.

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